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3.2 Support in enhancing quality standards

As an EU centre of expertise on asylum, EASO contributes to the effective, coherent and consistent implementation of the EU asylum acquis, with the ultimate goal of an efficient common European asylum system. To this end, EASO supports EU+ countries in improving the quality of their asylum and reception systems through a number of initiatives. For example, EASO conducts the Quality Matrix process, a mapping of practices in EU+ countries in key areas of the asylum acquis. The matrix highlights examples of good practices and available tools, identifies existing challenges and gaps, and presents sound solutions to address them. In 2019, two Quality Matrix thematic reports were produced on quality management and the withdrawal of international protection. An update of the Quality Matrix report on personal interviews is underway and planned to be published in 2020.

EASO regularly produces thematic reports on the latest developments based on information collected in consultation with Member States, the European Commission, UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders. The agency also develops user-friendly practical tools, such as checklists, guidance material and web-based, interactive tools to support the work of teams on the ground. The material covers a wide array of themes, including access to the asylum procedure, implementation of the Dublin III Regulation, examination of applications for international protection, quality assurance in the asylum procedure, reception, applicants with special needs and COI research.

For example, an EASO practical guidance on *Operational Standards and Indicators for the Asylum Procedure* was published in September 2019 to strengthen and further develop national asylum procedures. In November 2019, EASO's Management Board adopted the *Guidance on the Dublin Procedure: Operational Standards and Indicators* to support Member States in the implementation of key provisions of the Dublin III Regulation. In addition, to assist practitioners in the field, EASO published a report on practices among Member States and civil society organisations related to staff well-being. Based on the findings, EASO is currently developing guidance on staff well-being for first-line practitioners.

EASO supports and facilitates practical cooperation on issues related to applicants with vulnerabilities and special needs. This includes activities focused on children and unaccompanied children, addressing issues such as age assessment, family tracing, best interests of the child and trafficking of children. EASO has incorporated specific programmes in its work on victims of trafficking in human beings (THB), exploring the potential links between

THB and the asylum procedure in order to activate special responses in this context and increasing awareness among asylum officials in identifying, detecting and referring THB victims. Through expert meetings and practical workshops, EASO has developed practical guides and tools addressing applicants with vulnerabilities.

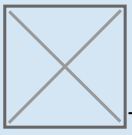
Box 3.3 Identification of persons with special needs and support for vulnerable applicants

The EASO Identification of Persons with Special Needs (IPSN) is a practical support tool for officials working in asylum procedures and reception.It aims to facilitate the timely identification of persons with special procedural or reception needs at any stage of the reception process.

In addition, EASO developed in 2019 more guidance material on handling minor applicants:

The *EASO Practical Guide on the Best Interests of the Child in Asylum Procedures* guides authorities in Member State in applying the principle of the best interests of the child and enhancing the guarantees for children within asylum procedures.

The *Report on Asylum Procedures for Children* presents national practices and policies, identifies gaps and good practices across EU+ countries, and provides key recommendations to strengthen the protection of children in the EU territory.



The *EASO Animation on Age Assessment* provides EU+ countries with a visual tool to guide the implementation of the principle of the best interests of the child when assessing the need for age examination and the design and undertaking of age assessments. A child-friendly animation on the same topic is currently being developed for children undergoing an age assessment.

To promote common standards and further harmonisation in the implementation of the asylum acquis, EASO cooperates with members of courts and tribunals in EU+ countries. Through a dedicated network and with multi-stakeholder cooperation, EASO creates professional development materials to provide courts and tribunal members with an overview of CEAS and key topics encountered in their day-to-day decision-making. As part of the professional development series, in 2019 EASO produced a judicial analysis, a judicial trainer's guidance note and a compilation of jurisprudence on legal standards for the reception of applicants for international protection. The agency also organises workshops for members of the courts and tribunals to share expertise on asylum law and provides ad hoc support, including training, when needed.

Box 3.4 EASO's network approach

EASO has developed networks to engage experts in different asylum-related areas to exchange expertise and develop analysis, guidance and practical tools for professionals in the field and policy-makers. Thematic networks managed by EASO include:

- Asylum Processes Network
- COI Strategic Network and Specialist COI Networks on key countries/areas of origin
- Country Guidance Network
- Early Warning and Preparedness System (EPS) Network and Advisory Groups
- on Early Warning and Secondary Movements
- Exclusion Network
- Information and Documentation System (IDS) Advisory Group
- Network of Courts and Tribunal Members
- Network of Dublin Units
- Network of Reception Authorities
- Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Network
- Third Country Cooperation Network
- Vulnerability Expert Network

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