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2. Developments in the European Union



In 2019, no major legislative progress was noted regarding the adoption of the CEAS reform package. In light of the elections for the European Parliament, the negotiations for the reform package were referred to the next parliamentary term. However, progress was made in legislative areas directly related to asylum. In May 2019, the Council of the EU adopted two regulations establishing a framework for the inter-operability of EU information systems in the areas of justice and home affairs. In addition, in June 2019, the Council adopted its partial common position on the recast Return Directive which was proposed by the European Commission in September 2018.

The topic of asylum remained high on the EU political agenda in 2019. Pending legislative negotiations, considerable work was accomplished in policy implementation and practical cooperation among EU+ countries. The EU's Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024, which was adopted by the European Council in June 2019, set the main priorities for the next institutional cycle, including migration and asylum as priority areas with a focus on border management informed by the values of the EU; cooperation with countries of origin and transit; and a much-needed consensus on the reform of the Dublin system to achieve a balance of responsibility and solidarity.

In January 2020, the European Commission published its new work programme, having as one of its priorities the launch of a new pact which will acknowledge the inter-connectedness of internal and external aspects of migration and will strive for more resilient, more humane and more effective migration and asylum systems.

The European Council adopted the EU's Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024, with asylum as a priority area

In October 2019, the European Commission published a Progress Report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration which took stock of major achievements since 2015 and focused on developments in 2019. While the pace of legislative reforms has been gradual, progress was made at a faster pace in policy implementation and consolidating the EU toolbox for effective migration and asylum management, including swift operational and financial support to Member States experiencing increased pressure.

Despite the overall decrease in the number of arrivals at the EU external borders in 2019, different trends emerged across migration routes into Europe. The Western and Central Mediterranean routes had fewer arrivals compared to 2018, while the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes experienced increased arrivals.

A key dimension of the EU approach to address the Eastern Mediterranean route is the partnership with Turkey through the EU-Turkey Statement. As a result of the statement, after four years of implementation, irregular arrivals from Turkey to the EU remained 94 % lower than before the agreement, and a cumulative total of about 27 000 Syrian refugees have been resettled from Turkey to an EU+ country. For the period 2016-2025, a total of €6 billion has been allocated through the Facility for Refugees to support refugees and host communities in Turkey, focusing on humanitarian assistance, education, health, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support. An area in which more progress is needed is the implementation of returns from the Greek islands to Turkey.

The disembarkation of migrants rescued in the Mediterranean Sea continued in 2019, underlining the need for a more systematic and coordinated EU approach to disembarkations including first reception, registration and relocation. A Ministerial Meeting on Migration in September 2019, involving Member States, the Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission, led to a Joint Declaration of Intent concluded by France, Germany, Italy and Malta for a structured emergency procedure to manage disembarkations and relocation arrangements. The European Commission launched a process to develop Standard Operating Procedures based on the declaration, which led to a common understanding among Member States and which is being applied operationally.

Resettlement remained high on the policy agenda related to asylum during 2019. It is an integral component of the collective efforts by the EU to provide protection to those who need it by transferring refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement. The European Resettlement Scheme was launched in July 2015 and, as of December 2019, two successful resettlement programmes have assisted more than 65 000 people.

Throughout 2019, the EU continued its cooperation with external partners to manage migratory pressures through a comprehensive approach rooted in multilateralism. The aims of activities implemented under the external dimension of the EU migration policy included preventing irregular migration; enhancing cooperation with third countries on returns and readmission; addressing the root causes of migration by improving opportunities in countries of origin and

increasing investments in partner countries; and ensuring legal pathways to Europe for those in need of international protection.

In its role to ensure a harmonised interpretation and application of EU law, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued 12 judgments in 2019 related to preliminary rulings on interpreting the CEAS. For example, the Court ruled on:

- The applicability of the recast Asylum Procedures Directive in relation to existing international protection in Member States and the role of judicial institutions in reversing first instance decisions;
- Revocation of international protection and the validity of certain provisions in the recast Qualification Directive;
- Withdrawal of material reception conditions as a form of sanction, in light of the recast Reception Conditions Directive, Article 20(4); and
- Assessment of dependents considered to be broader family members (not immediate family) and procedural aspects of the family reunification procedure.

The Court also interpreted key concepts and technical aspects of the Dublin system in light of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and clarified preliminary issues as a result of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU (Brexit).



Source: EASO.

In 2019, EASO’s operational assistance reached unprecedented levels coordinating the deployment of over 900 persons (including EASO staff, experts from EU+ countries, temporary agency workers, interpreters, cultural mediators and security personnel) in four Member States (Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta). Close to 40 % of the agency’s annual budget was spent on operational support in 2019.

In the area of third country support, EASO delivered capacity-building activities in 2019 in Western Balkan countries, Turkey and countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Previous Home Asylum Report 2020 Next

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