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Introduction

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Introduction

As the go-to source of information on international protection in Europe, the annual Asylum Report provides a comprehensive overview of key developments in asylum in Member States of the European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland (EU+ countries). All aspects of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) are covered by summarising changes to legislation, policy and practices at the European and national levels. The report presents selected case law which has shaped the interpretation of European and national laws, as well as key statistical indicators for the 2021 reference year, which highlight emerging trends and the effectiveness of asylum systems.

Pressure on the EU's external borders intensified in 2021 with the number of arrivals resuming to pre-pandemic levels, even amidst continued COVID-19 measures. The political landscape prompted a spike in arrivals from Afghanistan, Belarus and Ukraine. In response, EU+ countries quickly adapted to the waves of arrivals by facilitating the lodging process for an asylum application, rearranging reception places and resorting to arrival centres for various steps of the asylum procedure.

To set the scene, Section 1 presents an overview of forced displacement globally and addresses the international community's response to large refugee movements. In 2021, the focus shifted from reactionary measures during a global pandemic to adapting practices more permanently and capitalising on gains made in digital innovations. The section zooms in on key topics which were discussed at the global level: scaling up sustainable protection solutions, climate-induced displacement, the impact of gender on displacement, and developments for stateless populations.

Section 2 narrows in on the context in the European Union, presenting the latest legislative and policy developments in the evolution of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). It addresses key developments which spurred displacement in 2021 and early 2022, such as the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the instrumentalisation of migrants by the Belarusian government and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Cases addressed by the Court of Justice of the EU area also summarised to clarify the interpretation of law in often complex situations.

Transitioning from EASO to the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), the Agency was mandated with additional roles related to the operational and technical implementation of CEAS. Section 3 outlines the new tasks of the agency and presents an evaluation of its operational support to Member States in 2021.

Section 4 begins with supplementary overviews which summarise the digitalisation of the asylum procedure, the continued impacts of COVID-19 measures on asylum and reception systems, and national responses to the protection needs of Afghan citizens. The section then analyses developments at each stage of the asylum procedure, including procedures for first and second applications, special procedures, the Dublin procedure, reception conditions, detention during the asylum procedure, access to the asylum procedure and to information, legal assistance, interpretation services, country of origin information, the content of protection, the return of former applicants and resettlement. The key indicators which are presented help to identify and monitor trends in countries receiving asylum applicants and countries of origin.

The situation of children and applicants with special needs are described in *Section 5*. The section combines quantitative, qualitative and legal information to provide an overview of the situation for minors, women, victims of violence and human trafficking, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) asylum applicants. The section focuses in particular on unaccompanied minors, reviewing changes to legal representation, age assessments and reception conditions.

To include diverse perspectives, observations by civil society organisations and other stakeholders are presented throughout the report by topic. In 2021, concerns often centred around access to the asylum procedure, reception conditions and applicants with special needs.

The report serves as a main reference for developments in asylum in EU+ countries. It collates a wide range of sources to provide accurate information to policymakers, national asylum authorities, researchers and practitioners involved in the field of asylum.

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