

PRESS RELEASE

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2011 Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union and on the Activities of the European Asylum Support Office

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published its first 'Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union and on the Activities of the European Asylum Support Office' for 2011. The report provides a comprehensive description of the situation of asylum in the European Union (EU) in 2011, with a focus on areas in which EASO was involved in during this period.

The report covers the first year of EASO operation and looks into various topics such as: international developments, effects on member States and EASO tools and responses; developments related to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS); and EASO's network of institutional partners and stakeholders. It also includes a number of annexes including relevant statistics and the EASO financial report for 2011.

EASO activities in its first year of existence took place in a context where asylum was one of the main issues on the European Union's agenda. International events, in particular the so-called "Arab Spring" caused unexpected movements of populations on a large scale: more than 24 000 Tunisians reached the coasts of Italy in a very short time-span after the regime of President Ben Ali was toppled; the civil war in Libya set in motion one of the largest displacements of people since the wars in the former Yugoslavia; in Syria, tens of thousands fled their country and a few thousands of them sought protection in Europe, mainly in Germany.

A persistent inflow from the western Balkans countries, in particular Albania (2 800, +55%), albeit lesser than in previous years at EU-wide level, concentrated in Belgium and Luxembourg, putting the asylum and reception systems of both Member States under severe stress, and affected Germany and Sweden as well.

Moreover, in 2011 Afghanistan was the top country of origin for asylum seekers in the European Union. The number of asylum seekers from this country reached its highest level since 2002 and the country figured in the Top 5 country of origin arrivals of many Member States.

In 2011, and going into 2012, pressure remained strong on the asylum system of Greece at the same time that this system was being reconstructed. Indeed, a lot of attention was focused on Greece, especially since the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the case of *MSS vs Belgium and Greece* dated 21 January 2011 highlighted the shortcomings of the Greek asylum system and caused all Member States to suspend the transfers of applicants to Greece under the "Dublin II"

Regulation.

From the very start of its activities EASO's emergency support to Greece was one of the agency's main focuses. In this context, the first *Asylum Support Team* was deployed by EASO to Greece as early as 24 May 2011 and many teams were deployed since then for missions lasting from a few weeks to several months. EASO support to Greece is expected to continue at least until 2013.

The present report comments on a number of significant rulings by the Court of Justice of the European Union, by ECtHR and by national Courts showing the growing importance of jurisprudence in clarifying the interpretation of the EU asylum *acquis*.

In 2011 EASO provided training and developed training material in support of the enhancement of quality and harmonisation in the area of asylum, ultimately contributing to the implementation of a CEAS. The cornerstone of EASO training activities is the European asylum curriculum (EAC) – which EASO took over on 1 January 2012. EAC serves as a common vocational training system designed for asylum officials throughout the EU and covers core aspects of the asylum procedure in interactive modules.

Country of Origin Information (COI) also forms a core part of EASO's activities. This sort of information is essential for asylum officials during the asylum determination process. In this field EASO gathers COI information, manages and further develops the EU's common COI portal, elaborates a common format and methodology, drafts COI reports, and organises practical cooperation workshops to share COI.

In addition, EASO has been developing analytical tools with a view to establishing an Early Warning and Preparedness System with the aim of detecting situations likely to give rise to particular asylum pressures. In this context, EASO provides outlooks on asylum trends and risk scenarios and supports Member States in being fully prepared.

Moreover, EASO is engaged in cooperation with a number of institutional partners and other stakeholders: the European Commission – especially DG Home Affairs – and other European institutions; the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – whose representative sits at its Management Board; Frontex and other EU Agencies such as the Fundamental Rights Agency; as well as with civil society. To facilitate EASO's engagement with civil society (including NGO's, academics and the judiciary) a Consultative forum has been established. The first Consultative Forum with selected organisations from the non-governmental world and academia was held on 15 December 2011 in Valletta, Malta.

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