

Annex: Key findings of EASO's Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU 2014

Introduction

EASO's 2014 Annual Report provides a comprehensive overview of the number and nature of applications for international protection in all 28 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland (the EU+). It examines asylum trends, including key challenges and responses during the year, major institutional and legal developments and provides an overview of the practical functioning of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Input is provided by Member States, UNHCR, civil society, information specialists and field officers.

Key points of report

- In 2014 there were more than 660 000 applications for international protection in the EU+ - the highest number since the beginning of EU-level data collection in 2008.
- The highest numbers of asylum applicants recorded were citizens of Syria, the Western Balkan countries combined, and Eritrea. The main receiving countries were Germany, Sweden, Italy, France and Hungary.
- At the end of 2014, more than 500 000¹ people were awaiting a decision on their asylum application in the EU+; the volume of pending applications increased by +37% compared to 2013.
- The ongoing crisis in Syria posed a key challenge in the EU+ in 2014 as the number of applications from Syrians reached more than 128 000. This triggered the establishment of special measures in terms of resettlement and humanitarian admission.
- Afghanistan remained one of the main countries of origin of applicants last year; the 42 745 applications for 2014 represented a 53 % increase compared to 2013. It also had the highest share of unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in the EU+ (6 155).
- The number of applications from citizens of Western Balkan countries reached 110 000 with a significant share from Serbia and Kosovo.
- There were more than 14 000 Ukrainian applicants, which was a 13-fold increase compared to 2013.
- 2014 marked the launch of the 7-year Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) with a budget of 3.137 billion EUR to support projects in Member States.

Major developments in 2014

Mediterranean crisis

Access to asylum procedure and management of migratory flows were at the forefront of the political debate in 2014 with a significant rise in arrivals by sea, often leading to tragic loss of life in the Mediterranean. Task Force Mediterranean sought to learn more about the root cause of the problem and find solutions to address it. Much emphasis was put on the initial stage of the asylum procedure, including the application and registration process, where significant challenges remain, particularly in EU+ countries facing substantial and/or sudden increases in arrivals.

Reception facilities

An increase in asylum applications in 2014 led to accommodation shortages in many countries, highlighting the need for greater flexibility regarding reception facilities. Member States responded by creating new facilities and setting up emergency ones. In that context, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)

¹ This figure includes appeals

clarified that financial allowances granted to applicants must enable them to find, if necessary, private rental accommodation. Many EU+ countries decided to widen access to the labour market so that applicants could improve their self-sustainability. Detention policies were revised in many Member States with a visible trend towards introducing alternatives to detention.

Developing national asylum systems

Reflecting increases in applications and pending cases, many EU+ countries restructured their asylum administrations, recruited extra staff and reorganised tasks and resources. Several measures were implemented to boost efficiency and react to emerging pressures in a flexible manner. These included: defining contingency plans, use of special procedures for swifter decision-making, revisions to national lists of safe countries of origin, prioritisation of certain classes of asylum cases, and new technological solutions.

EASO support

EASO continued to provide operational support to Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Cyprus and successfully piloted joint-processing projects, that demonstrated the suitability of deploying joint processing support teams to Member States, and a project with Malta and Italy on facilitation of irregular migrants. EASO has trained over 2,800 asylum and reception officials. Moreover, EASO held external dimension activities with a number of states including Turkey, Serbia, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Furthermore, EASO launched new statistical data collection under its Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS), which sees contribution from all EU+ states on a monthly basis, adding to information available from Eurostat. Improved analysis is included in the Annual Report based on this new data.

Legal matters

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled on important aspects of subsidiary protection (most notably the concept of internal armed conflict and cases of serious medical conditions) and clarified how national authorities may assess the credibility of the declared sexual orientation of applicants for asylum. National courts and tribunals analysed a number of key concepts related to asylum, such as persecution on grounds of religion and use of various forms of protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) based on individual circumstances in each case.

Vulnerable groups

More than 24 000 unaccompanied minors applied for international protection last year. EU+ countries pledged to address the plight of vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, the disabled, victims of human trafficking, violence and torture, and provide specialised asylum-procedure services to address their needs.

Improved services

In line with recent changes in EU asylum law package, many EU+ countries revised their policies on legal assistance, information and interpretation to improve the standard of these services. These areas presented a challenge in 2014, especially in view of increased demand and an often limited pool of specialised resources.

Comparability

Different Member States receive significantly different flows of applicants and for different reasons. The report's chapter on comparability noted that factors such as presence of diaspora, recognition rate, historical and language links, benefits provided by Member states and processing times may influence the decision of asylum-seekers to choose certain destinations over others but that none can be considered in isolation.

Strategy for the future

Building upon the debate in 2014, new directions for European asylum policy were outlined by the Commission in the communication *A European Agenda On Migration* (EAM) issued in May 2015. Immediate action was proposed to save lives at sea, combat criminal smuggling networks, respond to high volumes of arrivals within the EU with relocation activities and develop a common approach to resettlement. EASO will play a key role in a number of these measures including those in the area of joint processing of asylum applications, fighting smuggling networks, relocation, resettlement and reception.