



EASO Consultative Forum Thematic Webinar:

“The Impact of COVID-19 on asylum in the EU”

On 23rd July EASO is organising a Consultative Forum thematic webinar on the impact of COVID-19 on asylum in the EU. The webinar is divided into three main sessions, as follows:

- Session 1 will discuss the impact of COVID-19 on EASO’s activities as well as Member States’ asylum and reception systems
- Session 2 will discuss the impact of COVID-19 on civil society organisations
- Session 3 will focus on: What is next? in terms of anticipated and emerging asylum trends as well as future developments of the CEAS

This paper serves to provide an overview of the main issues to be discussed. It has been compiled on the basis of each speakers’ contribution. **Please read this paper prior to the webinar and, should you have any questions to one of the speakers, don’t hesitate to send these to us in advance to: consultative-forum@easo.europa.eu**

Session 1: The impact of COVID-19 on EASO’s activities and Member States’ asylum and reception systems

Mark Camilleri, the Head of the Executive Office at EASO will provide an overview of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted EASO’s main activities, and will also explain how the Agency has provided specific support to Member States tailored to help them respond to the covid challenges. In brief, EASO maintained operational presence in Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Malta, though certain adjustments were made in line with the COVID-19 related measures taken by the authorities of the Host Member States. Training activities continued, with focus placed on enhancing online trainings. Meetings of EASO’s various networks were held online and several practical recommendations were issued which helped provide targeted support to Member States in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. EASO has also monitored the impact of the pandemic on asylum trends and on Member States’ asylum and reception systems, following which the Agency published several Special Reports (available on its website [here](#)).

Maria Papaioannou, Information and Analysis Officer at EASO will provide more information on a report published by EASO on 2 June 2020, called [COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems](#), and which analyses how emergency measures during the COVID-19 pandemic affected asylum and reception procedures in EU+ countries.

The report presented variations and similarities in national efforts to address the situation and describes interim solutions which were put in place. Building on the findings of the first report, [an update \(Issue 2\) was published on 15 July](#) which aims to supplement the initial report by presenting new developments in the period 15 May to 10 July 2020 and identify national trends and practices in asylum and reception systems in response to COVID-19 that may be implemented over the long term.



Session 2: The impact of COVID-19 on civil society organisations working in the field of asylum

Catherine Woollard, Director at the European Council on Refugee Exiles will present the impact that COVID-19 has had on CSOs working in the field of asylum in the EU. In her presentation, she will address a multitude of challenges that CSOs have been facing, including operational challenges, financial, as well as political and legal challenges. The crisis has also brought about certain positive changes and opportunities, which she will address and her thoughts on priorities going forward will further be outlined.

Subsequently, **three operational NGOs** will explain how they have adjusted their activities in a way that has allowed them to continue the delivery of activities and services and they will share their experiences/challenges related to this.

The Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR) is an NGO that upholds the rights of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection and the quality of the asylum system in Portugal. Within its mandate, CPR provides direct, free, and independent **legal, social and integration assistance** to applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, including reception. In its presentation, **Inês Carreirinho** will highlight the main impacts of the coronavirus outbreak in the national asylum system, the challenges faced by the organisation during this period, and the measures adopted to ensure continuity of assistance (legal, social and integration-related).

Gizem Dinc from Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen will explain how her organisation has adjusted its activities in line with confinement rules in Belgium. Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen is an umbrella organization that defends refugee rights. Vluchtelingenwerk has closely been monitoring developments in Belgium on the ground since the opening of the Arrival Centre for applicants of international protection in 2018. After the outbreak of the pandemic, activities were adjusted in line with the confinement rules while Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen continued being present on the ground. The Belgian Home Affairs introduced an **online appointment system** as an emergency solution **to register asylum requests**. This has brought many obstacles for asylum seekers to reach international protection and reception rights. The presentation by Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen will highlight the main developments and obstacles throughout the period of the pandemic.

Sara Fridlund from the Swedish Red Cross will explain how her organization was able to continue to provide **health and care work** to asylum seekers and migrants during the pandemic. The **Swedish Red Cross Health and Care Department** runs six treatment centers for persons affected by war and torture. In these centers, refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants receive trauma treatment by professional, clinical staff. During the COVID-19 pandemic, services have been adjusted and developed to meet mental health and psychosocial needs among patients and in the general public. The following services have been developed: digital solutions for meetings with patients in treatment centers, a psychosocial support hotline for the public, a digital platform focused on mental health, plus communication efforts and local response. The presentation focuses on the development of digital solutions for meeting with patients. The process of this development will be explained and information will be shared with regard to lessons learnt so far, both positive and negative.



Session 3: What is next?

Teddy Wilkin, EASO's Head of Analysis and Data Research Sector, will provide an overview of anticipated and emerging asylum trends. In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, asylum systems in the EU+ have been affected considerably due to imposed mobility restrictions and partial closure of asylum services for a period of time. This has affected both the number of applications that could be lodged, and the number of decisions that were issued. This triggered [two Special Reports](#) by EASO focusing on the evolution of latest asylum trends but also analysing the dynamic situation in countries of origin of applicants for international protection. These analyses elaborated on the quickly changing spread of the COVID-19 disease and the role of a variety of factors with direct or indirect impact on asylum-related migration. For example, the level of food insecurity was examined in light of aggravating economic conditions, the continuation and even intensification of conflicts in some countries of origin, trends with regards to stranded migrants and reverse migration, etc. Finally, the highly complex and dynamic environment does not allow for a reliable prognosis but instead [the second Special Report](#) offers an outlook considering the factors that will (continue to) play a role and their likely impact on asylum-related migration in the near future.

Ioana Pelin-Raducu from the European Commission's Migration and Home Affairs, will present on the CEAS in the wake of COVID-19. She will address the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**, which is expected to be adopted soon. The European Parliament, Member States, civil society organisations and international organisations have widely been consulted by Commissioner Johansson and all views and possible options are being considered by the Commission services. The **Pact** will consist of a 'chapeau' communication and a series of legislative and non-legislative initiatives. It will address all aspects of migration in a comprehensive approach to migration, both the legal and irregular migration, protection of the external borders, the Schengen area, asylum and return rules, crisis management, fighting smuggling of migrants, cooperation with third countries, and fostering integration of migrants into our societies. The **CEAS proposals** will notably aim at identifying common ground to move forward on the difficult still pending issues in the asylum reform, by placing the reform in the broader context of the comprehensive approach on migration and underpinned by the principles of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility. In addition, the Commission is reflecting on other procedural efficiencies that could be included to make asylum procedures efficient and crisis resilient by drawing on lessons learnt from the Covid pandemic while at the same time fully respecting fundamental rights. Following the **Guidance of 16 April**, the Commission continues to support the implementation of EU asylum rules in national systems, with the support of EASO, such as the exchanges of good practices in networks and working groups and the issuance of additional guidance and recommendations.



Nina Schrepfer from UNHCR will present several recommendations for asylum policy in the wake of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted asylum systems across Europe and the world. UNHCR too has felt the impact on its operations requiring quick adaptation. Drawing on its own operational experience coping with emergencies and adapting to them, as well as harnessing evolving State practice in Europe and beyond, UNHCR has set forth a set of practical suggestions offered to Governments in Europe to enable an effective response to the pandemic while respecting international refugee law, notably regarding access to territory, registration and documentation, adequate reception, and asylum procedures. As Europe is shifting measures in its response to COVID-19, there lie risks but also opportunities. Measures taken at a time of adversity, may contribute to building more resilient asylum systems for the future: The COVID-19 situation has shown that it is possible to balance the need to protect public health with access to territory for those wishing to seek international protection. And while the COVID-19 situation impacted on the functionality of asylum systems across Europe, the multitude of good practices can be used for more robust asylum systems now and in the future, such as the use of digital means for registration and interviews. Generally, the experience has shown that flexibility and adaptation in times of crisis does not need to come at the expense of access to protection and safeguards in the asylum procedures. This experience can serve as an important lesson learned for any forthcoming crisis that may affect Europe.

Relevant references:

- European Asylum Support Office, COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems, June 2020, available at: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/covid19-emergency-measures-asylum-reception-systems.pdf>
- European Asylum Support Office, COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems – Issue 2, July 2020, available at: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/covid19-emergency-measures-asylum-reception-systems-issue-2.pdf>
- EASO Special Report: Asylum Trends and COVID-19, May 2020, available at: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/easo-special-report-asylum-covid.pdf>
- EASO Special Report: Asylum Trends and COVID-19 Issue 2, June 2020, available at: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/easo-special-report-asylum-covid-june-2020.pdf>
- EASO Practical recommendation on conducting the personal interview remotely, May 2020, available at: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/easo-practical-recommendations-conducting-personal-interview-remotely-EN.pdf>



- EASO Practical recommendation on conducting remote/online registration (lodging), June 2020, available at: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/easo-practical-recommendations-conducting-remote-online-registration-lodging-EN.pdf>
- Communication from the Commission, COVID-19 Guidance on the implementation of relevant EU provisions in the area of asylum and return procedures and on resettlement, April 2020, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/guidance-implementation-eu-provisions-asylum-retur-procedures-resettlement.pdf>
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Practical Recommendations and Good Practice to Address Protection Concerns in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 9 April 2020, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ede06a94.html>
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Remote Interviewing: Practical Considerations for States in Europe, 9 June 2020, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ee230654.html>
- Press release: Coronavirus: UNHCR offers practical recommendations in support of European countries to ensure access to asylum and safe reception, 27 April 2020, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/4/5ea68bde4/coronavirus-unhcr-offers-practical-recommendations-support-european-countries.html>
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR Discussion Paper Fair and Fast - Accelerated and Simplified Procedures in the European Union, 25 July 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b589eef4.html>