**FIFTH EASO CONSULTATIVE FORUM PLENARY MEETING**

**30 NOVEMBER, HOTEL EXCELSIOR, VALLETTA**

**REPORT**

The fifth annual plenary meeting of the EASO Consultative Forum was held on 30 November 2015 in Valletta. Around 100 representatives of civil society, academia, together with representatives from EU Member States, the European Commission, EU agencies and EASO. The plenary session of the Consultative Forum brings together relevant members of the civil society and EASO to discuss thematic areas relevant for the work of EASO, particularly in the context of the European Agenda on Migration. EASO facilitated the discussions by identifying speakers representing different institutions and NGOs, preparing discussion papers and providing background information on the activities developed in 2015 with the members of the Consultative Forum.

The following sections of the report provide an account of the key topics presented and discussed during the meeting.

***Opening speech of EASO Executive Director a.i. (Mr Jose Carrera)***

The EASO Executive Director a.i., Mr Jose Carrera, opened the meeting explaining how EASO, following the European Agenda on Migration, has been assigned additional tasks including various new operational ones such as an important role on the Hotspots and relocation procedures in Italy and Greece. Additional resources have been made available to the agency in order to face the emergency situation. EASO’s commitment to perform the new operational tasks did not hinder the quality of its core business: data analysis, training, practical tools and capacity building. EASO is investing in improving EASO’s external communication: communication with civil society is crucial, and more efforts will be dedicated to fully implement an open door approach with civil society. The consultation with civil society is not a once in a year event: it is a continuous process, which will be enhanced through increased thematic consultations. EASO in the upcoming months will recruit new staff members; experts from the civil society are invited to apply, as civil society can be a valuable source of expertise relevant to the work of EASO.

***EASO and Civil Society: Stock-taking of cooperation and synergies***

EASO provided an overview of the main activities implemented in 2015, including some detailed figures on the key achievements: 1000 expert-days deployed in EASO’s operations, 44 training sessions and 3 regional training sessions organized, 2000 national staff of EU Member States trained, various COI publications published and COI workshops organized, important development in the joint processing activities, 4 on-going emergency/special support plans with Italy, Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus, the launching of the first stage of the research programme on push and pull factors. EASO recalled the principles for consultation with civil society, which are outlined in the EASO Consultative Forum Operational Plan, which is available on the EASO website. EASO furthermore provided an account of the consultations carried on in 2015 with the members of the Consultative Forum. They were also informed that the External Evaluation of EASO will be published soon. Civil society organisations had the opportunity to provide inputs to the evaluators and one of the recommendations included in the report is to foster collaboration with civil society. Modalities to implement the recommendation will be developed in 2016.

***Presentation of latest asylum trends and responses***

EASO provided information on the latest trends of applicants for international protection, including figures on the top countries of origin, the distribution of applicants among the EU+ countries, the recognition rates and relevant statistics on unaccompanied minors and pending cases. Data recently collected in relation to relocation was also presented.

[[See Presentation]](https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Tim-Cooper-Situation-of-asylum-in-the-EU-CF1.pptx)

***Round table 1: EASO’s activities in the hotspots in Italy and Greece: achievements so far and next steps***

The panel discussed the current state of play of EASO’s support to Italy and Greece within the hotspots framework, in particular looking at the ways to promote the relocation process by facilitating direct cooperation and exchange of information, monitoring of the overall relocation process and development of tools in support of specific steps in the relocation procedure. Italian and Greek representatives, both from the national administration and from the civil society, explained the adaptation to the local context of the concept of hotspot describing the current workflows and the foreseen activities in the hotspots.

They stressed the importance of having realistic expectations from the relocation program and to build trust of the migrants in the system. Participants discussed how relocation can be an opportunity to tackle the emergency situation, but should go hand in hand with a more strategic strengthening of the national asylum systems. It was observed that the current relocation scheme is different from the EUREMA relocation program from Malta, given that applicants are relocated before granting protection and the pledging Member State have no right to express compulsory preferences on the persons to be relocated.

The standards of protection in the EU are common and relocation is a way to show that Europe is a continent of protection; but it’s important to show results in order for the process to be credible.

[[See Presentation]](https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Regional-Asylum-Office-Lesvos-D_Papailiou-speaking-notes-clean.ppt)

***Round table 2: EASO and the Western Balkans migration route and Western Balkans as safe countries of origin***

The panel discussed current challenges and possible solutions in implementing activities for supporting the Western Balkan countries to manage the increased migratory flows passing through the Western Balkan route and presented the state of play of the designation of the Western Balkan countries as safe countries of origin. In 2015, applicants from Western Balkans counted for 25% of the total flow in the EU+ countries, and in the large majority they were repeated applicants.

EASO recalled that the COI publication on the Western Balkans was updated in May 2015 and provided further updates on the proposal of the European Commission to establish an EU common list of safe countries of origin. The International Organization for Migration informed that a joint statement with UNHCR and Unicef was recently issued highlighting the increased risk for vulnerable groups and the high need of reception capacities at the border of Western Balkans; the possible role of NGOs in the region was discussed.

[[See Presentation]](https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Federation-of-Swiss-Protestant-Churches-simon-roethlisberger_presentation_easo-forum-301115-def-II.pptx)

***Round table 3: EASO’s Annual report on the situation of Asylum in the EU and the EASO Work Programme 2016***

The Panel discussed achievements and challenges in the consultation process on EASO key publications, as well as ways to foster the contribution of civil society in the preparation of EASO’s work programme and EASO Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the EU. Representatives of the civil society acknowledged the progress made by EASO in the consultation process.

They also invited EASO to clarify the extent to which contributions are taken into account by providing feedback to the organisations which answered to the consultation and by increasing the accountability of the process by publishing on the webpage the contributions received and the list of organisations. Increasing transparency will also foster networking among members of the EASO Consultative Forum. EASO was invited to provide more precise guidance on the kind of inputs and contributions which are requested through the consultations with civil society organisations (CSOs).

Representatives of the civil society proposed to anchor the inputs on EASO Work Programme to the engagement with CSOs in the implementation of the proposed activities. EASO offered the possibility to channel the provision of information from the civil society through the newly established Information and Documentation System. Finally, a possible support role of CSOs for the dissemination of information to asylum seekers on the relocation program following a common narrative with EASO was discussed.

[[See Presentation]](https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Forum-R%C3%A9fugi%C3%A9s-COSI-PPT-BEA1.pptx)

***Final remarks***

Since the establishment of the EASO Consultative Forum a closer relationship between EASO and the members of the Consultative Forum has developed and a larger number of civil society organisations have been involved in different areas of EASO’s activities. EASO stressed its commitment to dedicate additional efforts to develop further the dialogue with civil society, aiming to bridge consultation gaps and benefit the most of the expertise and knowledge that CSOs can provide.