



**EASO Consultative Forum Plenary  
Brussels, 11-12 December 2014**

**Round Table 2: Influx of Eritrean asylum seekers: EU and MS practical responses**

**Moderator:** Francesco Maiani, Associate Professor, IDHEAP

**Speakers:** Eva Singer, Head of the Asylum Department, Danish Refugee Council  
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**1. Aim**

- To discuss challenges related to sudden shifts in destination countries
- To discuss possible ways to achieve a more harmonised approach
- To brief participants on outcomes of the Practical cooperation workshop on Eritrea

**2. Background**

In the second quarter of 2014, Eritreans became the third largest citizenship of applicants in the EU+. Despite the relatively high numbers, Eritreans applicants were mainly concentrated in a small number of EU+ countries. The beginning of the spring (April 2014) was marked by a very large influx of Eritreans applying for international protection, already exceeding the monthly peak registered during the summer of 2013. The flow accelerated in May, doubling compared to April, and stabilised in June at around 5 500 applicants per month. After a peak in July (8 036), numbers went down and this downward trend seems to continue in autumn.

EASO organised a practical cooperation workshop on Eritrea on 15 and 16 October with the aim to gain a better understanding of the reasons for recent increases and shifts in flows of the asylum seekers from Eritrea coming to EU+ countries.

Preliminary evidence in the first half of 2014 already showed clear indications of a large involvement of human traffickers in the influx of Eritrean nationals, which also manifested itself in some rather sudden shifts in destination countries. The influx seemed to be further exacerbated by the situation in Libya and the Mare Nostrum search and rescue operations.

The grounds cited by Eritrean applicants as a basis for their asylum application seem to be similar in most EU+ countries. A majority of Eritreans leave the country because of the open-ended national service. Furthermore, some fear persecution on the basis of their religion. Many also fear the consequences of illegal departure in case of return. Very often, several grounds are combined (e.g., national service and religion or illegal departure).

Even though the recognition rate for Eritreans is quite high, preliminary statistical analysis showed divergences in decision practices among EU+ countries as concerns the choice of protection status (cf. Figure 1). Some countries grant refugee status to almost all Eritrean applicants, while others rather grant subsidiary protection, mainly due to a different assessment of grounds on which protection is granted. It should be noted that in several countries there is little or no difference between refugee (Geneva Convention) status and subsidiary protection status in terms of rights and benefits.

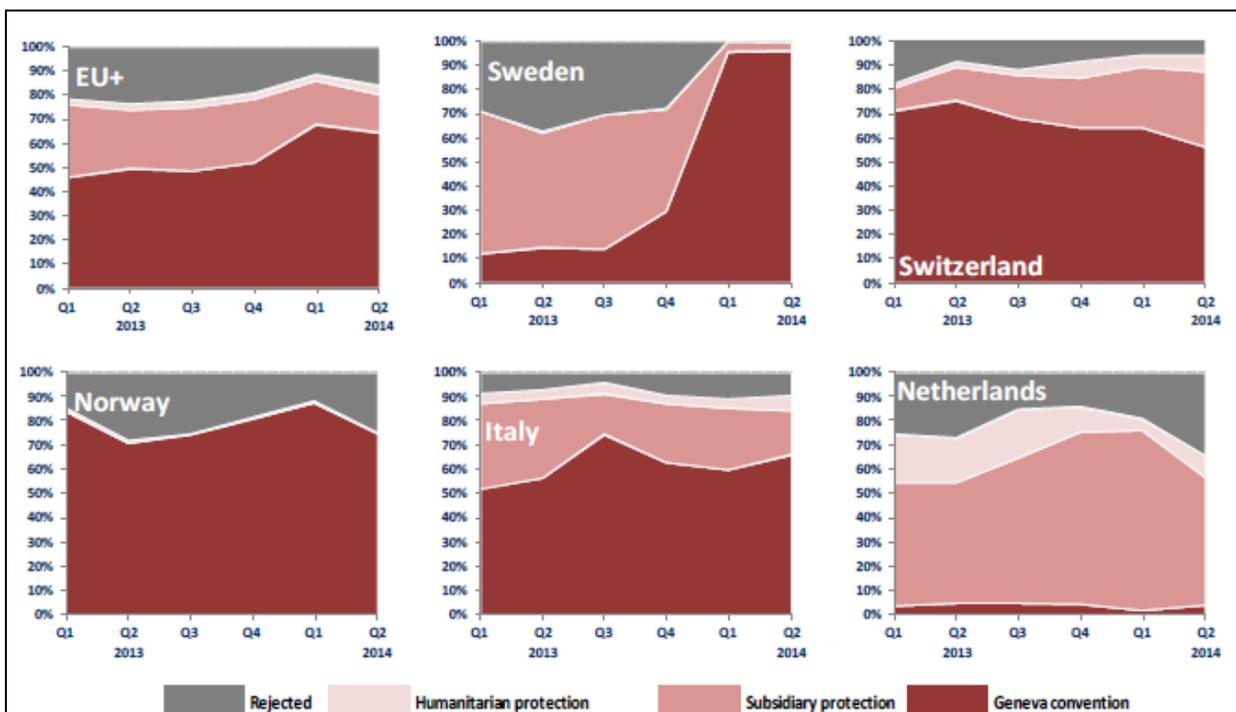


Figure 1: Type of decisions issued in the EU+ Q1 2013 – Q2 2014, evolution in EU+ and 5 Countries

Some states undertook a number of measures involving police and border controls targeting smugglers and traffickers which have been effective in moving the flow to other MS.

In order to facilitate sharing of existing and new knowledge on Eritrea and sources relevant for, e.g., origin verification, the EASO will set up a COI Specialist Network on Eritrea.

### 3. Expected outcomes

- Information from civil society organisations on how they cope with issues related to sudden inflows
- Input from participants on how to achieve more harmonised approaches with regard to decision practices in EU+ countries

### 4. Discussion points

- Which challenges have different EU+ countries (both at the level of national administrations and at civil society level) faced due to the recent Eritrean influx and how have they reacted?
- How can a more harmonised approach be achieved, e.g., when it comes to the choice of status?
- In how far can a comparative analysis on different decision practices be conclusive taking into account the lack of systematically collected information on profiles and asylum motives of applicants?
- What can be done to prepare EU+ states better (e.g., in terms of information needs) when confronted with an influx from a new country of origin? Can any lessons be drawn? What can be done to come to a truly European approach, whereby measures taken in one EU+ country to deal with the influx do not just shift the burden to another EU+ country?