

Press Release

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EASO and the Greek government sign agreement to extend EASO support to Greece until December 2014

On 7 March 2013 Dr Robert K. Visser, Executive Director of EASO, and Minister Nikoloas Dendias, Greek Minister for Public Order and Citizen Protection, signed the EASO-Greece Operating Plan Phase II, in Brussels. The Operating Plan Phase II builds on the progress made within the framework of Operating Plan Phase I, which was signed 1 April 2011. Phase II extends EASO support to Greece up until December 2014. EASO will continue with its emergency support to Greece in a number of prioritized areas, such as training of the staff of the new services, support to the backlog committees, support to improvement of reception procedures and the management of EU funds related to asylum and reception.

Following a request by the Greek Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection on 28 January 2013, the EASO Executive Director decided upon the deployment of Asylum Support Teams¹ (ASTs) and technical and operational assistance to Greece, in order to increase its capacity to deal with the institutional reform in the area of asylum, screening and reception in Greece. Via the Operating Plan Phase II, which was signed today, EASO will support Greece via the deployment of more than 70 experts from Member States in about 55 ASTs. Via these ASTs, EASO coordinates and manages the solidarity offered by the Member States, aiming at supporting Greece with its implementation of efficient asylum and reception procedures which match the relevant European standards and the requirements of the Common European Asylum System.

The Operating Plan Phase II builds on the achievements realized in the framework of Operating Plan Phase I, and is consistent with the goals of the revised Greek Action Plan on Asylum and Migration Management. The emergency support and deployment of EASO Asylum Support Teams under the Operating Plan Phase II will focus on a wide range of support measures, in the following areas:

- **Asylum procedures during the transitional period:** in particular, the training of the staff of the backlog committees (which deal with the backlog of asylum cases);
- **Sustainable and efficient asylum and reception procedures:** in particular, the training of staff of the three new services and in the field of provision of country of origin information
- **Horizontal issues,** such as in the area of management of EU funds, the collection and analysis of statistical data and ad hoc workshops on nationality identification.

¹ ASTs are multidisciplinary teams of EU experts deployed by EASO in a Member State for a limited time in order to support the asylum system of that Member State.

Background

EASO support to Greece dates back to April 2011, when the Operating Plan Phase I was signed. Greece has faced particular asylum pressures in the past years due to a significant influx of irregular migrants at the European external borders. Following a request made by the Greek Government, in February 2011, EASO agreed to support Greece and to deploy Asylum Support Teams (ASTs) to Greece. Since the beginning of its operations in Greece in 2011 **(under the Operating Plan Phase I)**, EASO has deployed over 65 ASTs to support Greece with building up a new asylum system, in particular by supporting Greece to enhance and build its capacity in tackling the backlog of asylum cases and supporting the setup of a sustainable and efficient asylum and reception structure: new First Reception Service; Asylum Service; and Appeals Authority; and improving reception conditions. EASO also supports the Greek Ministry for Public Order and Citizen Protection in the transitional period. EASO is managing ASTs on the ground in Greece and works closely with the Greek government, FRONTEX, the European Commission's Taskforce on Greece, UNHCR and other stakeholders. EASO support to Greece under Operating Plan Phase I will end in March 2013. The Operating Plan Phase II, which was signed today, will extend EASO support to Greece until December 2014.

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office by contacting Mr Jean-Pierre Schembri on the following e-mail address: jean-pierre.schembri@easo.europa.eu