



European Asylum Support Office

Five years of EASO: results and perspectives



SUPPORT IS OUR MISSION

Address by the Executive Director

Five Years EASO

Setting-up an Agency is a unique experience.

Starting from scratch is starting without anything.

Just an idea, a vision, a goal.

No office, no equipment, no staff.

Setting up an Agency from scratch is transforming an idea into reality.

Starting building the vital structures, finding people to join you and just go for it.

Five years later we can now look at a well-established and solid Agency that is in the centre of such an important policy area.

Such an enterprise cannot be done alone.

Many have contributed in very different ways.

I want to sincerely thank all those who did believe in the dream and have given their great support to make it a reality.

Especially I want to thank the Chair and the Members of the Management Board and all my staff for their support.



I would also like to acknowledge the support from the EU institutions and civil society.

It is only thanks to this positive environment that we have been able to realise what EASO is today.

Dr. Robert K. Visser
EASO's first Executive Director



EASO inauguration,
19 June 2011, Malta

EASO: who are we?

EASO is a regulatory agency of the European Union established to support, coordinate and further develop practical cooperation among Member States on asylum matters thereby supporting the coherent and full implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). As a centre of expertise on asylum, EASO helps Member States fulfil their European and international obligations to give protection to people in need and also provides support to Member States whose asylum and reception systems are under pressure, mainly due to an extraordinary influx of persons seeking international protection on their territory.

EASO became fully operational on 19 June 2011 and is hosted in Malta. In the first 5 years of operations, EASO's staff grew to around 100 agents and seconded national experts and a budget of €15M. The Management Board of EASO consists of representatives of all EU Member States, the European Commission, the UNHCR and the Associate Countries. Participating EU Member States and the European Commission have voting rights. The Executive Director is responsible for the day-to-day running of the agency as he is its legal representative. He is appointed by the Management Board.

EASO's Principles

- **Providing comprehensive and timely support to requesting Member States;**
- **Stimulating quality and efficiency of the asylum and reception systems of Member states;**
- **Acting as an independent and impartial centre of expertise;**
- **Providing accurate and up-to-date data, analysis and assessments on asylum related matters;**
- **Supporting Member States in taking up their responsibilities in the field of asylum and in showing solidarity with Member States whose asylum systems are under pressure;**
- **Facilitating and stimulating joint and common practical cooperation measures in the field of asylum thereby fostering mutual trust among Member States;**
- **Providing evidence based input to EU policy makers on asylum;**
- **Cooperating with EU institutions, EU agencies and bodies, international organisations, and civil society.**

EASO's approach: what we do

EASO follows a holistic approach to support Member States in implementing the Common European Asylum System with the aim of ensuring that similar cases are treated in a similar manner and produce similar outcomes.

EASO addresses the asylum and reception officers through common training, common practical tools for their daily work, common country of origin information for common assessments and decisions and common expertise.

EASO produces information and analysis on influx of persons seeking international protection and Member States' capacity. It provides a common support framework for Member States with specific needs on asylum, and common support tools.

At EU level, EASO promotes and stimulates a common approach on asylum matters through practical cooperation, supports common practices EU-wide, provides evidence-based policy input, and ultimately supports the further development of the CEAS.

Characteristics of EASO's work

1. EASO Training

One of the main contributions of EASO to the CEAS is the creation of a common culture on asylum in Member States. A key way to achieve this is through common training. A high quality common training

base for asylum and migration services across the EU supports the practical implementation of the CEAS and the enhancement of quality standards. EASO produces training material and training methodology.



EASO's core training tool is the **EASO Training Curriculum** composed of **16 interactive training** modules covering core aspects of the asylum procedure. A **learning path** has been developed with a set of Core, Advanced and Optional Modules for five target groups identified by EASO: case officers (primary target group for EASO training modules), managers of asylum units, policy officers, COI researchers and reception officers.

4 new training modules have been developed and 17 updates of the existing modules have been finalised. In addition, 4 training handbooks have been developed.

Since EASO gained ownership of the Curriculum in 2012, more than 8,000 **asylum and reception officers** have been trained, including about 750 participants to train-the-trainers' sessions.

EASO training has been a key component of operational support provided to several Member States and it has also been used in Third Countries.

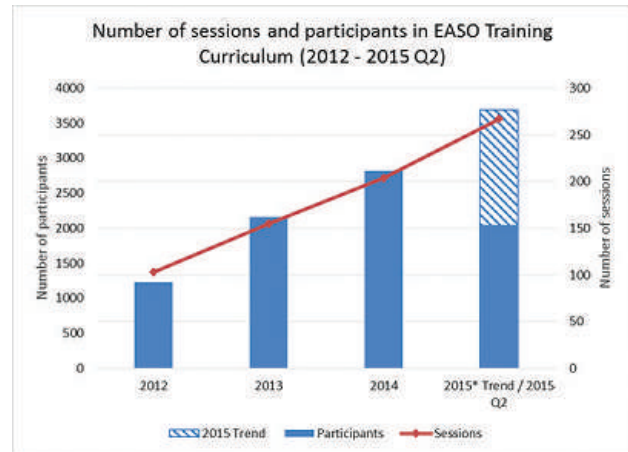


In 2016 EASO will finalise development of 3 new modules and at least 5 training handbooks.

EASO is facilitating the creation of a professional development curriculum for **members of courts and tribunals**. This curriculum aims to provide a full overview of the CEAS from a judicial perspective and be a useful support tool developed 'by judges and for judges'. EASO publications include: **judicial**

analysis on Article 15(c) QD and a Judicial Trainer's Guidance Note on Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive. By the end of 2015, a judicial analysis on Exclusion will be available. The development of materials on CEAS and on inclusion is also underway.

Trends in implementation of the EASO Training Curriculum

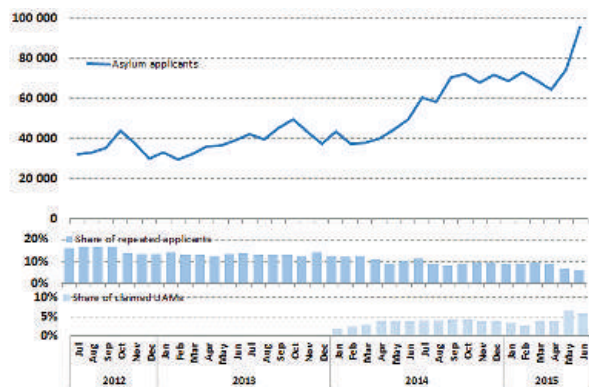


2. Tools

EASO develops common tools to support the daily work of asylum officers, case workers and Member States in the implementation of the CEAS. In order to produce tools, EASO seeks input from Member States through the provision of data and information about the functioning of various aspects of their asylum system.

Early warning and Preparedness

Since 2013, EASO has developed its **Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS)** which aims to provide EU+ countries (EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland), the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament with accurate, timely information and analyses on flows of asylum-seekers to and within the EU and the EU+ countries' capacity to deal with them according to the asylum acquis. The Dublin III Regulation assigned additional competences to EASO in relation to information and analysis support. According to Article 33 of the Regulation, EASO plays a key role in a “mechanism for early warning, preparedness and crisis management” in the field of asylum.



To achieve this aim, EASO set up the **Group for the Provision of Statistics (GPS)**, comprised of national statistical experts responsible for the quality and timeliness of asylum statistics, each of whom is nominated to the group by their home country to serve as the single point of contact with EASO with regard to statistical information.

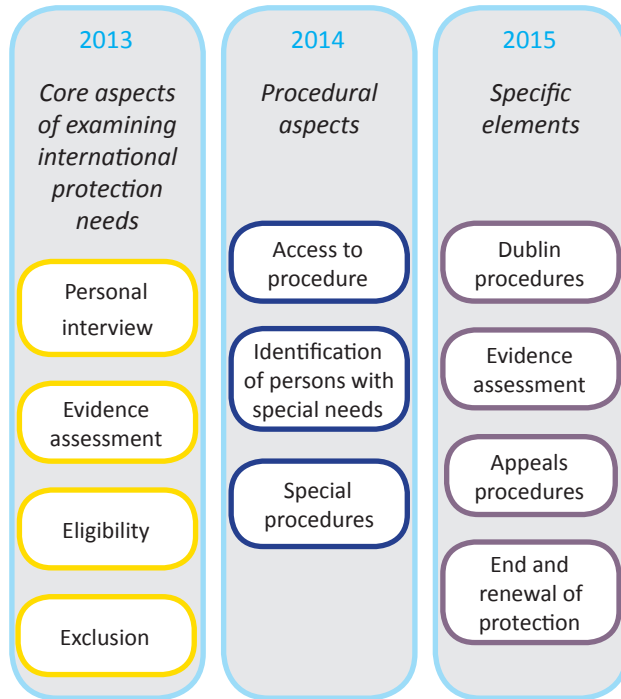
EASO developed EPS through a step-by-step process, involving feasibility studies with GPS members, pilot data collections and by ensuring that added-value is returned to the GPS and the EASO Management Board through embedding new analysis based on the EPS indicators into regular products provided to stakeholders (monthly and quarterly reports on asylum trends and analysis).

In March 2014, EASO launched **Stage II of the EPS** which focused on the first instance in the asylum process, spanning data collection under four indicators: **applicants for international protection, withdrawn applications, decisions and pending cases**. Countries contribute by providing data on the previous month within two weeks, **with all 30 EU+ countries contributing**. EASO recently began collection under **EPS Stage III, adding indicators on access to procedure, reception, Dublin statistics and return**. The timely information from the EPS has been fundamental in providing actionable insight on flows of asylum-seekers back to the key stakeholders. The framework of the GPS and close cooperation with other European bodies, e.g. EUROSTAT, has also ensured further harmonisation leading to an improvement in the quality of asylum-related statistics at the EU-level.

The Quality Matrix mapping process

The EASO Quality Matrix process began in early 2013, with the objective to gather comprehensive information on the way the asylum systems of Member States function and to provide meaningful practical support in the implementation of the CEAS. The process focuses on key aspects of the CEAS and has already collected a wealth of qualitative information, feeding into the way EASO

support is provided. The findings of the Quality Matrix are presented in thematic meetings, followed by comparative thematic reports. By the end of 2015, the Quality Matrix process will have covered ten of the core elements of the CEAS.



EASO publications:

- *EASO statistical reports*

EASO produced 10 quarterly, 30 monthly and 10 adhoc reports (early warning notes, situational updates and impact assessments) aimed at providing an overview of key asylum trends by analysing data regarding applications for

international protection made by asylum seekers and decisions made on those applications by European Member States and Associate Countries.

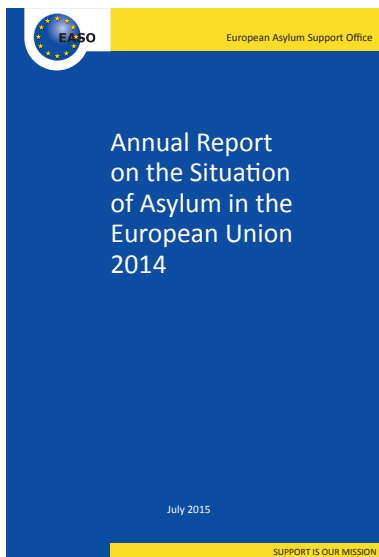


- *EASO Practical Guides*

In 2014 EASO initiated the development of practical tools and guides within its EASO Practical Guides Series. The series is developed in response to the support needs identified through the Quality Matrix and through a methodology drawing on the expertise of EASO, Member States, the European Commission and other EU institutions, UNHCR and members of civil society. The guides are publicly available and intended as a practical tool to support the daily work of asylum and reception officers and other target audiences within the EU and beyond. Seven such guides were developed: **Personal Interview, Evidence Assessment, Article 15 (c) Qualification Directive, Guidance on the implementation of Article 6 of the Asylum Procedures Directive, Guidance on the implementation of Article 10 of the EURODAC Regulation, Researching the situation of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons (LGB) in countries of origin, and Tools and Tips for Online COI Research.**

EASO is completing the development of an **interactive practical tool for identification of persons with special needs** in order to support Member States in the implementation of their new obligations to introduce a mechanism for the timely identification of special needs in the asylum procedure and the reception context. A **toolkit on access to procedure** is also being developed, in order to support first-contact officers in identifying those who may be in need of international protection.

- **Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union**



EASO published four editions of its Annual Report on the situation of asylum in the EU. These reports are drafted in coordination with the European Commission annual report on immigration and asylum and takes into account

input from civil society and academia. The report examines requests for international protection to the EU, analyses application and decision data, and focuses on some of the most important countries of origin of applicants for international protection.

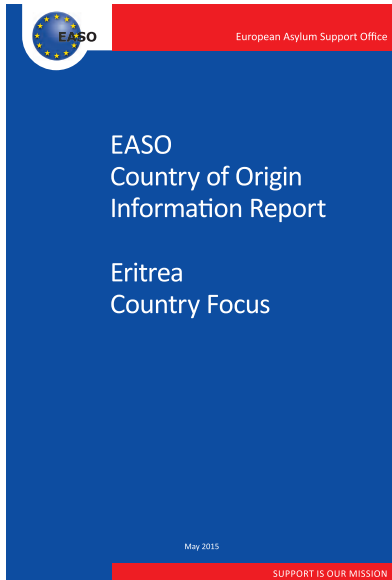
In 2015 EASO took steps to further widen and deepen the scope of the report in view of work done during 2014. In addition to EU Member States, the 2014 Annual Report now includes information on relevant developments in Norway and Switzerland. Input on relevant national jurisprudence was for the first time obtained from the EASO Network of Court and Tribunal members.

- **EASO country specific COI Reports**

Country of Origin Information (COI) has been one of the core focuses of EASO since the beginning, with the production of the EASO COI Report Methodology and two topical COI reports on Afghanistan in 2012. Within the context of the Network Approach, EASO produced a number of COI reports aimed at ensuring a common comprehensive information package on countries of origin at EU level.

These included country overview reports on **South and Central Somalia** and **Pakistan**, topical reports on the situation of women in **Chechnya** and the security situation in **Afghanistan**, and a country focus on selected issues in **Eritrea**.






EASO is working on topical reports on human trafficking in **Nigeria**, state actors of protection in the **Russian Federation**, and an update of the **Afghanistan** security report. These reports are produced jointly by Member States and EASO and are subjected

to a quality review. EASO will continue to produce such reports on important countries of origin and update them regularly to raise and harmonise COI standards in the EU and further support the practical implementation of the CEAS.

EASO activities on vulnerable groups

Since its establishment, EASO has been supporting and developing practical cooperation on issues related to applicants with special needs. Its focus has been on activities related to **children, including unaccompanied minors**; and on the link between asylum and **trafficking in human beings**. Identification and response to the special needs of vulnerable groups is further mainstreamed in all EASO activities, including in particular training, quality support and country of origin information.

In 2014, EASO started working on issues relating to COI research on vulnerable persons. Two workshops were organised in 2014 and 2015 on **COI and LGB** (Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Persons), and in 2015 EASO published the Practical Guide 'Researching the situation of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons (LGB) in countries of origin'. Member States, UNHCR and civil society organisations were involved in these activities. In parallel with the activities relating to LGB, EASO has been involved as a member of the Advisory Group in a project led by Unicef regarding **COI and Children**. In 2016, EASO will look into issues relating to **COI research on FGM** (female genital mutilation).

Specific programmes on vulnerable groups:	
Children	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Activities in implementation of the EU Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors (2010 – 2014) ☑ Publication on age assessment practices ☑ Practical Guide on Family Tracing ☑ Expert meetings ☑ Network and platform for practical cooperation
Trafficking in human beings	<p>Under its specific programme on trafficking in human beings EASO supports the implementation of the EU Strategy towards the Eradication Of Trafficking In Human Beings (2012–2016) in cooperation with European Commission and other EU Institutions, bodies and Agencies, such as CEPOL, Europol, FRA and Frontex. Expert meetings organised by EASO contribute to focusing the discussion on trafficking in human beings on the potential links with the asylum procedure, special needs and special responses within this context.</p>

EASO queries

The EASO query system allows Member States and Associate Countries to post questions and receive replies concerning practical aspects of the CEAS and other matters related to asylum policies and practices. The main aim of the EASO query system is to provide replies to focused queries within a short timeframe. Since its launch in July 2014, 13 queries have been submitted.

EASO specialised networks

- *EASO Thematic networks*

EASO established a number of thematic networks on **quality, training, statistics (GPS), resettlement and relocation, external action, courts and tribunals in Member States, experts on children issues, Dublin, and reception.**



- *EASO COI Networks*

The EASO COI Network Approach, launched in 2013 and further developed in the following years, has worked as a catalyst for information exchange, capacity-building, knowledge generation and joint COI production. EASO now manages nine **COI**

Specialist Networks, on Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Eritrea and Somalia. At managerial level, the **Strategic Network**, composed of COI Heads of Units or experts otherwise responsible for COI from all EU+ countries, gather twice a year, providing strategic input and feedback on EASO COI activities and exchanging managerial experiences with regard to COI research.



EASO practical cooperation workshops

EASO Practical Cooperation workshops and conferences are organised on an ad-hoc basis and have a wider participation, including first-instance asylum practitioners (decision-makers, policy experts), UNHCR and external experts, but occasionally also members of courts and tribunals and civil society organisations.

These include country-specific (**Afghanistan, Western Balkans, Ukraine, Russian Federation, Eritrea, Syria and Iraq**), thematic (quality processes,

joint processing, relocation, resettlement, case management, children, trafficking in human beings, and statistics), legal and policy.

Joint Contact Committee meetings



EASO worked closely with the Commission in organising joint and back to back meetings with the Contact Committees meetings on **Qualification Directive, Asylum Procedure Directive, Reception Conditions Directive, EURODAC Regulation and the Dublin Regulation.**

EASO ICT Tools

• *E-learning platform*

EASO training modules rely on a blended learning methodology combining approximately 15 hours of online work and 1 or 2 days of face-to-face seminar. The EASO e-learning platform is used by EASO to train national trainers and is also available to all Member States to organise their own national training.



Through the e-learning platform, participants have personal credentials to access the theoretical content, complete quizzes and other exercises. Progress made by trainees on the platform is monitored by their trainers in order to prepare the face-to-face seminar. Trainers also have access to a trainer's manual and related materials.

• *The Common European COI Portal*

The **COI Portal** was built to enable asylum officials to access a wide range of COI from a single point of entry. The portal allows connection of the official COI databases owned by EU+ countries to a single web application, while allowing Member States that do not have web-based systems to upload and share COI documents into a local dedicated area called the 'Upload Area'. Six national COI databases are connected: Germany, France, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Ireland. EASO is working on a redesign of the COI Portal. Whereas the Portal was so far only accessible to first instance asylum administrations, the aim is to make it publicly accessible, thus giving all stakeholders in the asylum

procedure (including members of courts and tribunals, legal representatives, applicants, civil society organisations) access to COI available in the Portal and ensuring a higher level of transparency. In addition, the new Portal is expected to provide an attractive and up-to-date interface, to improve search capabilities and to ease access for users, while refocusing the Portal as a specialist application providing high-quality COI produced by expert EU contributors. The new version of the Portal is planned for release in early 2016.



- **EASO Information and Documentation System (IDS)**

Understanding how the asylum systems of Member States and Associate Countries function can be complex. While there is a huge amount of information available on aspects of many national systems in the form of reports and analyses by various bodies, easily accessing relevant information that is reliable, comprehensive and up to date on the key stages of the CEAS in all EU+ countries is not possible; documenting and comparing different national solutions is also highly challenging given the complexity of the system. For this reason **EASO is setting up a combined**

content management system and database – the Information and Documentation System (IDS) – in the form of an IT tool which provides a detailed and up-to-date overview of the practical functioning of the CEAS.

IDS is planned to be a searchable library that provides comprehensive overviews of how each key stage of the asylum process is carried out in individual EU+ countries. These key elements include: access to procedure, application for international protection, Dublin procedures, determination at first instance, determination at second instance, reception and detention, return, and content of protection/integration. It is planned to form an IDS network of EU+ countries to validate the information in the IDS and to update it on a regular basis so that users can consult, compare, and analyse asylum practices across the EU.



In 2014, EASO set up a pilot version of IDS, and presented the concept to the EASO Management Board and to civil society in the Consultative Forum. In 2015, work continues on filling in the system so that first overviews can be provided for validation by experts.

3. Teams

For Member States under pressure due to an extraordinary influx of persons seeking international protection, upon request, EASO deploys asylum support teams from other Member States to provide operational support. Asylum support teams are composed of experts from the Asylum Intervention Pool, which now consists of about 500 experts grouped under 18 profiles.

Operational support: Tailor-made capacity building and emergency support

Since 2011, EASO provided operational support to Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Sweden. In total, over **260 experts** were deployed by EASO. EASO operational support activities have greatly contributed to effective solidarity and sharing of responsibilities with Member States subject to particular pressure.



EASO's tailor-made assistance to Member States having specific needs in their asylum and reception systems mainly revolved around the implementation of **four operating plans and six special support**

plans. Their activities consisted in the following achievements: **increased capacity to deal with the requirements in the Dublin Regulation, Asylum Procedure Directive, COI-field analytical research, data collection, analysis and processing of statistics, professional development of the judiciary in asylum-related matters and ECHR jurisprudence, age assessment procedures and treatment of vulnerable groups, absorption of EU funds.**

At the same time, guidance was given and standard operating procedures were introduced for strengthening the reception capacity and the current emergency response. Train-the-trainer sessions were organised under the EASO Training Curriculum, addressing the immediate needs of Member States staff to deal with a large number of asylum claims.



Joint processing

On the basis of discussions held in the Council of the European Union (in particular, in SCIFA) and the EASO Management Board in May 2014, EASO conducted several joint processing pilot projects (June 2014-June 2015). These pilots aimed to give participating States the opportunity to work together at a practical level in the pre-decision stage within the parameters of the EU asylum acquis.

22 experts took part in the joint processing preliminary pilot projects conducted by EASO in 9 Member States in 2014 and 18 experts from 15 Member States were involved in three EASO joint processing pilot projects in 2015.

Based on the positive experience of these joint processing pilots, the 10 point plan presented by Home Affairs and Citizenship Commissioner Avramopoulos at the 20 April joint meeting of Foreign and Interior Ministers and the European Agenda on Migration adopted on the 13 May 2015 make direct calls on EASO to deploy teams in Italy and Greece for joint processing of asylum applications in the hotspots.

In future, joint processing could be a regular practice and a new form of institutionalised cooperation on a voluntary basis between specific Member States willing to optimise their resources. EASO's practical handbook for joint processing activities will be available to all experts participating in this type of operational support in 2016.

Relocation and resettlement



In 2012, EASO drafted a fact-finding report on relocation from Malta and presented it to the European Commission in July 2012. EASO conducted an update of the fact-finding report on relocation in 2014.

Practical cooperation expert meetings on relocation and resettlement were organised by EASO, in agreement with the European Commission, to coordinate the exchange of information and other action taken on issues arising from the implementation of instruments and mechanisms relating to the external dimension of the CEAS.

EASO actively participates in the Annual Resettlement and Relocation Forum organized by the European Commission.

As part of the European Agenda on Migration, EASO has been tasked with supporting the Italian and Greek authorities in putting in place the emergency relocation procedure (Art 78 (3)) and accompanying the implementation of the provisional measures through operational support. Moreover, EASO will support the EU resettlement scheme.

4. Together

In its support to the implementation of the CEAS, EASO cooperates with third countries, EU agencies, UNHCR, members of courts and tribunal and the Consultative Forum.

- **EASO External Action**

EASO plays a role in supporting capacity building the external dimension of the CEAS. The EASO External Dimension Strategy was adopted in 2013, defining the approach and the general framework within which EASO will develop its work related to the external dimension of the CEAS.



The main action on the external dimension is a project financed under the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (the ENPI project) intended to familiarise officials from Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan with the mandate,

tools and instruments of EASO and cooperation models developed with EU Member States.

- *Cooperation with the Associate Countries*

Arrangements for the involvement of the associate countries (**Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Switzerland**) in the work of EASO have been initialled in 2013 and are under different stages of the negotiation and ratification process.

The arrangement between the European Union and the Kingdom of Norway on the modalities of its participation in EASO has been provisionally implemented since March 2014.

- *Cooperation with EU agencies*

EASO works closely with other EU agencies, in particular **Frontex, the Fundamental Rights Agency, eu-LISA, Europol, Cefpol and Eurojust**. In 2014, EASO chaired the JHA Agencies' network. During this period, the JHA Agencies focused their bilateral and multilateral activities on two main levels: the strategic and horizontal cooperation, and the operational cooperation on the other. EASO signed working arrangements with Frontex on 26 September 2012, Fundamental Rights Agency on 11 June 2013 and eu-LISA on 4 November 2014.

- *Cooperation with UNHCR*

UNHCR is a non-voting member of the EASO Management Board. Cooperation between EASO and UNHCR covers various areas from training, quality processes, trends and analysis, unaccompanied minors, resettlement, operational support and third country support. In September 2014, High Commissioner Antonio Guterres visited EASO. EASO signed a working arrangement with UNHCR on 13 December 2013.



- *Cooperation with members of courts and tribunals*

An important line of EASO activities is its cooperation with members of courts and tribunals. In line with its mandate under Regulation (EU) No. 439/2010 and with the ultimate purpose of supporting quality and harmonising judicial and quasi-judicial decisions made in asylum cases across the EU, EASO provides support for members of courts and tribunals, focusing on professional development materials, organisation of professional development activities and building a judicial network for practical cooperation. EASO has

established a network which includes National Contact Points from the courts and tribunals in Member States, CJEU, ECtHR, judicial associations and other bodies, including: AEAJ, EJTN, ERA and IARLJ, UNHCR and national judicial training bodies.



- *The Consultative Forum*

Since its inception, EASO has invested in developing a relationship with relevant civil society organisations based on sharing of expertise on asylum. Besides an annual plenary meeting, EASO established a two way dialogue inviting civil society directly in its work. The EASO Consultative Forum, which was established in October 2011, boasts a membership base of more than 80 organisations and individuals. In 2014 alone, more than 70 organisations and individuals were involved in EASO’s work, in particular training, unaccompanied minors and quality processes. Civil society input is now a standard feature in EASO’s annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU. Since 2011, four plenary sessions of the Consultative Forum have been held, attracting more than 400 participants and a distinguished list of speakers and other contributors.

