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Key findings of EASO's Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the EU 2015

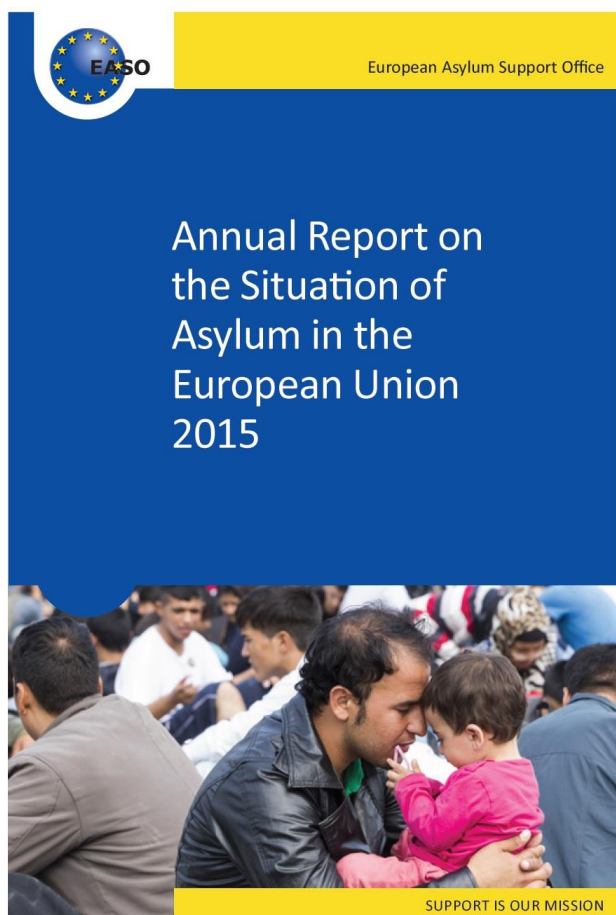
Introduction

EASO's 2015 Annual Report provides a comprehensive overview of the number and nature of applications for international protection in all 28 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland (the EU+). It examines asylum trends, including key challenges and responses during the year, major institutional and legal developments and provides an overview of the practical functioning of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Input is provided by Member States, UNHCR, civil society, information specialists and field officers.

Key points of report

- In 2015, almost 1.4 million applications for international protection were made in the EU+ – the highest number since the beginning of EU-level data collection began in 2008.
- The highest numbers of asylum applicants recorded were citizens of Syria, the Western Balkan countries combined, and Afghanistan. The main receiving countries were Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Austria and Italy.
- At the end of 2015, the number of persons awaiting a decision on their application for international protection in the EU+ passed the one million mark. The volume of pending applications more than doubled compared to 2014.
- The crisis in Syria continued to be a key factor in the number of applications for international protection in the EU+. Applications from Syrians reached more than 380 000, a threefold increase compared to 2014.
- The number of applications from Western Balkan countries in 2015 almost doubled to 201 405 applicants, the vast majority of them coming from Kosovo and Albania.
- Afghanistan remained one of the main countries of origin of applicants last year with 196 170 applications made (increased by 359 %) and comprising the highest share of the unaccompanied children applying for international protection overall in the EU+ (25% of all Afghan applicants).
- The first common EU effort on resettlement was agreed as 27 Member States, together with Dublin Associated States, pledged to resettle 22,504 displaced persons from outside the EU within two years.

Major developments in 2015



Relocation programme

With the unprecedented influx of applicants for international protection in 2015, a relocation programme was agreed to support 'frontline' Member States – Italy and Greece – that were under considerable pressure. After a proposal made by the Commission in May 2015, the Council adopted two decisions establishing a temporary and exceptional relocation mechanism for 160,000 applicants in clear need of international protection from Greece and Italy, to be implemented over two years until September 2017.

Unaccompanied children

In 2015, a total of 95 985 unaccompanied children applied for international protection in the EU+ – almost four times the number seen the previous year. Increases were most remarkable in four main receiving countries: Sweden, Germany, Hungary and Austria. These countries combined recorded 70 % of all asylum applications lodged by UAMs. The very significant influx of applicants for international protection claiming to be minors resulted in challenges regarding proper age assessment and lack of, or delay in, providing guardians.

Reception facilities

The increase in asylum applications in 2015 led to accommodation shortages in many Member States, particularly during the summer months. Some Member States had to double or treble their reception capacity, highlighting the need for greater flexibility regarding facilities. Measures taken to meet such challenges included providing additional permanent and temporary/emergency accommodation, setting up new initial reception centres, and closer cooperation between neighbouring Member States.

EASO support

Last year EASO continued to provide operational support to Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Cyprus. Since September 2015, EASO has supported the EU relocation programme from Italy and Greece to other European countries on the basis of Hotspot-Relocation Operating Plans signed with both Member States, by deployment of experts, including mobile teams, and by developing several tools to assist in the various steps of relocation (information leaflets, pre-departure information, registration, matching process, tool for the identification of vulnerable cases).

Developing national asylum systems

As the deadline for transposition of the recast asylum *acquis* passed in 2015, several Member States made legal changes to their national asylum systems. In parallel, a significant influx of applicants in several EU+ countries triggered emergency mechanisms in terms of border management, swift registering and processing of cases, and revision of the use of special procedures.

Information and legal assistance

Several legal changes in EU+ countries were made in 2015 that widened the scope of information and legal assistance provided to applicants for international protection at various stages of the procedure. This continued to be a challenge in 2015, especially in view of increased demand and an often limited pool of specialised resources.

Strategy for the future

In line with a proposal for the European Union Asylum Agency, put forward by the Commission, EASO is entering a new stage in its development, moving towards new and enhanced responsibilities and a new mandate, building upon its work so far.

Please go to <https://www.easo.europa.eu/information-analysis/annual-report> to view the full report.