**General information about the European Asylum Support Office (EASO)**

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) was established on 19 May 2010 by Regulation (EU) № 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council, as a result of a long tradition of practical cooperation between EU Member States. It plays a significant role in the implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and in supporting Member States establishing a level playing field in the application of protection standards.

EASO has been mandated to focus on three major responsibilities:

* contribute to the coherent implementation and development of the CEAS;
* support practical cooperation among Member States on asylum;
* support Member States that are subject to particular pressures.

As part of the reform of the Common European Asylum System, at the moment, negotiations are ongoing between the Council of the EU and the European Parliament on a legislative proposal for expanding the mandate of EASO and its transformation into a fully-fledged EU agency.

Its work is guided by the Management Board composed of senior asylum officials appointed by the Member States and the European Commission. The headquarters are located in Valletta Harbour, Malta.

EASO’s understanding of support is broad and wide ranging. Permanent support is offered on a regular basis to all Member States in the form of training, information, analysis, Country of Origin Information (COI) etc.,  whereas Special Support and Emergency Support are offered upon request, either to address specific needs in a particular Member State or to respond to an emergency situation in a Member State faced by particular pressure.

The State Agency for Refugees has a long history of close cooperation with EASO, both in terms of receiving support and in contributing to EASO’s operational activities in other Member States, which are subject to disproportionate pressure on their asylum and reception systems, most notably Italy and Greece.

*Further information about EASO can be found on the following web site:* [*https://www.easo.europa.eu/*](https://www.easo.europa.eu/)

**EASO’s Support to Bulgaria**

The cooperation between the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) and the European Asylum Support office (EASO) started at the end of 2013 within the framework of the **EASO Operating Plan to Bulgaria**, signed on 17 October 2013 by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Executive Director of EASO. The implementation of the Plan continued until the end of September 2014 and aimed at supporting the Bulgarian asylum and reception system in coping with the increased migratory pressure.

In the context of the Plan, EASO provided technical and operational support to Bulgaria in a number of areas, such as: identification and pre-registration of mixed migratory flows; registration of asylum seekers; information on top three countries of origin; support with drafting decisions on applications for protection in the first instance; support of the Dublin Unit; strengthening the reception system; referring unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable persons; processing backlog in the first instance; absorption of the EU financial assistance under the SOLID Programme; training of newly appointed staff under the key modules of the EASO training curriculum; capacity building in the field of information about countries of origin; support with respect to decisions on applications for international protection in the second instance.

On 5 December 2014, the Executive Director of the Support Office and the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria signed a subsequent **Special Support Plan to Bulgaria**, with duration until the end of June 2016. The request for further special support from EASO was motivated by the readiness to ensure sustainability of the good results achieved through the EASO Operating Plan to Bulgaria (October 2013 – September 2014) in order to enable an adequate response to the current and future challenges. With an amendment from 10 June 2016, the period of implementation of the Plan was extended until 30 June 2017.

Within the framework of the Special Support Plan, our joint efforts with EASO continued in order to enhance the Bulgarian asylum system in the following areas: implementation of the EU acquis in the field of international protection; enhancing the quality of the asylum procedure; identification and referral of vulnerable persons upon crossing the border and in the registration process; reception and social activities; statistics and data analysis; age assessment of asylum seekers; contingency planning; professional development and training.

The support provided by EASO continues to be of importance to building and maintaining the capacity of the State Agency for Refugees and other institutions whose work relates to the issues of international protection, namely – the Ministry of the Interior, more spcifically Chief Directorate Border Police, Migration Directorate and International Projects Directorate, as well as the National Institute of Justice.

On 27 October 2017, an amendment to the EASO Special Support Plan to Bulgaria was signed, whereby in the period January – October 2018 joint activities for enhancing the capacity of the Bulgarian asylum and reception system are envisaged in the following directions:

* complying with the EU Asylum Acquis and practical application of quality tools in the asylum procedure;
* vulnerability assessment, in particular unaccompanied minors;
* open and closed type of reception;
* Professional development activities (including practical workshops and trainings under the modules of the EASO training curriculum) and study visits in other Member States for exchange of experience and good practices;
* developing ICT tools and enhancing access for interpretation.

Further information about the operational support offered by EASO to Bulgaria and other Member States can be found on the following web page: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/operational-support>.

**Contribution of Bulgaria to EASO’s Operational Support Activities in Italy and Greece**

EASO provides support to Member States that are subject to particular pressure by coordinating the necessary technical and operational assistance to the requesting Member State and the deployment, for a limited time, of an asylum support team in the territory of that Member State on the basis of an operating plan. In order to provide the availability of experts for the asylum support teams, EASO has established an Asylum Intervention Pool consisting of experts from the Member States. In accordance with Article 15 of Regulation (EU) № 439/2010 establishing a European Asylum Support Office, the Bulgarian contribution to the **Asylum Intervention Pool** currently includes **41 national experts**, belonging mainly to the following profiles:

а) experts on access to the procedure and registration of applications for international protection;

b) experts on the application of the Dublin system;

с) experts on the examination of applications for international protection and conducting the personal interview;

d) experts on Country of Origin Information;

e) experts on identifying asylum applicants in need of special procedural guarantees (i.e. as a result of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence);

f) experts on guarantees for unaccompanied minors and children;

g) experts on the management of EU/EEA funds, financial and budget management.

The national Asylum Intervention Pool consists of experts from the State Agency for Refugees and experts from the Ministry of Interior. If necessary the expertise of asylum officials who are not part of the national Asylum Intervention Pool is used. Upon approval of their nominations by EASO, they are automatically included within the national pool and the EASO Asylum Intervention Pool.

For 2016 the overall number of missions in Italy and Greece with the participation of Bulgarian experts was 16, including 13 missions of experts from the State Agency for Refugees and 3 missions of experts from the Ministry of Interior.

In 2017 Bulgaria continued to be engaged with the provision of expert contribution to the EASO operational support activities in Italy and Greece in accordance with the capacity and the workload of the Bulgarian asylum and reception system. Since the beginning of the year 16 new missions of Bulgarian experts have been carried out in support of the two frontline Member States. 12 of them are missions of experts from the State Agency for Refugees and 4 – of experts from the Ministry of Interior.

National experts participate mainly in activities related to information provision, registration, conducting of the Dublin procedure, support in the context of the relocation procedure, support with the implementation of the admissibility procedure, including vulnerability assessment, as well as detection of possible document fraud and country of origin information.

Bulgaria remains committed to contributing with experts to the EASO operations in Italy and Greece in 2018, in accordance with the current administrative capacity and workload of its asylum and reception system. Whenever possible we have been flexible in relation to the deployment periods, which in most cases are longer than the minimum periods envisaged in the EASO calls for experts.