



Somali refugee children learn English at a primary school in Kobe refugee camp near Dollo Ado, Ethiopia. Globally, children below the age of 18 constituted 51 per cent of the refugee population in 2014, up from 41 per cent in 2009 and the highest figure in more than a decade.



Asylum and Refugee Status Determination

States bear the main responsibility for carrying out refugee status determination (RSD). However, in some countries UNHCR cooperates with governments in establishing fair and efficient asylum procedures. If national asylum procedures do not exist, are insufficient to identify protection needs, or when the government has restricted the application of the 1951 Convention, then UNHCR is compelled to conduct RSD under its mandate. In a few countries, UNHCR also undertakes RSD for the purpose of identifying persons with resettlement needs.

National asylum statistics constitute an important element in the monitoring of fair and efficient asylum procedures. Yet due to divergent asylum policies and practices across countries and regions, these statistics are far from harmonized and thus sometimes difficult to compare.

For the 173 countries and territories for which information was available for 2014, governments

were responsible for RSD in 103 countries (60%), and UNHCR was responsible in 51 countries (29%). In addition, UNHCR conducted mandate RSD in parallel to government and/or joint RSD procedures in 19 countries/territories (11%). Overall, these figures are virtually identical to last year's.

This chapter presents a global overview of RSD in 2014, including asylum applications submitted and relevant decisions taken. It also provides a brief overview of asylum applications lodged by unaccompanied and separated children. This chapter concludes with a contribution by the European Asylum Support Office and its work on harmonizing asylum statistics in Europe through the 'Group for the Provision of Statistics'.

It is important to note that this chapter does not include information on mass influxes of refugees, nor on those granted refugee status on a group or *prima facie* basis.

Global Trends

APPLICATIONS

More than 1.6 million individual applications for asylum or refugee status were submitted to governments or UNHCR in 157 countries or territories during 2014, the highest level ever recorded. An estimated 1.47 million of these were initial applications⁵⁴ submitted at 'first instance' procedures, while some 191,400 were submitted on appeal, including to courts.⁵⁵ This figure includes repeated asylum claims. Some 68 countries received more than 1,000 new asylum claims in 2014, compared to 67 a year earlier.

The UNHCR office in Turkey received the largest number of new requests (87,800), followed by Jordan (29,100), Malaysia (25,700), Lebanon (14,500), and Kenya (12,100).⁵⁶ Six out of the 10 major recipients of individual asylum applications in 2014 listed in Table 4.2 experienced an increase during the year. The top five UNHCR offices receiving asylum applications in 2014 registered 72 per cent of all new claims for the year. Further, four-fifths of all individual asylum applications registered by UNHCR in 2014 were concentrated in just seven countries.

TABLE 4.1 New and appeal applications registered

	2011	2012	2013	2014
State	734,100	781,400	870,700	1,402,800
UNHCR	98,800	125,500	203,200	245,600
Jointly*	31,700	22,800	5,800	12,900
Total	864,600	929,700	1,079,700	1,661,300
% UNHCR only	11%	13%	19%	15%

* Refers to refugee status determination conducted jointly by UNHCR and governments.

In 2014, UNHCR offices registered a record-high 245,600 individual asylum applications, including 11,200 on appeal or for review. In absolute terms, this was significantly more than during 2012 (125,500) and 2013 (203,200). In relative terms, however, the Office's share in the global number of individual asylum applications registered fell from 19 to 15 per cent. This was the result of some States recording significantly more individual asylum requests during 2014 than in previous years, notably the Russian Federation and Germany.

TABLE 4.2 New asylum claims registered in top 10 UNHCR offices (2014)*

	2012	2013	2014
Turkey**	26,500	44,800	87,800
Jordan	2,500	6,700	29,100
Malaysia	19,400	53,600	25,700
Lebanon	1,800	2,800	14,500
Kenya	20,000	19,200	12,100
Egypt***	6,700	10,800	10,000
Cameroon	3,500	5,800	9,100
India	2,900	5,600	7,000
Pakistan***	3,900	5,200	5,800
Indonesia	7,200	8,300	5,700

* Excluding appeal/review claims.

** Includes asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR as well as asylum-seekers who have been pre-registered but who are pending official registration with UNHCR.

*** Includes appeal claims (2012-2013)

NEW INDIVIDUAL ASYLUM APPLICATIONS REGISTERED

By country of asylum

With 274,700 registered individual asylum requests, the Russian Federation became the largest single recipient of new such claims worldwide in 2014. This figure includes about 7,000 applications for refugee status and 267,800 applications for temporary asylum. In previous years, the combined figure had never exceeded 5,000. Outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine had a major impact on the 2014 figures, in view of the fact that 271,200 or close to 99 per cent of claims in the Russian Federation were lodged by Ukrainians. The last time a country had registered a comparable figure was in 2009, when South Africa reported that 222,300 persons had lodged individual asylum requests, many of them from Zimbabwe.

The Russian Federation was followed by Germany with 173,100 new individual asylum applications registered during 2014. This figure is significantly higher than that registered a year earlier (109,600) and the seventh consecutive annual increase for Germany. Compared with the country's low in 2007 (19,200 new claims), these figures have increased nine-fold over seven years.

⁵⁴ The data for some countries includes a significant number of repeat claims, i.e. the applicant has submitted at least one previous application in the same or another country.

⁵⁵ Statistical information on outcomes of asylum appeals and court proceedings is under-reported in UNHCR's statistics, particularly in industrialized countries, because this type of data is often either not collected by States or not published separately.

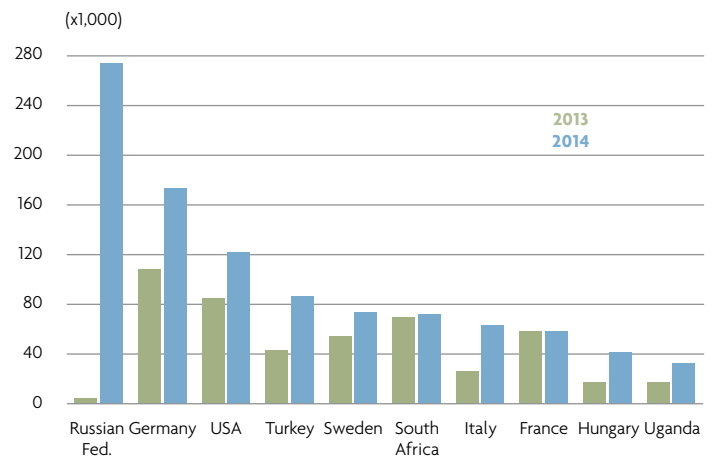
⁵⁶ UNHCR in Kenya is in the process of transferring responsibility for RSD to the Government. As of mid-2014, the RSD procedure has been undertaken jointly between UNHCR and the Government. The figure of 12,100 is limited to new individual asylum applications registered by UNHCR before the start of joint processing of asylum claims. Some 9,500 new individual asylum applications were registered under the joint procedure during the second half of 2014.

Germany’s 2014 level is partly attributable to a higher number of individuals from the Syrian Arab Republic, Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)), and Eritrea lodging individual asylum applications. The number of Syrian asylum claims in Germany more than tripled, from 11,900 in 2013 to 39,300 one year later. Eritrean asylum applications likewise almost quadrupled from 3,600 to 13,200 during the same period, while applications lodged by individuals originating from Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)) increased from 14,900 to 24,100 (+62%).⁵⁷ Overall, the Syrian Arab Republic was the top country of origin of asylum-seekers in Germany, followed by Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)), Eritrea, Afghanistan (9,100 claims), and Albania (7,900 claims).

The United States of America registered an estimated 121,200 individual asylum claims in 2014, a 44 per cent increase (+36,800) from the year before.⁵⁸ About 42 per cent of all asylum claims in the country were lodged by asylum-seekers from Mexico and Central America. This compares to 30 per cent one year earlier and demonstrates the increasing importance of this group among asylum-seekers in this part of the world, primarily fleeing violence and persecution perpetrated by transnational organized criminal groups. For the first time, Mexico became the main country of origin of asylum-seekers in the United States of America with 14,000 claims, followed by China (13,700) and El Salvador (10,100).

Turkey was hosting more than 1.5 million registered Syrian refugees by the end of 2014, all covered by the Government’s Temporary Protection Regime. Beyond this, however, Turkey has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of individual asylum applications registered with UNHCR in recent years. The Office registered 87,800 new individual asylum applications in Turkey during 2014, the highest figure on record and an almost doubling compared to 2013 (44,800 claims).⁵⁹ This turned Turkey into the fourth-largest recipient of individual asylum applications worldwide – an increase mainly

Fig. 4.1 Main destination countries for new asylum-seekers | 2013 - 2014



accounted for by Iraqi asylum-seekers, whose number doubled from 25,300 in 2013 to 50,500 a year later. As a consequence, more than half (58%) of all asylum claims registered by UNHCR in Turkey were lodged by Iraqis. Other important source countries of asylum applications were Afghanistan (15,700 claims), the Islamic Republic of Iran (8,200), and Pakistan (1,600).

Sweden ranked fifth with 75,100 new individual asylum applications received during the year, a 38 per cent increase compared to 2013 (54,300 claims). The year 2014 was the second-highest level on record for Sweden, following only 1992 when more than 84,000 people, many of them fleeing the former Yugoslavia, requested asylum in the country. The increase is a result of an almost doubling in Syrian asylum applications, from 16,300 in 2013 to 30,300 in 2014. Since the outbreak of violence in the Syrian Arab Republic in early 2011, some 55,000 Syrians have sought international protection in Sweden, making it the second-largest recipient of Syrian asylum-seekers in Europe, after Germany (59,500 Syrian claims).

Whereas South Africa was the leading destination country of new asylum-seekers worldwide between 2008 and 2012, the country’s ranking dropped in both 2013 and 2014. In 2014, 71,900 new asylum applications were registered, a marginal three per cent more than in 2013 (70,000), turning South Africa into the sixth-largest recipient of such claims. Asylum levels have gradually dropped from the 2009 peak of 222,300 claims, though as in past years Zimbabweans again lodged the majority of new asylum claims in 2014 (20,400).

⁵⁷ About 29 per cent of these asylum-seekers originate from Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)).
⁵⁸ Estimated number of individuals based on the number of new cases (63,913) and multiplied by 1.393 to reflect the average number of individuals per case (Source: US Department of Homeland Security); and number of new ‘defensive’ asylum requests lodged with the Executive Office of Immigration Review (32,239, reported by individuals).
⁵⁹ Figures include asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR as well as those who have been pre-registered but who are pending formal registration with UNHCR.

In Italy, the number of new individual asylum applications (63,700) registered in 2014 was the highest on record. The figure increased by 148 per cent compared to 2013 (25,700 claims), making Italy the seventh-largest receiving country during the reporting period. Mali was the main country of origin of asylum-seekers in Italy (9,800 claims), followed by Nigeria (9,700), Gambia (8,500), and Pakistan (7,100). While Syrians and Eritreans were the top nationalities of those arriving by sea in Italy, only a small number of these individuals applied for asylum in the country during the year (500 and 480, respectively).

As recipients of new asylum applications during 2014, Italy was followed by France (59,000 new claims), Hungary (41,100), and Uganda (32,400).

◦ By origin

Of the 1.47 million initial applications registered with either UNHCR or States worldwide during 2014, Ukrainians lodged 288,600 claims – on average, every fifth claim. Even though Ukrainian asylum-seekers were reported as having applied in 67 countries or territories, 94 per cent of all applications were registered by the Russian Federation. Other important recipients of Ukrainian asylum claims were Germany (2,700 claims), Poland (2,100), and Italy (2,100). Total recognition rates for Ukrainian asylum-seekers show a highly divergent approach ranging from above 90 per cent in the Russian Federation and Belarus to around or below 10 per cent in Belgium, Finland, France, Poland, and the United Kingdom. In Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, and the United States of America, total recognition rates were between 35 and 65 per cent.⁶⁰

Syrians lodged 170,000 new individual asylum applications in 109 countries or territories during the reporting period, underscoring this

population's global dimension. Excluding the Middle East, where Syrians enjoy temporary protection, the largest number of Syrian asylum claims was concentrated in Europe, notably Germany (39,300) and Sweden (30,300) but also in Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)) (9,800 claims), the Netherlands (8,700), and Austria (7,700). In general, recognition rates for Syrian asylum-seekers were above 90 per cent in most countries.

Iraqis were the third-largest group of asylum-seekers, with some 100,000 new applications registered during 2014, most of them in Turkey (50,500), Jordan (20,500), Lebanon (6,300), Germany (5,300), and Sweden (1,700). Total recognition rates were often above 80 or 90 per cent in most of the major receiving countries. The only noticeable exceptions to this trend were Sweden (52%), Georgia (39%), and the United Kingdom (37%).

Afghans filed the fourth-highest number of new asylum applications (73,400), notably in Turkey (15,700), Germany (9,100), and Hungary (8,500). Here again, total recognition rates were above 75 per cent in Turkey, Indonesia, Italy, and Sweden but below 25 per cent in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Greece.

Afghans were followed by individuals originating from Eritrea (60,000 claims), Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)) (55,300),⁶¹ the Democratic Republic of the Congo (48,100), Somalia (41,100), Pakistan (35,100), and Nigeria (32,000). Out of the top 10 countries of origin for asylum applications, nine are currently facing war, conflict, or human rights violations. However, these figures should be considered as indicative only, because the country of origin for some asylum-seekers is unknown or undisclosed by some States. Overall, the top five countries of origin accounted for almost half of all new asylum claims registered in 2014.

▮ Decisions

Available data indicate that States and UNHCR rendered more than one million substantive decisions on individual asylum applications during 2014.⁶² These figures do not include cases that were closed for administrative reasons with no decision issued to the applicant, of which some 350,000 such cases were reported to UNHCR in

⁶⁰ In the absence of an internationally agreed methodology for calculating recognition rates, UNHCR uses two rates to compute the proportion of refugee claims accepted during the year. The Refugee Recognition Rate divides the number of asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status by the total number of substantive decisions (Convention status, complementary protection, and rejected cases). The Total Recognition Rate divides the number of asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status or a complementary form of protection by the total number of substantive decisions (Convention status, complementary protection, and rejected cases). Non-substantive decisions are, to the extent possible, excluded from both calculations. For the purpose of global comparability, UNHCR uses only these two recognition rates and does not report rates calculated by national authorities.

⁶¹ About two-thirds of these asylum-seekers originate from Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)).

⁶² Refers to decisions taken at all levels in the asylum procedure.

2014.⁶³ Of all decisions, UNHCR staff adjudicated 99,600 substantive decisions, 9 per cent of the total – in absolute terms, the highest such figure in recent history.

Some 626,500 asylum-seekers were either recognized as refugees (286,700) or granted a complementary form of protection (339,800) during 2014. By contrast, some 434,900 claims were rejected on substantive grounds, a number that includes negative decisions both at the first instance and on appeal.

At the global level (UNHCR and State asylum procedures combined), the Refugee Recognition Rate (RRR) amounted to an estimated 27 per cent of all decisions taken during 2014, whereas the Total Recognition Rate (TRR) was 59 per cent. While the RRR was lower than in 2013 (32%), the TRR was significantly higher (43% in 2013). Both values are influenced by the level and type of recognition of Ukrainian asylum-seekers in the Russian Federation who were predominantly granted temporary protection rather than refugee status. Excluding these values, the RRR amounts to 35 per cent and the TRR to 46 per cent, roughly in line with previous years.

By the end of the year, 1.8 million individuals were awaiting decisions on their asylum claims, a figure that includes applicants at any stage of

TABLE 4.3 Substantive decisions taken

	2012	2013	2014
State	627,200	590,200	957,400
UNHCR	54,400	72,100	99,600
Jointly*	18,200	500	4,400
Total	699,800	662,800	1,061,400
% UNHCR only	8%	11%	9%

* Refers to refugee status determination conducted jointly by UNHCR and governments.

the asylum procedure. This was the highest such number in at least 15 years. The highest number of applications pending at any level in the asylum procedure was reported by South Africa (463,900), followed by Germany (226,200), the United States of America (187,800), Turkey (106,400), and Sweden (56,800). It should be noted that despite improved statistical reporting on pending asylum applications, the true number of undecided asylum cases is unknown, as many countries do not report this information. ■

⁶³ If an asylum-seeker withdraws or abandons his or her asylum application, or if an asylum-seeker dies before issuance of a substantive decision, the asylum application is, in most national statistics, recorded as having been closed for administrative reasons and therefore reported as 'Otherwise closed' in UNHCR statistics. This is also applicable to so-called 'Dublin III' cases in Europe, whereby the responsibility for the adjudication of an asylum claim is transferred to the country responsible in accordance with the Regulation criteria.

Unaccompanied or separated children seeking asylum

The number of unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) seeking asylum on an individual basis has reached levels unprecedented since at least 2006, when UNHCR started systematically collecting this data. More than 34,300 new individual asylum applications were lodged by UASC in 82 countries in 2014, far more than in previous years. While a large number of countries reported that they had not registered a single asylum claim by an unaccompanied or separated child during the year, some were not able to report such information at all, including South Africa and the United States of America.

Sweden and Germany not only received in total the highest number of asylum applications across the European Union but also the highest number of UASC among the 82 countries reporting such statistics. Some 7,000 UASC sought asylum in Sweden during the year, almost 10 per cent of the

overall total. For the most part, Afghans (1,500), Eritreans (1,500), Syrians (1,200), and Somalis (1,100) lodged such claims. The German authorities registered 4,400 UASC claims, with principal nationalities again being Afghans (1,050), Eritreans (920), Syrians (660), and Somalis (570). Sweden and Germany together registered one third of all UASC asylum applications worldwide (based on available data). Other European countries registering significant numbers of UASC seeking asylum were Italy (2,600), Austria (2,100), the United Kingdom (1,900), and Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)) (1,600).

Outside the immediate European region, UNHCR offices in Indonesia and Kenya reported having registered close to 1,100 and 2,200 individual UASC asylum claims, respectively. The number of individual UASC asylum claims in the United States of America is believed to be relatively significant, though official statistics are unfortunately not available. Data on UASC for South Africa, the largest recipient of new asylum applications on the continent, are not available either.

Available UASC data show that Afghans were the largest group lodging individual asylum claims in 2014, with more than 8,600 applications registered. These were followed by Eritreans (4,800), Syrians (3,600), and Somalis (3,000). ●



Improving asylum statistics in the European Union

– Contributed by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO)⁶⁴ –

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) began developing an Early warning and Preparedness System (EPS) that aims at providing the 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 Europe, as well as the

⁶⁴ The views and opinions expressed are those of the EASO and do not necessarily represent the views of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.



Hundreds of refugees and migrants crowded on a fishing boat are pictured moments before being rescued by the Italian Navy under its former “Mare Nostrum operation” in June 2014. They are among the lucky ones who survived the dangerous sea journey on the Mediterranean.

© THE ITALIAN COASTGUARD / M. SESTINI

capacity of the EU+ countries to deal with those flows.

Since 2008, Eurostat has collected some EU-level data on asylum, in accordance with European Regulation (EC) No 862/2007.⁶⁵ Yet EASO was concerned with setting up an operationally useful and timely collection using non-validated but highly comparable

data from contributing countries. To do so, 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 these experts is nominated to the GPS by the authorities responsible for the national asylum system, and these individuals serve as the single point of contact with EASO with regard to statistical information. The

GPS, whose meetings are also attended by representatives from Eurostat, the European Commission, UNHCR, and Frontex, has been fundamental in the development of EASO’s EPS, particularly in ensuring the comparability of data.

RATIONALE

The EPS aims principally to support the practical implementation of the Common

⁶⁵ See <http://goo.gl/6vtm5m>.

European Asylum System (CEAS), as set out in the ‘*asylum acquis*’ and established on the basis of Articles 9 and 11 of the founding Regulation of the Agency (Regulation (EU) No 439/2010). However, with the revision of the Dublin Regulation, Article 33 reinforced the need for rapid information on asylum pressures faced by Member States and foresaw a particular role for EASO in providing relevant information under a ‘mechanism for early warning, preparedness and crisis management’ in the field of asylum.

In forming the GPS, EASO sought to ensure that the provision of statistical data was first and foremost operational. This follows on the fact that the primary objective of the data collection is early warning rather than the compilation of official statistical data, which is within Eurostat’s mandate. Therefore, while statistical accuracy and reliability are indeed aims of the GPS, primacy is given to coherence and timeliness, so that comparable statistics can be collected in order to provide an up-to-date situational picture of the asylum system at the EU+ level. For this reason, data collection takes place on a monthly basis, within 15 days of the reporting period.

EASO also sought to benefit from the statistical knowledge already acquired by the national experts in charge of asylum-related data within the EU+ countries, as well as from the fact that the GPS members come from organizations that ‘own’ this data. As a result of this approach and despite the collection being voluntary, since March 2014 all 30 EU+ countries have contributed the required data to EASO within the requested deadlines, with only occasional exceptions.

Within the GPS, common understanding is essential. This extends not only to the indicator definitions and interpretations of legislation but also to understanding limits on the appropriate use of statistical information in analysis. To promote this common understanding, EASO works together with the GPS in developing indicator definitions and provides

feedback through monthly trend analysis shared with GPS members in analytical publications. A written guide is provided to members as a reference document, and concrete examples are used to test common understandings despite very different national organizations.

HARMONIZING ASYLUM STATISTICS AT THE EU LEVEL

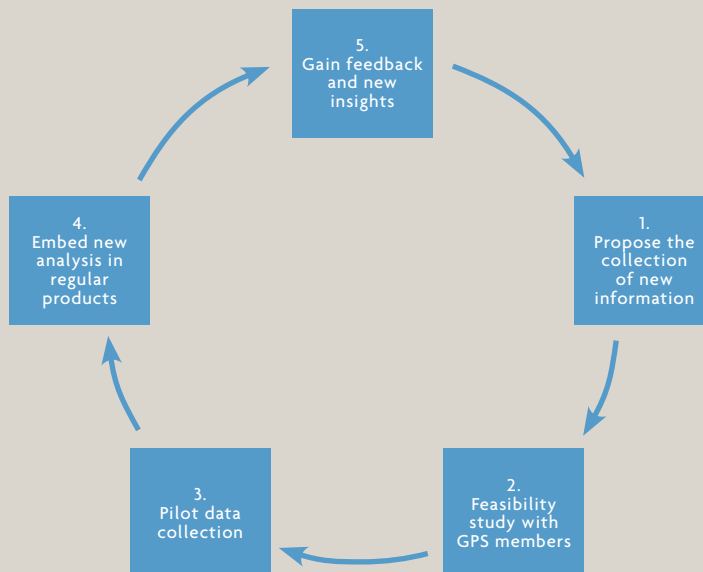
Since 2008, all EU Member States submit regular statistics on migration and international protection to Eurostat, in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 862/2007. Asylum statistics are included in the regulation’s Article 4, which encompasses applicants for international protection, pending cases, withdrawn applications, and persons covered by first instance and final decisions. Statistics on the implementation of the Dublin Regulation ((EC) No 343/2003 and (EU) No 604/2013) and unaccompanied minor applicants are also reported.

Regulation (EC) No 862/2007 and the accompanying “Technical Specifications” from Eurostat have gone a long way in harmonizing the collection of asylum statistics at the EU level. Yet one of the main conclusions from the GPS’s first meeting, in 2013, was the recognition that major divergences continued to exist in the collection and reporting of statistical data across the EU+. There could be many reasons for these divergences, but EASO found three key factors.

First, within the Member States, interpretations of the EU *asylum acquis* may vary. Moreover, the collection of operational statistics can be slowed down by the long time frame sometimes required for the implementation of transposed legislation. Second, the organizational specifics of national asylum systems can mean that information in some countries is shared incompletely between authorities involved in the asylum procedure. Third, reporting practices differ among countries. Regulation (EC) No 862/2007 establishes the periodicity, timeliness, and granularity for a minimum common set of

Fig. 4.2

The developing in stages of the EPS in close cooperation with the GPS members



indicators for reporting on a range of asylum-related statistics, yet Member States can and do voluntarily contribute more than this common set. However, in some cases this voluntary submission of statistical data is not comprehensive, leading to gaps at the EU level.

Lack of harmonization can have very significant impacts on both the comparability of the data between Member States and the accuracy of the aggregate statistics for Europe, underestimating or overestimating crucial data and potentially distorting the overall picture of asylum-related phenomena. In general, to be of most use, international statistical data should be accurate, timely, and reliable as well as harmonized across countries.

EASO developed the EPS through a step-by-step process. These phases involved feasibility studies with GPS members, pilot data collections, and ensuring that added value is returned to the GPS and the EASO Management Board by embedding new analysis based on the EPS indicators into regular products provided to stakeholders – for instance, monthly reports on latest trends and quarterly analytical reports.

This stage-wise development process helps to ensure that, while progress in

the EPS may be slow, it is comprehensive and eventually moves towards completeness. At each stage, EU+ countries develop harmonized procedures on the data being collected, thus ensuring the quality and utility of the analyses that result. This process allows GPS members to identify gaps and to put in place the resources needed to address them.

At each stage, EASO proposes a limited number of new indicators and disaggregations to be collected with a certain periodicity and timeliness. After endorsement by the GPS and the EASO Management Board, EASO begins data collection and provides feedback through analysis. Finally, the utility of this analysis is checked by end-users before any further expansion of data collection is planned.

There are several examples of how the GPS's work has strengthened the harmonization of asylum statistics at the EU+ level. In revisions to the Eurostat "Technical Guidelines", some definitions used by EU+ countries for the submission of official statistics have been aligned with the EPS definitions developed through the GPS. This has been the case with regard to the treatment of first time and repeated applicants as well as the closure of cases following a decision to transfer an applicant under

the Dublin Regulation. There has also been further clarity established on the reporting of first instance decisions according to the type of protection granted.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

As a first step in the process of setting up the EPS, EASO engaged the GPS members with a questionnaire of over 500 questions, to which every EU+ country responded. The questionnaire focused on the basic mechanics of the collection of asylum statistics in the individual countries: What information systems and technical approaches were used, how the indicator definitions were interpreted, the timing of the collection and recording of available data, and the scope of available information. This last element included contiguous aspects of the asylum process, such as Dublin procedures, residence permits data, and national forms of protection.

On the basis of this input, EASO compiled a comprehensive overview of the collection of asylum-related statistical data across the EU+. From this overview, EASO proposed a table of 22 indicators covering the entire CEAS – from access to the asylum procedure, through first and higher instances, reception and detention, Dublin, and finally return or integration. Due to the complexity of the system, however, a decision was made to implement the collection in stages, as per the process outlined above.

In March 2014, EASO launched Stage II of the EPS, which focused on the first instance in the asylum process. This phase spanned data collection under four indicators: applicants for international protection, withdrawn applications, first instance decisions, and pending cases. Stage II instigated the development process that was eventually adopted, with the GPS involved from the beginning in discussions about the extent of the new statistics – on the scope, definitions and disaggregations, and statistical collection templates.

Collecting statistical data on asylum alone is of little use if it is not accompanied by knowledge of the systems that produce the statistics. This is particularly true when assessing preparedness (e.g. legal, organizational, asylum procedures, reception, Dublin transfer, return, emergency preparedness). To improve EASO's knowledge of how the asylum systems of individual countries function (from access to procedure to return) and in order to better analyse the statistical data provided, EASO launched a mapping of national systems, in close cooperation with the GPS members of specific countries. So far, EASO has completed the mapping of Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Italy.

EASO recently began collection under Stage III of the EPS, adding indicators on access to procedure, reception, Dublin statistics, and return. Prior to this introduction, EASO conducted a survey with GPS members on possible additional indicators to include in the data collection and on the breakdowns that would bring the most added value. In developing the final set of indicators, the need for new information was balanced with the constraints that GPS members face on the availability of data and their own resource limitations, both in terms of staff and information systems. This was particularly important given that in many Member States, the data requested under this stage was not 'owned' by the body in which the GPS member worked.

It is also important to highlight that while the GPS ensures comparability across the EU+ countries based on EASO's definitions, the individual countries maintain their right to publish national asylum statistics based on their own definitions. At times, this can lead to different figures between these nationally reported data and those shared with EASO or other international organizations.

OUTLOOK AND VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The timely information gained so far from the EPS has been fundamental in providing key stakeholders with actionable

insights on flows of asylum-seekers. The framework of the GPS and close cooperation with other European bodies has also ensured further harmonization, leading to an improvement in the quality of asylum-related statistics at the EU level.

The achievements of the GPS to date have shown that it is possible to improve the timeliness and quality of harmonized asylum-related statistics collected across the EU+. Further, the EPS Stage III indicators will yield important additional insights on the pressures faced by individual Member States within the CEAS. The implementation of the EPS Stage III indicators will be gradual, as GPS members adjust their reporting capacity and make arrangements to complement the current set of information that they compile every month.

From the initial table of 22 indicators envisaged at the start of the GPS, several areas for expansion remain. There is a need for regular EU-level statistics on national reception capacity, both in terms of total accommodation and 'surge' capacity to provide emergency accommodation in cases of particular pressure. Another area of paucity in the statistics is with regard to efficiency and quality in the asylum procedure, with the potential for indicators on the number of caseworkers in the national asylum system and the time taken to process applications by instance.

In addition, the EPS indicators now cover most steps in the procedure in first instance, but these could be extended to include, for instance, appeal procedures and second instance decisions. Indicators such as the end-of-year stock of resident permits issued to persons granted protection would give insight on the diaspora within specific countries and the integration of asylum beneficiaries. Lastly, the collection of regular information through the GPS on relocation and resettlement would provide key operational insight on recent EU-level initiatives under the European Agenda on Migration.⁶⁶

Another advantage of a network of experts is that national experiences can be shared. As it gains experience, EASO can feed its knowledge back to national providers, suggesting improvements in automation of statistical provision and integration of EU+ data into national analysis products. The GPS also could connect national providers with the wider community focused on migration statistics.

In the development of harmonized, operational asylum-related statistics, the GPS serves as a model of how to promote close cooperation between key stakeholders. In the GPS, those stakeholders include national statistical experts, administrative authorities in EU+ countries, Eurostat, the European Commission and other EU partners, as well as other external stakeholders such as UNHCR. As a vision for the future, the concept has the potential to be replicated at the global level, including in countries from outside the EU that are the main destinations for those seeking international protection. With the unprecedented rise in the number of refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons worldwide, there is increased demand for more timely, harmonized asylum-related data to provide a coherent, up-to-date picture of the global situation. ●

⁶⁶ See <http://goo.gl/zT44KI>.