

Eurodac system for the comparison of the fingerprints of applicants for asylum and certain other aliens for the effective application of the Dublin Convention

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PURPOSE: To present the second annual report on the activities of the EURODAC central unit.

CONTENT: Provisions in Regulation 2725/2000, establishing the EURODAC Central Unit, state that the Commission shall submit an annual report to the European Parliament and Council on its activities. This is the second such annual report. It focuses largely on the management and performance of the system, as well as assessing the outputs and the cost-effectiveness of EURODAC. The quality of service provided by the Central Unit is similarly analysed. The main findings of the Commission's annual report are as follows:

- On the question of cost effectiveness, the Commission notes that EURODAC has been allocated a total of EUR 13 67 million between the year 2000 and 2004 from the EU budget. Given that the running of the Central Unit has been extremely stable some of this money has not been spent. After operating for two years, Community expenditure on all externalised activities specific to EURODAC totals EUR 7.5 million. The expenditure for maintaining and operating the Central Unit in 2004, totalled EUR 257 163. Within this context the Report proposes that savings could be made by the efficient use of existing resources and infrastructures managed by the Commission such as the use of the TESTA network.

With regard to the national budgets, the EURODAC Central Unit enables the Member States to use the Central Unit for comparing the data submitted to them with their own data already stored in EURODAC in order to find out whether the applicant has already applied for asylum before in their own country. This represents important savings for the national budgets as Member States do not have to procure a national system (AFIS) for that purpose. The Community also provided, via the IDA Programme, a communication and security services for exchange of data between the Central and National Units. These costs, initially to be borne by each Member State, were finally covered by the Community making use of common available infrastructures and generating savings for national budgets.

- On the question of quality of service, the Report finds that the Commission services have taken the utmost care to deliver a high quality service to the Member States, who are the end-users of the EURODAC Central Unit. These services include, not only those provided directly by the Central Unit, but also communication and security services for the transmission of data between the Central Unit and the national access points. Regarding the Central Unit, the Commission has set out very stringent availability requirements as far as public procurement is concerned. In the case of an incident, very short deadlines from two to four hours have been recorded. As such the Central Unit has been available 99.9% of the time. Moreover, no Member State has notified the Commission of a false hit or wrong identification performed by the AFIS.

- Regarding data protection issues, the Commission notes that the Central Unit registered a surprisingly high number of 'special searches', for the setting up of their NAPs. The number ranges from 1 to 611 across all Member States. As in 2003, some Member States continued to use practically the same (or at least a smaller range of identifiers) for their electronic transactions with the Central Unit.

To conclude, the Commission considers that the EURODAC Central Unit is efficient, offers a good service in terms of speed, output and security as well as being cost-effective. This assertion is backed up with statistical data. EURODAC plays an essential role in the application of a common European asylum system. A pilot project managed by the Commission, indicates that around 67% of total requests to take back an asylum seeker were a direct result of data collected by the Dublin Regulation. As such, EURODAC has established itself as an essential tool for a faster and more efficient application of the Dublin Regulation as well as a good indicator of the phenomenon of 'asylum shopping' in Member States. While the number of multiple applications appears to be on the rise, the work of EURODAC should ensure an eventual decline in this phenomenon.

Where there are concerns, these relate primarily to the excessive delay of transmitting data by some Member States to the Central Unit. The Commission, therefore, urges Member States to speed up their internal procedures and improve upon the quality of the data submitted.