

Asylum: practical cooperation, quality of decision making in the common European asylum system

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PURPOSE : to strengthen practical cooperation between Member States on asylum management.

CONTENT : this communication comes as a response to the European Council's call for intensified practical cooperation between EU Member States in the field of asylum. The adoption of the Asylum Procedures Directive in December 2005 marked the completion of the first stage of the Common European Asylum System. Now the EU will step up cooperation on asylum and by 2010 aims to have a fully harmonised common system. More specifically, it sets out how practical cooperation between Member States can support the realisation of the goals set at Tampere and in the Hague Programme. The Hague Programme – endorsed by the European Council as the EU's workplan for Justice and Home Affairs until 2010 - set three objectives for practical cooperation on asylum:

1) The establishment of a **Single Procedure** for all applications for international protection : single Procedure activities should be aimed at:

- identifying where changes need to be made in Member States' administrative practice in order to implement the 1st stage instruments;
- assessing how quality and efficiency of asylum systems can be improved through including all possible grounds for protection in one decision;
- identifying best practice in managing resources in a Single Procedure, including through costing comparisons and twinning exercises.

The results of these activities will inform the preparation of legislative action, notably to ensure that, at a minimum, the guarantees agreed as applicable to claims for refugee status in the Asylum Procedures Directive extend to applications for subsidiary protection.

2) A common approach to **Country of Origin Information** (COI) (the information used to make decisions on asylum claims) : Cooperation on COI should have three main objectives in the short to medium term:

- the establishment of common guidelines on the production of COI;
- the establishment of a 'common portal' to Member States COI databases as well as other relevant information;
- a pragmatic solution to the translation difficulties facing Member States in dealing with COI from different sources.

The result of these activities should lead in the longer term to the future development of an EU COI database.

3) How the EU should address particular pressures on asylum systems and reception capacities caused for example, by the geographic position of a Member State : **Actions to address particular pressures:**

- amendment of European Refugee Fund so that Member States can access funds quickly and with a minimum of bureaucratic process for emergency actions;
- streamlining of the procedure for accessing more rapidly the funding for urgent actions contained in the ARGO programme;
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setting up of expert teams to address reception and processing issues for sudden arrivals of large numbers at the external border of the EU.

Longer term options include a comprehensive assessment of particular pressures which have occurred in the past and the setting up of a network of Member State information officers in selected third countries.

The first wave of practical cooperation will encourage Member States to present projects in concert with other like-minded Member States or as an individual venture to the benefit of the 25, which will contribute to the achievement of the Hague objectives. The support and sustainability of the programme of activities put forward in this Communication needs to be assured. However it is clear that existing financial opportunities, through the ARGO Programme and the Community Actions of the ERF do not provide the flexibility or increased funding needed to complete the ambitious mandate set in the Hague Programme. The Commission therefore intend to make proposals to amend the ERF and the ARGO Programme to ensure that delivery of the Hague priorities can be supported.