

Press Release

20 June 2011, Brussels and Nicosia

World Refugee Day: NGO coalition calls for new EU asylum agency to end discrimination

On the eve of World Refugee Day, which is marked on 20 June, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) is taking charge of supporting the asylum processes of the EU. The current discriminatory and incoherent provision of protection across the EU and the lack of expertise on gender-related persecutions are putting individuals at risk.

If the EASO is to ensure that the EU fulfils its obligations to protecting all those at risk whether man, woman, gay, lesbian or transgender, a set of [recommendations](#) ("Engendering the European Asylum Support Office"), produced by a coalition formed by ILGA-Europe, the European Women's Lobby and Amnesty International's End Female Genital Mutilation European Campaign, must be translated into practice by the new agency.

The European Asylum Support Office will provide asylum expertise, conduct comparative research, collate country of origin information, gather existing practices, and provide training and guidelines for national asylum authorities.

The coalition calls on the EASO to work against discrimination in asylum procedures and to ensure that gender, sexual orientation and gender identity perspectives are embedded equally in the structure and the work of the EASO.

Current asylum procedures in the EU are generally lacking gender, sexual orientation and gender identity awareness: training on questioning techniques is inadequate, and the knowledge and understanding of persecutions on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity remains low. For instance, a Christian woman was not granted asylum by the Belgian asylum system because they mistakenly believe Christian girls and women not to be at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM).

Linda Freimane, Co-Chair of ILGA-Europe's Executive Board, said:

"In April 2011, the European Parliament adopted a [report](#) on asylum procedures which contains a number of measures taking into consideration special needs due to the gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity of individuals claiming asylum in the EU. We believe the European Asylum Support Office has a crucial role to play to make sure that, in practice, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) asylum seekers are being treated in non-discriminatory, sensitive and fair manner. We are open to work with the Office and provide any required information, assistance and advice."

Dr Christine Loudes of Amnesty International's END FGM European Campaign said:

"The EU must not further marginalize the marginalized. Instances of lack of expertise on gender-related persecutions are endangering girls and women at risk of FGM by returning them to countries where they are at risk of this human rights violation."

Cécile Gréboval, EWL Secretary General, said: "The opening of the European Asylum Support Office represents a key opportunity to support Member States in ensuring that all women victims of gender-based persecutions will see their asylum applications being

treated fairly in all EU countries which is far from being the case at the moment. We welcome the fact that the EU has committed to mainstream gender equality in the Common European Asylum System. The time has come to put into place mechanisms to reach this objective.”

In Cyprus, the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, being an active member of the European Women’s Lobby and a partner with the END FGM European Campaign, is coordinating lobby actions on the issue, including submission of lobby letters to the Cypriot Board members of EASO.

Ends

Background information:

Gender based violence and persecution is a global problem of pandemic proportions:

- more death and disability among women aged 15-44 are caused by acts of violence than by cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined (UN)
- 3 million girls worldwide are subjected to genital mutilation each year (WHO)
- 76 countries still criminalise same-sex sexual activities between consenting adults
- 539 trans people were murdered worldwide from January 2008 to the end of 2010 (Transgender Europe)

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Notes to editors:

(1) The EASO was established by the European Union in response to asylum challenges and is part of the implementation of the [2008 European Pact on Immigration and Asylum](#) which called for the completion of a Common European Asylum System by 2012 “to offer a higher degree of protection”.

(2) ILGA-Europe is the European Region of ILGA, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association and works for equality and human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans & intersex people in Europe: www.ilga-europe.org

(3) The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men: www.womenlobby.org

(4) Amnesty International's END FGM Campaign is a campaign, working in partnership with 14 organisations in EU member states to ensure that the EU adopts a definitive strategy to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and provide protection to women and girls who flee their countries for fear of being mutilated. Every day 8,000 girls worldwide are at risk of being subjected to FGM.

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies is a non-profit NGO affiliated to the University of Nicosia.