

# Eurojust remains fully operational during coronavirus crisis

## Undiminished support for national authorities in the fight against cross-border crime

The Hague, 3 April 2020



While Europe and other parts of the world are coping with the coronavirus crisis and its consequences, criminals continue to pursue their illegal activities. Some of them are even expanding their heinous business by ruthlessly taking advantage of the current situation. In these challenging times, Eurojust, the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, remains fully operational and continues its support for national authorities in the fight against serious cross-border crime.

In the beginning of March, a number of business continuity measures were swiftly activated to ensure the Agency's services also in a situation of remote working. Eurojust quickly adapted its infrastructure and critical processes to ensure that its laptops could provide secure access to the case management system, as well as advanced videoconferencing, including interpretation via secured channels.

In the period **13 – 31 March 2020**:

- **202 new cases were opened by National Members of Eurojust**, each case initiating cooperation among countries involved in a specific investigation of serious cross-border crime. This is only a slight decrease compared to the number of cases registered from 1 to 12 March (261), when the Eurojust building was still fully accessible;
- **eight coordination meetings** took place, one at Eurojust premises and the other seven via secure videoconferencing. Another four coordination meetings through videoconferencing are scheduled to take place in the next two weeks;
- Eurojust's coordination centre was deployed remotely to support a **joint action day**;
- **42 new grants for joint investigation teams** were awarded by Eurojust to national authorities on 27 March 2020 for a total amount of EUR 470 000; ; and
- agreements for **two new joint investigation teams** have been signed.

Ladislav Hamran, the President of Eurojust, said:

*"While we are in the middle of a global health crisis, Eurojust is committed to ensure that also in these extraordinary times, we do not allow criminals to escape justice. In the past weeks, we have continued to bring prosecutors from all over the EU together in a virtual way."*

*This reinforces our belief that the fight against cross-border organised crime calls for a profound digitalisation of the way we work, bridging any distance by using secure connections for videoconferencing and data exchange. Justice needs to be done under all circumstances."*

## **Background:**

Prosecutors and investigative judges tackling serious cross-border crime need to quickly find the right counterpart, coordinate their investigations, efficiently exchange information and solve a range of practical issues that regularly arise when using EU judicial cooperation tools, including the European Arrest Warrant (EAW) and the European Investigation Order (EIO).

Eurojust is a hub where national judicial authorities connect, work closely together and ensure solid judicial follow-up throughout the internal security chain, from the very start of the cross-border criminal investigation to the final verdict in court. Throughout the different stages of the investigation, Eurojust therefore offers tailor-made operational support:

- A rapid response, sometimes completed within a matter of hours, including connecting with key counterparts and preparation of formal judicial cooperation requests, including official translations.
- Complex forms of assistance and coordination mechanisms, which may be combined as required to support major operations:
  - the identification of key counterparts that need to be involved, for example to coordinate parallel investigations;
  - the organisation of case-specific coordination meetings;
  - the formation of joint investigation teams (JITs); and
  - the planning of joint action days, steered in real time from the coordination centre at Eurojust.
- In 2019, nearly 8 000 criminal investigations of many forms of serious cross-border crime, including drugs smuggling, cybercrime, trafficking in human beings, theft, migrant smuggling, terrorism and many forms of economic crime, including money laundering, fraud and environmental crime, were facilitated through Eurojust.

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## [ESMA Updates Its Public Statement of Consultation Practices](#)

The aim of consultation is to build consensus where possible between all interested and affected parties on what legislation or regulatory action is appropriate and to improve ESMA's decision-making process.

The statement summarises ESMA's consultation practices, most of which have already been in place since before the amendment of the ESMA Regulation.

The key elements of the ESMA consultation process are:

- 1) Publishing an annual work programme, so that all interested parties know when to expect output from ESMA;
- 2) Publishing all regulatory technical standards, implementing technical standards, guidelines, recommendations and questions and answers, technical advice and opinions to the EU Institutions, including overviews that concern the state of play of ongoing work;
- 3) Launching Calls for Evidence at an early stage, where needed;
- 4) Producing reasoned consultative proposals, including cost-benefit

analyses where appropriate and proportionate in relation to the scope, nature and impact of the measures;

- 5) Consulting using a variety of means, including public hearings, roundtables, technical workshops as well as written consultations;
- 6) Making public all responses to formal consultations, unless the respondent requests otherwise;
- 7) Making public the advice of the Securities and Markets Stakeholder Group, and the separate advice of its Members; and
- 8) Publishing a summary of the responses received, including feedback addressing all major points raised.

These changes are now in place.

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## **EASO publishes a new COI report on Syria: “Internally displaced persons, returnees and internal mobility”**

***Today, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) report titled “[Syria – Internally displaced persons, returnees and internal mobility](#)”. This report is part of a series of Syria reports produced in 2019-2020. These reports cover actors of protection, internal mobility, key socio-economic indicators, and targeting of individuals. The reports provide information relevant for international protection status determination for Syrian applicants for international protection, and will be used in the development of a country guidance note on Syria.***

In January 2020, Syrians lodged almost 8 000 applications, up by 22% compared to the previous month. This is the highest number since the end of 2017, and the continuation of an upward trend observed as of the second half of 2019. As a result, Syrians accounted for 12% of all applications lodged in the EU+; two thirds of such applications were lodged in just two EU+ countries. In the same month, some 5 610 first-instance decisions were issued to Syrian nationals in January, only slightly up from December (+ 10%). The number of pending cases reached a new high: more than 51 800 Syrian applications were awaiting a first-instance decision at the end of January. It must be noted that, at the end of December 2019, the number of Syrian applications awaiting a decision at all instances (thus, including cases in appeal/review) was higher, and stood at 86 435 cases.

The EU+ recognition rate for Syrian applicants continued to decline slightly, and stood at 83% for decisions issued between August 2019 and January 2020, down by three percentage points from the previous semester.

The report, [EASO COI Report: Syria – Internally displaced persons, returnees and internal mobility](#), analyses the situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and returnees in Syria, the underlying factors and general patterns of displacement, and then focuses on the situation of IDPs in various areas of Syria: rebel-held areas, and several areas in the north. The report further provides an overview of legal issues and practical procedures and obstacles for returning, freedom of movement and internal mobility in Syria.

The report was drafted by Country of Origin Information (COI) researchers from the Swedish Migration Agency, Country of Origin Information, Section for Information Analysis, in accordance with the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#). The report was reviewed by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS). Additionally, ACCORD, the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation, conducted an external review.

Additional information to complement this report can be found in the following EASO reports:

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## [CoR SEDEC Bulletin: COVID-19 impact and response measures](#)



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### **Covid-19 impact and response measures**

The Covid-19 pandemic has substantial repercussions on the European economies. The SEDEC Commission of the European Committee of the Regions prepares [regular bulletins](#) on recent research, articles and discussions on the socio-cultural impact of the pandemic in Europe and on the different response measures planned and implemented at EU, national, regional and local level.

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