

[EASO publishes 'Country Guidance: Syria'](#)

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Over the last seven years, Syria has consistently been the top country of origin of applicants for international protection in EU Member States and associated countries. Today, EASO published the 'Country Guidance: Syria', a tool for decision-makers and policy-makers in the EU and beyond, which aims to ensure that similar cases are treated and decided on in a similar manner.

The 'Country Guidance: Syria' represents the joint assessment of Member States of the situation in the country in view of the common international and EU legal framework. It provides an in-depth country-specific analysis, addressing all elements in the examination of international protection needs. It focuses on the main actors of persecution or serious harm in Syria, the refugee status or subsidiary protection needs of some of the relevant profiles of applicants, the ability and willingness of the actors in the country to provide protection, and the possibility of internal protection alternative, assessed in relation to Damascus City. Exclusion from international protection is also addressed.

The common analysis builds on the EASO COI reports concerning Syria and on available general EASO guidance on qualification for international protection. It is drafted by national experts, with the support of EASO and with valuable input from the European Commission and UNHCR. The final text is agreed by senior policy officials from EU+ countries and the guidance note, accompanied by the common analysis, is endorsed by the EASO Management Board.

✘ The 'Country Guidance: Syria' is available in a user-friendly electronic book format, as well as in pdf. It can be accessed at <https://easo.europa.eu/country-guidance-syria>.

For more information about EASO's role in fostering Member States' efforts towards convergence in the assessment of international protection needs and the work on country guidance, visit <https://easo.europa.eu/country-guidance>.

[Article – Commission changes: MEPs to assess McGuinness and Dombrovskis](#)



The [economic and monetary affairs committee](#) will hold a hearing on 2 October at 9.00 CET with Mairead McGuinness (Ireland) to evaluate whether she is suitable to serve as a commissioner in charge of financial services, financial stability and the Capital Markets Union.

Valdis Dombrovskis (Latvia), who is the executive Vice-President of the Commission, is proposed to assume responsibility for trade and is invited to a hearing on the same day at 13.00. The meeting will be organised by the [international trade committee](#), with the participation of the [foreign affairs committee](#), the economic and monetary affairs committee, the [development committee](#) and the [budgets committee](#). As Dombrovskis is already a member of the Commission, he will only face questions on his suitability for the new portfolio.

After the evaluations are completed, Parliament will vote in plenary on 7 October.

The reshuffle at the Commission comes after the [resignation of trade commissioner Phil Hogan](#) at the end of August.

McGuinness has served as an MEP since 2004 and has been Parliament Vice-President since 2014. Valdis Dombrovskis, a former prime minister of Latvia, has been a Commission Vice-President since 2014.

The procedure in Parliament

Whenever a member of the European Commission needs to be replaced or there is significant reassignment of portfolios, Parliament invites the candidates for the new jobs to hearings so that MEPs can evaluate them.

The procedure is similar to the one for the [election of the Commission](#) at the start of each term. First, the [legal affairs committee](#) examines a candidate's declaration of financial interests to confirm the absence of conflict of interests. This is a precondition for holding a hearing with the candidate.

The hearing is then organised by the committees dealing with the portfolio of each candidate. Before it starts, the candidate needs to answer some questions in writing. The hearing lasts three hours and is streamed live. After the hearing the responsible committee or committees prepare an evaluation letter.

The Conference of Committee Chairs, which includes all chairs of parliamentary committees, will then assess the outcome of the two hearings and forward its conclusions to the leaders of the political groups and the President of Parliament in the Conference of Presidents. The latter are responsible for the final evaluation and decision to close the hearings or request further action. Parliament can then proceed to the plenary vote.

Procedurally, the Parliament has a consultative role on individual candidates for commissioners, while it can approve or dismiss the European Commission as a whole. An agreement between Parliament and Commission requires the Commission president to consider the opinion of Parliament on individual candidates and changes in the composition of the Commission.

As always, when Parliament votes on individual candidates, votes are held by secret ballot. A simple majority of votes cast is required to establish Parliament's position.

Follow the [hearings live on our website](#).

[ESMA updates Q&A on data reporting under EMIR](#)

The European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), the EU's securities markets regulator, has today updated its [Questions and Answers](#) document on practical questions regarding data reporting issues, under the European Markets Infrastructure Regulation (EMIR).

The updated Trade Repository (TR) Q&A 1(c) clarifies that the counterparties should use the underlying to determine the asset class of total return swaps when reporting under EMIR.

A new TR Q&A clarifies that the reporting of the field *reference entity* for credit derivatives can be made with a country code only in the case where the reference entity is a supranational, a sovereign or a municipality.

Another new TR Q&A indicates how the fields *execution timestamp*, *effective date*, *maturity date* and *settlement date* should be reported for Forward Rate Agreement derivatives (FRAs).

The purpose of this Q&A document is to promote common supervisory approaches and practices in the application of EMIR. It provides responses to questions posed by the general public, market participants and competent authorities in relation to the practical application of the Regulation. This document aims to ensure that the supervisory activities of the competent authorities under the Regulation are converging along the lines of the responses adopted by ESMA. It should also help investors and other market participants by providing clarity on reporting requirements.

ESMA will periodically review these Q&A and update them where required.

[Article – New Migration Pact proposal gets mixed reactions from MEPs](#)



Members of Parliament's [civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee](#) discussed the [new plan for an Asylum and Migration Pact](#) a day after it has been presented by the Commission. on 24 September. The aim of the proposal, presented is to change and improve current procedures by ensuring shared

responsibility and solidarity. However, [committee members voiced mixed reactions](#), wondering if it will bring about real change.

During the debate with Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas and Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson, MEPs requested more concrete information about how the pact would be applied on the ground and enforced. Some considered the initiative to be a positive step to help EU countries where most of the asylum seekers first arrive, while others described it as the only way forward from the current situation.

However, MEPs also questioned whether the new rules will prevent another humanitarian disaster such as the [recent fire in the Moria refugee camp](#) and wondered whether the new screening and border procedures would respect fundamental rights. Several MEPs regretted that the principle of the [current Dublin regulation](#) – requiring the country of first entry to handle asylum claims – remains in the new regulation proposal, because they were worried this will maintain the burden on countries where most of the asylum seekers first arrive.

The Commission's proposal avoids compulsory relocation quotas, which proved so controversial in the previous proposal. EU countries can choose to take in (relocate) asylum applicants or commit to returning irregular migrants (sponsor returns) from another EU country. MEPs were concerned that this flexibility could lead to a situation where many EU countries choose to sponsor returns instead of taking in applicants and raised questions about the enforcement mechanisms and the effective cooperation with third countries. Some MEPs demanded the mandatory relocation of refugees, while others wanted a firmer stance on irregular arrivals.

[Press release – MEPs spell out their priorities for the Digital Services Act](#)



With the upcoming Digital Services Act (DSA), the EU aims to shape the digital economy not only at European Union level but also to be a standard-setter for the rest of the world, as it did with data protection.

In a [“legislative initiative”](#) report approved in the [Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee](#), MEPs request that the Commission addresses and tackles current shortcomings in the online environment in its DSA package, due to be presented by the end of the year. The principle of “what is illegal offline is also illegal online”, as well as the principles of consumer protection and user safety, should become “guiding principles” of the future DSA, they say.

The committee recommendations touch upon a wide range of issues, including obligations related to transparency and information for online marketplaces, product safety online, effective enforcement and supervision measures, including fines, the spread of illegal content online, artificial intelligence (AI), and *ex-ante* regulation to prevent (instead of merely remedy) market failures caused by big platforms.

Quote

The Internal Market Committee rapporteur on the DSA, [Alex Agius Saliba](#) (S&D, MT), said: “We live in a digital world where digital services have become the new utilities of our time. Their importance for our lives will only continue to grow. The report we voted on today recognises that a unique holistic, common approach built on trust, choice, and a high level of protection fully integrating users’, consumers’, and SMEs’ concerns is needed”.

“For the first time, we are introducing at EU level new concepts, such as Know your Business Customer, *ex-ante* rules for the digital sectors, special responsibilities for online marketplaces to guarantee consumer safety, stricter rules on targeted advertising and AI mechanisms and a scope that will encompass companies established even outside the EU”, Mr Saliba highlighted.

Key demands

What should be covered: The EU legal framework for digital services – the [e-commerce directive](#) – was adopted 20 years ago; it therefore needs to be updated to reflect the rapid digital transformation. A “one-size-fits-all” approach should, however, be avoided. The committee recommends distinguishing between economic and non-economic activities, and between “different type of digital services hosted by platforms rather than focusing on the type of the platform”. All digital service providers established in third countries must adhere to the rules of the DSA when directing their services to consumers or users in the EU, MEPs say.

Illegal, counterfeit and unsafe products: Consumers should be equally safe when shopping online or in stores. Platforms and online intermediation services will need to improve their efforts to detect and take down false claims and tackle rogue traders, e.g. those selling false medical equipment or dangerous products online, as was the case during the COVID-19 outbreak. Consumers should also be promptly informed by online marketplaces once a non-compliant product they have purchased has been removed from their site.

Notice-and-action mechanism: An effective and legally enforceable notice-and-action mechanism must be set up so that users can notify online intermediaries about potentially illegal online content or activities and to help the latter to react quickly and be more transparent regarding the actions taken on potentially illegal content.

The new rules should preserve the underlying legal principle that passive online intermediaries should not be held directly liable for the actions of their users.

Distinction between illegal and harmful content: MEPs call for a strict distinction to be made between illegal content, punishable acts and illegally shared content on the one hand, and harmful content on the other (the legal liability regime should concern “illegal content” only as defined in EU or national law). Harmful content, hate speech and disinformation should be addressed through enhanced transparency obligations and by helping citizens to acquire media and digital literacy regarding dissemination of such content.

Know your Business Customer: The so-called “Know your business customer” principle will require platforms to check and stop fraudulent companies using their services to sell their illegal and unsafe products and content. “Such a measure will help address one part of the problem with disinformation, misleading, or illegal content, and the sale of unsafe and fake products online”, says the rapporteur.

AI-driven services: The DSA should guarantee the consumer's right to be informed if a service is enabled by AI, makes use of automated decision-making or machine learning tools or automated content recognition tools, as well as their right to redress. They should be able to opt out and be given more control of the way content is ranked. MEPs also call for rules to ensure non-discrimination and understandable explanation of algorithms.

Online advertising, profiling, and personalised pricing: MEPs want the Commission to introduce additional rules on targeted advertising and micro-targeting based on the collection of personal data and to consider regulating micro- and behavioural targeted advertising more strictly in favour of less intrusive forms of advertising that do not require extensive tracking of user interaction with content.

Specific *ex-ante* rules for big platforms, "gatekeepers" of market access: Apart from a revision of the current e-commerce directive, the DSA package should also include a separate proposal for an internal market instrument imposing *ex-ante* obligations on large platforms with a gatekeeper role ("systemic operators"). The aim would be to prevent (instead of merely remedy) market failures caused by them and open up markets to new entrants, including SMEs, entrepreneurs, and start-ups.

For more details on these and other recommendations, see the [compromise amendments approved in the committee](#).

Next steps

The vote in plenary is expected to take place during the 19-22 October plenary session. This "legislative initiative" report will then be sent to the Commission to feed into its Digital Services Act package, to be tabled before the end of the year.