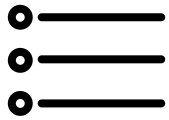




Report of the trustees and financial accounts

for the year ending 31 December 2020





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We dedicate this annual report to our colleague Lara Casalotti, who passed away in May 2021. We are incredibly grateful for her work and the impact it has made on the communities that we serve.



Asylos is an international network of volunteers who provide high-quality human rights research and documentation to asylum seekers around the world. This country-of-origin information is essential to corroborating the testimony of individuals fleeing persecution, and often makes the difference between winning and losing a case.

Objectives

The objective of Asylos, as set out in its original constitution from July 29, 2014 and its amended version from May 19, 2020, is the promotion of human rights law, particularly with respect to people seeking asylum and stateless people.

Asylos' mission statement reads as follows:

At Asylos, we believe that every person seeking asylum deserves a fair opportunity to claim their right to protection. Evidence to prove persecution or to support the credibility of individual testimony is a vital element in the decisions taken to grant or withhold asylum. But many refugees and their legal representatives cannot access this necessary information.

To redress this imbalance and protect the right to asylum, Asylos aims to:

➔ **ensure that people seeking asylum and their legal counsel have access to crucial information to substantiate their claim**

We believe that refugees and their counsel should have equal access to information and sufficient resources to conduct the needed research. Those helping to defend the rights of people seeking asylum face great difficulties when researching information: it often requires knowledge of local languages, experience in researching complex human rights issues and access to expert evidence in the countries of origin. We leverage our research skills, contextual knowledge, and contacts on the ground to ensure access to proper documentation.

➔ **ensure that the asylum procedure is evidence-based and unbiased**

We believe that decisions on individual claims should be fair and based on proper evidence instead of on preconceptions. Country-of-origin information (COI) reports produced by public administrations should meet the highest standards of our legal system and be driven by respect for human rights. Information relied upon by public authorities should be accessible to the public. Officials with decision-making power should receive sufficient training to make evidence-based decisions.

Activities

To access very detailed information from remote areas, and often conflict zones, we use academic and investigative research techniques and consult primary as well as secondary data available. We consult relevant publications from human rights (I)NGOs, governments, international organisations, and international and local media. Collectively, Asylos volunteers can conduct research in 27 languages. To fill information gaps, we conduct interviews with experienced individuals, such as (I)NGO professionals in the countries of origin, academics or journalists.

The activities currently carried out for the public benefit by the charity can be categorised into the following strands:



➔ Fill country-of-origin information (COI) gaps.

Our research investigates human rights violations in specific countries or deals with specific facts relating to the claimant's testimony. Our reports are free of charge and compiled on demand for asylum lawyers and (I)NGOs who assist people fleeing persecution and grave threats with their claim to protection.

➔ Create more country-of-origin information research capacity.

We train volunteer researchers, lawyers and (I)NGO representatives on researching and using country-of-origin information to represent their clients with better informed procedures, leading to fairer decision-making on asylum claims.

➔ Improve the accessibility and reach of high-quality country-of-origin information.

We administer a growing database of research reports and constantly invest in growing its audience and improving its functions. The database is accessible to anyone supporting persons seeking asylum worldwide.

In setting our activities each year we have regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit. The trustees always ensure that the programmes we undertake are in line with our charitable objectives and aims.

In 2020, Asylos' main objectives as set out in the work plan were to:

- 1. Improve access to high quality COI**
- 2. Broaden the impact of our research**
- 3. Raise awareness about the need for our work**
- 4. Strengthen and expand Asylos' organisational capacity**

In order to meet these objectives, we took on the following activities:

1. Improve access to high quality COI

We continued to provide a large number of high-quality individual-case reports:

- In total, we produced 74 reports for people seeking asylum originating from 46 countries
- The completed reports were split as follows between our regional research teams: Africa (28%), Americas (34%), MENA (15%), Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS, 12%) and Asia (11%).
- The reports that we produced were used at the following stages of the asylum procedure: first appeal (32%), second and subsequent appeals (5%), initial administrative application (35%) and further submission / fresh claim (19%). 9% of reports produced were used in other procedures such as statelessness claims.

- Reports produced in 2020 covered questions on civil status (2 reports; 3%), domestic security (11 reports; 15%), national - local governance practices (15 reports; 15%), political opposition (10 reports; 13%), social group (21 reports; 28%) and gender (20 reports; 26%).
- Asylos received 86 research requests in 2020. These were requested by a wide range of stakeholders, including lawyers and caseworkers from (I) NGOs.
- An approximate 30% of lawyers submitting research requests support their clients either on a pro bono (9%) basis or through charity funding (20%) which underlines the value and importance of Asylos providing COI reports free of charge. Remaining reports were submitted for cases funded by legal aid (50.6%), financed by the client (14.7%) or other means (2.7%).
- The top five countries for research requests were: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Iraq, Honduras and Zimbabwe.
- Research requests came from 9 host countries: the UK (33), the US (28), France (13) and Belgium (5), as well as Germany (2), Sweden (2), Bolivia (1), Morocco (1) and New Zealand (1).
- Compared to 2019, the proportion of research requests from the US, UK and France increased slightly, while the proportion of requests from Belgium decreased.

Achievements and Performance

Through our robust feedback protocol, Asylos continued to monitor the impact of our reports in order to further develop and refine our work. At the time of writing (end May 2021), an approximate 39.7% of requesters have provided feedback on research reports requested in 2020.

Some outcomes from the feedback collection are as follows:

- Lawyers stressed the indispensability of contacts on the ground, the broad range of language skills, and commended the thoroughness and quality of our research.
- In 88% of feedback collected for requests made in 2020, requestors said that our research provided them with information they did not already have before (**testimonials are available on our website**).

In 2020, we also followed up and recorded information on final outcomes of cases we worked on in 2019. We followed up case outcomes with a time lag of at least one year as final case outcomes are not usually available until long after we provide a COI report. Asylos received feedback on 33% (25 cases) of the 77 cases completed in 2019. Of these:

- 36% had received a 'successful' outcome, 24% had an 'alternative outcome', 12% were unsuccessful and 28% did not have a result yet.
- 56% indicated that they submitted the whole report to authorities/the court, 8% indicated that they submitted selected sources and 36% indicated that they used it for their own preparation or did not complete the field.
- 40% of respondents shared our report with colleagues.

Next to working on the production of research reports, we also worked on increasing the reach of our research:

- Even when we produce research with an individual asylum claim in mind, the evidence we find frequently applies to the cases of many other people seeking asylum. Our website is where our research lives, and registered lawyers can search our database for existing research by a range of countries and key words.

Among the feedback we received on reports requested in 2020 were the following comments:

- "The research I requested from Asylos provided me with new evidence, which helped me greatly to establish my client's risk of persecution." *Cecile Taymans, Lawyer, Belgium*
- "The reports are very useful in preparation (...) The reports are particularly useful in cases where the client has been refused legal aid and has no funds to pay for an official expert report (...) The client is very grateful." *UK lawyer representing a person seeking asylum from Afghanistan*
- "Thank you again for your brilliant work which is so helpful." *French lawyer representing a person seeking asylum from Pakistan*
- "Seems very on point. Thank you!" *US lawyer representing a person seeking asylum from Turkey*
- "Thank you for the work - it was an excellent report (...) I also think it is very high quality work considering it is free - which was essential as I was representing my client pro bono." *UK lawyer representing a person seeking asylum from Honduras*

Achievements and Performance

- In 2020, our case-specific research reports were downloaded 1,097 times. This gives us an approximate indication of how many asylum cases they were used for. We estimate that each download represents approximately one use in an asylum case, with some downloads not leading to a use and other downloads leading to multiple uses.
- We disseminated our research reports to 2,378 lawyers, caseworkers and (I)NGOs worldwide through monthly research updates.
- In 2020 we started collaborating with Refugee Action, ARC Foundation, and Clifford Chance to further increase access to our research database by building a an improved and joint online resource platform, which we are expecting to launch towards the end of 2021

In a number of cases, our reports helped people seeking asylum to be legally recognised as refugees:

- We published a selection of successful 'Asylum Stories' on our [website](#).

We also increased our thematic research (with support from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation):

- We continued to monitor and address COI gaps to identify the most pertinent research topics. Our thematic research reports are designed to address these gaps by combining publicly available information with new information obtained from interviewing.
- We published our third thematic research report in May 2020, in partnership with ARC Foundation. The report **Vietnam: Returned Victims of Trafficking** has since been downloaded from our website, [ecoi.net](#) and ARC Foundation by over 540 unique users and used in numerous asylum cases.

- The report was cited by the United States Department of Justice, and other organisations such as the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Stichting Los, Free Movement and the Electronic Immigration Network while an article was published in **The Independent**.
- We have been working on two more reports in this format. '**Ghana: State Treatment of LGBTQI+ Persons**' was later published in early 2021 and the next report, which is focussing on people with disabilities in Nigeria, will be published in late 2021.

Feedback on our Vietnam report

"As highlighted in the report, victims of trafficking face significant stigma and discrimination upon return. In our work supporting survivors, we have witnessed the discrimination that both women and men face from being a 'failed migrant.' Women face additional stigma associated with being sexually exploited. Recognizing the stigmas is crucial in helping the survivors receive the support that they need to successfully reintegrate and thereby reducing re-trafficking risks." *Diep Vuong, President and Co-Founder of Pacific Links Foundation*

"At our centre, we have supported many Vietnamese people seeking asylum, some of whom are victims of trafficking or modern slavery. We notice refusals tend to mention it is safe for them to return. The Asylos/ ARC report counters the Home Office's guidance and has provided a clearer picture of the risk to Vietnamese VoTs if they are returned to Vietnam." *Nikki Lee Clarke, Immigration advisor at St Augustine's Centre*

Achievements and Performance

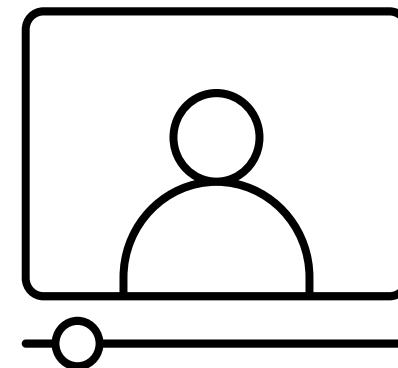
2. We increased the impact of our research and expertise

We invested in developing our research tools and standards:

- We conducted a major overhaul and expansion of our current research training curriculum, which had originally been launched in 2015. The new core curriculum is mandatory for all Asylos volunteers, spans over 94 pages, contains tips, examples and practical exercises and consists of the following modules:
 - **About Asylos**
 - **Country-of-origin Information**
 - **From a Research Assignment to the Start of your Research**
 - **Assessing and Selecting Source Material**
 - **Writing the Report**
- In addition, we launched one new thematic training module specifically for Asylos volunteers who coordinate the research process. The 26-page module provides practical and substantive guidance for COI research coordination
- With the launch of the new training, we introduced a new policy for continued training of Asylos volunteers. For the first time, volunteers are now required to pass an annual refresher training
- We facilitated a (digital) conference at the occasion of our 10th Anniversary, during which we offered advanced research training to volunteers about: 'Refugee Law 101', 'COI in the UK', 'COI in the US', 'Child-specific COI' and 'Interviewing in COI research'. We are currently working them into new training modules, which will be rolled out internally over the course of the next two years.

In January 2020, we managed to secure funding from the AB Charitable Trust to expand our training initiative for legal representatives in the UK, which we had previously started with the kind support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Throughout 2020, we:

- Mapped 'legal aid deserts' in the UK - areas where our services are most needed and which are marked by absence of specialist legal advice.
- Wrote and published a public training manual about COI research.
- Delivered a series of 7 basic COI training webinars, particularly advertised to representatives from 'legal aid deserts'.
- Developed a new training module and handbook on child-specific COI research (which was rolled out in January 2021) and delivered the first child-focused training webinar
- Trained a total of 143 individuals through this initiative. 48% of all UK participants were from 'legal aid deserts'
- 100% of participants stated that as a result of the workshop they felt more confident in researching and using COI and 98% rated the training as 'excellent' or 'very good'.





Feedback from our training webinars //

"Both the handbook and the presentations (...) were very useful. They complemented each other well and showed me how good open source COI research can be done, even with limited time and resources, and how good research can substantiate a client's case. It also helped me think more strategically about my client's asylum and human rights claims at different stages of their immigration proceedings. So thank you for running this workshop!"

A training participant

"Very interactive, stimulating, and useful even for experienced professionals"

A training participant

"I was impressed with the way in which the virtual workshop was managed remotely and the groups divided. (...)."

A training participant

Feedback from the new research training //

"Asylos' research training is key to everything we do. The modules are of course essential for every new volunteer to get up to speed with the quality standards and inner workings of Asylos. But what I find so wonderful is that they are a dynamic resource that develops as Asylos develops, that lives from volunteer's use and feedback, and that can be flexibly adapted and expanded as Asylos grows."

Katharina Natter, Trustee

"[The training] was very interesting. I definitely learned a lot and now I am looking forward to putting it into practice."

A prospective Asylos volunteer



Achievements and Performance

3. We engaged in strategic outreach to broaden the base of beneficiaries

Throughout 2020, we engaged in advocacy and communication activities to raise awareness for the circumstances that motivate our work:

- Published ten **blog posts** and ten **news items** to raise awareness for our work and tell the stories behind the individual cases we work on.
- We had 11,742 website visitors (compared to 9,239 website visitors in 2019).
- Slightly increased the number of followers on social media (from 3,423 to 3,456 on Facebook and from 3,319 to 3,456 on Twitter. We also expanded outreach on LinkedIn, bringing the number of followers to 929).

4. We strengthened Asylos' organisational structure and expanded our organisational capacity

Asylos was incorporated in the UK and has developed a significant body of work there, not least because of evident need. However, its aim was and is to reach out to as many countries as possible where reliable COI is hard to come by domestically. At the same time, its relative UK focus has allowed us to enhance our research, systems and networks, and enabled the development of high quality training and capacity building that is now internationally used and recognised.

Our network has expanded throughout the year:

- We recruited and trained 6 new volunteers. Our total number of active volunteers at the end of 2020 is 94. Volunteers are based in 29 countries.

We strengthened our governance and advisory structures:

- We convened one in-person coordination conference, 10 network-wide calls, one network-wide anniversary conference and 7 Board meetings.
- We recruited three highly competent new members of the board of trustees: Anna Magyarlaki, Development Officer at Fair Trials, and Diamantoula Vlantoni, Asylum Officer at the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Phil Arnold, Head of Refugee Support at the British Red Cross, joined the Board on 1 January 2021.

We incorporated in Germany:

- Asylos now has a sister entity in Germany, Asylos gemeinnützige Unternehmergeellschaft.

We focused on fundraising:

- We hired a part-time Fundraiser, Laura Wu, who started her role on 1 December 2020.
- Confirmed new grants from the AB Charitable Trust, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, a Dutch private philanthropist, the Haella Foundation, Stichting Niks Voor Niks and the Souter Trust.
- Raised 2,344 EUR in individual donations.

Financial Review

During the year, the net funds raised from the general public and philanthropies was 178,000 EUR. All of this income and some of the carryover from the preceding year was spent in 2020, bringing our total expenses to 179,000 EUR. Philanthropic donations are our biggest source of income and in total we raised a net income of 174,000 EUR from this source.

As shown in the restricted funds column in the Statement of Financial Activities, restrictive income was 66,000 EUR which was raised for particular programmes. We still have 47,000 EUR left which will be used as these programmes progress.

At the end of 2020, Asylos had almost 3,000 EUR in reserves. This represents less than one month unrestricted funds expenditure on charitable activities. It is the trustees' view that the charity ideally needs about three months' worth of expenditure to cover emergency situations and prevent disruptions to programmes. Trustees will therefore aim to build further reserves over time.

Restricted funds and unrestricted funds that are earmarked to be spent in a certain timeframe are not included in the trustees' view of reserve needs because these funds are held by the charity for only as long as is necessary to organise the relevant activities. Normally these funds are spent within one year of receipt.

INCOME				
	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds	2019
Paul Hamlyn Foundation		€57,946	€57,946	€57,366
Sigrid Rausing Trust	€46,357		€46,357	€45,853
AB Charitable Trust		€23,178	€23,178	
Open Society Initiative for Europe	€21,687		€21,687	€40,237
Dutch private donor	€15,000		€15,000	
Haella Foundation	€5,000		€5,000	
Stichting Niks Voor Niks	€5,000		€5,000	
European Programme for Integration and Migration		€1,000	€1,000	€4,000
Other donations	€2,573		€2,573	€9,861
Interest and other	€133		€133	€5,251
TOTAL INCOME	€95,749	€82,124	€177,873	€162,568

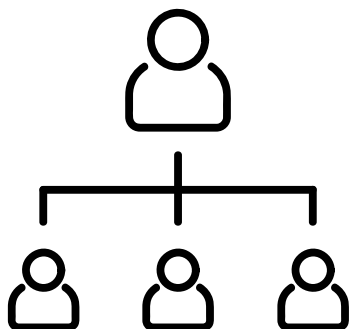
EXPENDITURE				
	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds	2019
Payments				
Network coordination	€99,840		€99,840	€70,339
Volunteer meetings	€985	€3,091	€4,076	€3,447
Office costs	€7,096		€7,096	€10,722
UK Project		€63,255	€63,255	€57,841
Governance and development	€5,017		€5,017	€8,267
TOTAL PAYMENTS	€112,937	€66,346	€179,283	€150,616

Cash funds				
	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds	2019
Unrestricted	€10,292			€27,480
Restricted	€46,552			€30,774
TOTAL	€56,844			

Structure

Asylos is an international non-governmental organisation established in 2010. Its original constitution is dated July 29, 2014 and was amended on May 19, 2020. It is registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation with the Charity Commission of England and Wales. The constitution defines the charity's objects as:

'The promotion of human rights law as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent United Nations or regional conventions and declarations, and in national law. In pursuing this object, Asylos will focus on the advancement of human rights law with respect to people seeking asylum and stateless people in the UK and elsewhere.'



Board of Trustees

The constitution allows for up to 12 trustees to be appointed. Trustees serve for renewable terms of three years, with the exception of the founding trustees, who served for renewable terms of four years. Trustees can serve until they either resign or their term ends without renewal. None of our trustees were remunerated for their trusteeship aside from expenses.

Our trustees are responsible for setting the strategy and are responsible in law for the running of Asylos. All trustees, except where otherwise stated, served for the whole year:

Dick Oosting (chair)

Daphne Bouteillet-Paquet

(Daphne relinquished her duties in January 2020)

Katharina Natter (vice chair)

Alexandra Dufresne

Anna Magyarlaki (appointed in June 2020)

Colin Yeo

Diamantoula Vlantoni (appointed in November 2020)

Mira Wolf-Bauwens

Where new trustees are appointed, they are given a formal induction to the work of the trust and provided with the information they need to fulfill their roles, which includes information about the role of trustees and charity law. New trustees are nominated by the board of trustees, and appointed where they have the necessary skills to contribute to the charity's management and development.

Advisory Committee

Since 2012, Asylos has benefitted from an Advisory Committee to advise on research priorities and to support fundraising. In 2020, its members are:

- Thomas Klau (Chair of the Advisory Committee, co-founder of Asylos and editor of Eurointelligence)
- Franziska Brantner (member of the German Bundestag)
- Géraud de Geouffre de la Pradelle (President of the Citizen's Enquiry Commission on France's Role in Rwanda and a Patron of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine)
- Gunnar Lund (former Ambassador of Sweden to France, the US, and the EU)
- Anila Noor (Refugee activist based in the Netherlands)
- Salim Salamah (Activist focusing on the issue of statelessness among the Syrian-Palestinian population)
- Satya Staes Polet (lawyer in a leading international law firm)
- Nick Witney (senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations)

Staff

At the end of 2020, Asylos had three staff members (one full-time and two part-time). Asylos' Director, Sophie Kloos, is responsible for the strategic management of the organisation and the daily coordination and delegation of all Asylos-related tasks. The Network Coordinator supports the Director in the coordination of the volunteer network. This position was occupied by Olivia Baskerville until she resigned at the end of 2020 to pursue a PhD degree. Her successor, Nanneke Wisman, has been recruited and will commence in mid-January 2021. The part-time fundraiser, Laura Wu, commenced in December 2020. This was a new role created to meet urgent fundraising needs.

In March 2020, Asylos Brussels staff, Director, Sophie Kloos, and Network Coordinator, Olivia Baskerville, left Belgium and moved to the Netherlands and the UK respectively. Since Olivia's resignation, all Asylos staff are now based in the Netherlands. Asylos has also been working with two part-time consultants, Maya Pritchard and Lara Casalotti, based in London, who deliver its UK-specific activities.

Asylos' Director and Network Coordinator work closely with the volunteer coordination team, comprising Asylos' 12 regional research coordinators (up to three per team) for Africa, Americas, Asia, MENA and the Russia/CIS team. Each coordinator oversees the work of the volunteers in the respective team and contributes to the strategic development of the network and its functions.



**We stand for asylum
decisions based on
evidence.**

