

ELENA NETWORK

Who we are

The European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA) is a forum of legal practitioners promoting the highest human rights standards for the treatment of refugees, asylum seekers and other persons in need of international protection in their daily individual counselling and advocacy work.

Our history

The ELENA Network was established in 1985 with the support of France Terre d'Asile and EKD Germany. The initiative was based on the idea that lawyers and independent legal practitioners should come together to address the common concern of protection of asylum seekers and refugees in their work across Europe. Over time the ELENA network has become known for its qualitative comparative research and its respected training courses.

The ELENA Network will be celebrating its 30th anniversary this year after many fruitful years of litigation, research, training and information dissemination.

ELENA today

The ELENA network extends across most European states and involves some 500 lawyers and legal counsellors. The network is coordinated by the Secretariat of the *European Council on Refugees and Exiles* (ECRE) in Brussels in close consultation with the *ELENA National Coordinators* from 33 European countries. National co-ordinators of the network include legal practitioners, legal academics and legal officers in ECRE member organisations.

Our objectives:

- Provide and reinforce contact between legal practitioners in different European countries to promote cooperation on individual cases and practice;
- facilitate the exchange of information and experience between legal practitioners across Europe;
- study the implementation of national, European and international law relating to refugees;
- organise seminars on specific topics relating to refugee law and make the results available to practising lawyers;
- promote the development of national networks of legal practitioners specialising in asylum law.

Our activities

- *The ELENA Index*

The *Index* provides contact information of lawyers and organisations providing legal services and other support to refugees and asylum seekers in Europe. The document is updated on an annual basis. The last update of the Index now dates from November 2014 and is available on ECRE's website.

- *The ELENA Courses:*

Following a long-standing tradition, ECRE facilitates regular ELENA training courses on topics of international and European refugee and asylum law. To date ECRE and the ELENA network have organised almost 40 events attended by approximately 3,000 participants from various backgrounds including

private lawyers, counsellors, NGO-experts, administration and international organisations representatives, academics, and national judges.

We organise both introductory (usually one in two years) and advanced (one or two per year) courses in different European countries.

“Knowledge acquired at the course will inform my practice as a lawyer and will also enable the cross training of colleagues back home. In this aspect the materials compiled and disseminated to participants are vital. The organisation of the conference was incredibly professional and I will recommend future courses to my colleagues.”

A participant from the ELENA course “The use of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in Immigration and Asylum Law”, Leiden, November 2014.

The ELENA Research

ELENA undertakes qualitative research or comparative information projects, coordinated by staff in the ECRE Secretariat. *ELENA’s latest research on Syrians seeking protection in Europe* provided an overview of 21 country practices towards those fleeing the Syrian conflict and seeking asylum in Europe. Other comparative reports include the *ECRE-ELENA Research on ECHR Rule 39 Interim Measures* (2012) and the *ELENA Survey on Legal Aid for Asylum Seekers* (2010).

The ELENA Weekly Legal Update

The ELENA weekly legal updates (EWLU) aim to inform asylum lawyers and legal organizations supporting asylum seekers and refugees of recent developments in the field of asylum law. The update covers asylum-related judgments of the European Courts and domestic case law as well as asylum legal news from across Europe. Relevant training courses, calls for papers and other important announcements are also advertised. The *subscription* to this newsletter is free and available on ECRE’s website.

The Information Exchange

The sharing of information is currently moderated through a mailing list of all the ELENA co-ordinators. Co-ordinators circulate queries or new legal developments in their countries as well as important jurisprudence and domestic practice from the other European countries following on from requests of national ELENA members. In 2015 the ELENA network gathered information in response to over 60 legal queries concerning various issues including: Dublin returns to Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy and Malta; family reunification of asylum seekers from Syria; legal aid provision for asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking and argumentation in the cases of North Korean asylum seekers.

Please contact Julia Zelvenska (JZelvenska@ecre.org), the ELENA coordinator at ECRE Secretariat, or your *national coordinator* should you have a legal query or need more information on the ELENA network.