

## 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, information provision and its respected training courses.

### 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 36 European countries. National coordinators of the network include legal practitioners, legal academics and legal officers in ECRE member organisations.

### Our objectives:

- reinforce contact between legal practitioners in different European countries to promote cooperation on individual and strategic cases in the area of asylum;
- facilitate the exchange of information and experience between legal practitioners across Europe in order to address challenges faced by refugees and those in need of international protection;
- analyse the implementation of national, European and international law relating to refugees in Europe;
- organise training on specific topics relating to refugee law for 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 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 three 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 [Note on Legal Aid](#) provided an overview of recent European and domestic case law and practice on the topic of asylum applicants’ access to legal aid in Europe. Other recent and comparative reports include the ELENA Legal Note on [access to the territory and the asylum procedure](#) (2017), [Information Note on Family Reunification for Beneficiaries of International Protection in Europe](#) (2016) and the ELENA [Information Note on Dublin transfers post-Tarakhel: Update on European case law and practice](#) (2015).

### **The ELENA Weekly Legal Update**

The ELENA weekly legal updates (EWLU) aim to inform asylum lawyers and legal organisations 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 2016 the ELENA network gathered information in response to over 90 legal queries concerning various issues including: Dublin returns to Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy and Croatia; the Safe Third Country concept in EU law and its application to Turkey; and Member States implementation of the discretionary clause in Dublin III, amongst many others.

*Please contact Julia Zelvenska ([JZelvenska@ecre.org](mailto: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.*