

European Refugee Fund: period 2005-2010

(Decision 2000/596/EC)

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The purpose of this paper is to offer an intermediate report on the implementation of the European Refugee Fund in 2005 and 2006. To recall, in 2004 three important new features were adopted regarding the Regulation's management and implementation namely: i) the adoption of the strategic guidelines; ii) the introduction of more precise management and control systems; and iii) the setting up of provisions facilitating the take-up of programme funding.

The report is divided into three parts: Part I is an overview of the budgetary and financial implementation of the Fund in 2005 and 2006; Part II analyses national implementation of programmes that are co-financed by the Fund; Part III sets out a number of comments and recommendations on the Fund's implementation. The findings of this study are based, by and large, on data sent to the Commission by the Member States. The Commission stresses that the report is not an evaluation of the Regulation, rather an analysis of its implementation and management.

Budgetary and financial implementation of the Fund: 2005/06:

For the period 2005/06 the Fund was allocated EUR 114 million. The budget appropriations made available from the Fund for national programmes amounted to €43 200 593.14 in 2005 and €46 288 323.78 in 2006. The amounts actually committed for programmes approved by the Commission were €43 169 204.71 in 2005 and €45 200 066.41 in 2006. Overall, nearly all the budget resources available to national programmes have been used up (99.9% in 2005 and 96.9% in 2006). The very small difference between budget appropriations and the amounts actually used is explained as follows: in 2005, the Slovak Republic did not use a small part of its allocation and, in 2006, Ireland and the United Kingdom were in the same situation. When the additional resources, provided by the national, regional and local budgets and by the beneficiaries themselves, are added to the contribution from the Fund, the total costs of all operations funded through the national programmes amounted to €83 303 061.17 in 2005 and €91 326 598.10 in 2006. Over the two years (2005 and 2006) taken together, in the EU as a whole, the ERF contributed to operations with total costs of more than €174 million

The United Kingdom, Germany and France were the three main beneficiaries of the Fund. 41% of actions concerned reception and asylum procedures; 30% was dedicated to integration and 29% was dedicated to voluntary return. The figures indicate that for this reporting period there was a slight increase in spending on voluntary returns.

Implementation of the national programmes: 2005/06:

This part of the report focuses on an overview of the national programmes; it analyses their implementation and it assesses how the Member States implemented their programmes. Three main activities were funded by the Member States: Reception and asylum procedures; Integration and Voluntary Return. Although many Member States experienced problems in the implementation of the programmes, their overall assessment of the Fund was positive. Several Member States indicated that the ERF provides real added value in terms of supporting asylum seekers and refugees, given that many of the activities promoted by the Fund are not provided at national level. Further, in many Member States the multi-annual approach is considered a very useful tool. Further, some Member States report that they have increased their internal capacity to manage and implement the European Refugee Fund, by way of greater resources that have been made available for Technical Assistance.

Conclusions and recommendations:

The main conclusion to be drawn from the implementation of the ERF during the second programming phase is that the Fund has gained a high level of acceptance and support, as well as much political recognition. The problems that have been encountered relate, mostly, to implementation problems related to the somewhat delayed implementation framework at an EU level. It should be stressed, however, that this was connected to the need for the Commission to set up the strategic framework required under the basic act. For its part, the Commission has made every effort to ensure that the legal provisions for the Fund's correct and proper implementation have been put in place.