

General programme "Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows": European refugee Fund, 2008-2013

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In accordance with Decision No 573/2007/EC the Commission presents a report on the results achieved and on qualitative and quantitative aspects of implementation of the European Refugee Fund (ERF) for the period **2005-2007**. The evaluation report is based on Member States' submissions with regard to the implementation of the national programmes. It also builds upon additional data and information available to the Commission.

Budgetary overview: the amounts committed for programmes as approved by the Commission were EUR 43 169 204 in 2005, EUR 45 200 066 in 2006 and EUR 63 302 688 in 2007. **Almost all the budget resources available to national programmes have been used.** The total costs of all operations funded through the national programmes during the period 2005-2007 amounted to almost **EUR 300 million**. The Fund's contribution accounted for slightly more than half of that amount. Additional resources were provided by the national budgets and by the beneficiaries.

The **United Kingdom, Germany and France** were the three main beneficiaries of the Fund during the period 2005-2007, with shares ranging from around 12% (France) to 17% (United Kingdom). They were followed by Sweden and Austria (7.7 % each) and the Netherlands (5.4%).

Compared to the previous programming period (2000-2004), the 2005-2007 period shows **significant changes to the breakdown of ERF funding across the three Actions** (Reception and asylum procedures, Integration and Voluntary return) as programmed by the Member States. There was a decrease in the share of the first area (from 46 % to 41 %), a small decrease in the share of the second area and a relatively large increase in the share of the third area (from 22% to 28%). Although **voluntary return** was the smallest of the three areas, and even if its implementation was more difficult than the others, there was an increased focus of Member States' strategies on that area. This trend relates to the share of each area, not to the amounts. Member States did not reduce their budgets allocated either to reception or to integration – instead they significantly increased the amounts allocated to voluntary return.

In general, national programmes were implemented through open calls for proposals (in the majority of Member States one call was organised every year) which attracted an impressive total of 2 492 proposals. Of these, **1 403 were selected and funded**. The average EU contribution amounted to about €108 000 per project.

Additionality and European value added: in the majority of Member States, the results of operations were better than forecast. However, integration operations proved to be the most successful, followed by those targeting the reception of asylum seekers, whereas operations on voluntary return produced the least satisfactory results. The use of the ERF during the period 2005-2007 proved to be **additional to national funding**. There were only very few instances where projects could have been funded through national support. Moreover, in no single case did the Fund replace financing from other European funds, such as the European Social Fund or the EQUAL programme. As a result, few, if any, of the 1 403 projects funded would have been implemented in the absence of the ERF.

The Fund was used either as a supplement to national resources, in order to increase the volume of existing projects and activities; or, as a complement to finance activities linked with existing projects, but

of a different nature, which does not necessarily increase the number of projects; or, completely separate from other funding instruments, to fund projects of a new type, content or size, including innovative projects which have not been taken into account in other subsidy schemes.

Impact of national programmes: it is estimated that the 1 403 projects funded provided direct benefit to a total target group of more than **350 000 persons**. Of these, **26 200 persons returned to their country of origin under voluntary return schemes**. In addition to those in the target group, more than 6 500 persons belonging to the project implementing organisations received support from the Fund, e.g. for training or as a result of recruiting additional staff. These are remarkable achievements considering the Fund's relatively limited resources (some EUR 50 million per annum).

Conclusion: the overall picture of **the implementation of the European Refugee Fund during the period 2005-2007 is satisfactory**. The project implementing organisations and the national authorities responsible for implementing the national programmes were able to build upon the experience gained from the first implementation period of the Fund, from 2000 to 2004, and to achieve even better results. Beyond the achievements of all projects funded, significant impacts were identified at national level against the main policy objectives set for the Fund. Although there is still room for improvement, the European Refugee Fund, after two implementation periods, is now firmly established, as part of the General Programme "Solidarity and management of migration flows", as a useful European funding instrument in support of implementation of the European *acquis* in the field of asylum policy.

Among the many recommendations that emerge from the evaluation with regard to the activities funded and the implementation mechanisms, a number have already been implemented in the third phase of the Fund, from 2008 to 2013, which is currently taking place in the broader context of the General Programme "Solidarity and management of migration flows". For example, the Commission has issued a number of guidance documents to clarify the legal requirements in various areas (eligibility rules, programming, reporting, programme closure etc.) with a view to finding practical solutions, and it has had regular exchanges with Member States on a range of implementation issues since the new programmes began. Further consideration will be given to all recommendations in the context of a Commission-wide debate on all proposals to be made for the period post-2013.