

Special report 22/2012 (2011 discharge): Do the European Integration Fund and European Refugee Fund contribute effectively to the integration of third-country nationals?

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PURPOSE: to present the European Court of Auditor's Special Report 22/2012 on the effectiveness of the European Refugee Fund and the European Integration Fund as regards the integration of third-country nationals.

BACKGROUND: the EU's SOLID programme, funded by the European Integration Fund and the European Refugee Fund, supports actions to foster integration of third country nationals in EU Member States and strengthen solidarity by sharing the financial burden resulting from the management of common external borders and the implementation of common policies on asylum and immigration.

The question is whether these Funds contribute effectively to the integration of third-country nationals in the European Union.

CONTENT: the ECA's special report found that while positive results could be observed at the level of individual audited projects, **inadequate systems had been set up to measure the success of the Funds**. The programme design hampered effectiveness and there was inadequate coordination with other EU funds.

The Court recalls that the European Integration Fund and European Refugee Fund, forming part of the SOLID programme, are run by the Commission and Member States through shared management. It found that it was not possible for the Commission or Member States to assess the contribution of the SOLID funds to integration, because audited Member States did not set proper targets or indicators for their annual programmes. The Commission's intermediate report on results achieved and on qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation, based on Member States' reports, did not provide enough information for the Funds to be evaluated or steered. At the individual project level, there are positive results, but this does not necessarily represent success at a broader level, not least due to overall implementation being lower than planned in 2007 and 2008.

Conclusions: the audit concluded that it has **not been possible to measure success of the annual programmes due to the lack of a proper monitoring and valuation system**. Nevertheless, most of the individual projects audited achieved positive results. However, some projects have failed. Member States generally consider the Funds to have added value.

Court's recommendations: to improve the systems for integrating third-country nationals, the ECA recommends that:

- the European Parliament and Council should simplify the programming arrangements with single national programmes to cover the whole period;
- in establishing management and control systems, the Commission and Member States should give due consideration to proportionality with the amount of funds involved and the impact on resources, as well as drawing on previous experience in similar funds;

- the Commission should carry out a comprehensive assessment of needs for integration regardless of whether migrants have EU or third-country nationality. Based on this assessment, an appropriate fund(s) structure should be designed which ends the separation of the target population on the basis of nationality and which is oriented towards the needs of the final beneficiaries. Setting an obligatory priority to fund third-country nationals would ensure that they receive the necessary specific attention;
- the Commission should place greater importance on obtaining concrete details on the assurance of coherence and complementarity in EU funds from Member States;
- the Commission and Member States should set-up an obligatory system of common indicators, and Member States should set target values for national programmes;
- for the start of the new programme, the Commission should ensure that its key guidelines are ready in advance and that Member States have set up adequate Management and Control Systems.