

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

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The Commission presents a report on the ex-post evaluation of the European Return Fund for the period 2008-2010.

To recall, the objective of the Fund is to support the efforts made by Member States to improve the management of return in all its dimensions ('integrated return management'), including through cooperation between Member States for the purpose of economies of scale. The Fund has a total budget of EUR 676 million. The resources are distributed among 26 Member States.

Purpose of the evaluation: the report is based on national evaluation reports on the results and impact of actions co-financed by the Fund. The Commission also considers the complementarity between the actions implemented under the Fund and those pursued under other relevant Community policies, instruments and initiatives.

It also presents the findings of the ex-post evaluation of the implementation of the annual programmes 2008 to 2010 covering over **EUR 199 million of allocations to the Member States**. The latter had to submit their national reports by the end of June 2012. However, since the eligibility period for the actions of the 2010 annual programme ran until 30 June 2012 and in order to allow comprehensive results of this annual programme to be included, the deadline was postponed until 31 October 2012.

Main conclusions: having reviewed the evaluation reports from Member States, the Commission finds that the overall picture of the implementation of the 2008 to 2010 programmes of the **European Return Fund** is quite satisfactory. The project implementing organisations and national authorities were able to achieve good results, **even if the first year of implementation of the Fund was challenging for some Member States**.

Additionally, it can be concluded that the Fund is living up to its promise to **boost implementation of integrated return management in Member States**. The Fund supported:

- the implementation of information campaigns and wide dissemination of information on return in various languages and through targeted channels of communication;
- the introduction or development of counselling activities for potential returnees (e.g. extension to new categories of migrants such as persons in detention, families, victims of human trafficking);
- the introduction or development of **reintegration assistance in the country of origin** and the development of country-specific information databases.

In terms of results, Member States reported that actions co-financed by the Fund contributed - significantly, for some Member States - to the **overall development of an integrated approach to return management**, to an increase in the number of returnees and to an improvement in the quality of the return process.

Moreover, the Fund helped to increase the use of voluntary return in comparison to forced return — and even allowed voluntary return and reintegration activities to be introduced in some Member States. **Overall, however, Member States still return more migrants forcibly than voluntarily.** In the future there should be an even greater focus on voluntary return in compliance with the principle of primacy of voluntary return under EU standards.

Even though some achievements were reported in the field of cooperation between Member States (e.g. joint return flights, exchange of best practices), the small size of the allocations devoted to this objective (less than 3 % of the total amount spent by Member States during the period under evaluation) reveals either difficulties in establishing cooperation networks or a preference for the joint flights organised by FRONTEX. In the future there should be a greater focus on the promotion of practical cooperation, with a view to reducing duplication of effort, for example, in cooperation with third countries, training activities, and the gathering of information on the situation in countries of return.

As far as the principle of solidarity underlying the Fund is concerned, the United Kingdom, Greece, France, Spain and Italy — whose allocations represented altogether 59 % of the total EU contribution that was allocated during the period 2008-2010 — **performed quite well in managing the Fund and implementing the programmes**, with an average implementation rate of 83 %. All but one of them assessed the overall results and achievements of the Fund as very positive. Greece rated them as positive, due to legislative and administrative difficulties faced in implementing the Fund.

The procedures and systems of the new Funds set up for the period 2014-2020 address the criticism expressed by the Member States, which stressed the **need for simplification and reduction of the administrative burden**. The first generation of Solidarity funding (SOLID Funds — including the European Return Fund) combine a multiannual framework with annual programmes, which makes this system complex, time-consuming and rather difficult to manage. Future Funds will shift towards a multiannual programming approach, aiming to offer **more flexibility**, reduce significantly the workload for the Commission, the Member States and the beneficiaries, and allow more results-driven management of the Funds. Additionally, while there are currently four different Funds with four different basic acts in the framework of the General Programme ‘Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows’, the structure of the next Funds will be simplified by reducing the number of programmes to a **two-Fund structure**: an [Internal Security Fund](#) and an [Asylum and Migration Fund](#) (merging the current European Return Fund, the European Refugee Fund and the European Fund for the integration of third-country nationals).