

Immigration: creation of a liaison officers network. Initiative Greece

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The Commission presents a staff working document accompanying its [proposal for a regulation](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council on the creation of a European network of immigration liaison officers.

The document assesses:

- Regulation (EC) 377/2004 on the creation of an immigration liaison officers network (‘ILO Regulation’) in terms of the Regulation’s effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added-value, identifying gaps and areas for improvement;
- the work of the individual immigration liaison officers (ILOs) and of developments within ILO Networks since the adoption of the Regulation.

The evaluation process included consultation of a wide range of sources, including analysis of Presidency reports and documents on the work of the Member States Expert Group on ILO Networks, the organisation of fact-finding missions in 14 countries where ILOs are deployed (Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa, Albania (Western Balkans region), Morocco, Senegal, Ghana, Turkey, Thailand, China, and Russia), and surveys of ILOs and their managers. An external evaluation was carried out as well as consultation with stakeholders. The Commission recalls that in the context of rising migratory pressures the utilisation of ILOs has increased dramatically to a point where almost 500 ILOs are currently deployed by Member States in third countries, together with 13 European Migration Liaison Officers (EMLOs).

Results of the evaluation:

Bilateral nature of ILOs: the report confirms that ILOs and their networks **remain relevant** in the current global migration context and retain coherence with the Union policies on migration in all their aspects, in particular those aimed at preventing and combating irregular migration. The ILOs have operational expertise, first-hand knowledge and contacts in host third countries that are relevant and useful when pursuing cooperation on migration issues with authorities and collecting information to support evidence-based policy making.

However, the evaluation also revealed that immigration liaison officers are **tightly bound to their home administration** in terms of taking and prioritising their work as well as sharing information. It highlighted the lack of consideration given to this aspect in the existing Regulation, which concentrates on directing how immigration liaison officers should design, develop and manage networks locally in third countries, and neglects to address the fact that the vast majority of ILOs are Member State resources with **clear bilateral objectives** and guided by national administration.

Need for formal networks: the current Regulation **has not been responsible for instigating the systematic establishment of formal networks**. Indeed, evidence suggests that networking takes place in some form or another in any location where three or more ILOs are deployed. These networks may differ significantly by location, the levels of collaboration available, and the levels of network formalisation. ILOs involvement in different networks depends on their individual mandates, tasks, the bilateral priorities of the sending country as well as less objective factors such as the personalities of liaison officers.

A more **systematic approach** is evidently required. The evaluation cited the experience of the Immigration Liaison Officers Managers Network, (ILOMN), which draws together managers of ILO networks from some EU Member States and non-EU/non-Schengen states into a semiformal group who meet twice a year.

Promoting the exchange of information: the current Regulation **has not promoted a systematic flow of strategic information** and operational analysis upwards from the ILO networks to the EU bodies, i.e. Commission, European External Action Service, EU Delegations and EU Agencies, as well as horizontally across the networks and Member States.

Stakeholder consultations: stakeholders voiced need for **better cooperation and coordination mechanisms** to be established. Member States, in particular, stressed the value of cooperation with non-EU states deploying liaison officers and wanted flexibility as to the formation of the local and regional networks of immigration liaison officers. The Union Agencies solicited a closer cooperation with the networks of immigration liaison officers and more effective sharing of information with the Agencies and use of analytical product produced by the Agencies. Lastly, there was a unanimous agreement across all stakeholders consulted on the **ineffectiveness** of the current provisions linked to information sharing and reporting mechanisms.