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

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The Commission presents an ex post evaluation reports for the period 2011 to 2013 of actions co-financed under the framework programme 'Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows'.

This consists of four instruments (the 'SOLID Funds'): **the European Refugee Fund (ERF),** the External Borders Fund (EBF)**,** the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals (EIF) and the European Return Fund (RF).

The aim of the SOLID General Programme was to provide financial support to Member States to help them better manage the Union's external borders, and better implement the common policies on asylum and migration.

This summary concerns the **European Refugee Fund (ERF), which** supported Member States ‘actions related to the reception of asylum seekers and processing of their asylum applications, the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and, to a limited extent, resettlement or transfer of beneficiaries of international protection between Member States. The Commission recalls that when the ERF priorities were set, the enhancement of responsibility sharing between Member States and third countries remained optional.

The ERF was allocated EUR 386 million under the SOLID funds and had an average absorption rate of 81%.

During the 2008-10 and 2011-13 periods, the ERF was particularly effective in **supporting Member States that had acceded to the EU more recently** (with less developed asylum systems) in their efforts to improve their reception conditions and asylum procedures, and enhancing their capacity to establish national asylum systems. The added value of the ERF was crucial for these Member States.

However, the Commission highlights **one key shortcoming** for both the 2008-1024 and the 2011-13 periods, this being the **allocation mechanism**, which was based on historic inflows (previous three years) and which could therefore not address Member States unprecedented needs following the drastic increase in asylum flows from 2013. This issue was partly mitigated by the allocation of emergency assistance to Member States, which proved useful to address the crisis.

The report also makes the following points:

- due to the legal framework at the time, most ERF projects remained purely national, and **limited support** was provided for cooperation and experience-sharing amongst Member States. As the results of the Community actions were not widely disseminated;
- the ERF was only effective to a very limited extent in implementing responsibility-sharing projects, such as the **resettlement and intra-EU transfer** of beneficiaries of international protection, and very few projects were implemented in this area. There was inefficiency in several Member States, mostly due to a lack of experience and to insufficient technical and administrative capacities;
- networking was enhanced, while investments in reception capacities were deemed as most sustainable;
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- all Member States found that the Fund enabled projects that could not have been financed by national public resources only.

The report makes certain observation common to all four funds. In the case of the ERF, most of the main findings have already been taken into consideration under the asylum, migration and integration fund (AMIF), which succeeded the ERF, EIF and RF, while others are given due consideration in the preparation of the next generation of Funds.

With respect to the ERF, the report notes particularly that the principles of solidarity and responsibility-sharing at EU level **could be optimised for resettlement and intra-EU transfer** of beneficiaries of international protection. For the latter, Member States preferred to use their allocation for actions addressing their own specific needs and the ERF did not provide additional financial incentives per person transferred. For resettlement, there was a financial incentive (EUR 4 000 to 6 000) but it proved insufficient to cover the cost of resettling a person. AMIF has addressed these shortcomings to a limited extent with additional funding in the form of increased lump sums (EUR 6 000 to 10 000) and a system of pledging which brings political attention to bear.

The AMIF also features some improvements which help better steer implementation towards EU priorities, such as financial incentives, additional funding for specific actions and top-ups to the allocation of all Member States for specific EU policy priorities.