

Review of the European Union Solidarity Fund

2020/2087(INI) - 18/05/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 668 votes to 10, with 18 abstentions, a resolution on the review of the European Union Solidarity Fund.

The European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF), set up following the major floods in Central Europe in 2002, provides financial assistance to Member States and acceding countries hit by major natural or regional disasters or public health emergencies.

Parliament expressed its concern that extreme weather events and natural disasters will only multiply and intensify with climate change. Major and regional natural disasters and major public health emergencies (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) are now a common occurrence.

Members believe it is essential to channel aid and funds to the affected regions as quickly, easily and flexibly as possible. They stressed that synergies between the EUSF and the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the ERDF climate change adaptation component and territorial cooperation programmes are essential for building a comprehensive response and resilience package.

Disaster management, damage assessment and simplification of procedures

In the context of a future reform of the EUSF, the Commission is called on to continue its work to **simplify and speed up** the application procedure for Member States, for example by paying particular attention to simplifying applications for activation of the EUSF across several regions in the context of cross-border disasters.

Members also considered it essential to invest in disaster risk prevention and management in the EU by building preventative infrastructure. In this respect, they recommended that Member States, together with the Commission, put in place disaster prevention and management plans that allow for accurate and rapid damage assessment.

Given that climate change and the increase in natural disasters are making territories and regions increasingly vulnerable, Members called on the Commission to consider revising the EUSF so as to take better account of regional disasters. They also stressed the role of ERDF programmes, in synergy with rural development programmes, in risk prevention and mitigation.

The resolution stressed the need for **increased capacity building** through technical and administrative support to beneficiary countries to help them develop long-term management strategies to reduce the impact of major and regional natural disasters and major public health emergencies.

The Commission is invited to devote particular attention in a future revision of the EUSF to the outermost regions, islands, mountainous or sparsely populated regions, and all territories particularly prone to the risks of natural disasters.

Financial resources and speed of allocation

Members expressed concern about the merger between the EUSF and the Emergency Aid Reserve (EAR), as it makes the funding possibilities from the EUSF, which are now linked to the needs of the EAR, uncertain, for a joint annual budget of EUR 1.2 billion (only slightly higher than the one proposed by the Commission in May 2020 for the Fund alone).

Parliament suggested that the management of the **new reserve** should be closely monitored to see whether the funding amount and allocation key provided for in this new financial instrument meet the needs of the EUSF, in view of the extension of its scope and the scale and proliferation of emergencies resulting, in particular from major and regional natural disasters and major public health emergencies.

Members welcomed the fact that the revised EUSF adopted in March 2020 increased the value of **advance payments** from 10 % to 25 % of the anticipated financial contribution and the upper limit from EUR 30 million to EUR 100 million. They pointed out, in this context, the importance of advance payments for increasing the effectiveness of aid programmes.

Risk prevention and quality of reconstruction

Parliament called for the criteria for determining the ‘eligibility’ of projects for support from the Fund to take greater account of the latest risk prevention principles and for the principle of ‘**build back better**’ to be fully integrated into Article 3 of the EUSF Regulation.

Members also believe that extending the scope of the EUSF to tackle the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic requires an increase in its budget.

Visibility of the Fund's financial assistance

Parliament stressed the importance of informing the public about the tangible benefits brought about by the EUSF in order to increase citizens’ trust in EU tools and programmes. It called on the Commission and the Member States to improve the visibility of the fund’s assistance through ad hoc, targeted communication activities, in parallel to making the rapid response and delivery of aid a priority.