Refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers: voluntary repatriation and reception, Kosovo emergency assistance

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PURPOSE : Provide the Union with a legal instrument enabling it to support, firstly, measures designed to improve the reception conditions and access to asylum procedures, and, secondly, to facilitate the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers. CONTENT : The objective of this joint action is to provide the Union with an instrument enabling it to react in a flexible manner to the changing needs and future pressures in this field and which will also take account of the principle of shared responsibility between Member States. More specifically it aims to : - provide the individuals and groups concerned with appropriate protection in accordance with the common traditions of the Member States and with the obligations incumbent upon them, particularly by virtue of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; - provide appropriate reception certificates for asylum seekers and facilitate access to fair and efficient procedures to protect the rights of refugees; - create conditions in which refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers who wish to return voluntarily from the Member States to their countries of origin are able to do so; - ensure a balance of effort between the Member States to deal with the reception and voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons. With respect to reception aspects, the programme will cover the following aspects : - measures for the improvement of the infrastructure in the Member States for the reception of asylum applicants and displaced persons; - the enhancement of the fairness and efficiency of asylum procedures and the facilitation of access to them, including the provision of : legal assistance and other counselling services, interpretation services; information on the procedure to be followed, and the rights and obligations of the asylum applicant during the procedure; access to precise and up to date country information; - the ensuring of a basic standard of living conditions for asylum applicants and displaced persons, including accommodation, medical care, education and training; - special assistance to vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, victims of torture or rape, and people requiring special medical treatment; - the provision of information to the public on Member States' obligations to persons seeking international protection and the European Union's asylum policy, including public awareness measures complementing other measures financed under this joint action. With respect to voluntary repatriation of asylum applicants, displaced persons and refugees from the Member States to their countries of origin, and their reintegration there, the following is envisaged : - the collection and dissemination of information on all aspects relevant to return, including the economic and administrative situation in the country of origin, employment opportunity, property rights and other legal matters; - counselling to assist both persons who are considering whether to return voluntarily to their country of origin and persons who have decided in principle to return; - training and education, with the aim of providing refugees, displaced persons and asylum applicants with skills which will be of benefit on return to the country of origin. The following may also be eligible for funding : - transport costs associated with repatriation; - measures to support the reintegration in their country of origin of persons returning from the Member States, including post repatriation monitoring. The Commission will be responsible for managing the measures and will publish guidelines regarding eligible expenditures. The programme will run for two years from the entry into force of the legal base, i.e. the period 1999-2000. The projected budget is 30 million euros. At the end of that period, an evaluation will be made to see whether it is necessary to continue the action or re-direct it. The Commission will carry out regular evaluation and monitoring of operations financed under this instrument to ensure that they correspond to the objectives and priorities set, and to draw up guidelines with a view to improving project selection criteria. At the end of each financial year, it will report to the European Parliament and the Council on the action taken and on the assessment of this action.