

European Refugee Fund: period 2005-2010 (Decision 2000/596/EC)

2004/0032(CNS) - 12/02/2004 - Document attached to the procedure

COMMISSION'S IMPACT ASSESSMENT

For further information concerning the background to this issue, please refer to the summary of the Commission's initial proposal of 12/02/2004 for a Council Decision establishing the European Refugee Fund for the period 2005-2010 – COM(2004)0102.

1- POLICY OPTIONS AND IMPACTS

Four policy options were considered in the Commission's impact assessment.

1.1- Option 1 - to abandon the European Refugee Fund as a separate Financial solidarity initiative:

Measures aimed at refugees and asylum seekers would be mainstreamed into existing Community instruments such as the European Social Fund. With this option, specific initiatives would be sought in the actions of and the Community initiatives under the European Social Fund for the target population of asylum seekers and refugees. The advantages of this option would lie in the existence of an integrated treatment of the target population through a single instrument, and a "guichet unique" for actions aimed at integration of refugees and asylum seekers into the European labour market and European society. However, the role of such an instrument as an accompanying measure to the progressive implementation of a Common Asylum Policy (including asylum procedures) would be lost.

1.2- Option 2 - the continuation of the European Refugee Fund: This would be as a purely redistributive financial instrument covering the needs identified and expressed by the Member States. In this option, the ERF would mainly act as a redistributive mechanism, based on the number of persons within the target group registered or admitted in each Member State. Each Member State would then invest the funds in accordance with its identified needs and priorities, based purely on national strategy. This option, which is, in essence, the one adopted for the first phase of the European Refugee Fund, would have the advantage of reflecting closely on the reality of needs in the field, and would be easier to manage at Community / Commission level. However, the mid-term review showed the limits of such an approach, which acts mainly as a financial compensation instrument and has little or no impact on improvement of coordination and convergence of national policies in the context of a Common European Asylum policy.

1.3- Option 3 - a completely centralised financial instrument where the Commission would both identify needs and priorities at a European level: This would select and co finance actions to be supported to encourage actions that correspond to needs at Community level. In view of the limitations identified in point 1.2 with regard to the first phase of the ERF, one could be tempted to refocus completely the financial support towards projects with a strong European added value and transnational impact, in order to ensure full adequacy of actions supported to the common standards developed. However, this approach would prove difficult to manage at EU level due to the level of human resources required and would run the risk of a disconnection between objectives and targets set at EU level and the actual needs of the target population and actors in the field (governments, NGOs, regional and local authorities) in the Member States.

1.4- Option 4 - a more strategic "solidarity" instrument: This would have a reinforced link to European asylum policy, and greater cooperation and cross-fertilisation dimension at national and European level. It would encourage a progressive convergence and consistency not only of legislation, but

also of material and social conditions for the reception, the integration and the return of asylum seekers, refugees and displaced persons. In addition, strong and supportive actions at EU level would be supported, disseminated and discussed, in order to bring out innovative new approaches or methods and mainstream them into national policies and systems.

CONCLUSION: Option 4, which is the one chosen by the Commission, aims at correcting the weaknesses identified with the first phase of the ERF, building on the progressive establishment of a common asylum policy and the common European asylum system, and recognising the still wide diversity of asylum systems between Member States.

IMPACTS

For final beneficiaries (asylum seekers and refugees):

- reception conditions and asylum procedures: improvement in quality / quantity of material reception conditions for persons seeking protection, fairer and more effective asylum procedures;
- integration: decrease in dependence on social welfare, improved access to the labour market for refugees enabling them to support themselves at an earlier stage, increased participation in social life through civil society organisations and other relevant channels, improved well-being and self-esteem;
- voluntary return: changed or improved conditions enabling refugees and asylum seekers to return home in a sustainable way, development of skills of returnees with a positive impact on the country of origin.

For Member States:

- contribution to the economic responsibility undertaken by the Member State in relation to the reception of asylum seekers and refugees and implementation of a common asylum policy;
- contribution to changes in processes / policies by development of higher standards, fairer and more effective asylum procedures, reduction of the length of asylum procedures, improvement of reception, integration and return capacity, improvement of qualification of staff , exchanges of experiences and best practices at EU level.

For partners of asylum policy (NGO, Refugee Community Organisations, local and regional authorities):

- capacity building and development of new services and greater involvement of self-help organisations;
- improvement of qualification of staff, increased cooperation of services / structures in developing capacity in the area of reception.

For EU citizens:

- awareness raising to the issue of refugees and asylum seekers;
- better acceptance of reception centres by local communities.

2- FOLLOW-UP

Several national and Community evaluations are planned, based around the multiannual programming schedule of the Fund, which is divided into two programming periods: 2005-2007 and 2008-2009. The timetable of evaluations set out in the proposal for a Decision is as follows:

- 31 December 2006: Member States submit national reports with an evaluation of the implementation of action under the Fund. This is followed by a Commission report pooling these evaluations no later than 30 April 2007. Given the deadline, the reports will concentrate primarily on the state of play in implementing programmes and action: it is unlikely that a detailed evaluation of the results and impact of action will be possible at that date. Nevertheless, the reports are necessary to prepare the second multiannual phase of the Fund (2008-2010).

- 30 June 2009: Member States submit national reports on the evaluation of action under the Fund for the 2005-2007 multiannual programming period. The Commission will then produce an intermediate evaluation report by 31 December 2009 at the latest, accompanied by a proposal for pursuing action under the Fund from 2011.

- 30 June 2012: Member States submit national reports with an *ex post* evaluation of action under the Fund for the 2008-2010 multiannual programming period, and an overall *ex post* evaluation of action. Commission will then produce an *ex post* evaluation report by 31 December 2012 at the latest.

Both the national and Community evaluations will be based on independent assessments conducted according to the terms of reference drawn up by the Commission under Article 26(2) of the proposal for a Decision.