Asylum procedure and protection in the regions of origin

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The Council welcomes the Commission's Communication on managed entry in the EU of persons in need of international protection and the enhancement of the protection capacity of the regions of origin. The Council considers it important to address the question of how more refugees worldwide can access effective protection and durable solutions, as quickly as possible and as close to home and to their needs as possible. It notes the large numbers of refugees which are received by third countries in regions of origin and underlines the need for the EU to assist in the enhancement of the protection capacity of regions of origin. Therefore, the Council welcomes the Commission's recommendation to develop Regional Protection Programmes, as well as the idea of developing these programmes in accordance with the Regional and Country Strategy papers framework.

The Commission is invited to present an action plan for one or more pilot Regional Protection Programme (s). A pilot project should draw on a range of measures, such as assistance to third countries to comply with international obligations, to enhance protection capacity, better access to registration and local integration, and assistance for improving the local infrastructure and migration management. The pilot project must take account of the causes of the refugee situation in question and of the situation of the local population.

The Programme should be developed in close partnership and in a spirit of co-ownership and be the result of direct negotiations with the third countries concerned. The development and the implementation of these programmes should be taken forward in close cooperation with UNHCR and other international organisations. Proposals for pilot projects should indicate possible EU and other funding sources.

The Council endorses the view that voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement are the durable solutions for refugees. The targeted use of resettlement will demonstrate the Community's commitment towards international efforts to find comprehensive and effective solutions to protracted refugee situations. The Council welcomes the inclusion of resettlement in Regional Protection Programmes, and invites the Commission to present a proposal for a resettlement scheme by July 2005. Such a scheme needs to be situation specific, flexible and allow Member States to choose whether or not to participate.