Refugees, displaced persons, asylum-seekers: creating a European Refugee Fund

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PURPOSE: to present the final evaluation of the European Refugee Fund for the period 2000-2004.

CONTENT: the European Refugee Fund was established by Council Decision 2000/596/EC, for the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2004, to allocate resources fairly and proportionately to the burden on each Member State by reason of its efforts in receiving refugees and displaced persons.

The financial reference amount for implementing this Decision was estimated at **EUR 216 million for the five-year period**. Compared with other Community instruments, the annual amount (some EUR 40 million) was relatively small.

Budget implementation: 95% of the budget appropriations were allocated to the Member States for carrying out national programmes cofinanced by the Union and implemented under shared management. The remainder, i.e. up to 5% of resources, could be used for Community actions implemented directly by the Commission, in particular, innovatory action or action of interest to the Community as a whole, steps to promote cooperation at Community level, as well as assessment and technical assistance.

All the Member States of the Union as constituted before 1 May 2004 participated in implementing the Fund, with the exception of Denmark in accordance with the Protocol on the position of Denmark annexed to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community. Since 1 May 2004, the new Member States that have joined the EU have been eligible to receive aid from the Fund. The Czech Republic did not wish to make use of it but it is now participating in the second phase of the European Refugee Fund covering the period 2005-2010.

On completion of the 2000-2004 programme, the Commission assigned independent experts to carry out a final evaluation which is the subject of this document.

The total number of commitments made under the European Refugee Fund for the 2000-2004 period amount to **EUR 187 541 160.68**, consuming nearly all the budgetary allocation.

Over the whole period, the national programmes represent 95.2% of the funds and Community Actions represent 4.8%. These percentages are in line with those established in the Council Decision.

Over the whole period 2000-2004, EU funds committed for national programmes amounted to **EUR 178 613 853.45**. The difference with the total amount of the European Refugee Fund commitments is equal to the amount of the commitments for Community actions (**EUR 8 927 307.23**).

The amounts committed each year for national programmes were:

- EUR 24 005 995 for 2000 programmes;
- EUR 32 479 953 for 2001 programmes;
- EUR 42 826 949 for 2002 programmes;
- EUR 40 157 450 for 2003 programmes;
- EUR 39 143 507 for 2004 programmes (these concerned the enlarged Union).

The breakdown of programme expenditure and the Community contribution between the three measures was as follows for the whole period:

- reception: 46 %
- integration: 32 %
- repatriation: 22 %

As regards the target groups, apart from integration measures which concern persons whose stay in the Member State is of a lasting and/or stable nature, the other measures made no distinction between persons that have obtained protection and those that have applied for it.

A total of 2 050 projects were funded. Of these, 1 107 (54% of the total) concerned reception, 760 (37%) integration and 183 (9%) repatriation. The breakdown in number of projects is similar to that of allocations, the main difference being repatriation for which the cost per project is usually higher than for the other measures.

Considering the Fund's relatively limited resources during this period, the number of persons directly affected by the operations funded under the projects was remarkably high – estimated at over **600 000 persons**. It appears from the data provided by the project leaders, that the number of beneficiaries directly involved in each of them was often very high. For all the national programmes, 65% of the projects affected more than 100 beneficiaries each. Some 25% of all the projects in each case actually concerned more than 500 persons.

Community actions: directly managed by the Commission, these actions were implemented by means of five calls for proposals published each year in the period 2000-2004. In total, 53 projects, lasting up to 12 months (from 2000 to 2002), and then lasting up to 18 months (2003 and 2004) were funded for a total Community contribution of EUR 8 927 307.23 and a total cost of EUR 11 828 568.42 (average rate of Community contribution of 75.4 %).

The projects funded generally involved a transnational partnership (4 partners on average). The actions carried out concerned skills acquisition, awareness raising and analysis and evaluation.

Conclusions and perspectives: the evaluation study contracted to independent experts positively judges the first phase of the implementation of the European Refugee European from 2000 to 2004. The data included in previous paragraph underline the high level of realisation in comparison to the committed resources and stress the favourable judgment of the community intervention by the organisations involved. This first step enabled to reinforce the programme for the period 2005 – 2010 and to establish a new framework, the "Solidarity and migratory flows management" programme, which will follow with substantially more credits.

Several of the recommendations resulting from the analysis or stated in different contexts are already taken into account, particularly in the framework of the second phase of the Fund for the period 2005 – 2010. The following elements are some examples of this:

- the Fund can from now on finance multi-annual projects, the community intervention for an action being limited to three years.
- the credits for technical assistance available for Member States in the frame of the national programmes have been significantly increased in order to give Member States the appropriate technical means for the realisation of their tasks in the framework of shared management.
- the share of the Community actions was increased from 5% to 7% maximum of the resources of the Fund in order to reinforce the role which can play these innovative actions in the search of solutions for refugees.

In the short and mid term view, actions on the following aspects are planned:

- in response to the request expressed by Member States, the Commission departments plan on organising training activities for the authorities responsible for the implementation of the national programmes. The objective is to provide with practical tools and to share a common approach in the concerned fields;

- during the second semester 2006, the Commission departments intend to discuss with the Member States on a common evaluation frame for the second phase of the Fund, which will focus in particular on the implementation of common indicators and methods applicable at the level of the projects, of the Member States and of the Union.

There are still subjects to be deepened in order to increase the efficiency of the interventions, such as:

- mechanisms of collection and dissemination of information and experience should be set up, both at the level of the Commission departments in charge of the Fund as well as at the level of the responsible authorities in each Member State;

- a better articulation must be established between the Community actions and the national programmes in order to spread and add value to these programmes the achievements of the Community actions;

- implementation procedures should be simplified, with the view of reconciling, on the one hand, the responsibility of the Commission in the implementation of the budget as well as the respect of the financial regulation, and on the other hand, the suitability to the dimension for the programmes concerned.