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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**on the results achieved and on qualitative and quantitative aspects of implementation of
the European Refugee Fund for the period 2005-2007**

(report submitted in accordance with Article 54 (5) of Decision No 573/2007/EC of the
European Parliament and of the Council of 23 May 2007)

FINAL EVALUATION

Final evaluation of the European Refugee Fund for the period 2005-2007

Introduction

The European Refugee Fund, which was established in 2000 for the period from 2000 to 2004, was continued thereafter by virtue of Council Decision 2004/904/EC of 2 December 2004. While the new implementation period was initially intended to cover the period from 2005 to 2010, it was subsequently limited to 2007 as a result of the introduction of a new legal and financial basis as part of the General Programme on “Solidarity and management of migration flows” which embraced the European Refugee Fund and three other Funds for the remaining part of the initial period and beyond.

Building upon the first implementation period of the Fund from 2000 to 2004, the European Refugee Fund for the period 2005-2007 continues “to support and encourage the efforts made by the Member States in receiving and bearing the consequences of receiving refugees and displaced persons, taking account of Community legislation in these matters”. The Fund is designed as an instrument to allocate resources fairly and in proportion to the burden on each Member State by reason of its efforts in receiving refugees and displaced persons.

The target groups for the Fund's operations are:

- - any third-country nationals or stateless persons having the status defined by the Geneva Convention and permitted to reside as refugees in one of the Member States
- - any third-country nationals or stateless persons enjoying a form of subsidiary protection granted by a Member State in accordance with the applicable European legislation
- - any third-country nationals or stateless persons who have applied for one of the forms of protection described above
- - any third-country nationals or stateless persons benefiting from temporary protection arrangements in a Member State, in accordance with the applicable European legislation.

Actions entitled to support from the Fund cover one or more of the three following areas:

- reception conditions and asylum procedures
- integration of target group persons whose stay in the Member State is of a lasting or stable nature
- voluntary return of target group persons, provided they have not acquired a new nationality and have not left the territory of the Member State.

Actions supported by the Fund shall, in particular, promote the implementation of the provisions of the relevant existing and future European legislation in the field of the common European asylum system. Furthermore, they shall take account of the specific situation of vulnerable persons, such as minors, elderly people, persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, etc.

Ninety three percent of the budget appropriations were allocated to the Member States for carrying out national programmes co-financed by the Union and implemented under shared management. The remainder, i.e. up to 7% of appropriations, was available for Community actions implemented directly by the Commission to finance transnational actions or actions of interest to the European Union as a whole concerning asylum policy and measures applicable to refugees and displaced persons.

All the Member States of the Union 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. Bulgaria and Romania, which joined the European Union on 1 January 2007, participated only during the final year, 2007.

After completion of the 2005-2007 programmes, each Member State submitted an evaluation report on the results and impact of the actions co-financed by the Fund. In all Member States the evaluation was carried out at the level of the projects funded; it covered all of them or – where there were a large number of projects - a representative sample. Since most Member States had recourse to external evaluation expertise, the national evaluation reports provide a fair and independent view of the programmes' achievements and possible shortcomings.

The present evaluation report is based on the Member States' submissions with regard to the implementation of the national programmes. It also builds upon additional data and information available to the Commission. It should be stressed that the figures collated in this evaluation report are average values which do not always reflect deviations from the trend. Wherever possible, variations or divergences from average results have been flagged.

1. BUDGETARY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FUND FROM 2005 TO 2007

The following summary description of the budget implementation is based on funds committed, since not all payment operations have been completed.

1.1. National programmes

1.1.1. Budget overview

The budget appropriations from the Fund for national programmes amounted to €43 200 593 in 2005, €46 288 323 in 2006 and €63 302 688 in 2007. The amounts committed for programmes as approved by the Commission were €43 169 204 in 2005, €45 200 066 in 2006 and €63 302 688 in 2007 (all figures are rounded). Almost all the budget resources available to national programmes have been used. The slight difference between budget appropriations and the amounts used is due to the fact that, in 2005, the Slovak Republic did not use a small part of its allocation, and the same was true of Ireland and the United Kingdom in 2006.

The total costs of all operations funded through the national programmes during the period 2005-2007 amounted to almost €300 million. The Fund's contribution accounted for slightly more than half of that amount.¹ Additional resources were provided by the national budgets and by the beneficiaries.

**Table 1 – Total cost of ERF programmes and sources of funding, 2005-2007
at EU level**

(Consolidation of all Member States' national programme financial plans)

| Source of funding | | Amounts in € | % |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| European Refugee Fund allocation | A | 151 671 959.34 | 51.1 % |
| State allocations | B | 88 331 906.23 | 29.8 % |
| Allocations from Regions | C | 10 360 468.64 | 3.5 % |
| Allocations from Local Authorities | D | 16 295 722.46 | 5.5 % |
| National public allocations | B+C+D | 114 988 097.33 | 38.7 % |
| Total public Allocations | A+ B+C+D | 266 660 056.67 | 89.9 % |
| Private Allocations | E | 30 125 122.27 | 10.1 % |
| Total Cost | A+B+C+D+E | 296 785 178.94 | 100 % |

¹ The Fund's contribution to projects supported may not exceed 50% of the total cost, except for particularly innovative projects (up to 60 %) and for the Cohesion Countries, where this is increased to 75%. As a result, the global figure for all EU Member States together was 51%.

Commitments of the European Refugee Fund for national programmes since 2000, per Member State

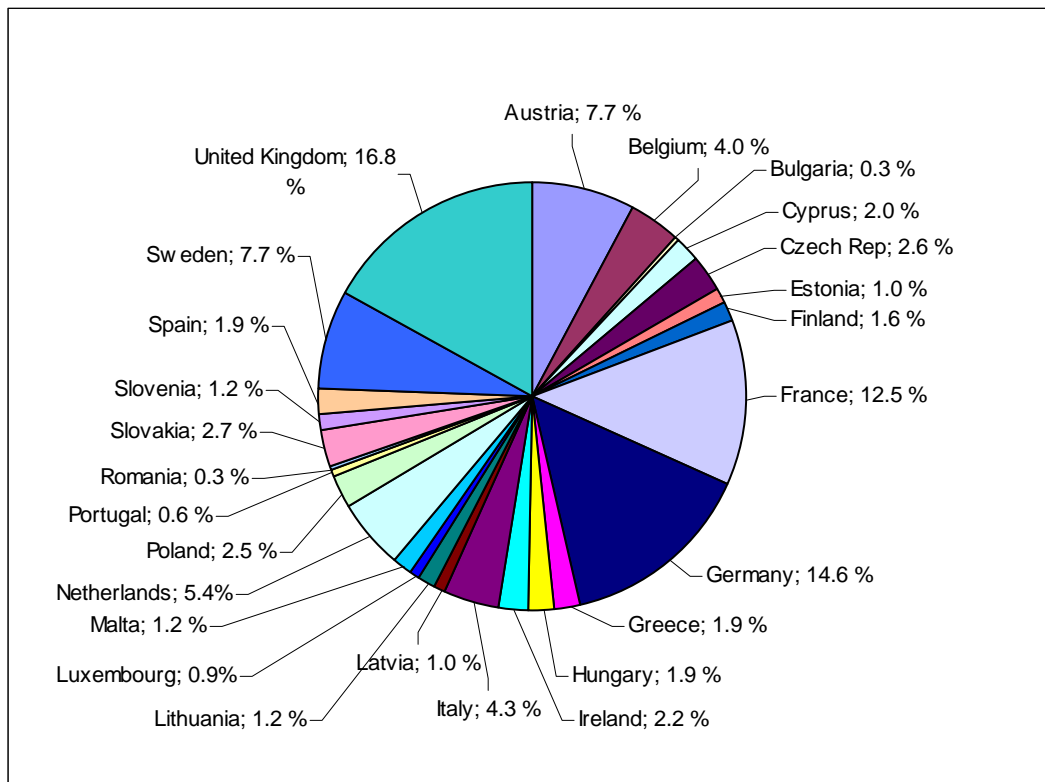
| Commitment per Member State | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | TOTAL | TOTAL |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | | | | | 2005-2007 | 2000 - 2007 |
| Austria | 912.382,09 | 1.454.753,68 | 1.938.106,21 | 2.007.650,38 | 2.230.280,21 | 2.742.218,08 | 3.846.031,28 | 5.043.250,98 | 11.631.500,34 | 20.174.672,91 |
| Belgium | 1.223.201,55 | 1.869.724,55 | 2.729.082,53 | 2.381.191,60 | 2.131.527,03 | 1.708.787,99 | 1.776.562,59 | 2.603.893,57 | 6.089.244,15 | 16.423.971,41 |
| Bulgaria | | | | | | | | 495.312,69 | 495.312,69 | 495.312,69 |
| Cyprus | | | | | 168.058,60 | 647.118,56 | 908.577,92 | 1.500.569,01 | 3.056.265,49 | 3.224.324,09 |
| Czech Republic | | | | | 0,00** | 1.322.783,90 | 1.224.732,11 | 1.466.059,64 | 4.013.575,65 | 4.013.575,65 |
| Estonia | | | | | 101.264,04 | 501.165,50 | 501.107,84 | 501.920,54 | 1.504.193,88 | 1.605.457,92 |
| Finland | 651.386,00 | 673.605,00 | 671.256,00 | 524.730,29 | 392.632,81 | 576.732,16 | 765.446,81 | 1.076.742,49 | 2.418.921,46 | 5.332.531,56 |
| France | 2.255.053,80 | 3.156.227,70 | 4.133.680,00 | 5.067.825,42 | 4.041.961,16 | 4.419.370,47 | 4.030.904,13 | 10.558.351,31 | 19.008.625,91 | 37.663.373,99 |
| Germany | 6.218.898,77 | 8.391.364,30 | 10.324.674,58 | 9.935.791,60 | 8.113.021,93 | 6.808.594,52 | 5.740.645,75 | 9.652.645,44 | 22.201.885,71 | 65.185.636,89 |
| Greece | 652.057,17 | 629.043,03 | 535.611,36 | 439.481,17 | 459.296,30 | 738.841,43 | 816.091,64 | 1.283.253,07 | 2.838.186,14 | 5.553.675,17 |
| Hungary | | | | | 824.724,64 | 1.064.593,65 | 979.609,02 | 866.343,13 | 2.910.545,80 | 3.735.270,44 |
| Ireland | 632.205,18 | 709.109,67 | 965.573,27 | 981.675,33 | 919.090,69 | 1.037.486,23 | 1.079.242,69 | 1.154.112,32 | 3.270.841,24 | 7.478.495,38 |
| Italy | 1.956.104,78 | 2.741.880,68 | 3.460.943,09 | 2.396.267,75 | 741.665,14 | 1.763.702,74 | 2.053.628,78 | 2.650.121,13 | 6.467.452,65 | 17.764.314,09 |
| Latvia | | | | | 95.628,95 | 501.174,78 | 501.345,60 | 501.821,57 | 1.504.341,95 | 1.599.970,90 |
| Lithuania | | | | | 154.927,86 | 573.217,83 | 607.775,87 | 645.556,32 | 1.826.550,02 | 1.981.477,88 |
| Luxembourg | 528.971,74 | 480.528,81 | 411.194,85 | 299.703,18 | 171.647,79 | 398.036,69 | 456.620,40 | 568.733,03 | 1.423.390,12 | 3.315.436,49 |
| Malta | | | | | 111.840,01 | 536.748,47 | 613.261,96 | 711.494,88 | 1.861.505,31 | 1.973.345,32 |
| Netherlands | 2.984.948,74 | 3.642.649,54 | 4.175.006,40 | 3.239.737,01 | 2.972.102,53 | 2.481.878,07 | 2.471.049,17 | 3.187.495,09 | 8.140.422,33 | 25.154.866,55 |
| Poland | | | | | 440.490,02 | 890.515,65 | 1.162.043,64 | 1.680.799,75 | 3.733.359,04 | 4.173.849,06 |
| Portugal | 534.238,01 | 518.815,68 | 457.005,68 | 304.394,29 | 123.369,56 | 317.204,29 | 316.952,82 | 318.324,52 | 952.481,63 | 2.890.304,85 |
| Romania | | | | | | | | 405.310,82 | 405.310,82 | 405.310,82 |
| Slovakia | | | | | 372.374,00 | 1.068.062,00 | 1.360.927,53 | 1.630.673,76 | 4.059.663,29 | 4.432.037,29 |
| Slovenia | | | | | 343.443,67 | 573.652,24 | 584.197,32 | 675.421,09 | 1.833.270,65 | 2.176.714,32 |
| Spain | 745.290,55 | 837.462,10 | 933.063,85 | 786.229,10 | 665.287,27 | 828.501,41 | 859.539,41 | 1.141.075,16 | 2.829.115,98 | 6.796.448,85 |
| Sw eden | 1.808.616,60 | 2.555.669,69 | 3.326.823,31 | 2.869.672,23 | 2.691.651,76 | 2.929.516,46 | 3.904.398,26 | 4.861.458,49 | 11.695.373,21 | 24.947.806,80 |
| United Kingdom | 2.902.639,84 | 4.819.118,07 | 8.764.928,09 | 8.923.100,66 | 10.877.220,93 | 8.739.301,59 | 8.639.373,87 | 8.121.948,42 | 25.500.623,88 | 61.787.631,47 |
| TOTAL EU | 24.005.994,82 | 32.479.952,50 | 42.826.949,22 | 40.157.450,01 | 39.143.506,90 | 43.169.204,71 | 45.200.066,41 | 63.302.688,22 | 151.671.959,34 | 330.285.812,79 |

1.1.2. Distribution of ERF funding between the Member States and between actions

The Commission allocated the funds available for national programmes to the Member States according to a distribution key set out in the Council Decision establishing the European Refugee Fund. This key is based on the number of persons in the Fund's target groups with the applicable weighting coefficients. It is a tangible expression of the principle of solidarity and burden-sharing that underpins the Fund.

As can be seen from Figure 1 below, the United Kingdom, Germany and France were the three main beneficiaries of the Fund during the period 2005-2007, with shares ranging from around 12% (France) to 17% (United Kingdom); they were followed by Sweden and Austria (7.7 % each) and the Netherlands (5.4%). The three largest beneficiary Member States were the same during the previous programming period (2000-2004) and in the same order, while the ranking of the other Member States may vary from one year to another, depending notably on asylum flows in a particular year.

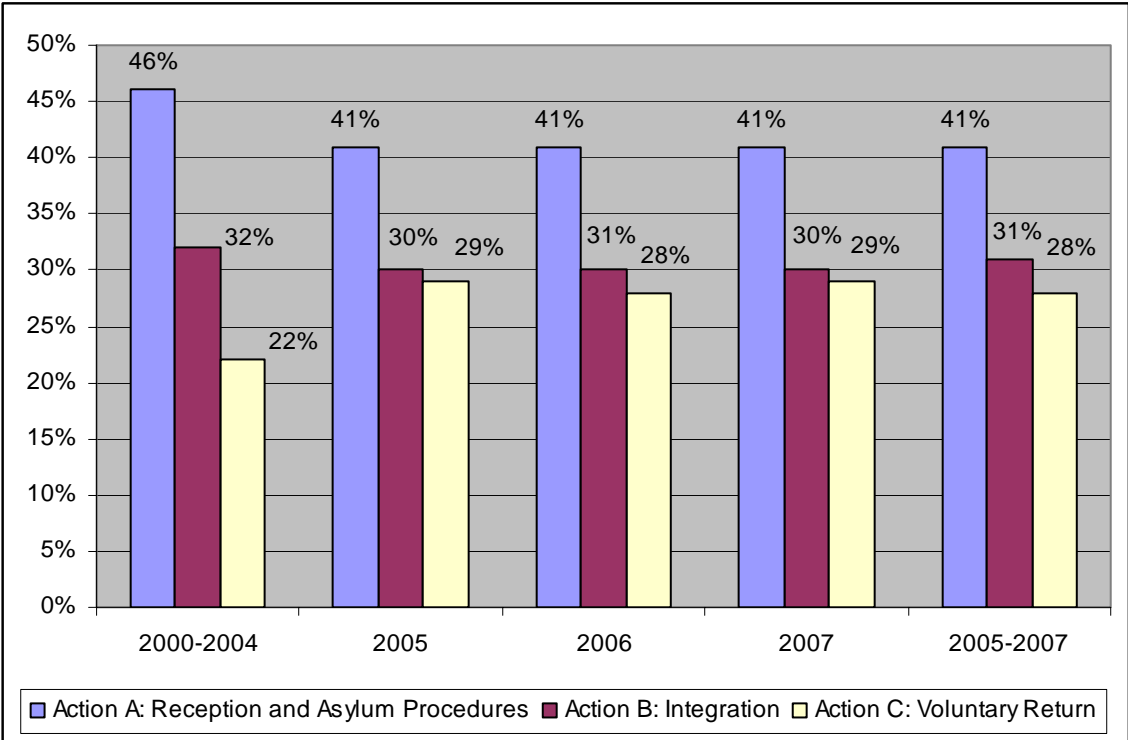
Figure 1 – Distribution of ERF funding between the Member States (EU26) 2005-2007



Of the Member States that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, the main beneficiary Member States during the period 2005-2007 were the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, followed by Hungary. In 2004, the first year of implementation in the new Member States, Hungary was the biggest beneficiary, ahead of Poland and Slovakia. However, the Czech Republic decided not to participate in the implementation of the Fund in 2004.

Compared to the previous programming period (2000-2004), the 2005-2007 period shows significant changes to the breakdown of ERF funding across the three Actions (Reception and asylum procedures, Integration and Voluntary return) as programmed by the Member States (see Figure 2). There was a decrease in the share of the first area (from 46 % to 41 %), a small decrease in the share of the second area and a relatively large increase in the share of the third area (from 22% to 28%). Although voluntary return was the smallest of the three areas, and even if its implementation was more difficult than the others , there was an increased focus of Member States’ strategies on that area. This trend relates to the share of each area, not to the amounts; therefore, the Member States did not reduce their budgets allocated either to reception or to integration – instead they significantly increased the amounts allocated to voluntary return.

Figure 2 – Distribution of EU funding at EU level by Action (rounded figures)



There were significant differences between Member States in the share for each area, which were related to each Member State’s situation and strategy, as can be seen from Table 2 below.

While most Member States earmarked significant amounts of funding for improving the reception conditions of asylum seekers and for asylum procedures, in several Member States with comparatively large asylum flows (Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy and especially Malta) higher than average shares were apparent. Similarly, in many of the Member States that joined the EU in 2004, comparatively high ERF amounts were channelled into upgrading reception facilities for asylum seekers and asylum procedures to the standards required by the applicable EU legislation. Although amounts allocated to actions targeted at integration of refugees and persons enjoying another form of international protection did not display such large differences in general, they were clearly emphasised in some national programmes (Finland and Ireland).

Actions on voluntary return, which were taken by only a few Member States during the first programming period of the European Refugee Fund, 2000-2004, were a feature common to the programmes of all but three Member States during the second programming period. In the United Kingdom, one large and successful project in this area actually used up the majority of its appropriations.

This provided for a more balanced approach encompassing the improved reception of asylum seekers, the integration of those being granted protection status and, lastly, the provision of better reintegration prospects in the country of origin for those whose application had been rejected.

Further details are provided in the subsequent chapters of this report.

Table 2 - Distribution of ERF funding at Member State level by Action (2005-2007)

(See Figure 2 above for the definition of Actions A, B and C)

| Member States/ Actions | Austria | Belgium | Bulgaria | Cyprus | Czech Rep | Estonia | Finland | France | Germany | Greece | Hungary | Ireland | Italy | Latvia | Lithuania | Luxembourg | Malta | Netherlands | Poland | Portugal | Romania | Slovakia | Slovenia | Spain | Sweden | United Kingdom | Total EU |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|----------|--------|-----------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|-------|--------|-----------|------------|-------|-------------|--------|----------|---------|----------|----------|-------|--------|----------------|----------|
| Action A | 36% | 51% | 66% | 70% | 32% | 57% | 27% | 59% | 43% | 63% | 49% | 18% | 79% | 61% | 39% | 60% | 76% | 20% | 73% | 81% | 46% | 68% | 45% | 50% | 43% | 3% | 41% |
| Action B | 44% | 24% | 32% | 30% | 37% | 35% | 67% | 30% | 29% | 30% | 38% | 67% | 12% | 35% | 56% | 38% | 14% | 40% | 19% | 6% | 54% | 21% | 55% | 35% | 43% | 17% | 31% |
| Action C | 20% | 24% | 2% | 0% | 32% | 8% | 6% | 11% | 28% | 6% | 13% | 15% | 9% | 3% | 5% | 2% | 10% | 40% | 8% | 13% | 0% | 11% | 0% | 15% | 14% | 80% | 28% |

1.1.3. Community Actions

Community Actions were implemented through three annual work programmes of the Commission, which referred to policy documents - namely the Hague Programme and the Communication on practical cooperation (COM(2006)67 final). The work programmes provided for the co-financing of measures to put in place structures that brought national asylum services together, with a view to facilitating practical cooperation towards three main objectives: achieving an EU-wide Single Procedure; the joint compilation, assessment and application of Country of Origin Information; and ways in which Member States could work more closely together to address particular pressures on asylum systems or reception capacities resulting from factors such as geographical location.

The selected projects generally focused on the implementation of Community legislation, good practices and the setting-up of transnational cooperation networks. The majority of project leaders were non-governmental organisations and the target groups were young people, vulnerable people and persons who had been resettled. The projects were characterised by their innovative aspects, in terms of content, target group and partnership. Table 3 below shows a summary of the projects selected and their budgetary implications.

Table 3 - ERF Community Actions in 2005, 2006 and 2007

Number of projects selected and budgetary implications

| ERF Community actions | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Year | Total available budget (for grants) € | No of proposals received | No of proposals financed | For selected projects | | | | % of budgetary execution |
| | | | | % of proposals selected out of total received | Total eligible costs € | ERF contribution € | Co-financing % | |
| 2005 | 2 250 000 | 26 | 8 | 31% | 2 067 166 | 1 576 038 | 76% | 70% |
| 2006 | 3 144 067 | 18 | 10 | 56% | 2 685 093 | 1 820 310 | 68% | 58% |
| 2007 | 4 204 996 | 35 | 17 | 49% | 5 278 476 | 4 150 101 | 78% | 99% |

The amounts not committed were due to the insufficient quality of the proposals. It was decided not to select projects below a certain level of technical quality; therefore, some appropriations were not used in time.

There is still some scope for more efficient use of Community Actions. For instance, mechanisms for collecting and disseminating information on Community Actions should be improved both within the Commission departments in charge of the Fund and in the Responsible Authorities in each Member State. Also, a better link needs to be established between Community Actions and national programmes.

In addition to the grants described above, the Commission used some resources for public procurement, such as a feasibility study on the European Asylum Support Office (€138 800) in 2007.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL PROGRAMMES FROM 2005 TO 2007

2.2 Implementation of the Commission Strategic Guidelines

The national programmes of the Member States had to comply with the Strategic Guidelines of the Commission. The Guidelines, which included five Priorities, provided a framework for implementation in line with certain objectives set at European level, but they did not restrict the eligibility of the measures envisaged by the Member States, provided that they complied with the legal basis of the European Refugee Fund. The following is an assessment of the implementation of the Guidelines on programme closure.

- Priority 1: implementation of the principles and measures, including those related to integration objectives, set out in the Community *acquis* of the asylum policy

The purpose of Priority 1 was to support implementation of the Community *acquis* of the asylum policy through measures and projects funded from the European Refugee Fund. It was implemented in all Member States without exception.

- Priority 2: the preparation of the implementation of principles and measures provided for in the Council Directive on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status

Priority 2 was implemented to a significant extent in all Member States except Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. An important topic for the implementation of Priority 2 was legal assistance provided to asylum seekers, which was one of the main categories of operations funded as part of the Action “Reception conditions and asylum procedures”.

- Priority 3: the implementation of actions aimed at improving the quality of procedures for the examination of claims for international protection in Member States

Priority 3 was implemented in all Member States except France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Portugal. Projects addressed the Priority from various angles: improving the procedures; changing the working methods of the authorities involved; conducting research to help identify pressures on the asylum system; purchasing equipment, such as computerised systems, to help improve the quality of procedures, etc.

- Priority 4: the implementation of measures relating to asylum seekers, refugees or beneficiaries of temporary or subsidiary protection and minors, respecting the principle of the best interest of the child

Ten Member States (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Spain) had projects that were entirely dedicated to minors, and four Member States (Belgium, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) had various projects targeted at asylum seekers or refugees in which particular attention was paid to children. Germany, Greece and Ireland placed some emphasis on this Priority.

- Priority 5: for Member States having established or willing to establish resettlement schemes, actions which address, in particular, the reception and orientation of persons admitted to the Member States under such schemes and the management of such schemes.

Only three Member States addressed Priority 5: Finland (integration of persons resettled under the UNHCR resettlement scheme), Portugal (relocation of twelve refugees transferred from Malta) and Spain (in-depth analyses of resettlement proceedings).

2.2 Key data

In general, national programmes were implemented through open calls for proposals (in the majority of Member States one call was organised every year) which attracted an impressive total of 2 492 proposals. Of these, 1 403 were selected and funded. The total number of projects funded in each Member State ranged from one in Romania and six in Bulgaria (because they only participated in the Fund in 2007) to 441 in Germany.

The average number of projects funded annually (467 in the EU) is higher than under the previous programming period (410 during the 2000-2004 period), but the increase in the number of projects is less than the increase in budget appropriations. Thus, during the 2005-2007 period there was on average a larger number of comparatively smaller projects: the average EU contribution amounted to about €108 000 per project.

The majority of project beneficiaries were non-governmental organisations and local authorities (82 % of all projects). State authorities were also important beneficiaries (9 % of all projects), especially in those Member States where the Fund supported the upgrade of State-owned facilities, such as reception centres for asylum seekers. Of the remaining beneficiary categories the most significant is the International Organization for Migration, which received funding from national programmes in 15 Member States for a total of 31 projects.

The legal basis of the European Refugee Fund for the period 2005-2007 introduced two important changes with regard to the features of projects eligible for support, namely the possibility to support multiannual projects and the possibility to fund projects covering more than one Action. Nine Member States (Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, The Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom) supported multiannual projects, and ten (Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta and Poland) funded projects covering several actions. Italy, in particular, made full use of the possibility to fund projects covering several actions, with nearly all projects covering both the improvement of reception conditions of asylum seekers and the integration of refugees at municipality level. Germany stands out in both respects, with one third of all projects being multiannual, nearly two thirds of all projects covering more than one Action and 45 % of all German projects covering all three Actions eligible under the Fund.

Rather than being limited to one activity many projects often embraced several activities (hereinafter called 'operations'), under the same Action or under more than one Action. Therefore, the total number of operations funded (3 259) significantly exceeded the number of projects. In the following chapters, the analysis of the implementation of each of the three Actions is based on the detailed description of these operations as they were reported in the implementation reports submitted by the project beneficiaries on project closure.

2.3 Implementation of the Action “Reception conditions and asylum procedures”

From the three Actions eligible for support, the Action “Reception conditions and asylum procedures” was the most important in terms of the number of operations funded. It covered a wide range of topics falling into eight broad categories: accommodation infrastructure or services; material aid; medical and psychological care; social assistance, assistance with administrative formalities and legal aid; other assistance, including language assistance, interpretation; education, language training, other initiatives consistent with the status of the person; information to local communities who will be interacting with those being received in the host country; improvement of the efficiency and quality of asylum procedures.

The Action “Reception conditions and asylum procedures” was well-represented in all Member States, but with varying emphasis. The Member States with the lowest number of operations belonging to this Action were the United Kingdom, Romania, Bulgaria and Estonia. In the case of Bulgaria and Romania, the reason was that they took part in only one annual programme. The United Kingdom chose to focus its programme on the other Actions eligible for support, “Integration” and especially “Voluntary Return”. Germany, Italy and France, on the other hand, had a very clear focus on this Action.

Social assistance, assistance with administrative formalities and legal aid was the category included in most of the projects funded in the period. It included legal, administrative and social counselling of asylum seekers in the context of the asylum procedure, individually or in group or face-to-face meetings, as well as the dissemination of information material. The next category was medical and psychological care, which was implemented in twenty one Member States and has grown in importance with the increasing number of asylum seekers suffering from medical and psychological problems as a result of violence and torture.

Of the remaining categories, accommodation infrastructure and services were supported in fifteen Member States. Especially in the Member States which joined in the Union from 2004 the European Refugee Fund played a very important role to upgrade State-owned facilities where asylum seekers are accommodated to EU standards, supporting not only extension or refurbishment but also the enhancement of services provided to asylum seekers (food, clothing, activities, administrative/legal assistance etc.).

There was an increasing trend in the majority of Member States for project implementing organisations to provide asylum seekers with a package of measures, encompassing different kinds of assistance (social, legal, administrative, medical, material, educational etc.) and possibly tailoring them to the situation of each person or group of persons.

The least common operations were those related to improving the efficiency and quality of the asylum procedures, which in eleven Member States were funded from national resources alone, i.e. outside of the programmes. Nevertheless, in the Member States where such operations were implemented, they were carried out successfully: examples included the development of country of origin databases and of information systems necessary for the asylum procedure, enhanced operation of the Dublin II Regulation and cooperation between Member States, as well as generally improving and shortening asylum procedures.

Reception Conditions and Asylum procedures - Number of operations completed, 2005-2007

| | Accommodation infrastructure or services | Material aid | Medical and psychological care | Social assistance, assistance with administrative formalities and legal aid | Other assistance, including language assistance, interpretation | Education, language training, other initiatives consistent with the status of the person | Information to local communities who will be interacting with those being received in the host country | Improvement of the efficiency and quality of asylum procedures | TOTAL OPERATIONS COMPLETED |
|-----------------|--|--------------|--------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|----------------------------|
| Austria | 0 | 0 | 33 | 27 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 74 |
| Belgium | 2 | 0 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 30 |
| Bulgaria | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Cyprus | 3 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 18 |
| Czech Republic | 0 | 6 | 4 | 17 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 38 |
| Estonia | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 6 |
| Finland | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 15 |
| France | 49 | 32 | 22 | 52 | 14 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 184 |
| Germany | 26 | 14 | 77 | 133 | 65 | 105 | 128 | 0 | 548 |
| Greece | 16 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 32 |
| Hungary | 5 | 9 | 8 | 12 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 49 |
| Ireland | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 14 |
| Italy | 86 | 86 | 78 | 66 | 73 | 60 | 12 | 0 | 461 |
| Latvia | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 18 |
| Lithuania | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 14 |
| Luxembourg | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| Malta | 6 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| Netherlands | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 11 |
| Poland | 3 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 19 |
| Portugal | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 30 |
| Romania | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Slovak Republic | 3 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 35 |
| Slovenia | 7 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 5 | 29 |
| Spain | 0 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 34 |
| Sweden | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 12 |
| United Kingdom | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total EU | 220 | 173 | 270 | 390 | 174 | 234 | 179 | 62 | 1702 |

2.4 Implementation of the Action “Integration”

Based on the number of operations funded, the Action “Integration” - which is targeted only at persons whose stay is of a stable or lasting nature (recognised refugees, persons being granted other forms of international protection) - ranked second among the three Actions eligible for support under the Fund. The topics covered by this Action can be grouped in the following categories: assistance in housing and the provision of means of subsistence; medical and psychological care; social assistance, assistance with administrative formalities, legal aid, language assistance; education, vocational training, acquisition of skills; other actions aimed at access to employment; other actions designed to promote self-empowerment; actions enabling recipients to adapt to the society of the Member State; actions to promote participation in civil and cultural life and the promotion of equality of access and equality of outcomes in dealing with public institutions.

Operations under this Action were well represented in all Member States. Italy was the Member State with the most operations (more than 40 % of all Integration operations funded in the EU); this is because most Italian projects at local level combined the reception of asylum seekers and the integration of those persons granted protection status. The number of operations turned out to be comparatively low in some Member States because the national assistance system, which did not involve EU funding, was already providing support to people in need, such as refugees.

Of all the areas of support, it was access to employment, including education, vocational training, acquisition of skills, actions designed to promote self-empowerment and all necessary forms of assistance that stood out as the most important. In several Member States, significant assistance with housing was also provided through various types of support. It is acknowledged that having a job and accommodation as soon as possible after status recognition are essential pre-requisites for refugees and persons granted international protection in order to speed up their integration into the society of the host country. Medical and psychological care, which is an essential feature of measures for asylum seekers, continued to be needed after the recognition of protection status. Lastly, operations targeted at participation in and communication with the host society and involving the latter were well supported.

There was increased support for the self-empowerment of refugees and persons granted international protection as an efficient way to promote their integration. The idea was to enable refugees to realise their own economic, social, cultural or even political potential in order to integrate into the host society and to establish positive role models.

Finally, similar to the operations funded under the Action on “Reception conditions and improvement of asylum procedure”, most projects funded under the Action ‘Integration’ included a number of topics (accommodation, work, social, medical assistance etc.). They were combined into integration packages with varying focuses (employment; communication between refugees and the local community; direct support in specific situations such as housing, legal aid etc.), thereby tailoring integration support to the particular situation of the persons concerned and to their environment through a range of appropriate measures.

Integration - Number of operations completed, 2005-2007

| | Assistance in housing/ means of subsistence | Medical and psychological care | Social assistance, assistance with administrative formalities, legal aid, language assistance | Education, vocational training, acquisition of skills | Other actions aimed at access to employment | Other actions designed to promote self-empowerment | Actions enabling recipients to adapt to the society of the Member State | Actions to promote participation in civil and cultural life | Promotion of equality of access and equality of outcomes in dealing with public institutions | TOTAL OPERATIONS COMPLETED |
|-----------------|--|--------------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|----------------------------|
| Austria | 0 | 0 | 0 | 24 | 0 | 2 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 50 |
| Belgium | 0 | 11 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
| Bulgaria | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Cyprus | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 9 |
| Czech Republic | 8 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 33 |
| Estonia | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 11 |
| Finland | 3 | 0 | 8 | 23 | 0 | 8 | 7 | 12 | 0 | 61 |
| France | 34 | 0 | 16 | 6 | 22 | 10 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 91 |
| Germany | 4 | 9 | 9 | 16 | 7 | 22 | 16 | 9 | 4 | 96 |
| Greece | 3 | 2 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| Hungary | 6 | 0 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 40 |
| Ireland | 0 | 0 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 31 |
| Italy | 50 | 75 | 80 | 69 | 45 | 65 | 0 | 69 | 86 | 539 |
| Latvia | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 15 |
| Lithuania | 3 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 38 |
| Luxembourg | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Malta | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Netherlands | 0 | 2 | 0 | 11 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 34 |
| Poland | 3 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 17 |
| Portugal | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Romania | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Slovak Republic | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| Slovenia | 10 | 2 | 3 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 43 |
| Spain | 0 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 32 |
| Sweden | 0 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 44 |
| United Kingdom | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 9 |
| Total EU | 133 | 126 | 181 | 231 | 124 | 133 | 91 | 129 | 124 | 1272 |

2.5 Implementation of the Action “Voluntary return”

With less than 10% of all operations funded by the Fund, the Action “Voluntary return” was the least represented of the three Actions. Operations funded fell into the following categories: information and advice on voluntary return; information on the situation in the country of origin or former habitual residence; assistance with travel; support - including financial support - for reintegration in the country of origin or former habitual residence; other actions which facilitate the organisation and implementation of national voluntary return programmes.

Four Member States did not implement voluntary return, but in the Member States where these operations were supported their number increased significantly compared to the initial implementation period (2000-2004). When the programme was in preparation, the Commission encouraged the Member States to include the Voluntary Return Action. Importantly, there was an increased recognition by non-governmental organisations acting in support of asylum seekers that it would be useful to provide asylum seekers whose applications were rejected with assistance to reintegrate in their country of origin, in addition to actions to assist asylum seekers during the asylum procedure and to facilitate integration of recognised refugees.

Of all the Member States, Germany - with 45 % of all operations in the area of voluntary return in the EU - was the Member State where this was most apparent, since the majority of operations in the area of voluntary return were implemented as part of projects covering two or all three of the Actions eligible under the Fund. Implementing organisations endeavoured to provide asylum seekers in their care with sound prospects, whatever the outcome of the asylum application: be it integration into German society if refugee status could be granted, or a new start in the country of origin and, in any case, assistance until departure if the conditions for recognition could not be met.

Voluntary return operations were the most difficult to implement as they depend on the asylum seekers’ willingness to return to their country of origin and to forego what they considered as a better life in a prosperous host country. However, the difficulty of implementing voluntary return may be the reason why some successful operations funded were assessed as well thought-out and even innovative. This was the case for the United Kingdom’s most successful project of the programming period 2005-2007, which was implemented under this Action. In several Member States, a further success factor was the involvement of the International Organization for Migration, either as an implementing organisation or as a partner.

Voluntary Return - Number of operations completed, 2005-2007

| | Information and advice on voluntary return | Training in support of reintegration | Assistance with travel | Support, including financial support, to reintegration in the country of origin or former habitual residence | Information on the situation in the country of origin or former habitual residence, not included in information and advice on voluntary return | Actions which facilitate the organisation and implementation of national voluntary return programmes | TOTAL OPERATIONS COMPLETED |
|-----------------|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--|--|--|----------------------------|
| Austria | 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 27 |
| Belgium | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Bulgaria | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Cyprus | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Czech Republic | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Estonia | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Finland | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| France | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 16 |
| Germany | 40 | 23 | 9 | 27 | 23 | 5 | 127 |
| Greece | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Hungary | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| Ireland | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Italy | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 15 |
| Latvia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lithuania | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Luxembourg | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Malta | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Netherlands | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| Poland | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Portugal | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Romania | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Slovak Republic | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| Slovenia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Spain | 6 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 21 |
| Sweden | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| United Kingdom | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Total EU | 100 | 34 | 33 | 57 | 35 | 26 | 285 |

3. EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY AND VALUE ADDED OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAMMES FROM 2005 TO 2007

3.1 Effectiveness

In most of the Member States the results achieved at the level of operations were satisfactory compared to what was planned. However, Integration operations proved to be the most successful, followed by those targeting the reception of asylum seekers, whereas operations on voluntary return produced the least satisfying results.

The main reasons why certain operations achieved results in excess of those planned, or did not achieve them, were connected not to the type of activity concerned (with the exception of voluntary return), but rather to external factors, especially the unpredictability of asylum flows. As a result, during a particular year with large asylum flows, projects for the reception of asylum seekers could reach a higher number than predicted and in another year where asylum flows were less than expected, they might fall short of expectations.

Further explanations for overachievement or underachievement were to be found in the following: the quality of project preparation, management and organisation; the clear understanding by the implementing organisation of the specificities of the particular asylum seeker group; the level of partnership with other organisations and, finally, the personal commitment of project organisers. In addition, the extent to which asylum seekers, refugees and persons who had been granted other forms of protection were involved in the design and implementation of the projects proved to be a significant factor in their success or failure.

Voluntary return operations were confronted with different problems. Many asylum seekers and persons granted international protection, who had invested considerable efforts in order to arrive in the host country, were not interested in returning, in spite of the dissemination of information on the possibilities of return and of support. Adverse situations in certain countries of origin could also deter them from applying for assistance to return.

At the level of the national programmes, the extent to which planned results were achieved was more varied: objectives set at the beginning of the programmes were not fully met in some Member States, but were exceeded in others. Implementation of the national strategies proved fairly successful in terms of the reception conditions of asylum seekers, but less so for the integration of refugees. As far as voluntary return was concerned, implementation of the strategies was below expectations, with the exception of the United Kingdom.

Although the assessment was that other actions or measures than those funded could not have been more effective, it is widely recognized that the projects could have been made even more effective. An increase in cooperation, knowledge and experience sharing between implementing organisations would have allowed synergies and the pooling of resources, and would have helped avoid possible duplication. Voluntary return operations could have been made more effective by developing contacts with partners from the countries of origin, by staff training or through exchange of best practices across Member States.

With regard to project planning and management, supporting longer-term projects or building on previous projects could be more effective than starting new initiatives. The administrative workload of project implementing organisations was identified as an obstacle to the effective implementation of projects, and should therefore be examined.

3.2 Efficiency

Resources needed to implement the projects were assessed as sufficient in general. During the selection process carried out in the Member States, the relevant expertise was used to assess

the budget to fund the proposals, thereby ensuring that the expected costs were realistic and that the resources allocated were sufficient for the chosen projects. However, in a number of Member States, co-funding of projects from the national budget, which came on top of EU funding, became difficult or even disappeared completely as a result of budget constraints; this created very difficult situations for small and medium-sized organisations.

The timeliness of fund availability was less satisfactory. It was felt that funds were available to implementing organisations later than expected; this was due to the fact that not all EU provisions were in place until one year after the beginning of the programming period, but national delays were also a factor. As a result, signing of contracts and the initial payments following the signature of contracts with implementing organisations were delayed and this had an adverse impact in several Member States. In some cases, the delays resulted in projects or parts of projects being cancelled, while in other cases organisations were obliged to borrow funds in order to initiate activities. Similarly, during project implementation, the time lag between the first payment and subsequent payments was considered too long by implementing organisations and their resources were too limited to carry out all activities during this period.

The costs incurred to achieve the projects' outputs seemed reasonable. Where that assessment was based on comparisons with other financial instruments or sources of funding, or based on known unit prices, it was found that the projects were as efficient as or even more efficient than similar projects funded with other resources. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the National Audit Office concluded that the average cost of a large scale project on voluntary return was significantly cheaper than that of enforced removal, and yielded better results, since it provided for reintegration in the country of origin on a needs basis.

However, there was room for improvement. At project level, some expenditure on technical assistance, management costs, workshops, seminars, round tables etc. were those costs where possible savings could have been made. While in some cases it was considered that staff costs should be kept to a minimum, it was questioned whether these costs could be kept low by using volunteers. In spite of their high level of commitment, staff working on a voluntary basis might not always have the time and opportunity to fully dedicate themselves to project implementation, which is necessary in order to make projects a success.

In the context of the programmes as a whole, further savings could be achieved by reducing the administrative tasks placed on the national authorities responsible for programme implementation and the reporting requirements for implementing organisations, which most considered to be particularly heavy. In some cases, public procurement rather than project subsidy might have been a possible alternative way to reduce programme costs. Finally, more cooperation between projects, projects with a longer duration and, where appropriate, larger projects (in budgetary terms) might have allowed a more efficient use of the available resources.

3.3 Additionality and European value added

The use of the European Refugee Fund during the period 2005-2007 proved to be additional to national funding. There were only very few instances where projects could have been funded through national support. Moreover, in no single case did the Fund replace financing from other European funds, such as the European Social Fund or the EQUAL programme. As a result, few, if any, of the 1 403 projects funded would have been implemented in the absence of the European Refugee Fund.

In their calls for proposals, Member States made provision to the effect that projects already funded from national or from other European resources could not be funded from the

European Refugee Fund. In practice, Member States implemented different strategies to ensure additionality of the Fund. The Fund was used either as a supplement to national resources, in order to increase the volume of existing projects and activities; or, as a complement to finance activities linked with existing projects, but of a different nature, which does not necessarily increase the number of projects; or, completely separate from other funding instruments, to fund projects of a new type, content or size, including innovative projects which have not been taken into account in other subsidy schemes.

4. EFFECTS AND IMPACTS OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAMMES FROM 2005 TO 2007

It is estimated that the 1 403 projects funded provided direct benefit to a total target group of more than 350 000 persons. Of these, 26 200 persons returned to their country of origin under voluntary return schemes. In addition to those in the target group, more than 6 500 persons belonging to the project implementing organisations received support from the Fund, e.g. for training or as a result of recruiting additional staff. These are remarkable achievements considering the Fund's relatively limited resources (some €50 million per annum).

Beyond the direct project outputs, significant impacts at national level were identified in the following areas.

4.1 Improvement of reception conditions and asylum procedures in the Member States

In most of the Member States which joined the European Union from 2004, as well as in other Member States, projects contributed specifically to the renovation or extension of reception centres for asylum seekers or to the quality of the services they provide to asylum seekers. As these centres in general accommodate all asylum seekers in these Member States, the result has been a general improvement of reception conditions at national level. In addition, in Latvia, temporary reception conditions were set up in case of a sudden inflow of asylum seekers.

In the Netherlands, where one single organisation is responsible for reception of asylum seekers, awareness of social safety was raised via a large-scale project in all reception locations. In many locations this resulted in those living there being given resilience training and all locations received information material.

Similarly, in France, "reception platforms" managed by non-governmental organisations in most regions provided asylum seekers throughout the country with a range of quality services which were maintained in spite of large asylum flows during the 2005-2007 implementation period. In Spain, almost half of all asylum seekers benefited from services ranging from improved reception conditions to medical/psychological assistance, legal support and coverage of basic needs.

Particular emphasis was placed on vulnerable groups in several Member States, with significant results at national level. In Italy, dedicated reception procedures were set up. In Austria and Belgium, psychological assistance was provided country-wide. Cyprus set up a Torture Care Unit. In Belgium, France and Portugal, implementing organisations started to tackle the specific needs of unaccompanied minors who, according to reports, were not being properly taken care of by existing schemes.

In several Member States, such as Bulgaria, Germany, Slovakia and Spain, legal assistance to asylum seekers improved at national level as a result of the implementation of the programmes. In Germany, for instance, projects in this field benefited approximately one-third of all asylum seekers.

Given the comparatively lower number of operations involving asylum procedures, impacts in this area were more limited. Several operations were carried out in Cyprus. In Austria, a quality management system for the asylum procedures was introduced nation-wide. In Poland, a database with information on the countries of origin was set up. In Slovenia, the establishment of the EURODAC system and of a system establishing identification cards were funded, as well as a registry of applicants for asylum. The United Kingdom appointed an Asylum Liaison Officer in Italy, who effectively managed relations between the two Member States under the Dublin Regulation.

4.2 Improved integration of refugees in the society of the Member States

Impacts on the integration of refugees at national level were less pronounced and appear to be specific to some Member States. In France, for instance, integration projects gained growing importance and benefited around 9% of all refugees with an emphasis on access to independent accommodation together with social assistance, as a first step to accessing the labour market. In Finland, where integration of refugees has become an important topic of political debate, models developed for integration at local level, and involving the mainstream population, peer-support by earlier immigrants and services jointly produced by non-governmental organisations and municipalities, have the potential to achieve national impacts provided they are implemented on a large scale. In Cyprus, projects raised awareness among the general public on the issues of refugees, promoting multiculturalism and diversity. Significant impacts of integration projects were also reported in Ireland and Latvia.

4.3 Increased voluntary return of persons belonging to the target groups

As the least represented of the three Actions, voluntary return is the area where impacts at national level were lowest. In the United Kingdom a large voluntary return programme benefited 11 262 persons, which is a significant figure at national level. In Luxembourg, voluntary return measures, implemented for the first time with the support of the European Refugee Fund, led to a 10 % increase in voluntary return after several years of decrease; this was due to individually orientated interviews, which was an innovative feature. In Hungary, the very existence of voluntary return was seen as a result of the programme and in Malta an assisted voluntary return system was able to be set up for the first time. In Slovakia, the Fund made it possible to start cooperating with the countries of origin in assistance with voluntary return and for the first time provided returning asylum seekers with a financial contribution.

4.4 Development of policy measures in the field of asylum policy, including a contribution to the development of the Common European Asylum System

Although no single project involved the development of policy measures in the field of asylum policy directly, there was evidence of some specific, often indirect, impacts in these areas in some Member States.

In Portugal, projects for the improvement of reception conditions for asylum seekers were taken into account in the design of the changes required to adapt the national law to the European Directive on minimum reception standards. In Belgium, where three major laws on the asylum procedure and on the reception of asylum seekers were adopted, the Fund played an important role in providing information about the new legal provisions and in training stakeholders in their correct implementation. In Luxembourg, continued support for projects implemented by a non-governmental organisation enhanced its lobbying action and thereby facilitated the approval by Parliament of a new law on asylum and subsidiary protection.

In Finland, projects for improving the quality of the reception system and for the integration of refugees yielded new models which attracted the attention and interest of other EU Member States. Similarly, the Italian Asylum Liaison Officer appointed by the United Kingdom generated interest from other Member States. Lastly, in Estonia, as a result of projects for the integration of refugees, the Ministry of Social Affairs introduced changes to the law on Social Care.

4.5 Other impacts linked at least partly to the implementation of the programmes

Implementing projects funded by the European Refugee Fund produced tangible, lasting effects for the organisations implementing projects in the form of an increase in experience, qualification and institutional capacity, as well as in relation to fund and project management; cooperation and networking with other organisations, both domestically and with other Member States; and recognition from national authorities as partners in matters related to asylum seekers and refugees.

Not only did non-governmental organisations develop cooperation among themselves; cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organisations in asylum and refugee matters also developed as a result of the implementation of the programmes.

At the level of governmental organisations, work quality improved, there was a growing awareness of the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, and institutions in charge of asylum policy improved their working method and were able to have access to first hand information concerning asylum seekers and refugees, as well on pitfalls and critical points of the asylum policy. Better inter-institutional coordination was achieved in several Member States (Poland, Spain and Slovakia). In Italy, implementation of the projects at the level of municipalities optimised the implementation of the asylum provisions set at national level. In Belgium, by concentrating support on areas that were relevant at EU level, there was an improvement in the consistency and focus of actions carried out at various levels of government.

5. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAMMES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT BY THE RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES AND THE IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATIONS

As part of the national evaluation reports, the Responsible Authorities in the Member States on the one hand, and the project implementing organisations on the other hand, were asked to provide their assessment of the programme of the European Refugee Fund and to suggest improvements.

Both the Responsible Authorities and the implementing organisations were generally satisfied with the European Refugee Fund, which they regarded as a genuinely useful instrument to improve reception conditions for asylum seekers and integration of persons granted protection status, and to support the efforts made in the Member States to comply with the Community *acquis* in the field of asylum policy. They also considered that the range of measures eligible for assistance was adequate and that, after programme closure, they had been able to achieve meaningful results in relation to the objectives set for the Fund.

The Responsible Authorities and the implementing organisations made a number of suggestions for improvement. The most important recommendation concerned the reduction of the administrative requirements placed on them. Proposals were made to intervene in a number of areas relating to the management of the programme: reducing the request for documentation during the project selection phase; simplifying eligibility rules, control and oversight mechanisms; relaxing the financial accountability requirements; and reducing reporting requirements. In this context, the project implementing organisations felt that excessive paperwork and the recurrent writing of progress reports hampered the organisations in the implementation of their project and required a disproportionate amount of work, to the detriment of the content and activities of the project. However, this concerned national provisions which may go beyond European requirements.

The second recommendation concerned the timeliness of programme approval during the first year of implementation and timeliness of payments. In the event of late approval, Member States were unable to keep to their own timetable, and implementing organisations lacked funds in the project start-up phase, when they are most needed. Also, financial flows should not be delayed during implementation and on closure.

It was also possible to provide greater flexibility during programme and project implementation. The Responsible Authorities could be allowed to alter the budget and possibly the content of the measures to a reasonable extent, while still adhering strictly to the principle of additionality, thereby having more discretion in the day-to-day management. At project level, implementing organisations could be given more flexibility to transfer resources between project items or between project implementation years.

Finally, both the Responsible Authorities and the project implementing organisations stressed that more integrated and effective cooperation between Member States and between implementing organisations could have positive effects, both for them and for the target groups. In particular, the establishment of cooperation schemes where knowledge and best practices would flow freely between Member States would be of great benefit in the planning and implementation of asylum and refugee activities.

They would favour arrangements to facilitate the exchange of experience and best practices with practitioners from public and civil society organisations from all over Europe.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall picture of the implementation of the European Refugee Fund during the period 2005-2007 is satisfactory. The project implementing organisations and the national authorities responsible for implementing the national programmes were able to build upon the experience gained from the first implementation period of the Fund, from 2000 to 2004, and to achieve even better results. Beyond the achievements of all projects funded, significant impacts were identified at national level against the main policy objectives set for the Fund. Although there is still room for improvement, the European Refugee Fund, after two implementation periods, is now firmly established, as part of the General Programme “Solidarity and management of migration flows”, as a useful European funding instrument in support of implementation of the European *acquis* in the field of asylum policy.

Among the many recommendations that emerge from the evaluation with regard to the activities funded and the implementation mechanisms, a number have already been implemented in the third phase of the Fund, from 2008 to 2013, which is currently taking place in the broader context of the General Programme “Solidarity and management of migration flows”. For example, the Commission has issued a number of guidance documents to clarify the legal requirements in various areas (eligibility rules, programming, reporting, programme closure etc.) with a view to finding practical solutions, and it has had regular exchanges with the Member States on a range of implementation issues since the new programmes began; this is greatly appreciated by the Member States. Further consideration will be given to all recommendations in the context of a Commission-wide debate on all proposals to be made for the period post-2013.