

NEW EU FINANCIAL PROGRAMME LAUNCHED FOR ASYLUM, MIGRATION AND BORDER MANAGEMENT

Almost every day we hear of migrants risking their lives to travel by boat to Spain, Italy, Malta and other countries at the external borders of the European Union. The UK is examining how to attract more highly-skilled workers to address skills gaps and shortages. France faces rising discontent among its immigrant population. Cyprus is welcoming displaced persons fleeing the war in Lebanon. These are only some examples of the challenges faced by many EU Member States. In November 2004, EU ministers agreed on policy objectives for the next five years in the field of asylum and immigration. In order to achieve these policy goals, a new EU financial programme has been introduced to provide the support needed to Member States.

In April 2005 the European Commission announced the launch of a new financial programme in the field of asylum and migration. The new **framework programme on solidarity and management of migration flows for the period 2007-2013**¹ will replace the existing myriad of financial programmes and instruments managed by the Commission which cover actions on asylum, migration, visa policy and border controls. In May 2006 the European Commission adopted proposals for these instruments, which revised inter alia, the reference amounts.

Several of the actions envisaged for asylum seekers are similar to those that the EQUAL partnerships in the Asylum Seeker theme have been developing. With EQUAL ending in 2007, the programme may provide for new funding opportunities.

The new Framework Programme will help to achieve the policy objectives set out in the November 2004 Hague Programme.. At a conference in Brussels in November 2005, Franco Frattini, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, highlighted the importance of taking action to address the challenges the EU is currently facing in asylum and migration: *"We are talking serious problems, we should therefore be talking serious money. The establishment of a framework programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows for the period 2007-2013 has key importance. The Commission counts on Member States' support to make sure that this programme – and related external relations programmes – will have the financial size that is in line with the challenges that face us."*

The aim of the new framework programme is to provide the financial backing needed to improve the management of migration flows to the European Union and foster increased solidarity between the Member States. At the same time, this will strengthen the EU as an area of freedom, security and justice.

The new framework programme on solidarity and management of migration flows is one of three new programmes introduced by the Commission to cover policies which fall under the field of freedom, security and justice². The launch of these new framework programmes coincides with the Commission's new financial framework for 2007-2013 – a multi-annual spending plan which provides the funding needed to achieve the European Union's policy priorities. *"The Commission's blueprint for investing in Europe's future is complete..."* explained Commission President José Manuel Barroso: *"Our budget choices have been carefully constructed around the*

¹ For additional information, see <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l14509.htm> & http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0123en01.pdf

² The two other new framework programmes under the Freedom, Security and Justice policy area include: the framework programme on Security and Safeguarding Liberties, and the Fundamental Rights and Justice framework programme.

political priorities set by EU governments for our enlarged Union of 25... Europe must have the means to match its ambitions. I believe we have got the balance right."

Action at European level is necessary to meet the challenges faced by many Member States in the field of asylum and immigration. The new framework programme on solidarity and management of migration flows will provide support for actions at the national level covering four areas: the control and surveillance of external borders; the return of third-country nationals residing illegally in the EU and failed asylum seekers; the integration of legally resident third-country nationals and asylum.

Each of these four areas is covered by a specific fund which falls under the framework programme:

The current **European Refugee Fund** is due to run until 2010. In order to harmonise its schedule with the three other funds making up the new framework programme, new provisions will be introduced in January 2008 which will extend its duration until 2013. The Fund will continue to provide financial support to Member States so that they can improve reception conditions and asylum application procedures, and promote the integration of refugees and displaced persons with other forms of protection. Actions which will be put in place at national level should help to provide the assistance and services an asylum seeker needs when arriving in a Member State, and support the integration of persons recognised as refugees under the Geneva Convention on Refugees and receiving subsidiary protection. This includes accommodation or services for asylum seekers and refugees, medical and psychological care, social assistance, information and help with administrative formalities, legal aid and language assistance, and information and counselling on the possibility of voluntary return. In order to promote their integration, the Fund will also help support activities put in place by Member States to encourage participation in civil and cultural life and contact and dialogue with the host society, provide measures focusing on education, vocational training, and the recognition of qualifications and diplomas, as well as actions promoting self-empowerment. For the period 2007 to 2013, a proposed budget of 699 million euro has been allocated to the European Refugee Fund.

The aim of the **External Borders Fund** is to improve the efficiency of border controls in the EU, make entry easier and faster for certain travellers and enhance the efficiency of issuing visas while reducing illegal immigration. Member States will be able to benefit from the Fund by introducing or upgrading their data collection systems, improving coordination and information exchange between different national authorities, providing training to border guards, upgrading IT and security systems and developing common consular offices. These are only a few examples of the actions which will be implemented as a result of the External Borders Fund. The Fund has been allocated a proposed budget of 1820 million euro.

The **European Fund for Integration** will provide EU Member States with the necessary funds to develop admission procedures for newly arrived third country nationals and promote their integration into the host society, increase capacity to develop, monitor and evaluate integration policies, and improve the exchange of information and best practices on integration among Member States. Examples of activities include: preparing third-country nationals for their integration into the host society through pre-travel measures such as information packs or courses, setting up programmes to help newcomers learn about the host society's language, history, socio-economic aspects and cultural life, put in place measures to gather and analyse information about the needs of new arrivals, organise awareness-raising campaigns. The budget for the Integration Fund has been set at a proposed 825 million euro.

The aim of the **European Return Fund** is to improve the return management of illegal residents by Member States, enhance cooperation between them and promote uniform standards on return. These objectives will be achieved through a variety of actions implemented at Member State level, such as providing information on voluntary return, simplifying procedures for enforced returns of illegal migrants, developing working relationships between Member States' authorities and consular authorities and immigration services in third countries, designing joint return plans, and enhancing the capacities of administration and judicial authorities. The proposed budget allocated to the Return Fund is 676 million euro. The Fund will only start in 2008.

The Commission's proposals for the four Funds making up the framework programme on solidarity and management of migration flows are currently being discussed by the ministers responsible for issues relating to justice and home affairs at meetings of the Justice and Home Affairs Council which meets regularly in Brussels or Luxemburg and the European Parliament. In response to discussions held in the Council and the European Parliament, amendments have been made to proposals for the Refugee, Borders and Return Funds.

In May 2006, the Commission adopted amended proposals for these Funds. The target date for finalising the negotiations is October 2006.