



# **Ex post evaluation of the European Union Solidarity Fund 2002-2016**

Case Study - Greece

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## **GREECE, FOREST FIRES IN THE REGIONS OF ATTICA, CONTINENTAL GREECE, PELOPONNESE AND WESTERN GREECE, AUGUST 2007**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This section presents a case study for the Ex Post Evaluation of the European Union Solidarity Fund, assessing the EUSF application relating to **forest fires in the regions of Attica, Continental Greece, Peloponnese and Western Greece in August 2007 (case 50)**<sup>1</sup>. The aim of the case study is to analyse the implementation and performance of the EUSF as a contribution to understanding the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, added value and solidarity of the EU funding. The following section sets out the context for the EUSF support and a brief overview of the intervention. It then examines the experience of implementation, the factors influencing implementation, the relevance of EUSF, the administrative burdens and costs associated with the intervention, the achievements and added value of the EUSF support and the lessons learned.

### **2. CONTEXT**

In the summer of 2007 a series of forest fires broke out in the regions of Western Greece, Peloponnese, Attica and Continental Greece (Euboea), beginning in late June and continuing until early September. The fires were at their most damaging in the August period of the blaze, and in this period alone caused many of the total 65 fatalities. The fires also burned over 2,700 square kilometres of land and destroyed over 2,000 buildings before being extinguished.<sup>2</sup> More than 100,000 people lost their homes, their farms or their livestock as a result of the fires in Ileia, Messinia, Arkadia, Lakonia and Euboea Prefectures and more than 120 villages were destroyed or badly damaged.

The first major fire to occur broke out on 28 June in Attica and caused unprecedented damage, and by mid-July more than 100 fires had been reported throughout several regions of Greece. Some of these blazes spread, one of which reached the outskirts of Athens on 17 August.<sup>3</sup> Whilst this particular fire was extinguished on 23 August, by far the worst outbreak of forest fires began in Peloponnese, Attica and Euboea, destroying several villages and prompting a declaration of a state of emergency in Greece, as well as requests for assistance from other EU Member States. The forest fires were stopped completely in early September 2007.

The damage caused by this series of fires was exceptionally significant for local agriculture and forestry, causing not only immediate damage to the natural environment, but serious short and long-term economic consequences due to loss of crops and arable land. The damage to crops and levels of reforestation required make up the largest share of the total direct damages caused by the fires (EUR 788 million out of a total of EUR 2.118 billion).

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<sup>1</sup> This case study was researched and originally drafted by Victoria Chorafa, Dimitris Lianos, LKN Analysis Ltd, and edited and revised by the EPRC Core Team.

<sup>2</sup> Boschetti L, Roy D, Barbosa P, Boca R and Justice C (2008) A MODIS assessment of the summer 2007 extent burned in Greece, *International Journal of Remote Sensing*, 25/3/08, ISSN: 0143-1161

<sup>3</sup> See BBC source article, 'Forest fire grips Athens suburbs'E, 17/8/07, accessed 30/08/2018, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6950662.stm>

Infrastructure was also heavily damaged, with water shortages, destroyed road networks and damaged infrastructure systems designed to protect against flooding, all occurring as a result of the disaster. Additionally, the economic impacts of the blaze affected multiple sectors such as agriculture, packaging and hospitality, due to the impossibility of using any crops or farmland for at least a year within the burned areas of affected regions, which make up two percent of the entire area of Greece.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. OVERVIEW OF EUSF INTERVENTION

Within the ten-week deadline after the first damage from the forest fires was recorded on 23 August 2007, the Greek authorities submitted an application to the Commission requesting financial assistance from the EUSF (see Table 1). In the application, the Greek authorities estimated the total direct damage at EUR 2.118 billion.<sup>5</sup> This amount was accepted by the Commission as the basis for assessing the disaster and for the calculation of the amount of financial assistance. As the initial estimated damage was more than 1.98 times the major disaster threshold applicable to Greece in 2007 (EUR1.066 billion), the application was assessed as a major disaster.

**Table 1: Timeline of the EUSF intervention**

Intervention stage	Date
Disaster occurrence	23/08/2007
Application submission	30/10/2007
Application submission (update)	24/01/2008
Date of proposal	08/04/2008
Date of EP and Council Decision	05/06/2008
Commission Decision	08/09/2008
Implementation agreement	08/09/2008
Payment date	29/09/2008
Implementation period end	29/09/2009
Implementation report due	29/03/2010
Implementation report received	30/03/2010
Implementation report (dates of updates received)	11/03/2011, 05/04/2011, 16/12/2011, 31/07/2012, 06/12/2012
Closure date	15/05/2013

Source: DG REGIO, 2018.

In the application, eligible costs were estimated as EUR 1.007 billion, most of which (70 percent) was accounted for by infrastructure restoration particularly in the field of transport. Following the submission of the request for the EUSF mobilisation, the Commission requested clarifications on the methodology of damage assessment and the assumptions made.<sup>6</sup> The additional information was provided by the Greek authorities on

<sup>4</sup> Application for EU Solidarity Fund Greece – Forest Fires (CCI: 2007GR16SPO001)

<sup>5</sup> Application form to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, 29/10/2007, REF 46575 / EYS 6631. The first request for the financial support of the EUSF was sent by the deputy Minister of Economy and Finance to the Commissioner by fax on 29/08/2007.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2007), DG REGIO letter, 20/12/2007, Brussels, REGI OBI/PS/a ID(2007)141295



24 January 2008.<sup>7</sup> The Commission proposed on 8 April 2008 to grant financial aid to Greece following its assessment of the application, and proposed a financial contribution of EUR 89.8 million based on the application of its methodology for EUSF aid.<sup>8</sup>

In preparing the subsequent implementation agreement, the indicative allocations to categories of damage were amended to reduce the proportion of funding for infrastructure restoration (from 70 percent of the budget to 39 percent) increasing the allocation for preventative infrastructure to 50 percent (see Table 2). Following the Commission Decision and the signing of the implementation agreement on 8 September 2008, the financial contribution was paid to the Greek authorities on 29 September 2008 (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2: EUSF awarded and reported (EUR million)**

Categories of damage	EUSF awarded	EUSF reported	
		Total Expenditure	Amount covered by EUSF
Infrastructure restoration	34.7	50.3	44.2
Temporary accommodation and rescue services	5.0	35.1	34.3
Preventative infrastructure	45.0	2.4	2.3
Clean-up of disaster area	5.1	10.7	9.0
Total	89.8	98.6	89.8

Source: DG REGIO, 2018.

In the course of EUSF implementation, there were further shifts of funding as different categories of project were over/under estimated, compared to those indicated in the implementing agreement (but within the same overall budget). The implementation report was submitted on 30 March 2010, an updated report and the validity statement followed later and after a period of 2.5 years to respond to the audit requirements, closure was recorded on 15 May 2013. The lengthy period of closure was due to the non-acceptance of the validity statement by the Commission audit unit, the submission of clarifications by the Greek authorities and the domestic audit authority's delay in providing answers to one of the three questions for which the Commission requested further details.

Comparison of the timetable for this case with other EUSF cases<sup>10</sup> is limited by the small number of forest fire disasters assisted through EUSF (four cases)(see Table 3). Bearing this in mind, the time period between the occurrence of the disaster and the payment of aid was (at 57.6 weeks) almost a third longer than the average of all four EUSF forest-fire cases (57.4 weeks) but almost a month shorter than the average for all six EUSF cases in Greece (61.3 weeks). This was significantly due to the much longer time period for

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Economy and Finance, General Directorate for Development Planning ,Regional Policy and Public Investment, Ref.No.:3188/4376

<sup>8</sup> European Commission (2008) *Communication from the Commission on the application for the European Solidarity Fund financial aid presented by Greece relating to the forest fires in Greece of August 2007*, Brussels.

<sup>9</sup> DG REGIO (2014) *Closure of the EU Solidarity Fund financial aid granted to Greece relating to the forest fires of 2007 – Commission decision No C(2008)5033 – Note to File*, Ref. Ares(2014)950977 - 27/03/2014.

<sup>10</sup> Based on analysis of all EUSF cases undertaken for the Interim Report.

application submission, including updates, which at 22 weeks, was much longer than the average for EUSF forest-fire cases and also for other Greek EUSF cases. The Commission assessment and the EP and Council assessments/approval also took slightly longer than for other forest fire cases, though were shorter than the average for other EUSF cases in Greece. The closure process was, however, relatively more efficient. The implementation report was submitted on time, and the process of updating the report (146.3 weeks) and the closure process (16.9 weeks) were both significantly shorter than the averages for the type disaster and for EUSF cases in Greece.

**Table 3: Comparison of administration of the case study with other EUSF cases**

Indicators	Case study : GR50 (weeks)	Average of all other Forest Fires (weeks) (n=4)	Average of all GR interventions (weeks) (n=6)
Submission of application in relation to the deadline	-0.3	:	:
Application completion duration	22	13.7	18.8
Commission assessment duration	10.7	9.8	14.4
EP & EC assessment duration	8.3	6.9	13.6
Time between disaster occurrence and payment of aid to beneficiary country	57.6	43.6	61.3
Submission of IR in relation to deadline	0.1	1.0	19
Duration of updates to implementation report	146.3	482.6*	172**
Duration of closure process	16.9	46.3	22.6

Source: DG REGIO, 2018.

\* Case ES12, submitted IR on 17/02/2006 however, the last update was 19/05/2015.

\*\* Case GR39, submitted IR on 02/07/2009 however, the last update was 16/04/2013.

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION OF EUSF

The following sections describe the implementation of EUSF in greater detail, covering the institutional context, application / submission, evaluation/assessment and approval, implementation, closure, and publicity and visibility.

### 4.1 Institutional context

In order to deal with the fires' disastrous impacts, a state of emergency was declared in the country by Decision 47870/25-8-2007 of the Minister for the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation<sup>11</sup> (Gov. Gazette 1706/B/2007). The state of emergency was lifted in the regions of Attica and Continental Greece by Decision M.O.1257/4.4.2008 of the Minister for the Interior and in the regions of the Peloponnese and Western Greece by Decision 885/5.2.2009 of the Minister for the Interior.

After the disaster struck, the National Civil Protection Plan 'Xenokrates' was activated by the General Secretariat for Civil Protection (GSCP) operating under the Ministry of Interior.

<sup>11</sup> Now renamed Ministry of Interior

The GSCP is, *inter alia*, the body empowered to issue emergency and contingency plans for all kinds of natural and/ or human-caused disasters and hazards, with the exception of wildfires that lie under the responsibility of the Fire Brigade. It adopts appropriate preparedness measures and undertakes prevention, preparedness, response and recovery actions. Emergency response state services and various bodies were coordinated under this system to address the impacts of the forest fires (see Table 4).

Furthermore, a national framework for addressing the impacts of the disaster was created. The framework included:

- The *Central Coordinating Committee* under the former Minister of Economy and Finance, with the participation of Ministries, Regions, the Central Union of Municipalities and the former Union of Prefectural Authorities. Its main duty was to monitor the progress of implementation, to provide guidelines in order to address the problems identified and to interfere in the institutional framework when necessary.
- The *Permanent Project Team* at the Ministry of Economy and Finance, which prepared the submission of the request for the mobilisation of the EUSF.
- The setting- up of a domestic "*Special Emergency Response Fund*" aiming at damage restoration caused by the fires and the creation of a reserve to deal with potential future disasters.

As regards the institutional arrangements for the EUSF intervention, the former Ministry of Economy and Finance<sup>12</sup> (and specifically the Special Coordination Service in the Community Support Framework Managing Authority,) was designated as the body responsible for coordinating the implementation of the grant (as laid down in Article 4 of the agreement). The bodies responsible for the implementation of the grant were the Managing Authorities of the respective regional operational programmes (ROPs), namely the ROPs of Western Greece (Dytiki Ellada), Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada), Peloponnese (Peloponnisos) and Attica (Attiki) - as far as types of measure falling within their area of competence were concerned. The body responsible for all other types of measure was the Directorate General for Regional Policy Development Programming & Public Investments within the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Lastly, the Financial Audit Committee (EDEL) was designated as the body responsible for conducting the checks of operations and also the system audits required to draw up the statement of validity.

The former Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works<sup>13</sup> - through the General Secretariat for Public Works - Rehabilitation Service for Earthquake Victims, a Service with significant experience in damage restoration from natural disasters - played a coordinating role in the issue of regulatory decisions to assist the regional and prefectural departments in their work as implementing bodies.

The implementing bodies for enforcing EUSF actions at central level were:

- General Secretariat for Civil Protection;

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<sup>12</sup> Now renamed Ministry of Economy and Development

<sup>13</sup> Now renamed Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport

- Ministry of National Defence;
- Fire Brigade Command;
- Public Power Corporation;
- Hellenic Telecommunications Organisation;
- Ministry of Culture and Tourism;
- Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity;
- School Building Organisation S.A., and
- Hellenic Railways Organisation.

The implementing bodies responsible for enforcing EUSF actions at regional level were as follows.

- The *Forest Services*, which come under the respective Regions' Forestry Directorates, are the authorities responsible for designing and supervising all forestry engineering projects. The Forest Services were responsible for designing and implementing relevant EUSF-financed actions.
- *Regional Public Works Directorates* of the affected regions were the technical departments responsible for designing and implementing the restoration projects at regional level.
- The *Regional Funds* of the affected regions were the financial bodies responsible for settling the various costs.
- The Engineering Services Departments of the *Prefectural Authorities*<sup>14</sup> are responsible for designing and constructing each Prefecture's public engineering projects. Similarly, the Financial Services Department of every Prefectural Authority is responsible for conducting financial audits and settling all costs incurred by the Authority, and for implementing and providing payment for procurements and (non-engineering) services rendered. The term 'prefectural' refers to projects carried out within the administrative boundaries of the Prefecture and which do not have national coverage. As regards the EUSF-funded operations, the Engineering Services Department of every Prefectural Authority was responsible for designing and implementing the relevant actions, and the Financial Services Department of every Prefectural Authority was responsible for providing payment for and implementing the relevant actions.
- The *municipalities* were responsible mainly for first responsive actions and actions of immediate relief, evacuations and local network restorations.

Apart from the EUSF, the operations for damage restoration in the affected areas were supported by both national (state budget and national strand of the Public Investments Programme) and private funding. In particular, the funding sources of the domestic

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<sup>14</sup> Now renamed Regional Units

'Special Emergency Response Fund' were the state budget and the collection of donations from organisations, banks, businesses and citizens. Furthermore, the Ministry of Economy set up a specific budget line in the region of Western Greece to address the damage caused by the major fires of 2007 in the Regional Units (former Prefectures) of Ilia, Achaia and Aitolokarnania.

Due to the fires that occurred in the summer of 2007, the deadline for the eligibility of expenditure for the 2000-2006 OPs was extended until 31 December 2009. The extension was granted to allow the Greek state to complete the projects in progress and to include actions to address the impacts of the fires (see also section 3.9).

Table 4 summarises the name and role of the institutions sending the application, key implementing authorities, and key stakeholders.

**Table 4: Institutional arrangements for the EUSF intervention**

	<b>Organization name</b>	<b>Role</b>
Institution sending application	Ministry of Economy and Finance	Preparation and submission of the application for mobilising the EUSF / Coordination of the EUSF implementation
Key implementing authorities	Organization name <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regulatory decisions to assist the regional and prefectural departments in their work as implementing bodies. The Directorate for Natural Disaster Damage Restorations' civil engineering units inspected damages incurred in buildings.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing Authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing Authority of Dytiki Ellada OP</li> <li>Managing Authority of Peloponnisos OP</li> <li>Managing Authority of Sterea Ellada OP</li> <li>Managing Authority of Attiki OP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bodies responsible for the implementation of the EUSF grant</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent audit body</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial Audit Committee (EDEL)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Body responsible for conducting the checks of operations and also the system audits required to draw up the statement of validity</li> </ul>
Bodies managing actions at central level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General Secretariat for Civil Protection</li> <li>Ministry of National Defence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobilisation of the National Civil Protection Plan "Xenocrates" for addressing natural disasters.</li> <li>Assistance in emergencies using personnel and equipment provided and directed by the General Secretariat for Civil Protection.</li> </ul>

	<b>Organization name</b>	<b>Role</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire Brigade Command</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire suppression by conducting air- and ground-based operations in emergencies.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Power Corporation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The electricity distribution network and the Megalopoli Lignite Centre in Arcadia suffered damages in the course of the fires. These were repaired by the Public Power Corporation</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hellenic Telecommunications Organisation (OTE S.A.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OTE S.A. used its service network to repair all the damages.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Culture and Tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision of the regional antiquities agencies. Once the fires had ended, the antiquities agencies in the affected areas were asked to intervene and repair the damages caused to archaeological sites and monuments.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the course of the fires, the hospitals and health centres provided shelter to the fire-stricken population.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Building Organisation S.A.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The School Building Organisation S.A. transferred appropriations to the prefectural and local authorities in the stricken areas so that buildings damaged by the fires could be repaired.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hellenic Railways Organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Peloponnesian railway system was damaged by the fires. EDISY S.A., the agency responsible for maintaining the system, undertook the task of repairing the damages.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hellenic Organisation of Agricultural Insurances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for damage assessment in the primary sector of the economy</li> </ul>
Bodies managing actions at regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire-stricken regions of the country – Forestry Directorates – Forest Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Forest Services were responsible for designing and implementing the relevant EUSF-funded actions.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Public Works Directorates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Public Works Directorates of the affected regions are the technical departments responsible for designing and implementing the projects at the regional level.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Funds of the regions involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Regional Funds of the affected regions were the financial bodies responsible for settling the various costs.</li> </ul>

	Organization name	Role
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prefectural Authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Engineering Services Department of every Prefectural Authority was responsible for designing and implementing the relevant EUSF-funded actions, and the Financial Services Department of every Prefectural Authority was responsible for providing payment for and implementing the relevant actions.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsible mainly for first responsive actions and actions of immediate relief, evacuations and local network restorations</li> </ul>
Key stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other associations</li> <li>Volunteers</li> </ul>	Organization name: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greek Red Cross</li> <li>Volunteers of the National Civil Protection</li> <li>National Emergency Aid Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support in assisting the affected population.</li> </ul>

#### 4.2 Application / submission phase

Based on previous experience,<sup>15</sup> the Ministry of Economy and Finance managed the phase of preparing and submitting the application for mobilising the EUSF during the period August/October 2007<sup>16</sup>. As mentioned in section 3.3 (Overview of EUSF implementation) the first official EUSF application was submitted by the Greek authorities on 30 October 2007. The application was accompanied by an Annex named 'Technical report, Major Natural Disaster: Fires in Greece, summer 2007' describing in detail the characteristics of the disaster-affected areas.<sup>17</sup> Further clarification was requested by the Commission services on 20 December 2007, and the additional information was submitted by the applicant authority on 24 January 2008 (see also section on the Appraisal/evaluation / approval phase below).

In line with EUSF requirements, the application included a direct damage estimation based on the active involvement of affected regional and national public administrations. In particular, the damage assessment was coordinated and managed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, in cooperation with the technical departments of the affected regions and municipalities. Experts along with civil engineers from the Directorate for Natural Disaster Damage Restorations within the Ministry of Environment, Physical

<sup>15</sup> This refers to the floods along the entire length of the River Evros and in the Alexandroupoli area (2006).

<sup>16</sup> Application form to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, 29/10/2007, REF 46575 / EYS 6631.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Economy and Finance, Application to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund – Annex (Τεχνική Έκθεση: Μείζων Εθνική Καταστροφή: Οι πυρκαγιές στην Ελλάδα-Καλοκαίρι 2007), Athens 2007.

Planning and Public Works were assigned to assess the damages incurred, particularly on private properties, and relevant administrative acts were issued by the above-mentioned Ministry.

As highlighted by the applicant authority consulted for this ex-post evaluation, the application process was assessed as fairly complex (see Table ). Due to the lack of a national assessment tool, the main problem identified in that period was the estimation of the direct damage cost. A period of exchange of information followed between the competent authority and the Commission services, as understanding the regulation and the eligibility thresholds for the application requirements was not considered easy; advice and frequent clarifications were necessary<sup>18</sup> (see also section on the Appraisal / evaluation / approval phase below). The guidance and technical support provided by the Commission were considered effective in accurately quantifying damages to public property as well as to the territory. This enabled the best, under the circumstances, damage assessment and the application for mobilising the EUSF to be submitted in due time.

There was a strong consensus among interviewees at all levels of administration that although the problems identified during the application phase related to the provision of sufficient and accurate data by the relevant actors for the damage assessment, they were addressed properly. The problems were due to the need for data collection from actors involved at all administrative levels (as illustrated in Table 5) but also due to the large extent of the affected area.

**Table 5: Assessment of application/submission phase**

Assessment of application phase	Straight-forward	Neutral	Fairly complex	Excessively complex
Applicant authority for EUSF			X	
Managing Authority of Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada) OP 2014-2020			X	
Ministry of Environment and Energy, General Secretariat of environment, General Directorate of Forests and Forestry Environment, Planning and Evaluation Department, Forestry Policy and Development			X	

Note: Assessment based on four interview respondents.

### 4.3 Application / evaluation and approval phase

The European Commission received the application on 30 October 2007, within the deadline of ten weeks after the first damage was recorded on 23 August 2007.

In order for the Commission to complete its assessment further clarification was requested by the Commission services on 20 December 2007<sup>19</sup> regarding the estimation of the total direct damage claimed. In particular, eight points were raised as follows:

- the estimation of the fire-fighting/rescue services and the extent to which the costs incurred in the fire-fighting services deployed from other Member States through

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, DG REGIO letter, 20/12/2007, Brussels, REGI OBI/PS/a ID(2007)141295

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*



the EU Civil Protection Mechanism were included in the amount declared in the application;

- the amounts calculated as regards the damage to forestry;
- as regards damage to agriculture, how the cultivation costs were calculated;
- confirmation that no losses of future crops were contained in agricultural damage figures;
- the damage estimate for the reforestation of burned areas, in particular additional information on (i) how much burnt forest (in ha) was considered for reforestation; (ii) the basis on which the amount of EUR 10,000/ha determined and computed; (iii) the breakdown of costs for reforestation; and (iv) the stock of the damaged forest;
- confirmation that 'reforestation costs' could only be considered in the case of a non-commercially exploited forest, where the cost of the disaster was the cost of reinstating the *status quo ante*;
- confirmation that the damage assessment included only those forest fires that occurred after the date indicated as starting date in the application and the eligible expenditure was restricted to the regions referred to in the application; and
- whether the Greek authorities had requested any compensation from the EAGGF or other Community instruments or intended to (re)allocate any funding under the ERDF, Cohesion Fund or other Community instruments.

The additional information was submitted by the applicant authority on 24 January 2008. There were no further amendments or modifications, and on 8 April 2008 the European Commission approved the application to mobilise the EUSF aid presented, proposing to apply the percentages defining a major disaster according to the EUSF methodology and to grant the amount of EUR 89.8 million.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, the Commission submitted the amount for approval to the European Parliament and the Council<sup>21</sup> and requested the cooperation of the Greek authorities in preparing the subsequent implementation agreement<sup>22</sup>.

The Commission Decision granting the aid under the EUSF in favour of Greece was on 8 September 2008, the implementation agreement between the European Commission and the Greek Government was also signed on 8 September 2008 and the financial contribution was remitted to the Greek State on 29 September 2008, a total of about 57 weeks after the disaster first struck. However, it is notable that after the signing of the implementation agreement the EUSF financial aid was received in due time (three weeks).

According to the applicant organisation's opinion, the evaluation/approval phase was closed in due time, within ten weeks after the provision of the additional information to

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<sup>20</sup> European Commission SEC(2008)428.

<sup>21</sup> COM (2008)201

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, Letter 22/4/2008, DG REGIO reference REGIODI/PS/aID(2()08)700527- Application to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund; Forest fires in Greece in 2007 (CCI2007GR16 SPO001)

the Commission, and problems relating to the evaluation/approval phase were limited (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Assessment of evaluation/approval phase**

Assessment of evaluation/approval phase	Straight-forward	Neutral	Fairly complex	Excessively complex
Applicant authority for EUSF		X		

Note: Assessment based on two interview respondents

#### 4.4 Implementation phase

Due to the public nature of the eligible interventions, the bodies involved in project implementation were the relevant local authorities and their supervised bodies, the regional authorities and the operational bodies of the Civil Protection Mechanism.

The project generation, appraisal and selection process started with the launch of the EU implementing decision and concerned the selection of projects / actions that had already been completed or were under implementation, as a result of the immediate response of the state services and local authorities to the disaster. Applications for EUSF financial support could be submitted by the implementing bodies illustrated in Table 4. The process can be summarized as follows.

- The central bodies and the affected Regions prepared tables of projects for funding under the EUSF, based on the proposals submitted by the implementing bodies.
- Subsequently, those tables were forwarded to the applicant authority for EUSF (Ministry of Economy and Finance). The projects which fulfilled the EUSF eligibility criteria were selected with the support of a Technical Consultant appointed for this purpose.
- The Financial Audit Committee (EDEL) was in charge for conducting managerial verifications of all completed projects / actions, as well as for the on-the-spot verifications of projects under implementation.

Indicative types of project implemented by different levels of government were as follows.<sup>23</sup>

- Immediate restoration of infrastructure to working order (e.g. Iliia electricity network damage repairs (PPS); communications system failure repairs in Iliia Prefecture (OTE S.A); Andritsa - Kalamata railway network restoration; completion of flood control works on ogresses torrent in Iliia Prefecture (Iliia Prefectural Authority); retaining wall construction and water supply system restoration in Vartholomio Municipality.

<sup>23</sup> Implementation report on the use of funds granted by the EU Solidarity Fund to the Hellenic Republic for it to deal with the disasters caused by the fires of the summer of 2007. Actions taken by central bodies in the regions of Attica, Central Greece, the Peloponnese & Western Greece, Ministry of Economy, Competitiveness and Shipping, General Secretariat for Investments and Development, March 2010, pages 36 -48.

- Providing temporary accommodation and funding rescue services (e.g. procurement of 41 electric generators and pump systems (General Secretariat for Civil Protection); aircraft maintenance and repair (Ministry of National Defence); infrastructure works (slope arrangement, landside prevention, etc.) and instalment of water tanks to meet fire-fighting needs (Technical Service of Kalyvia Municipality).
- Immediate securing of preventive infrastructures flood control works in burnt areas of Tamynaia, Avlonas and Konistra Municipalities (Aliveri Forest Service); school building restoration in Ancient Olympia Municipality (OSK S.A.), etc.
- Immediate cleaning up of disaster-stricken areas (e.g. cleaning up of areas (Technical Service of Keratea Municipality); Clearing away of flammable biomass along residential areas, on forest roads and on selected sites on Mount Ymittos. Area IV: Koropi, Paiania and Glyka Nera (2009) (Ymittos Development & Protection Association); cleaning up, pruning and planting in fire-stricken areas (Technical Service of Kalamata Municipality).

According to the implementation report the difference between the initially approved (indicative) budget for the above action categories (a) and (b) in the implementation agreement and the costs actually incurred was due to the intensity with which the fires spread over large areas of land, which led to the expenditure for these categories being overestimated. At the same time, the rescue services needed (under action category (b)) were underestimated, making it necessary to transfer funds to the projects in those categories. Taking into account that the rescue services were spread over large stretches of land in the fire-stricken areas, funds had to be similarly redistributed among categories (a), (b) and (c).

The implementation end date was 29 September 2009. The aid granted was used within one year of the date on which the Commission had disbursed the grant as stipulated by the Regulation. The timespan between the operation's closure date and the submission of the last update to the implementation report was around 17 weeks. In the opinion of most interviewees, contributions under the EUSF were not delivered quickly. As abovementioned in section Appraisal/evaluation and approval phase funds were made available to the national budget in September 2008, 57 weeks after the disaster. In particular, the applicant authority was dissatisfied with the total timespan between the submission of the application and EUSF payment. In the meantime, the potentially eligible operations were supported by national funding (national budget and national strand of the Public Investments Programme) with great efforts by all the actors involved.

As far as the implementation phase is concerned, most interviewees stated that they encountered significant or moderate problems linked to the complexity of EUSF implementing procedures. Although eligibility criteria were clear, problems were identified regarding the selection of operations meeting the EUSF requirements. Further, the timetable foreseen for the disbursement and reporting of expenditure – all interventions had to be completed by 29 March 2010 - was perceived as extremely tight and challenging, considering the severity and the exceptionality of the post-fire context along with the timing foreseen by the national procurement code. Technical works of immediate priority related to immediate restoration projects (telecommunication and electricity networks, flood preventive infrastructure projects, etc) were implemented through emergency procedures. However, there were cases of overall improvement of the relevant

infrastructure, especially of road or water supply networks. In case that restoration also included the improvement of basic infrastructure, through national funding, the implementation of the full project cycle provided for by the national public procurement legislation was required (study, public procurement, contracting), a process that was particularly time consuming. These difficulties were confirmed by the applicant authority for EUSF and the Managing Authority of Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada) OP 2014-2020.

Table 7 summarizes the extent of problems met during the implementation phase, according to interviewees, showing the different point of views of the actors consulted. Overall, however, the problems in implementation can be summarised as being moderate to significant. Most of the interviewees agreed that the problems met during implementation were mainly due to external factors (e.g. timing foreseen by public procurement legislation, etc.)<sup>24</sup> more than EUSF procedures themselves, which were considered reasonably clear, notwithstanding the tight timelines for reporting costs.

**Table 7: Assessment of the implementation phase**

Extent of problems in implementation phase	Minimal	Limited	Moderate	Significant	Excessive
Applicant authority for EUSF				X	
Region of Western Greece			X		
Managing Authority of Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada) OP 2014-2020				X	

Note: Assessment based on four interview respondents.

#### 4.5 Closure

Time constraints, administrative procedures required under national legislation and complexity of information demanded were the main factors influencing the closure of interventions in the view of the applicant authority (see Table 8).

The implementation report was originally due by March 2010<sup>25</sup>. Greece presented its report on 30 March 2010. An updated report and the statement of validity followed later. The updated implementation report was received on 25 June 2010 while the translation of the report into English was done and received in August 2010. The statement of validity reported that Greece spent EUR 89,769,017 under the EUSF of which the Greek authorities found EUR 9,247,866 to be ineligible. On 24 August 2010<sup>26</sup>, the internal consultation (audit, financial and legal unit of DG REGIO) on the implementation report and statement of validity was launched. On 20 December 2010,<sup>27</sup> the audit unit of DG REGIO sent its conclusions and analysis stating that the validity statement could be accepted and the

<sup>24</sup> See the following Section 5 "Factors influencing the implementation of the EUSF support".

<sup>25</sup> *ibid* footnote 6

<sup>26</sup> ARES 701026

<sup>27</sup> ARES 974194

Greek authorities should provide further information. A letter was sent to the Greek authorities on 24 January 2011<sup>28</sup> with the request to provide answers to three questions.

The Greek authorities submitted further information on 11 March 2011<sup>29</sup> in Greek and on 5 April 2011.<sup>30</sup> Answers to questions 2 and 3 were provided by the Greek authorities; however, question No 1 was not addressed.

The answer to the first question was sent by EDEL on 16 December 2011. From December 2011 to February 2013, the DG REGIO audit unit did not accept the validity statement on two occasions,<sup>31</sup> requesting further information that was provided on 6 December 2012.<sup>32</sup>

On 21 January 2013 the EU audit was consulted<sup>33</sup> and a positive reply stating that the statement of validity could be accepted and that the closure could proceed was received by the Greek authorities on 11 February 2013.<sup>34</sup> Following the inter-service consultation, launched on 28 February 2013, and the OLAF consultation, which did not report any irregularities, on 15 May 2013,<sup>35</sup> a closure letter was sent to the Greek authorities stating that the Commission intended to close the file and that the amount of EUR 9,247,867 needed to be recovered. Greece did not object to the recovery and the recovery was initiated by the financial unit on 29 October 2013. The deadline was set at 31 January 2014. Greece however missed the deadline and interest amounting to EUR 2,662 (calculated by DG BUDG) was added to the total amount. On February 2014, Greece paid back the full amount of EUR 9,250.52, and the EUSF intervention was closed.<sup>36</sup>

Interviewees noted that the main challenge of closing procedures under the EUSF was the time constraints for the submission of the implementation report. On the other hand, the interviewed stakeholders, with the exception of the applicant authority, stated that they were unaware of the delays identified in the closure phase regarding the acceptance of the validity statement since the communication took place between the Financial Audit Committee (EDEL) and the Commission.

**Table 8: Assessment of closure procedures**

	Minimal	Moderate	Excessive
Bureaucracy involved		X	
Complexity of information demanded		X	
Time constraints		X	

Note: Assessment based on four interview respondents.

<sup>28</sup> ARES 76545

<sup>29</sup> ARES 301133

<sup>30</sup> ARES 376265

<sup>31</sup> ARES 385825 (30 March 2012) and ARES 1052821 (11 September 2012),

<sup>32</sup> ARES 1452511

<sup>33</sup> ARES 69163

<sup>34</sup> ARES 170420

<sup>35</sup> ARES 1100798

<sup>36</sup> European Commission - Closure Note to File (Ref. ARES (2014)950977 - 27/03/2014). See also section 3.3 'Overview of EUSF intervention' of this case study report.

#### **4.6 Publicity and visibility**

No specific efforts were made to communicate the implementation and impacts of the EUSF support in the affected areas.

In the course of the wildfires, publicity measures were undertaken by both the Greek government at the political level and the Fire Brigade at the operational level regarding the measures followed to address the extremely difficult situation. In particular, the government activated different information and communication channels managing relations with both national and local media, through press releases, press reviews and organisation of interviews.

Moreover, there was a broad coverage in the media regarding the mobilization of voluntary organisations which contributed to the restoration efforts in the affected areas and the voluntary donations by the Cypriot government and a private Greek company in order to fully reconstruct two totally burnt villages in the Prefecture of Ilia (Makistos, Artemida). Further, the media focused on the short-term measures and arrangements announced by the government for the victims' relief such as financial aid, rent subsidy and tax exemption, as well as the long-term actions (e.g. the launch of a special programme entitled 'Specific Framework for the regeneration and development of the fire-stricken areas', the setting-up of the separate domestic Fund named 'Special Emergency Response Fund', the bank measures taken (e.g. loan settlements), etc.

As far as the EUSF is concerned, publicity put emphasis on the submission of the request for the mobilisation of the Fund. The main publicity measure was the issue of a press release by the Ministry of Economy and Finance on the submission of the request for the EUSF mobilisation and thereafter the publication of a press release for the Commission's approval decision.

According to the Media Survey conducted for this evaluation, there were 63 articles containing a reference to the EUSF in relation to the disastrous fires that took place in the Peloponnese during the summer of 2007. These were published by four main media sources, of which three are popular and nationwide newspapers and one is an online news portal. In terms of content and sentiment analysis, approximately half of the articles (31) were positive towards the EUSF, yet there were variations in terms of the meaning attributed to the EUSF. About one-quarter (15) contained a negative message (and/or positions) towards EUSF while the remaining quarter (16) were neutral.<sup>37</sup>

- The majority of the media articles contained a positive framing of the EUSF but in different ways. The most common was that EUSF constitutes an important source of help provided by the EU, while another sub-set of articles mentioned a series of proposals that would contribute to a better functioning of the Fund, such as the implementation of quicker procedures. In the same sub-set of articles, there were others which mediated their positive stance towards the EUSF by using disclaimers such as the delays on the part of the Member States to approve the amount of the funding, the time needed for the approval by the European Parliament, the demanding application procedure, the uncertainty regarding the final amount of the contribution and finally the strategic and lawful planning required in utilising the Fund correctly on the part of the Greek government. All these arguments were used

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<sup>37</sup> Further details are provided in the Media Survey published as a separate report.

not to undermine the utility or the logic of the Fund but rather to point to potential weakness mainly around its implementation.

- The 15 media articles that contained a negative framing regarding the EUSF drew on a critique of how the EUSF works by focusing on the bureaucracy surrounding the application, approval and the payment of the funding, decision-making delays and the lengthy time needed for releasing the Fund. A further criticism concerned the approved amount of the financial contribution, which was seen as inadequate compared to the damage that was initially evaluated.
- In the articles where the EUSF was mentioned using a rather neutral tone, the majority were related to preparing and filing the application for requesting the fund, or by mentioning the EUSF as another funding possibility among others for the case of Greece. Some of them referred to donations from private companies or the creation of the domestic Solidarity Fund. In the rest of the articles with a neutral framing of the EUSF, factual reporting of the EUSF is elaborated and linked to the effort required by the Greek government to meet the deadline for the application as well as the need for negotiation with the EU for achieving the maximum funding.

Although predominantly positive, the Greek media did not refrain from challenging the EUSF as well as highlighting the perceived politicised nature of the fund and implementation challenges.

During implementation, there were no EU flags and logos to signal works and services financed through the EUSF, as this was not required by the EUSF regulation. Also, no coverage of European finance support through the media was ensured, no meetings with stakeholders and citizens were organized, and there were no references on governmental or regional and local authorities' websites. The non-mandatory character of publicity actions led to a very limited knowledge of citizens in the affected areas of the Fund's role and contribution. It should be noted that all the mayors interviewed stated that the population in the disaster-affected areas had limited or no knowledge regarding the role of the EUSF in the fires of 2007.

The common opinion of the interviewees is that the Fund is mainly known only by technical staff of the ministries, regions, municipalities and all the other actors directly involved in the implementation of the interventions, while the awareness of citizens is very limited or non-existent. It is of note that even the representatives of the Hellenic Red Cross, which is the largest voluntary first aid and rescue force in Greece, ready to act in cases of natural or other disasters and any kind of emergency, was completely unaware of the EUSF role. This was attributed to the nature of the eligible interventions, covering short-term services to the population and provisional works rather than permanent and more tangible infrastructure investments and to the fact that the relevant expenditure had already been paid through national funding. Furthermore, the combined use of multiple funds (EU, national, voluntary) overshadowed the use of EUSF specifically.

## **5. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EUSF SUPPORT**

The most important factors influencing the implementation of EUSF support are considered to be governance and institutional factors. Table 9 provides a summary of the influences of specific factors based on responses by interviewees at different levels.

**Table 9: Assessment of factors influencing EUSF implementation**

Factor	No influence	Slight influence	Moderate influence	Highly influential	Most influence
Governance				X	
Institutional factors				X	
Economic resources	X				
Accountability		X			
Public procurement requirements			X		
Lack of specific competences	X				
Time needed for the transfer of funding from the State to the regional accounts	X				

Note: Assessment based on five interview respondents.

- Governance.* This was assessed as a highly influential factor in the application / submission phase, during the evaluation period and until the approval phase. The existence of the EUSF is known to all administrative levels (central government, regional and local authorities). However, with the exception of the applicant authority, which had previous experience in using EUSF, and the regional authorities involved, the majority of local authorities are characterised by lack of specific knowledge regarding the EUSF eligibility rules and requirements. The interest in the EUSF is rather limited during the implementation phase and even more during the closure process of the Fund.
- Institutional factors.* These also had a high influence, in particular during the implementation phase. Relations with the Commission were managed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, which supported the involved bodies (ministries and organisations at central level, regional and local authorities) in their efforts to comply with EUSF requirements. Due to the problematic Greek administrative model with overlapping responsibilities and the ambiguity observed between the various administrative levels the institutional factors are considered highly influential. In particular, the various actors involved, the difficulty of assessing the environmental damage (forest destruction, direct loss and loss of farmers' revenues) and the non-keeping of analytical accounting data for damage recovery are considered internal administrative factors which led to difficulties in damage assessment and its allocation according to the EUSF eligibility rules during the application phase.
- Economic resources.* In the case of the 2007 fires, there does not appear to have been a shortage of economic resources. As noted above, the Greek authorities, namely the Ministry of Economy and Finance, drew up a 'Special framework for the regeneration and development of the fire-stricken areas' with an estimated total budget amounting to EUR 2.232 billion, with EU and national funding.<sup>38</sup> The

<sup>38</sup> No aggregated data are available on the final distribution of the foreseen funding and the total amount of economic resources for the affected areas.



allocation of national funding (state budget and the Public Investments Programme) was quick, while there was a very broad participation of individuals through donations. As regards the latter, the domestic Special Emergency Response Fund was set up as indicated above, with EUR 198,018,546<sup>39</sup> deposited in a special interest account, including funding by the state budget and donations from organisations, banks, companies and citizens, as well as EUR 10,295,882 from interest, a total of EUR 208,314,428. For the fulfilment of its objectives the Fund spent until 8 October 2009 EUR 76,622,018, mainly in Ilia Prefecture and other affected areas. The account balance on that day was EUR 131,692,410.

The Fund, thanks to the 93,000 donors, financed, through the former Ministry of Public Works, the reconstruction or repair, completely free, of 1,158 houses and 802 other buildings, mainly rural ones. The money was paid directly to the victims - owners through the regional offices of the Ministry of Public Works, in three instalments under their supervision, depending on the progress of the works. The Fund also provided funding to Regions and Municipalities in Peloponnese and elsewhere to construct anti-flood, anti-corrosion and similar small projects, but very useful for the local communities. For this purpose, in 2008, EUR 8,162,883 was spent. Finally, the Fund was abolished in 2011 and the remaining balance of its account in the Bank of Greece was transferred to the state budget.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Economy set up a distinct budget line in the region of Western Greece to address the damage caused by the major fires of 2007 in the Regional Units (former Prefectures) of Ilia, Achaia and Aitolokarnania. Finally, restoration projects in the affected areas were funded by donations both domestic and foreign (except those of the 'Special Emergency Response Fund'). However, there is a lack of aggregated data on the amount of these donations. Indicatively, it should be mentioned that the Cypriot government offered EUR 14,500,000 for the total reconstruction of Artemida village (Ilia Prefecture), while a Greek private foundation provided EUR 60,000,000 for relevant interventions in the affected areas.

- *Accountability.* The competent authorities had limited influence on accountability at the implementation phase. The active involvement of the ROP Managing Authorities in issues related to public procurement, project contracting, checks of operations and final costs control ensured effective implementation. In the case of the 2007 fires and the EUSF recovery amount<sup>40</sup> the ineligible costs were identified in a specific category of interventions (immediate anti-erosion projects such as the construction of branch lattices, trunk lines and trunk barriers to prevent erosion of slopes and to retain washed-off solid materials) which, due to their nature (temporary works), presented difficulties in the verification of physical and financial progress.
- *Public procurement requirements.* In some cases delays were observed. Immediate restoration projects did not encounter problems with national public procurement legislation, as well as projects implemented by central bodies. Problems were

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<sup>39</sup><http://www.kathimerini.gr/980686/article/epikairothta/politikh/h-alh8eia-gia-to-tameio-molyviath>

<sup>40</sup> See also above sections on implementation of EUSF intervention/closure.

identified in projects falling under the competence of municipalities, the majority of which were small municipalities lacking staff with relevant experience in preparing public tenders for technical projects.

## 6. ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN AND COST

Overall, the interviews with public authorities and main stakeholders did not highlight any widespread administrative burden affecting the management and implementation of the EUSF support (see Table 10).

Regarding the relationships between the institutions and stakeholders:

- relationships with the European Commission were managed, at the national level, by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, based on a perceived “very collaborative approach” and a mutual exchange of information; and
- the relationship between national authorities and implementing bodies were judged by all the consulted stakeholders as “good” and “productive”.

All of the interviewees stated that they encountered limited problems linked to administrative procedures or in the relations with other public authorities across all phases of the intervention. The difficulties were identified mainly during the application phase regarding the estimation of the direct cost of the damage and the separation of operating costs between normal operating costs and additional costs related to the disaster response.

**Table 10: Assessment of administrative burdens**

Administrative burdens	Minimal	Limited	Moderate	Significant	Excessive
Applicant authority for EUSF		X			
Region of Western Greece		X			
Managing Authority of Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada) OP 2014-2020		X			
Ministry of Environment and Energy, General Secretariat of environment, General Directorate of Forests and Forestry Environment, Planning and Evaluation Department, Forestry Policy and Development		X			

Note: Assessment based on five interview respondents.

The administrative burdens mainly refer to the administrative burden between the applicant authority and the bodies involved in the implementation regarding project selection meeting the EUSF eligibility criteria and determination of eligible costs. Difficulties were identified in the Fund’s requirement for immediate restoration to working order (e.g. difficulties in separating the restoration to the *status quo ante* part from the rest of the restoration projects). For example, the destruction of an infrastructure built two to three decades ago with very different technical specifications than the present led to problems in finding the optimal balance between restoration - smooth operation and eligibility under the EUSF. According to the applicant authority, many of the restoration projects included the construction of new infrastructure and not only the restoration to the

*status quo ante*. In the case of infrastructure restoration when the normal process (study, public procurement, contracting) was followed, delays were often observed leading to costs exceeding the tight timescales set by the EUSF eligibility rules.

A similar conclusion applies to the assessment of administrative costs (see Table 11). Despite the fact that data collection for administrative costs was not feasible due to the lack of relevant data, all of the interviewees agreed that administrative costs had a limited effect on the implementation of interventions under the EUSF. The costs were considered adequate and proportionate considering the scale of the financial contribution, the geographic coverage of the damage and the variety of interventions.

**Table 11: Assessment of administrative costs**

Administrative costs	Minimal	Limited	Moderate	Significant	Excessive
Applicant authority for EUSF		X			
Region of Western Greece		X			
Managing Authority of Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada) OP 2014-2020		X			
Ministry of Environment and Energy, General Secretariat of environment, General Directorate of Forests and Forestry Environment, Planning and Evaluation Department, Forestry Policy and Development		X			

Note: Assessment based on five interview respondents.

## 7. RELEVANCE OF EUSF SUPPORT

The forest fires in Western Greece, Peloponnese, Continental Greece and Attica were classified as a 'major disaster' according to Art. 2 of the Council Regulation (EC) no.2012/2002 establishing the EUSF, with estimated total direct damages of over EUR3 billion and representing the 1.19 percent of the Greek GNI, according to 2007 EUSF thresholds.

- *Appropriateness to specific local needs.* The analysis confirmed the appropriateness of EUSF support to the recovery needs of the local community in the aftermath of the fires. The total final resources, amounting to EUR 89.8 million, were dedicated to addressing the most urgent needs: immediate restoration to working order of infrastructure; providing temporary accommodation and funding rescue services to meet the immediate needs of the population concerned; immediate securing of preventive infrastructures and measures of immediate protection of the cultural heritage; immediate cleaning up of disaster-stricken areas, including natural zones. Most interviewees confirmed that the EUSF objectives were appropriate to the disaster characteristics, particularly in relation to the restoration of infrastructure and the provision of temporary accommodation and care for people who had lost their houses (provision of food, water and medical care). However, the particular socio-economic characteristics of the affected areas (rural areas) and the very high percentage of destroyed land (forests and wooded areas) had a significant long-term environmental cost that cannot be assessed in economic terms. This cost was ineligible under the EUSF and it was not covered. According to the municipality of

Krestena, the main impact of the forest fires to the region of Western Greece, particularly in the Prefecture of Ilia with a primary sector dependent economy was the loss of plants and livestock, and the loss of revenue of farmers. The olive oil trees (the main crop in the area) returned to production five years later, while the breeders were forced to significantly reduce their livestock due to the lack of grazing.

- *Ineligible aspects of disaster management/recovery.* There were ineligible aspects such as loss of revenue and profits for farmers and livestock farmers, while the biodiversity and natural environment, which were potential tourist resources, were badly affected. Direct and mainly indirect damages to livestock farming (damage to pastures), damages to residences and enterprises as well as damages in equipment and buildings used in agriculture were not covered by the EUSF. These losses were covered by national funding (e.g. direct damage to plant and livestock was covered by the Hellenic Agricultural Insurance Organisation) while the indirect loss of revenue as well as the restoration of houses and businesses from national and private funding.
- *Cash flow constraints.* The implementing bodies did not face cash flow constraints as the relevant costs had already been covered by the state budget, the Public Investments Programme and donations.

## **8. ASSESSMENT OF ACHIEVEMENTS**

### **8.1 Operational achievements**

The EUSF succeeded in achieving the operational objectives based on the damage assessment and given the needs of the affected populations.

Table 12 illustrates the total budget per action category and the fields of EUSF intervention.

**Table 12: Total budget per Action Category / Fields of EUSF Intervention**

Action Type	Fields of intervention	Indicative types of projects	Number of projects	Total Expenditure reported (EUR)	% of Total Expenditure	National funding (EUR)	EUSF (EUR)	% of Total EUSF contribution
<b>A</b>	Energy	Network damage repairs, machinery	12	8,796,260	51.0	1,000,000	7,796,260	49.2
	Health	Infrastructure / equipment restoration	10	235,460		0	5,460	
	Telecommunications	Communications system failure repairs	8	2,395,052		0	2,395,052	
	Transport	Repairs / restorations of roads / railway networks	75	16,867,044		699,034	16,168,010	
	Water and waste water	Water pumping, rainwater drainage, flood control, erosion control	78	21,997,162		4,395,978	17,601,185	
Total for Action Category A:			183	50,290,980		6,095,013	44,195,968	
<b>B</b>	Temporary accommodation	Accommodation / clothing / meals for victims	5	307,2580	35.6	0	307,258	38.2
	Rescue services	Fire-fighting equipment, maintenance of aircrafts / helicopters	64	34,806,355		846,049	33,960,307	
Total for Action Category B:			69	35,113,613		846,048	34,267,565	
<b>C</b>	Preventive infrastructures & measures	School building restorations, seasonal personnel, machinery leasing	21	2,435,061	2.5	124,829	2,310,234	2.6
	Protection of the cultural heritage	Interventions on archaeological site	1	13,000		0	13,000	
Total for Action Category C:			22	2,448,061		124,829	2,323,232	
<b>D</b>	Cleaning up of disaster areas	Tree-trunk barriers, fire prevention, forest and gully cleaning	38	10,722,843	10.9	1,740,598	8,982,245	10.0
Total for Action Category D:			38	10,722,843			1,740,598	
<b>TOTAL:</b>			<b>312</b>	<b>98,575,498</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8,806,489</b>	<b>89,769,009</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: National Expert elaboration of data from the implementation report.

As summarized in Table 12, most resources were used in the restoration of infrastructure to working order so as to guarantee fundamental services to citizens (51 percent of the total expenditure reported or 49.2 percent of the total amount covered by EUSF). A total of 183 projects were implemented under this action category; the majority of them related to restoration projects in the field of water and waste water (water pumping, rainwater drainage, flood control, erosion control) and transport (repairs / restorations of roads / railway networks).

Temporary accommodation and rescue services for the affected population were highly significant too (36 percent of the total expenditure reported or 38.2 percent of the total amount covered by EUSF). Sixty nine (69) projects were implemented under this action category, out of which sixty four (64) concerned the rescue services (fire-fighting equipment, maintenance of aircrafts / helicopters). Due to the long duration and the geographic coverage of the fires (184,000 ha) the expenditure was very high and the EUSF contribution is considered of high significance.

The resources invested in preventing infrastructures and protection of the cultural heritage can be considered of limited significance representing 2.48 percent of the total expenditure reported or 2.59 percent of the support under the EUSF. The relevant costs refer to projects for the protection of the archaeological site of Olympia and to school building restorations, seasonal personnel and machinery leasing. A higher amount of resources was used for the immediate cleaning up of the disaster areas and can therefore be considered of moderate significance (11 percent of the total expenditure reported or ten percent of the support under the EUSF). This action category included thirty eight (38) projects related to removing fallen trees, fire prevention, forest and gully cleaning. The moderate significance of this action category was attributed to the considerable difficulty of the projects included in this category of intervention, due to their nature, and also because a significant part of the specific works were implemented with the same financial means and donations of equipment to the municipalities.

Table 13 below presents a list of representative projects per action type funded by EUSF.

**Table 13: List of representative projects per action type funded by EUSF**

Operation Title	Implementing Authority	Total Expenditure	Amount covered by National Funding	Amount covered by EUSF
<b>Action Type: A</b>				
Fire-fighting & fire control works	PPC S.A./ Megalopoli Lignite Centre	5,090,437	1,000,000	4,090,437
Ileia electricity network damage repairs	PPC S.A.	1,878,839	0	1,878,839
Ileia Prefecture communications system failure repairs	OTE S.A.	1,601,819	0	1,601,819
Flood and erosion control works	Pyrgos Forest Service	1,323,231	0	1,323,231
Repair and restoration of roads to Mt. Panio, Taxiarches, Aimatoriza and Agios Georgios and of three nameless roads in fire-stricken areas of Kalyvia Municipality, as a result of August 2007 fires	Tech. Serv., Kalyvia Municipality	1,281,480	0	1,281,480
Erosion control works on burnt land, from Ordinary Budget	Tripoli Forest Service	1,004,848	0	1,004,848
Action against landslide phenomena and flood control works in fire-stricken areas of Messinia Prefecture – Protective works in Andania Municipal District, Andania Municipality (Haradros gully)	Public Works Directorate, Peloponnese Region	978,040	0	978,040
Action against landslide phenomena and flood control works in fire-stricken areas of Messinia Prefecture – Protective works in Filia and Desylla municipal districts, Andania Municipality	Public Works Directorate, Peloponnese Region	974,619	0	974,620
Action against landslide phenomena and flood control works in fire-stricken areas of Messinia Prefecture – Protective works in Oihalia and Siamo municipal district, Oihalia Municipality	Public Works Directorate, Peloponnese Region	960,110	0	960,110
<b>Action Type: B</b>				
Fuel and lubricants for aeroplanes and helicopters	Nat. Def. Min./Air Force Gen. Staff	7,645,734	0	7,645,734
Aircraft maintenance and repair	Nat. Def. Min./Air Force Gen. Staff	7,507,411	0	7,507,411
Hiring of fire-fighting equipment	Citizen Protection Min./Fire Brigade	4,521,146	0	4,521,147
Travelling expenses	Nat. Def. Min./Air Force Gen. Staff	2,500,000	0	2,500,000

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Aircraft spare parts	Nat. Def. Min./Air Force Gen. Staff	2,398,703	0	2,398,703
Sundry fire-fighting expenses	Nat. Def. Min./Air Force Gen. Staff	2,108,746	0	2,108,746
Travelling expenses and away-from-home allowances for transferred units	Nat. Def. Min./Army Gen. Staff	1,676,998	0	1,676,998
Cost of fuel as a lubricant used for vehicles	Nat. Def. Min./Army Gen. Staff	1,171,278	0	1,171,278
Procurement of 41 electric generators and pump systems	Citizen Protection Min./Gen. Secretariat for Civil Protection	275,485	0	275,485
Seasonal personnel overtime, travelling and salary expenses	Nafpaktos Forest Service	259,500	0	259,500
<b>Action Type: C</b>				
School building restoration, Oitylos Municipality, Laconia	OSK S.A.	297,571	0	297,572
Seasonal Personnel Hiring Expenses	Aliveri Forest Service	286,205	37,568	248,637
Compensation for machinery leased to combat fires and clear river and torrent beds in fire-stricken areas of Arcadia Prefecture	DTY, Arcadia Pref. Authority	239,368	9,357	230,011
School building restoration, Evia Prefecture	OSK S.A.	216,684	0	216,684
Aerial photographs	Nat. Def. Min./Army Gen. Staff	266,406	57,190	209,216
<b>Action Type: D</b>				
Construction of tree-trunk barriers	Olympia Forest Service	4,929,629	0	4,929,629
Special interventions to prevent fires on Mount Ymittos in its southwestern environs (Stage I)	Ymittos Dev. & Protection Assoc.	1,073,862	200,000	873,862
Forest and gully clearing	Olympia Forest Service	651,938	0	651,939
Infrastructure restoration work to protect natural environment of fire-stricken areas in Messinia Prefecture	DTY, Messinia Pref. Authority	372,786	0	372,786
Machinery Hired for Emergency Fire Control	DTY, Evia Pref. Authority	296,620	0	296,620



The views of the institutional respondents interviewed for the case study on the significance of the operational achievements are shown in Table 14.

**Table 14: Assessment of operational achievements**

Activity	Not significant	Limited significance	Moderate significance	High significance	Most significance
Restoration of infrastructure to working order				X	
Temporary accommodation & rescue for population				X	
Securing of preventative infrastructure & cult. heritage		X			
Immediate clean-up of disaster areas			X		

Note: Assessment based on four interview respondents.

Despite these achievements, most of the interviewees stated the EUSF failed in demonstrating the solidarity of EU, which was primarily perceived by public institutions and technical staff directly involved in the implementation of supported operations. According to the views of the representatives of the local authorities (mayors and former mayors of the affected areas) the citizens of the fire-stricken areas had limited or no knowledge regarding the role of the EUSF in the fires of 2007 (see also section 3.4.6). Furthermore, no efforts were made to make the EUSF achievements publicly available. All the interviewees stated that the adoption of publicity rules similar to those of the ESI Funds would significantly contribute to raising awareness of the Fund, and, thus, EU solidarity would be more 'visible'.

## 8.2 Added value

The added value of the EUSF support was regarded as primarily in the operational and learning spheres, while aspects of policy, economic and political added value were deemed of lesser importance (see Table 12).

- *Economic added value.* The economic added value of the Fund was considered of moderate significance due to the nature and magnitude of the disaster in relation to the Fund's eligible expenditure categories and the available funding. Taking into account that funding was received with a significant delay for expenditures that had already been incurred and paid by national funding made it less visible to a large part of the administrative system and citizens. The timing of the occurrence of the 2007 fires (before the financial crisis that hit Greece in 2009 and the subsequent fiscal discipline) as well as the use of other funding sources (EU, national, voluntary) overshadows the financial contribution of the Fund.
- *Political added value.* Interviewees agreed that the political added value of the EUSF was of moderate significance as it had not succeeded in increasing awareness of EU solidarity, especially at the local level. Cooperation with the EU was limited to the central level between the competent Ministry and DG REGIO. The active

involvement of the other administrative levels can be best traced during the EUSF interventions' closure phase. Cooperation at the central level was assessed as very important.

- *Policy added value.* The vast majority of the interviewees stated that the EUSF policy added value was of limited significance. Despite the fact that after 2007 there has been a broad public discussion and various studies were carried out including specific recommendations on forest fire management and prevention there was no change to domestic policies as proved by the recent (2018) devastating fires in Attica region. Prevention measures (e.g. forest clean-ups, firebreaks, removal of vegetation and clean-ups in the interface zones between forests and residential areas,) as well as the increased involvement of voluntary organisations in fire suppression and the drawing-up of alternative plans where weather conditions do not allow for air suppression were not adopted. Also, the overlapping responsibilities between the various actors involved in the civil protection mechanism and the lack of coordination between the administrative levels of administration remain. The national Civil Protection System has not incorporated the risk assessment approach to address the climate change impacts and is almost exclusively focused on addressing disasters rather than on prevention and risk assessment. In natural disasters such as floods and fires the country has not still acquired reliable mechanisms to prevent and mitigate the impacts.
- *Operational added value.* The experience gained in financing and monitoring the damage restoration is assessed of high significance. The setting up of an effective mechanism for damage recording, the mobilisation of various funding sources and data collection for damage assessment are considered "*a step forward*" due to the experience gained from the EUSF involvement in 2007. In addition, the amendment of the operation of the national Public Investments Programme with the addition of a distinct category of costs related to damage restoration from natural disasters was recognized as a spillover effect of the EUSF implementation. Based on the experience gained from the 2007 fires the Special Coordination Service (Ministry of Economy and Development, National Coordination Authority) monitors the occurrence of hydro-meteorological/climatic and geodynamic natural phenomena and the potential causing of disasters and addresses claims for the collection of damage costs, with an indicative methodology and categorization, to central or supervised bodies and to local authorities as appropriate, in order to assess the possibility of requesting the EUSF mobilisation. At the same time it monitors the requests of implementing bodies to ensure funding from the Public Investments Programme for actions aiming at the restoration of damages caused by natural disasters. Since 2016, the Service has designed new processes for the rationalization of funding from the Public Investments Programme for damage restoration from natural disasters in collaboration with the Directorate of Public Investments.
- *Learning added value.* The EUSF implementation had an important learning value between the different administrative levels as it enhanced the cooperation among them. The need for cooperation between bodies that were lacking or had limited experience in damage assessment and cost estimation (e.g. Fire Brigade, Ministry of Defence, etc) but also among the different administrative levels created increased requirements for the provision of know-how on the specific issues which

was provided by the applicant authority. This need emerged during the damage assessment in the application phase and in the preparation of the implementation agreement with the EUSF. Furthermore, the mobilisation of the ESIF delivery mechanism contributed to the transfer of know-how mainly to the regional and local authorities of the affected areas. This communication helped the Greek administration as a whole to create a distinct funding line through the national strand of the Public Investments Programme to the regions and municipalities aiming at both the immediate damage restoration and the victims' relief. The setting-up of a Management and Control System for financial and physical monitoring of the EUSF interventions in 2014 was the most important spill over effect from the operation of the Fund, as the reporting and monitoring system for EUSF operations has been embedded into the Monitoring and Control System for operations under the 2014-2020 ESI Funds. Furthermore, project funding under the EUSF follows the public procurement rules, while the funding process through the national strand of the Public Investments Programme is similar to that applied for project selection under the ESIF operational programmes.

**Table 15: Assessment of added value**

	Not significant	Limited significance	Moderate significance	High significance	Most significance
Economic			X		
Political			X		
Policy		X			
Operational				X	
Learning				X	

Note: Assessment based on five interview respondents.

## 9. SYNERGIES AND COMPLEMENTARITY WITH ESIF

After the disaster struck the Greek authorities, namely the Ministry of Economy and Finance, drew up a 'Special framework for the regeneration and development of the fire-stricken areas' with an estimated total budget amounting to EUR 2.232 billion. Part of the necessary intervention was included in the Operational Programmes (OP) of the Community Support Framework (CSF) 2000-2006, which were revised for this purpose, and in the operational programmes of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) 2007-2013.

Due to the fires that occurred in the summer of 2007 the deadline for the eligibility of expenditure for the 2000-2006 operational programmes was extended until 31 December 2009. The extension was granted to allow the Greek state to complete the projects in progress and to include actions to address the impacts of the fires. The total request for the extension amounted to EUR 1.455 billion (EU contribution), while the amount accepted by the Commission was EUR 1.374 billion. In terms of public expenditure, the total request for the extension of payments was EUR 2.078 billion, out of which EUR 1.963 billion was approved. In particular, the eligibility period for payments was extended for all Priority Axes of the operational programmes 'Road Axes, Ports and Urban Development, 'Rural Development - Reform of the Countryside' and 'Fisheries'.

Moreover, the Commission accepted the extension of the implementation period of specific Priority Axes of other OPs. Furthermore, the 2000 – 2006 'Rural Development - Reform of the Countryside' OP was revised in order to include actions aiming at the protection and regeneration of the affected areas. More specifically:

- Under Priority Axis 1 'Integrated Investments in Agricultural Holdings', investments at farm level were supported by additional actions for the protection and regeneration of the fire-stricken regions. Indicatively, those actions concerned: a) improving living conditions, b) Replenishment and increasing income, c) restoring and improving plant and livestock holdings, maintaining crops associated with the rural tradition of the regions, and introducing new, more competitive crops, and d) promoting job creation.
- Under Measure 4.2 'Upgrading the infrastructure for information, training and population awareness' support was provided for the development of library networks, renovation, modernization and automation activities as well as actions to upgrade existing local information networks of the rural population of the affected areas.
- As an exception to the rest of the country, in the regions hit by fires (Attica, Continental Greece, Western Greece and Peloponnese), restoration projects and investments were eligible under Priority Axis 5 Measures 'Interventions in the Agricultural Product' and were directly related to the improvement of the quality of products.
- Under Priority Axis 6 'Development and protection of natural resources and the environment' actions were foreseen for restoring forestry potential in the fire-stricken regions (Attica, Sterea Ellada, Western Greece and Peloponnese) and other general forest protection preventive measures, anti-flood and anti-corrosion projects while improving fire protection, stabilising soil, limiting production of sediments and improving hydrological conditions of the affected areas.
- Finally, under Priority Axis 7 'Integrated Programmes for Rural Development' support was foreseen for farmers in the fire-stricken regions.

With regard to European funding and in order to strengthen the programmes of the affected regions and meet the new increased needs the Greek authorities decided to allocate 20 percent overbooking in specific Priority Axes of the 2007-2013 NRSF regional OP.

Lastly, in order to mitigate the adverse effects on the rural areas from the devastating fires of 2007 funding under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) was foreseen through the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme, which led to the amendment of the 2007-2013 National Strategic Plan for Rural Development.

Based on the interview research for Task 4 of this study coherence between the 2014-2020 ESIF and EUSF is considered strong, regarding regulatory frameworks, governance and thematic objectives; moderate as regards spatial coverage and non-existent regarding joint funding of strategies/ measures and/or joint projects.

In the 2014-2020 period the response to natural disasters falls within the general framework of actions aiming at mitigation and adaptation to climate change. As regards the **thematic objectives** Greece complies with the provision referred to in paragraph 17 of the preamble of the revised EUSF Regulation 661/2014, which states that *"It is important to ensure that eligible States make the requisite efforts to prevent natural disasters from occurring and to mitigate their effects, including by full implementation of relevant Union legislation on disaster risk prevention and management and the use of available Union funding for relevant investments"*, through the implementation of interventions under the Thematic Objective 5 «Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management». Funding from ERDF will be used under the investment priorities 5(a) "Supporting investment for adaptation to climate change, including ecosystem-based approaches and 5(b) "Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems. Funding from EAFRD will be used under the Union priorities for rural development, namely 4 "Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry" and 5 "Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors".

Under the Partnership Agreement 2014-2020 Greece will allocate a total amount of EUR776.6 million for operations aiming at mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Funding from ERDF amounts to EUR 326.3 million and the relevant actions will be implemented through the regional operational programmes (ROPs), while the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 will contribute with EUR 450.3 million for relevant actions.

The majority of interventions in the 2014-2020 regional OPs related to disaster risk prevention and management concern the construction of flood prevention infrastructure and the supply of fire fighting vehicles. Some regional programmes have started project selection related to the disaster risk management. For example, the Ionian Islands OP has recently included two relevant projects, namely the LAERTIS- Innovative Risk Management System in the Region of Ionian Islands with a total budget of EUR 2,807,269 and the Telemachus - Innovative Operational Seismic Risk Management System in the Region of Ionian Islands with a total budget of EUR 1,209,991.

Finally, under the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 and in particular through Measure 8, "Investments in developing forest areas and improving the sustainability of forests" Greece will implement interventions for the prevention of forest fires (sub-measure 8.3, budget EUR 67.1 million, 45,000 ha) and the restoration of forest damage from forest fires (sub-measure 8.4, budget EUR 77.6 million, 55,000 ha). Furthermore, Measure 5 (total estimated budget EUR 55 million) provides support to farmers for investments aimed at reducing the consequences of probable natural disasters, adverse climatic events and catastrophic events (sub-measure 5.1) and restoring agricultural land and production potential damaged by natural disasters, adverse climatic events and catastrophic events (sub-measure 5.2).

As regards **governance** the coherence and complementarity between EUSF and ESIF is considered strong as the delivery mechanism for EUSF interventions has been incorporated into the Monitoring and Control System (MCS) for operations under the 2014-2020 ESI Funds. Furthermore, project funding under the EUSF follows the public procurement rules, while the funding process through the national strand of the Public Investments

Programme is similar to that applied for project selection under the ESIF operational programmes.

As far as **spatial coverage** is concerned, the coherence and complementarity is considered modest and difficult to be identified in advance since the EUSF provides financial assistance for restoration projects in a specific area after the disaster has occurred, while funding from ESI Funds is allocated to projects planned and selected by the competent authorities at regional or local level. Where appropriate, projects aiming at the total upgrade of an area affected by the disaster can receive ESIF funding and not only a specific spatial entity.

Finally, with regard to the **joint funding of strategies / measures and joint projects**, there is no link between the EUSF and ESI Funds as there is incompatibility between the eligibility rules. ESI Funds can not finance an operation that has been completed prior its selection under an operational programme, while EUSF operations are usually funded retrospectively.

## 10. LESSONS LEARNED

The overall assessment of the experience of the EUSF intervention was broadly considered to be positive by the interviewees consulted for the research at different levels (see Table 16).

**Table 16: Overall assessment of administrative lessons learned**

Activity	Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive
Application process				X	
Information on how to apply					X
Support by the Commission					X
Extent of administrative demand			X		
Reporting requirements				X	
Overall experience of dealing with EUSF				X	

Note: Assessment based on five interview respondents.

Examining the lessons learned in more detail, the following points can be made to elaborate on the rankings in the table.

First, the experience of the EUSF intervention was considered positive regarding *the application process*, as it has led to the highlighting of problems and the lack of expertise in the entire administration as regards the economic assessment of natural disasters and the setting-up of a framework for the management and funding of natural disasters. The Ministry of Economy and Finance managed the whole phase, building on the experience acquired in previous disasters in Greece (e.g. the earthquake of Athens, 1999, where a significant part of the damage restoration was financed by ERDF; floods along the entire length of the River Evros and in the Alexandroupoli area, 2006); the process adopted

ensured the active involvement of public institutions, at regional and local levels in the phase of damage restoration but without being involved in the processes related to EUSF funding, and the efficient assessment of damages as well as the quality of the application for mobilising the EUSF support.

Second, *information on how to apply and the Commission support was assessed as 'very positive'* by the authority involved in the application process in ensuring a smooth implementation of the EUSF support. Cooperation with the Commission services was considered the most positive point, particularly during the application phase. The provision of support in calculating the damage costs, the exchange of information and seeking joint solutions in a period of time that domestic experience on relevant issues was limited helped significantly to meet the timescales. Problems were identified in the closure phase which was extremely long due to the poor communication between the national audit body (EDEL) with the Commission.

Third, with respect to administrative demands, *the EUSF was regarded as having clear criteria and deadlines*. The eligibility criteria and timescales to be respected were clear to the Greek authorities from the outset. The main difficulties encountered refer to project selection meeting the EUSF eligibility criteria and determination of eligible costs. All of the interviewees stated that they encountered minimal problems linked to administrative procedures or in the relations with other public authorities across all phases of the intervention.

Fourth, while *reporting requirements* were considered largely positively, interviews highlighted a demand for the scheduling of reporting procedure to be more flexible and proportionate to the amount of resources to be reimbursed.

Fifth, notwithstanding difficulties linked to the reporting phase, *the overall experience in dealing with the EUSF was generally judged as positive*, since it was regarded by national authorities as an important additional resource, supporting public institutions in dealing with the difficult and challenging management of emergency conditions after such a striking event through knowledge transfer and enhancing capacity building. The revision of the EUSF regulation in 2014 is considered a positive step and contributed in clarifying several issues that led to confusion. Issues to be considered are the increase in the amount of the advance payment, but also greater flexibility in the "definition" of restoration of infrastructure to working order (*status quo ante*). Further, the increasing frequency of natural disasters caused by climate change highlights the need to redefine the regional "threshold" of damage to a lower level. Although GDP is a clear indication of the economic disaster the assessment of the environmental cost that cannot be estimated directly but only in the long-term highlights the need to `redefine the way in which the economic disaster is calculated. The destruction of an infrastructure built 20 or 30 years ago with very different technical specifications than today leads to problems in finding the optimal balance between restoration - smooth operation and eligibility under the EUSF.

Finally, the interview research indicated that *awareness of the EUSF does not extend beyond the officials involved in the implementation process*. Interviews with government authorities and other stakeholders, suggested that the wider population in the affected area does not recognise the specific contribution of the Fund and therefore the "expression of solidarity" from the EU is not acknowledged. It was argued that communication activities on the goals and results obtained through the EUSF needs to be strengthened by the Commission for wider awareness among citizens to be achieved. The majority of the local

interviewees stated that the EUSF regulation could be amended in order to include mandatory publicity measures relevant to those applied in the ESIF regulations; a minimum measure of publicity could be the launch of the implementation report on the regional and local authorities' websites.

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## **12. ANNEX: METHODOLOGY OF THE CASE STUDY RESEARCH**

### **Methodology**

This case study was researched through a mix of methods: (i) literature review (for the introduction and context) and desk analysis of EU regulations and official documentation produced for the purpose of mobilising the EUSF support as well as of institutional websites dedicated to the 2007 forest fires in Greece; (ii) interviews with relevant stakeholders at national and regional levels, including representatives of NGOs and Universities; and (iii) phone interviews through the use of questionnaires with the elected authorities (mayors and former mayors) of the affected areas and the representative of the Central Union of Municipalities in order to check the visibility of the EUSF among the citizens. These interviews replaced the organisation of the focus group which was not feasible taking into

account the timing of the study, the time constraints and the fact that the area affected by the fires of 2007 was too large (four regions, eight Prefectures).

Interview templates were drafted in both Greek and English, following EPRC guidance on the Task 3 Case Studies provided for national experts.

Invitations to participate in the research, including a presentation letter by the European Commission, were sent by email to a list of public authorities and other stakeholders whose addresses and telephone numbers were detected through web research (see the following tables 'List of contacted public authorities' and 'List of other stakeholders').

Emails were followed by phone recalls and interviews to stakeholders, who were available before the deadline of 17 August, were conducted face-to-face. After 17 August interviews were conducted by telephone.

A synthesis of the interviews was sent by email to the interviewees, who were invited to send possible integrations to the texts. Most of them replied accepting the synthesis and/or suggesting fine-tuning.

The table below shows the name of interviewees, the institutions they represent and the dates of the interviews.

Moreover, the evaluation team has contacted Mr Nikos Manetas, Head of the RDP 2014-2020 Managing Authority, and Mr Kostas Aspiotis, Head of Unit B2, Managing Authority of the 2014-2020 Ionian Islands OP, in order to collect preliminary information for Task 3 and on the coherence and implementation of EUSF with ESIF and national programmes (Task 4 of the study).

## Interviews

Institution	Type of institution	Name of interviewee	Date
Ministry of Economy and Development, National Coordination Authority, Special Coordination Service	Public		20.07.2018 & 27.07.2018
Region of Western Greece, Directorate of Environment and Spatial Planning	Public		20.08.2018
Region of Western Greece, Directorate of Development Planning	Public		21.08.2018
Managing Authority of Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada) OP 2014-2020	Public		3.08.2018
Municipality of Andritsaina – Krestenon	Public		17.08.2018
Municipality of Ancient Olympia	Public		21.08.2018
Municipality of Ilida (former Municipality of Amaliada)	Public		21.08.2018

Ministry of Environment and Energy, General Secretariat of environment, General Directorate of Forests and Forestry Environment, Planning and Evaluation Department, Forestry Policy and Development	Public		7.08.2018
Hellenic Red Cross	NGO		20.08.2018
Hellenic Red Cross, Regional Unit of Ilia	NGO		21.08.2018
WWF Hellas	NGO		6.08.2018
Central Union of Municipalities	NGO		7.08.2018
Agricultural University of Athens	Public		25.07.2018
Media	Private		9.08.2018

### List of contacted public authorities

The following table shows the full list of public authorities by region, province, organization and role in the institution contacted by email and/or by telephone with the aim of arranging interviews.

Region	Administration/ Organization name	Province	Role
National	Ministry of Economy and Development, National Coordination Authority, Special Coordination Service		Applicant authority for EUSF
National	Ministry of Environment and Energy, General Secretariat of environment, General Directorate of Forests and Forestry Environment, Planning and Evaluation Department, Forestry Policy and Development		Forestry policy
Western Greece	Region of Western Greece, Directorate of Environment and Spatial Planning		Environment and Spatial Planning at regional level
Western Greece	Region of Western Greece, Directorate of Development Planning		Development planning at regional level
Western Greece	Managing Authority of Western Greece OP 2014-2020		Body responsible for the implementation of EUSF grant
Western Greece	Municipality of Andritsaina – Krestenon		
Western Greece	Municipality of Ancient Olympia		
Western Greece	Municipality of Ilida (former Municipality of Amaliada)		
Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada)	Managing Authority of Continental Greece (Sterea Ellada) OP 2014-2020		Body responsible for the implementation of EUSF grant

### List of other stakeholders

<b>Level</b>	<b>Organization name</b>	<b>Type of stakeholder</b>	<b>Name and role</b>
National	WWF Hellas	NGO	
National	Hellenic Red Cross	NGO	
Region of Western Greece	Hellenic Red Cross, Regional Unit of Ilia	NGO	
National	Agricultural University of Athens	University	
National	Central Union of Municipalities	NGO	
National	Journalist	Media	

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