



EU file

ISSUE 119
1 OCTOBER 2015



Dear Members,

In the wake of the Refugee Crisis which hit particular Members of the European Union, especially in recent months, please find a Factsheet issued by the EU on support for better management of integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

On the 25th September 2015 the Commission held a meeting to discuss how to optimise the use of EU funds and measures to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

The meeting was held with the managing authorities of the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) to discuss how to optimise the use of EU funds and measures to support the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. Both EU funds are instrumental in response to the current humanitarian emergency.

When can ESF and FEAD support refugees and asylum-seekers?

In the case of FEAD, each Member State defines the group of most deprived people to be targeted. Asylum-seekers and refugees may therefore be eligible for support if the Member States wishes so. In fact, FEAD already supports this group in some countries like Sweden, Belgium, and Spain.

FEAD can intervene with food and material assistance as soon as asylum-seekers and refugees arrive in the Union. Social inclusion can only be delivered when asylum has been applied for. Measures by FEAD are generally short-term for material assistance, but can be more long-term when covering social inclusion. The choice of duration and of when FEAD support kicks in depends on the Member State.

From the ESF side, given that its main mission is to improve the employment opportunities of the workers living in the Union, third-country nationals can have full access to support if they are able to participate in the labour market. In the case of asylum seekers, this would be once they acquire the status of refugee, or at the latest 9

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months after they apply for it. Periods vary among Member States and shortening them falls under national competence.

However, asylum seekers may also receive limited support from the ESF before having access to the labour market. This applies to educational measures for children and also to vocational training when allowed by the national legislation.

What measures can the ESF and FEAD funding be used for?

ESF can support, within its investment priorities, the integration of refugees and asylum seekers with a view to facilitate their social inclusion and integration into the labour market. ESF and FEAD investments can support refugee integration into the labour market and to society through for example: counselling to refugees and their families; through training; through access to health and social services for refugees and their families; and through campaigns to combat discrimination against refugees. Improving the recognition of skills and qualifications gained outside Europe will also help support their faster integration into the labour market and reduce the risk of social exclusion.

The FEAD can provide food and basic material assistance and it can support social inclusion activities.

How much funding is available from the ESF and FEAD to the Member States for integration of asylums seekers and refugees?

The European Social fund has a budget of 86.4 billion euro, with a minimum of 20% allocated to social inclusion. Typically, specific support to these vulnerable groups would fall under the poverty and social inclusion objective, for which the current allocation is around 21 billion euro. However, support to

asylum seekers and refugees may also be envisaged under the other objectives of the ESF Regulation.

FEAD has an EU budget for 2014-20 of 3.8 billion million euro, complemented by 674 million euro of national co-financing.

What other financial support is available when it comes to integration of asylum seekers and refugees?

Whereas the ESF is the most adequate financial instrument of support to continue the integration process of refugees, with a view notably to facilitate their integration into the labour market, the newly established Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) plays a major role in the first stages of the integration process

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund offers 3.1 billion euro to Member States for 2014-2020 to support them in developing and improving their reception conditions for asylum seekers, in offering language, civic integration and labour market integration courses for refugees and legally residing third country nationals.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) complements the ESF in supporting the integration process of refugees. The ERDF can finance measures in several fields, such as social, health, education, housing and childcare infrastructure, regeneration of deprived urban areas, actions to reduce spatial and educational isolation and business start-ups. More than 20 billion euro is allocated for 2014-2020 to these inclusive growth measures.

Coordination between ESF, ERDF and AMIF is crucial in order to reinforce synergies. This requires close collaboration between the relevant stakeholders.

What kind of practical support can the Commission offer the Member States?

For successful socio-economic inclusion of migrants, the policy response at the local level is of crucial importance. However, employment and social services at the local level often experience difficulties in successfully reaching out to and supporting disadvantaged migrant and refugee populations in their localities.

The refugee crisis is putting social and employment services under pressure. The Commission is therefore exploring all options to optimise the use of funds and to address constraints in the implementation of measures for migrants under the funds, taking account of established good practice on the ground. The Commission stands ready to work closely with the Member States to facilitate this process and ensure a swift adoption of such amendments in an accelerated procedure.

How do the ESF and the FEAD work?

Both funds are run according to the principle of shared management. The European Commission and EU countries together agree the main priorities to use the available funding, according to each country's needs, while implementation on the ground is managed by the relevant national authorities. The outline of the planned spending is set in Operational Programmes for both funds, designed by the Member States for each seven years financing period and adopted by the Commission.

Can Member States revise their cohesion policy programmes (ESF, ERDF) to make better use of the available resources in order to provide (more) support to asylum seekers and refugees?

Member States are invited to analyse the current needs and challenges taking into account the consequences of the crisis situation. The Commission is ready to examine all proposals Member States may have to make use of the remaining EU support available under the period 2007-2013. Given the limited time left, this would require swift action. Moreover, the Commission stands ready to examine and rapidly approve

amendments to the 2014-2020 Operational Programmes in order to better accommodate (more) actions to support the integration of refugees.

Can EU funds support emergency cases?

The ERDF may support – in exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis – emergency measures in the field of the

reception system of asylum seekers and refugees complementing the support from the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund. This may include building or extending reception centres, shelters or actions to reinforce the capacities of the reception services.

