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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Ex-post Evaluation of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the 2014- 2020 programming period

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BACKGROUND TO THE EVALUATION

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund[1] (hereinafter the AMIF) for the programming period 2014-2020, was adopted on 16 April 2014. The AMIF was established as the successor of the European Refugee Fund[2], the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals[3] and the European Return Fund[4]. The AMIF 2014-2020 benefitted from a larger budget than the preceding Funds, enabling comprehensive support to Member States. The initial total EU contribution of the AMIF 2014-2020 was EUR 3 137 million.

The AMIF is implemented through shared management, direct management and indirect management. The programming occurs either at the Member State level through the national programmes or at the Commission level, through Union Actions, Emergency Assistance, the European Migration Network and Specific Actions via the Annual Work Programmes.

Moreover, all Home Affairs Funds during the 2014-2020 period were governed by a separate legal act, i.e., the Horizontal Regulation[5], with the rationale to ensure a better coordination and management between them.

The general objective of the AMIF is to contribute "to the efficient management of migration flows and to the implementation, strengthening and development of the common policy on asylum, subsidiary protection and temporary protection and the common immigration policy, while fully respecting the rights, freedoms, and principles enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" [6]. Within this general objective, the Fund is further elaborated through the following four Specific Objectives:

1. Strengthening and developing all aspects of the Common European Asylum System, including its external dimension;

2. Supporting legal migration to the Member States in accordance with their economic and social needs, such as labour market needs, while safeguarding the integrity of the immigration systems of Member States, and promoting the effective integration of third-country nationals;

[1] Regulation (EU) No 516/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, amending Council Decision 2008/381/EC and repealing Decisions No 573/2007/EC and No 575/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Decision 2007/435/EC, OJ L 150, 20.5.2014, p. 168-194, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/516/2022-04-12

[2] Decision No 573/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 May 2007 establishing the European Refugee Fund for the period 2008 to 2013 as part of the General programme Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows and repealing Council Decision 2004/904/EC, *OJ L 144, 6.6.2007, p. 1–21 ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2007/573/oj*.

[3] 2007/435/EC: Council Decision of 25 June 2007 establishing the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals for the period 2007 to 2013 as part of the General programme Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows, *OJ L 168, 28.6.2007, p. 18–36,* ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2007/435/oj.

[4] Decision No 575/2007/EC of 23 May 2007 establishing the European Return Fund for the period 2008 to 2013 as part of the General Programme 'Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows,' *OJ L 144, 6.6.2007, p. 45–65, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2007/575/oj*.

[5] Regulation (EU) No 514/2014 (OJ L 150, 20.5.2014, p. 112, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/514/oj

[6] Article 3(1) of Regulation (EU) No 516/2014

3. Enhancing fair and effective return strategies in the Member States which contribute to combating irregular migration, with an emphasis on sustainability of return and effective readmission in the countries of origin and transit;

4. Enhancing solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility between the Member States, in particular towards those most affected by migration and asylum challenges, including through practical cooperation.

The purpose of the ex-post evaluation is set out in Article 57(2)(b) of the Horizontal Regulation which requires the Commission to carry out an ex-post evaluation to assess the effects of the AMIF Regulation and Horizontal Regulation following the closure of the national programmes.

The temporal scope of the evaluation covers the entire implementation period, from 1 January 2014 until 30 June 2024. Initially, funded activities were meant to end by 30 June 2023. However, following the Russian war of aggression towards Ukraine, an extension of the implementation of the Fund by one year was agreed, so that Member States might make full use of still available funding to face the consequences of the war[7]. Consequently, the deadline for the Commission to carry out an ex-post evaluation was also extended by one year, to 30 June 2025.

The geographical scope of this evaluation is the 27 Member States bound by the AMIF during the period, i.e. all Member States excluding Denmark[8] and including the UK. The evaluation relied upon both qualitative and quantitative methods, including the consultation of the Member States, European Commission officials, implementing partners, and beneficiaries.

MAIN FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Effectiveness

The AMIF significantly contributed to Specific Objective 1 - strengthening of the Common European Asylum System, including its external dimension. While the achievements varied across Member States, overall, AMIF was particularly successful in supporting the creation and renovation of reception accommodation and providing assistance to third-country nationals. Emergency assistance also contributed to the achievements of the Specific Objective, primarily by improving and expanding reception conditions, as well as addressing the needs of vulnerable third-country nationals and supporting the improvement of asylum policies.

Under Specific Objective 2 - supporting legal migration and promoting the effective integration of third-country nationals, AMIF contributed substantially to the effective integration of third-country nationals and to some degree to legal migration measures. Over

[7] The implementation period of the Home Affairs Funds 2014-2020 was extended in 2022 by 1 year (from 30 June 2023 to 30 June 2024) to allow the Member States to fully use any unspent amounts from those programmes, and, where necessary, to swiftly revise the implementation of their programmes to address the challenges arising from the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022 (See Regulation (EU) 2022/585).

[8] As per Recital 62 of the AMIF Regulation, in accordance with Articles 1 and 2 of Protocol No 22 on the position of Denmark, annexed to the TEU and to the TFEU, Denmark is not taking part in the adoption of this Regulation and is not bound by it or subject to its application.

10 million third-country nationals participated in integration measures supported by the Fund, far exceeding the target set by Member States. Union Actions contributed to the integration of third-country nationals, with the highest number of projects in capacity building, followed by support to vulnerable people and women. Member States prioritized using their allocation under this Specific Objective for integration measures over legal migration interventions. However, where legal migration measures took place, these measures were found to be successful.

AMIF contributed to Specific Objective 3 - fair and effective return strategies, however the achievements varied across Member States. For example, all Member States, to varying degrees, used AMIF to finance reintegration measures. Under Union Actions, the Migration Partnership Facility contributed to combatting irregular migration and enhancing cooperation with third countries to reinforce return and readmission processes.

The AMIF contributed to a lesser extent to Specific Objective 4 - enhancing solidarity and responsibility sharing. Across the board, Member States allocated significantly less resources to this Specific Objective than to the other specific objectives. Resettlement in accordance with the common Union priorities was by far the most common intervention. Modest achievements were made in relocation, while cooperation projects to enhance solidarity and responsibility-sharing were minimally supported.

Across the specific objectives, several key challenges, such as the migration crisis of 2015 and 2016, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, and the COVID-19 pandemic, can be observed. The evaluation found that Member States adapted to these challenges through the adoption of remedy strategies to counteract the negative impacts of these challenges on their national programmes.

Furthermore, AMIF successfully contributed to supporting Member States in emergency situations. Throughout the programming period, the emergency assistance allocation significantly increased in response to the various challenges mentioned above.

Efficiency

The evidence gathered on the cost-effectiveness of the AMIF in comparison to similar Funds provided mixed and non-conclusive results. The administrative burden of the AMIF was generally considered proportionate to its benefits and comparable to that of the other EU Funds. However, it was generally not viewed as proportionate in comparison to national funds. Furthermore, about half of the Member States reported a high administrative burden.

Interventions supported by AMIF, such as language learning and vocational training, were viewed as cost-effective in EU benchmarking studies.

Member States implemented measures to monitor and identify fraud and irregularities. However, limited reporting on measures to monitor and identify fraud and irregularities led to insufficient information to assess and reach conclusions of the cost-effectiveness of such measures.

Simplification and reduction of administrative burden

Generally, the simplification measures established under the AMIF were welcomed positively, however, there were mixed views on their effectiveness. First, AMIF created one Fund dedicated to migration management and a single set of rules was adopted for the

Home Affairs Funds (AMIF, ISF-P, ISF-BV) to improve coordination and harmonise procedures. Secondly, AMIF introduced a single seven-year funding cycle and multi-annual programming. This allowed Member States to plan long-term interventions, better adapt to evolving needs, and simplify procedures by removing annual renewal processes. Finally, AMIF introduced national rules on expenditure eligibility to provide flexibility for national contexts and the option to use simplified cost options. Where simplified cost options were implemented, they were viewed positively by stakeholders. However, their implementation was challenging for some Member States, and their overall use was considered limited.

Coherence and complementarity

The AMIF demonstrates a satisfactory degree of coherence between the Member States programmes and other actions funded by the AMIF. At the level of the Commission, procedures were put in place in the preparation of the Union Action and emergency assistance annual work programmes to ensure coherence from the outset. Reporting on internal coherence was limited. However, several Member States did describe the mechanisms they established to ensure coherence and complementarity at the national level. These included engaging stakeholders, coordination groups, and information sharing.

The AMIF demonstrates sufficient coherence with the programming of other EU Funds, particularly, the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund and the Internal Security Fund. All but one Member State conducted an assessment of coherence and complementarity during the programming or the early implementation stages. Overall, the ESF was viewed as the most relevant for coherence and complementarity; however, coherence with the ESF could be further reinforced by coordinating integration interventions and better demarcating the differences between their scope of support.

All Member States established mechanisms to ensure coherence and complementarity between the AMIF and other EU Funds and prevent potential overlaps. Importantly, no evidence of double funding was found between AMIF components, nor between AMIF and other EU programmes.

As far as coherence with external spending programmes is concerned, enhanced cooperation and coordination on programming both between the Commission services and with Member States are needed. Several challenges in the current funding architecture have been identified, including notably: the insufficient alignment of the Union's external migration and security funding with the Union policies in these areas; the persistent challenge to use all existing (policy, funding, investment and other) tools, both at the disposal of the EU and its Member States, in a Team Europe spirit, to use strategically and timely leverage in relation to partner countries in order to improve cooperation on migration and security; the limitations for funding migration- and security-related actions in third countries, given that most of spending in the external dimension must comply with the criteria for development assistance[9] eligibility.

[9] Official development assistance eligibility criteria are set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

EU added value

AMIF contributed to EU added value by allowing Member States to offer more services and reach a broader audience than would have been possible without AMIF support. Emergency assistance was particularly important in expanding services and their reach during emergency situations. AMIF also allowed Member States to introduce new interventions to address evolving needs, extend activities and benefits to additional target groups, and strongly contributed to innovation.

Most Member States reported that actions would have been carried out to some extent even in the absence of the Fund's support; however, the interventions would have been minimal, of a smaller scale, and/or of a lower quality, therefore highlighting AMIF's value.

On AMIF's contribution to transnational cooperation, solidarity and burden sharing, stakeholders' perception was mixed. AMIF supported relocation and resettlement efforts both through EMAS and the national programmes; however, Member States carried out these interventions at varying rates. While there was limited evidence of transnational cooperation in the national programmes, European Migration Network and Union Actions supported transnational projects and fostered cooperation between Member States.

Sustainability

While there were efforts to ensure sustainability, there was limited evidence of projects being transferred, replicated or scaled up with national resources. More commonly, sustainability is ensured through the selection of activities that have long-term impacts, such as capacity building or labour market integration. In addition, some Member States included sustainability as an element of the monitoring process. Stakeholders described the importance of beneficiaries, local communities and volunteer networks in ensuring sustainability; however, dependency on EU funds remained high and further efforts to ensure sustainability could be made.

Relevance

AMIF addressed evolving needs both at the time of programme approval and during the programme implementation.

While the needs assessments performed by the Member States at the beginning of the programming period were only updated by a few Member States, there is evidence that the Member States received timely inputs on evolving needs during programme implementation by stakeholders involved within the Monitoring Committee. The Responsible Authorities also affirmed that the processes involved in amending the national programmes were sufficient to respond to emerging needs.

The Union Action and emergency assistance annual work programmes were also found to be aligned with actual needs and flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances. While stakeholders largely agreed on the relevance of the AMIF, several stakeholders highlighted areas of support that were not met or only partially met (i.e. assistance to irregular migrants and continuing the support to migrants after they are no longer minors).