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Future EU funding to support the integration of refugees and migrants

INTEGRATION



Synthetic Reports are the final outcome of ReSOMA's activities related to one of the most pressing topics in the EU migration, asylum and integration debate. Bringing together findings and results of previous ReSOMA Discussion Briefs and Policy Options Briefs, they provide an overview of **key controversies**, **available evidence** and **proposed policy alternatives**. Drawing on ReSOMA's dialogue with policymakers, stakeholders and research, the Synthetic Reports point to **viable reform paths** in order to fill crucial policy gaps in line with realities on the ground, the rule of law and human rights. They have been written under the supervision of Sergio Carrera (CEPS/EUI) and Thomas Huddleston (MPG).

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Future EU funding to support the integration of refugees and migrants*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

Funding support through EU programmes and their objectives is the EU's main lever to promote the integration of migrants and refugees. Next to the soft law embodied in policy guidelines like the Common Basic Principles of immigrant integration, it is the amounts, binding provisions and concrete spending rules of instruments such as the Asylum-, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) or the structural funds including the European Social Fund (ESF) that define EU policy and a joint European approach in the integration domain. In a number of Member States, EU funds are even the sole or nearly only source of support for integration measures and -policies, rendering them crucially important for the outlook and opportunities of migrants and refugees in many places across Europe. Against this background, the proposals and negotiations on the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), i.e. the 2021 to 2027 EU programme and funding period, have become the focal point of the EU integration debate since 2018. Local level integration actors

including cities and civil society organisations are key stakeholders in these policy debates, whose outcomes will be decisive for the availability of means both for early and longer-term integration, and on local level as much as for mainstreaming integration across all relevant policy areas.

This report synthesizes previous ReSOMA briefs in the area of integration that have focused on the unfolding MFF debate. Following an overview of the 2018 Commission proposals which set out scope and structure of the future EU instruments (**chapter 1.2**), it presents twelve policy debates related to the 'what' and the 'how' of EU support for integration and their sticking points from a local level and civil society perspective (**chapter 2**). Partly referring to the discourse responding to recent policy trends and how they became incorporated in the Commission proposals, partly referring to long-standing debates between stakeholders and EU institutions, the chapter offers an abridged version of key topics of debate as identified in the previous ReSOMA Discussion Briefs on 'Cities as providers of services to

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migrant populations', 'Sustaining mainstreaming of immigrant integration' and 'The social inclusion of undocumented migrants'.

Against the background of these conversations and controversies, stakeholders came forward with numerous proposals to improve and amend the Commission proposals to better address their concerns. The European Parliament in 2018 has been the key arena of decision-making towards the 2021 to 2027 MFF, with MEPs able to amend the proposed legislation based on the concerns driving the policy controversies and offering stakeholders the opportunity to advocate for their own proposals.

Chapter 3 shows how the suggestions for alternative solutions brought forward converge around four mayor policy options for the future of EU spending on integration:

- *Adequate funding* – to ensure sufficient and flexible spending on integration according to changing needs across all Member States
- *Meaningful needs assessment* – to base AM(I)F national programming and Partnership Agreements on structured and standalone assessment of needs and challenges
- *Mainstreamed, longer-term policies* – to promote comprehensive integration policies with a long-term orientation and mainstreaming them on Member State and EU level
- *Broader participation* – to ensure funds can be accessed by civil society and local/ regional authorities, and that these actors are fully involved in the funds' governance

For each of these options main proposals are listed as voiced by stakeholder organisations in the field, including the ReSOMA partners ECRE, EUROCITIES, PICUM and Social Platform. The chapter also shows, in each of the options, how the European Parliament has amended the Commission proposals, thus illustrating the uptake by Parliament of solutions advocated for by stakeholders. References to the previous ReSOMA Policy Options Briefs on 'High levels of EU support for migrant integration, implemented by civil society and local authorities' and 'Comprehensive and mainstreamed, longer-term support for the integration of migrants' point to more in-depth information on the evidence base supporting these proposals, the details of the various stakeholders positions and a mapping of the EP amendments.

Chapter 4.1 sheds light on the state of play as of spring 2019, with the EP positions on the key EU instruments all decided before the EP elections and clarified at time when MFF negotiations are gearing up in the intergovernmental Council arena. Compromises among Member States and with the European Parliament are expected to be reached in late 2019/early 2020. Next to highlighting current debate among governments, the chapter stresses the importance of the preparations taking place already now on Member State level in terms of programming and priority setting. How the national AM(I)F and ESF+ programmes are shaping up even now, in advance of final EU-level decisions on the scope of the instruments, is crucially important for the future availability of EU means for integration support and the possibilities of key actors to benefit from

programmes. Across all levels, governments, the Commission, European Parliament and integration stakeholder are called upon to act accordingly, to ensure full exploitation of the new instruments' potential for integration support, complementarity in programme planning, comprehensive compliance with the partnership principle and a need-based approach to the services funded.

Drawing the consequence from the lack of realtime evidence on the actual uptake of EU instruments supporting integration and on the practice of partnership-led implementation, the Synthetic Report culminates in a **proposal for a new, independent EU-wide quality monitoring mechanism (chapter 4.2)**. Led by civil society and local level stakeholders across the EU, the mechanism would provide for ongoing, regular monitoring of how the partnership principle is observed, national programmes are implemented, different funds are used, and of the quality of coordination and coherence among the instruments. Quality assessment of content and effectiveness of projects funded would improve the evidence base for future AM(I)F midterm reviews and allocation decisions for the second tranches of the fund. The new mechanism would thus aim to generate the necessary knowledge for pushing towards

- compliance with the partnership principle,
- purposeful use of AM(I)F and structural (ESF+) funds to support integration,
- coordination and collaboration among the implementing authorities,
- robust mid-term review procedures.

This recommendation to set up a new, enhanced quality monitoring mechanism not only responds to a core gap identified in activities and analyses of stakeholders, but also builds on ReSOMA's dialogue with local level and civil society experts, policy-makers and researchers. In a very concrete way ReSOMA suggests the contours of a transnational mechanism that brings together implementation monitoring, qualitative evaluation, empowerment and capacity building of stakeholders, as well as EU-wide benchmarking and mutual exchange.

1.2. The post-2021 agenda: MFF proposals of the European Commission

Commission preparations for the 2021 to 2027 Multiannual Financial Framework were informed by the experiences since the peak of arrivals in 2015/16, a comprehensive spending review and positions voiced by the European Parliament, Member State governments and various stakeholders. (EC 2017a, 2018a, ECA 2018b, EP 2018a). The eventual Commission proposals for the 2021 to 2027 MFF, published in May and June 2018 (EC 2018b-f), include the following key changes relevant for the integration of migrants and refugees:

- Structural Funds will continue to be spent and programmed across all, including higher developed, EU regions; ensuring that all Member States are covered by ERDF- and ESF-sourced programmes that offer funding opportunities for migrant integration.
- The merging of the ESF, YEI (Youth Employment Initiative), FEAD, EaSI and Health Programme into one fund, the

ESF+, with the goal of a more comprehensive, less fragmented overall instrument in the social policy area aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights, including higher responsiveness to unexpected challenges. At least 25% of national ESF+ would have to be earmarked for social inclusion and fighting poverty; with at least 2% dedicated to measures targeting the most deprived.

- The European Social Fund is to become, as ESF+, a major EU funding source for medium and long-term integration, with a newly established programme priority ('specific objective') that includes the promotion of the socio-economic integration of third country nationals. Member States will have to address the objective as part of the overall 25% allocation of national ESF+ funds to the social inclusion policy area.
- Simultaneously, the restructuring of AMIF to an Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF), to fund early integration measures for newly arrived third-country nationals; with a reinforced partnership principle and a financial scope of national programmes with euro 6.25 bn more than doubled compared to the 2014-2020 period.
- Higher flexibility in the AMF to increase its ability to react to unexpected developments, by allocating only 50% upfront to Member States and other parts subsequently to specific priorities as part of a Thematic Facility (proposed at euro 4.17 bn, representing 40% of overall funds), and by allocating the remaining 10% to national pro-

grammes after a mid-term re-calculation based on recent migration statistics.

- Explicit provisions to use the AMF Thematic Facility (biannually programmed by the Commission) to support early integration measures implemented by local and regional authorities or civil society organisations, relevant for its 'Union actions' strand and components regarding emergency assistance, 'solidarity and responsibility efforts' (related to a reformed Dublin regulation) and resettlement; and coming with an increased co-financing rate of 90%.
- A general focus on labour market integration, and related to that, issues of qualification, training and skill recognition that has already underpinned the 2016 Action Plan; visible e.g. in the advancement of the mainly employment-oriented ESF to a major funding instrument for medium- and long-term integration, as well as specific AMF support to assessment of skills and qualifications acquired in a third country.
- Simplification of implementation and financial management rules, through a Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) that will cover all funds under shared management (by Member States and the Commission, implying national programmes implemented on Member State level), including AMF, ESF+, and ERDF;
- Harmonisation across funds of the provisions on the so-called partnership principle (which stipulates the participation of stakeholders such as NGOs or local and regional authorities in the programme and implementation of

the instruments) through the CPR, implying a strengthening of the partnership principle in the AMF and alignment with the standards achieved under the Structural Funds.

- The inclusion of reception of migrants in the allocation criteria of Structural Funds on the regional level (for the ERDF and ESF+), contributing to a shift of funds from central European to southern Member States and creating a long-term incentive to accept the sharing of responsibilities in the asylum field.
- A stronger alignment of the ESF+ (and ERDF) with the European Semester to support reforms and increase the funds' leverage, and to better coordinate the programme framework with

newly emerging EU level policy initiatives. Policy challenges of Member States identified in the European Semester process are to inform programming of the funds at the start and mid-term of the 2021 to 2027 period.

- Synergies between integration funding under ESF+ and the EU Social Open Method of Coordination as well as the EU Education and Training strategic framework, to which the European Social Fund contributes;
- Increased use of conditionalities in the Structural Funds ('enabling conditions'), i.e. the existence of adequate regulatory and policy frameworks in Member States before funding is released, to ensure that performance of all co-financed operations is in line with EU policy objectives.

2. KEY TOPICS OF DEBATE: 12 CONTROVERSIES AROUND THE WHAT AND THE HOW OF EU SUPPORT FOR MIGRANT INTEGRATION

Varying commitment and denial of migrant integration as policy priority among Member States. The EU integration framework calls for concentrated efforts at enabling and supporting the inclusion of migrants and refugees in European societies. Policy principles promoted by the EU and funding to support their implementation build on the recognition that integration is a process of mutual adaptation of the receiving society and migrants; and that migration is a major factor shaping society, resulting in needs for adjustment and reform of general policies and policy-making, public institutions and public services. In the political reality of Member States, however, this very notion is widely contested, and longer-term integration and mainstreaming may not make it to government policy agendas due to constraining public attitudes, dominance of a denying political discourse or electoral considerations. What is still at stake in many EU Member States, is whether broad-scale integration efforts and mainstreaming are necessary at all – or even, whether they are desirable in view of perceived pull effects.

In this vein, it is not a surprise that the establishment of immigrant integration as an EU policy goal worth of a spending priority that would deduct available EU funds from other objectives is contested as well. As proposed by the Commission, in the 2021 to 2027 MFF Member States will be asked to allocate part of ESF+ funding to the integration of third country-nationals,

while the ESF+ budget would roughly stay the same as the combined ESF and FEAD budget in the 2014 to 2020 period (CPMR 2018b, EC 2018d, ECRE 2018a, EUROCITIES 2018b, EP 2018b, EPRS 2018). As opposed to this de-facto stagnation of available ESF means, AMF funds are planned to sharply increase, but it remains to be seen what the spending shares dedicated to integration in national programmes will be.

ESF+ as main EU integration fund: incentive for mainstreaming in Member States or empty claim? With its cross-cutting objectives, including access to employment, training, education, equal access to services, social inclusion and poverty relief, the ESF represents a significant tool to potentially support medium- and long-term integration. Another obvious advantage is the fund's broad definition of target groups (based on Art. 162 TFEU), where all persons enjoying legal access to the labour market include third-country nationals in the same way as nationals with a migration background or migrants from other EU countries. Locating the topic under the remit of social affairs and inclusion policies also allows for a more comprehensive approach than closely linking integration to admission and migration management policies under home affairs portfolios (cf. ECRE 2018a). Most important, the ESF is already widely used to support migrant integration in a number of Member States, and on the ground often represents the most obvious and for many actors most accessible EU funding source

for e.g. labour market insertion, skill validation and training measures for migrants and refugees (EC 2015, 2017d, Rietig 2016).

However, to what extent precisely the ESF is used for migrant integration in the implementation practice of Member States, is widely unknown (Ahad and Schmidt 2019, Beirens and Ahad 2019, ECA 2018a). Only in the upcoming programme period output indicators on 'third country nationals' and 'participants with a foreign background' (disentangled from other target groups) will be introduced according to the proposed ESF+ regulation. Crucially, it is not clear at all from the Commission proposal how it will be ensured that ESF+ will actually support integration on a broad basis across all Member States: The fund's general objective expressly does not refer to migrant integration (EC 2018d, Art. 3). Socio-economic integration of third-country nationals is being introduced as part of the specific objective that includes other marginalised communities (Art. 4.1.viii). Although the Commission suggests that Member States have to programme this objective by taking into account third-country nationals (Art. 7 on thematic concentration), no ring-fencing of means is foreseen for this specific objective, which is only part of the sub-set of social inclusion objectives (Art. 4.1.vii to xi) for which at least 25% of national allocations will have to be dedicated.

At any case, it can be assumed that Member States willing to tap the ESF+ for integration purposes would do so anyway, in line with current practice. Member States not wishing to use ESF+ means for migrant target groups, on the other hand, could get away with dedicating only token

amounts within the social inclusion objectives, according to the proposed provisions on objectives and thematic concentration. The same risk regards regional governments, as a large share of ESF operational programmes are drafted and implemented at regional level. In this light, the proposed mechanism to take into account Country-Specific Recommendations may not have much effect on unwilling governments either, as long as these recommendations have to be agreed by the Member States (ESN 2016, 2017). Overall then, the claim that ESF+ will become the EU's foremost funding source for medium- and long-term integration stands on shaky grounds. If AMF national programmes in practice turn out to concentrate on early integration in a strict sense, the threat is of a major future funding gap for medium/long-term integration in such Member States which at the same time chose not to concentrate ESF+ resources on migrant target groups.

Priority for early integration and availability of supporting EU funding. One of the most contested policy debates revolves around early integration, and at what point public support measures are to kick in. Nowhere is this debate as pronounced as in the refugee integration area. In particular cities pursue – and support in national and EU policy debates – 'integration from day one', striving for the provision of language support, education, recognition of skills, labour market insertion and, generally, interaction with the receiving society as quickly as possible after arrival. As an early intervention approach, such policies aim to avoid the demotivation and deprivation seen by people who are left in a social and legal limbo, possibly for years,

after arrival, including long delays before the accession to rights to labour market. They accept higher costs in the short term for preventive measures which invest in the ability of migrants to adapt and integrate quickly, rather than postpone costs to later, reactive interventions to deal with the results of 'failed' integration.

This policy mindset, however, conflicts with the policy approach stressed by many national governments, suspicious of early integration as creating additional pull effects, and which in the asylum field draws a clear line between a pre-integration reception phase (however long procedures last) and the provision of integration support only to recognised beneficiaries of international protection. For the sake of speedier procedures, administrative efficiency and lower costs – and often better control of asylum seekers' movements, control of civil-society based (legal) support for asylum seekers, and deterrence effects – this alternative policy approach typically aims for centralised accommodation in large reception centres. Widely shared criticism point to resulting rudimentary education and language support, isolation from the receiving society, higher crime rates, contempt for human dignity, stigmatisation of asylum seekers, demotivation and delayed start of integration processes.

The conflict between these contrary policy approaches and visions for the reception phase are played out on EU level as well, not least in the debates on integration-related support from EU funds. A sticking point is the precise definition, scope and overall framing of 'early integration', as funded from AMF in particular, and the availability of EU instruments which support

a broad range of essential early integration measures that are effective starting points for long-term integration (EC 2018e).

EU-funded support for the social inclusion of the undocumented.

The EU has extremely limited funding instruments openly available to support the inclusion of undocumented migrants. Only FEAD—the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived—in principle allowed co-funding for measures supporting the undocumented. Comparatively small in scale, FEAD is designed to help people take first steps out of poverty and social exclusion by addressing their most basic needs. Implemented through national programmes, Member States can provide material assistance in the context of social inclusion measures or non-material assistance to help people integrate better into society. However, Member States have wide discretion in their national programmes, in terms of priorities, the definition of target groups and actual funding decisions, such as whether or not to include the undocumented. Migrants in an irregular situation were not explicitly mentioned in any of the Member States Operational Programmes and related performance indicators. No clear overview exists of the actual uptake of FEAD in terms of undocumented migrants. Other EU funding programmes exclude irregular migrants in their eligibility rules. The ESF as a matter of principle targets persons with legal labour market access, thus excluding persons without the right to work (EC 2015). People not holding a regular residence status are very rarely included in programmes, and only in certain Member States. The same holds true for the other major EU financial instruments

on social inclusion, such as the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the Employment and Social Innovation fund (EaSI). In practice, national reporting and auditing requirements on listing final recipients often decide on whether e.g. ESF actions aimed at access to services or provision of information may benefit persons without regular residence status. AMIF's focus on integration only includes third country nationals with regular residence.

Strict eligibility rules excluding the undocumented have led to complaints from organisations and projects working on social inclusion, as their target groups often include persons with diverse, often fluid, residence status. The EU social NGOs have therefore stressed in a joint statement that the requirement in EU funding to report immigration status "represents not only an additional burden on civil society, but also compromises the establishment of a trustful relation between service providers and users, justifies the division of families and leads to many errors" (Social Platform 2018a:11). The merger of FEAD into ESF+, as proposed by the Commission, on the one hand could theoretically allow the access of these to social services (as basic health assistance), but on the other hand further threatens to increase the obstacles for social inclusion of the undocumented (EC 2018d). While the hitherto definition of most deprived target groups within national programmes is kept in the proposal, a key point of debate is whether the current 'low threshold' approach to FEAD will be upheld, or whether the potential use of EU co-funding for inclusion measures to the benefit of undocumented will become further reduced (Social Platform 2018a).

Capacity of EU instruments to support and encourage policy innovation. During and in the wake of the 2015/16 arrivals, the local level has become a testing ground for new, innovative approaches and policies related to immigrant integration. A large share of this innovation has been civil-society driven, resulting from the wave of voluntarism seen during this time, or emerged from social entrepreneurship. This innovation has led to new solutions to providing integrated support services, e.g. with regard to language learning, social mentorship, training and labour market insertion. (EUROCITIES 2016, 2017b,d, EWSI 2016, FRA 2018, Jeffrey 2018, OECD 2018). EU funding instruments and Commission engagement have played a certain role in these new types of local integration initiatives, e.g. through integration-specific calls under the Urban Innovation Action (UIA) instrument and measures included in the 2016 EU Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals (EC 2016).

Nevertheless, the capacity of EU instruments to foster community involvement and local innovation is widely questioned. For small-scale projects carried by civil society organisations or voluntary initiatives, EU funds are difficult to access or outright unattractive due to financial requirements and complex programme rules. Community building efforts, early integration initiatives or school-related activities have numerous EU options (from AMIF to Erasmus+, Europe for Citizens, as well as the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programmes), but in reality often fail to access funds (ECRE & UNHCR 2017 and 2019, EUROCITIES 2016, 2017 b,c, Urban Agenda 2018a, Social Platform 2018a). A key question thus has been how in future more civil society-

driven projects enabled by EU funds can take place, with lower thresholds for small-scale projects and funding instruments geared towards non-public/non-profit project carriers.

Comprehensive social policies versus competitiveness paradigm. A long-standing controversy around the intervention logic of EU instruments in the social policy domain – and one that will gain importance as the ESF is poised to become a major funding source for migrant integration – refers to the underlying cohesion philosophy. Ever since the EU adopted overall economic and social development strategies focused on improved competitiveness and the knowledge economy, EU programmes have been geared towards an empowering and enabling approach, helping individuals to participate in the labour market. Typical policy goals have been human capital development, vocational training and life-long learning. Critics of this approach have been pointing out that a focus on labour market activation alone is not sufficient to tackle complex cohesion challenges, including material deprivation, poverty, precarious and atypical employment, lack of affordable housing and discrimination. Cities and their interest organisations have mostly shared this critique, e.g. pointing out that it is cities where such problems arise first and are felt hardest.

A concern stressed by many stakeholders is that if the future ESF+ does not overcome the binary focus on employment/unemployment, it will be of limited use as an integration support instrument (EAPN 2016, ESN 2017, EUROCITIES 2014, 2018a, Social Platform 2018a). In national

integration debates, such controversy reverberates, too. Member States political discourse often concentrates on the balance between providing access to welfare provisions (like social assistance/income support) and a 'demanding' approach that sees the integration effort and responsibility for labour market success or language acquisition primarily on the side of the migrant. Policy preferences of national governments in such debates are relevant in the European context, as governments will first decide on the future ESF+ instrument, its priorities and underlying intervention logic, and then set their priorities in national implementation programmes.

EU policies to support, not constrain, urban level social investments and integration efforts. In its most critical variant, debate on the EU's role in facilitating migrant integration and the provision of adequate public services on the local level has focused on the constraints emanating from various EU policies. In countries most affected by the financial and sovereign debt crisis over the last decade, EU-agreed austerity policies have led to considerable spending cuts, decline in social investments and limited capacities to address social cohesion issues including migrant integration, while at the same time problems and needs multiplied. EU economic crisis responses and their local impact aside, social housing represents another long-standing policy controversy between cities and the EU with implications for migrant integration. Pointing to the role of public housing for combatting spatial segregation on local level and socially mixed neighbourhoods, local level stakeholders have consistently pushed for

the availability of Structural Funds for housing stock refurbishment and social infrastructures, and generally for considering social housing as a service of general economic interest (SGEI) with limited applicability of EU competition and state aid rules.

Against this history of cities' discontent with certain EU policies, it is not surprising to see urban representatives call for a general turn of EU economic strategy to more public spending and investment-based policies; and in particular ample possibilities to support social investments under the EU funding instruments in the 2021 to 2017 MFF (Fransen et al. 2018, Jeffrey 2018). Being able to leverage EU co-funding for new schools, childcare services, vocational and skills centres, and enlargement or refurbishment of public housing stock is seen by many cities as inherently linked to their capacity to address challenges of migrant integration.

Ability to set policy priorities on urban level and direct access to EU funds. Cities frequently strive for a regulatory and funding environment that allows for autonomous policy responses in line with their responsibilities vis-à-vis migrant populations. In the EU programme context, distinct local priorities lead to the call for direct access to EU funds, as cities usually access EU funds through Member State authorities. In the case of AMIF, in the 2014 to 2020 period cities in many Member States have not been able to act as co-beneficiaries from AMIF emergency support, and national AMIF funds may not be readily available to meet the needs of local stakeholders due to the National Programmes' specific priorities and calls. In some Member States, cities have reported to be widely

excluded from AMIF funds as a consequence. Local authorities therefore have been asking to become directly eligible for Emergency Assistance and/or automatically receive a certain share of available funding for integration based on objective criteria (ECRE & UNHCR 2017 and 2019, EUROCITIES 2015, 2016, 2017 b,c, HLG 2017, Urban Agenda 2018, Social Platform 2018a).

In the case of ESF, the current programme period has seen improvements insofar as Member States were encouraged to use the EU Structural Funds for so-called 'integrated actions for sustainable urban development', leading to an estimated third of the new urban strategies to include ESF funding. This and the requirement to use part of the national ERDF allocation for these integrated actions led to more frequent direct responsibility of cities in the management of ESF funds. Notwithstanding these developments, cities continue to point out that Operational Programmes and calls leave key local challenges not addressed, that target groups and indicators do not match the local reality, and that coordination gaps exist at the ESF/ERDF nexus (EUROCITIES 2018a, HLG 2017, Urban Agenda 2018, Social Platform 2018a).

Stronger role for civil society and local authorities in the governance of EU funds implementation. A focal point of stakeholder efforts at stronger involvement in planning/implementing EU programmes is the so-called partnership principle. With a long-standing tradition in the Structural Funds programmes it refers to the close involvement of civil society, local governments and other relevant actors in the preparation, implementation, monitoring

and evaluation of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes. A 'European Code of Conduct on the Partnership Principle (ECCP)', adopted as EU Delegated Act in 2014, has further strengthened the principle by clearly defining the objectives and criteria Member States have to observe (EC 2014), although its implementation is not binding.

Notwithstanding this improvement, in practice only a handful of countries have fully involved local and regional authorities and civil society organisations in the process in all stages. Under the AMIF, the partnership principle is even less established. Reflecting the intergovernmental roots of EU policies in the migration policy domain, the principle has never been more than a recommendation to Member States and cities and civil society stakeholders report ignorance for their concerns in AMIF national programming in a number of countries (CEMR 2015, CPMR 2018a,b, ECRE & UNHCR 2017 and 2019, EPRS 2017, ESF Transnational Platform/AEIDL 2018b, Fondazione Brodolini et al. 2016, Social Platform 2016, Sweco et al. 2016, Urban Agenda 2018).

As proposed by the Commission, in the 2021 to 2027 programme period the AMF will become part of the newly harmonised rulebook across all funds under shared management funds, implying a strengthening of the partnership principle and alignment with the standards achieved under the Structural Funds. Requirements in the proposed future Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), equally referring to ERDF, ESF+ and AMF include a binding provision to carry out partnership organisation in accordance with the 2014 Code of

Conduct (EC 2018c). Welcomed by stakeholders, this was bound to be controversial with governments that have preferred to keep civil society and other stakeholders at arm lengths' when implementing national AMIF programmes. Stakeholder also pointed out inconsistencies in terminology between the ECCP and the new proposals (e.g. concerning the role of Monitoring Committees in programme reporting and reviews), and in how the ECCP refers to the specific funds and programmes to which it applies (ECRE & UNHCR 2018b).

Coherent, simplified and flexible EU instruments in line with local needs. Drawing from different EU funding sources for the integration of migrants and refugees (AMIF, ESF, FEAD, ERDF, EasI, Erasmus+, REC), local authorities, civil society stakeholders and potential beneficiaries in cities are faced with overlapping priorities, target groups and policy objectives. Partly this is a result of lacking adjustment among EU instruments, partly it is a mirror of unaligned priorities at local, regional or national levels as the programmes are implemented within Member States. In particular actors with limited administrative resources struggle to navigate EU funding processes without guidance on how to best leverage resources and which funds to apply for.

Technical differences in deadlines and eligibility, reporting and financial accountability rules across the different EU funds can create major obstacles and render EU funds unattractive. The divergent definition of target groups in various programmes leads to especially grave problems when colliding with realities. For example, AMIF interventions can only focus on third-country nationals, whereas under ESF in principle a much wider population

of citizens with migration background (including newly arrived EU citizens or second-generation nationals) are able to benefit. However, the definition of the ESF target group has been very diversified across Member States, creating confusion and difficulties in comparing the quality of measures provided and the number of recipients served. Moreover, programmes to foster inclusion and social cohesion typically include the receiving community, meaning that eligibility rules need to accommodate all citizens (Ahad and Schmidt 2019, EC 2015, 2018e, ECA 2018b). Stakeholders have therefore consistently called for simplification, less administrative burden, better harmonisation of rules, flexibility and possibilities to blend funding from different funds (EUROCITIES 2017b,c, Urban Agenda 2018).

Reception of migrants, an indicator on which to lose or to gain from EU Structural Funds? The envisaged broadening of regional allocation criteria of Structural Funds (incl. ERDF and ESF+) to include, next to regional per-capita GDP, the reception of migrants has proven to be highly controversial. To better reflect needs and challenges on regional level, the Commission proposes to take into account net migration from outside the EU since 2013 as one in a set of additional indicators when calculating available amounts in the 2021 to 2027 MFF (EC 2018c, Annex XXII). This would entail a re-channelling of funds among Member States and create an incentive (of sorts) in the long term to accept and accommodate more immigration, but also provide resources to better include those who have accepted to accommodate more asylum seekers in the past. However, this

provision lacks a direct link with the fulfilment of the integration-related objective viii of ESF+. In other words, increase in allocation to the regions which have welcomed a higher number of third country nationals, will not grant per se more investments in integration. For cities in the potentially negatively affected countries, frequently committed to a more inclusive approach to integration than their national governments, these proposed conditionalities are a double-edged sword: While underlining their political stance of more openness, eventually less cohesion funding would be available on local level. Municipalities, together with civil society stakeholders, feel threatened to be taken hostage by the anti-immigration stance of their governments and to lose out in urgently needed investments that depend on EU co-funding.

In view of these potential effects, the Commission proposals are also far away from the idea of a new EU instrument offering direct financial support to cities in return for receiving refugees and asylum seekers, floated among others by the European Parliament in early 2018 (EP 2018a, Knaus & Schwan 2018, Bendel et al. 2019). Under such an incentive scheme, possibly linked to resettlement programmes, municipalities would apply directly to receive means for the integration of refugees whom they wish to welcome.

Contested necessity of more binding European governance in integration field. An overriding question with regard to the EU's role in the integration field is whether EU policies can, or should, go beyond the existing 'soft' governance aimed at inspiring, enabling and facilitating mainstreaming in Member States, and move towards a

more binding framework. As proposed by the Commission, mainstreaming of integration in the 2021 to 2027 MFF would become more strongly entwined with overall EU economic and social governance, i.e. the European Semester and national reform programme process. More flexible and cyclical governance of the ESF+ would be part of this shift, providing a new EU lever to influence Member State policy priorities. Annual Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) in the European Semester cycle (increasingly also referring to migrant integration) are proposed to be taken into account at least at the beginning of the programming period and for the mid-term review (assessing progress after five years; EC 2018d).

The main rationale for such a more binding frame, from a Commission perspective, is to level out the existing differences

among Member States in terms of their capacity and commitment to integrate migrants and refugees, and to respond with efficient policies. With stronger incentives, conditionalities related to migration and integration in funding programmes and under peer pressure, the hope is that also more reluctant governments would develop and implement comprehensive, broad-based integration policies. However, given the contested nature of the policy objectives underlying the EU's system of social and economic governance, political attitudes among some Member State governments, as well as the legal constraints of the EU mandate in the integration policy field, any plans for a more binding EU governance framework for integration are set to be contested.

3. FROM DEBATE TO PROPOSALS: POLICY OPTIONS PROMOTED BY STAKEHOLDERS AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

3.1 Policy option adequate funding – to ensure sufficient and flexible spending on integration according to changing needs across all Member States

Advancing this policy option is informed by lacking, or patchy, public spending on migrant and refugee integration seen in many Member States. Across Europe, the attention given to integration policies varies dramatically. Comparably high levels of financial support provided in wealthier and/or long-standing destination countries contrast with much lower levels in more recent destination countries or Member States where public finances have been under strain. In most countries, however, policy gaps related to specific and sectoral challenges exist, together with a lack of national spending in such areas. In this overall context, EU funds represent a key mechanism to instigate and leverage higher spending on migrant and refugee integration according to actual needs. In addition, they provide an opportunity to strengthen the principle of early integration 'from day one', in line with the EU policy approach.

Proposals put forward by stakeholder organisations start from the fact that traditionally EU funding dedicated to integration has been comparatively low (i.e. mostly under AMIF in the current programme period). In addition, there is a sense that existing spending levels need to be defended and reinforced in view of recent EU priorities focused on migration

management and -control. Proposals are also driven by growing reluctance in some Member States to create favourable conditions for migrants and refugees in general, and the varying propensity of Member States to let migrants and refugees benefit from various EU programmes (structural funds, education programmes etc.). Pushing for adequate levels of EU integration funding is therefore not only about maintaining and expanding what is available from EU programmes, but also about making sure, through programme rules, that Member States eventually take up the potentially available means.

Stakeholder proposals

Specific stakeholder proposals put forward as reaction to the Commission proposals and relevant for this policy option include:

- At least 30% of national AMF programmes under shared management to be allocated to, and actually spend, on integration and legal migration actions;
- allocation of AMF funds to Member States solely based on numbers of third-country nationals who arrived (and not on returns), to match the needs in the asylum and integration areas;
- 50% of the AMF to be managed by the European Commission under the Thematic Facility, to increase the Commission's possibilities to address integration needs in Member States;

- the possibility to reabsorb AMF funds and spend them under the Thematic Facility in case a Member State under-spends the funding allocated to its national programme;
- explicit inclusion in the scope of AMF of the early identification of victims of violence and torture, and support to specialized civil society organisations through the Thematic Facility;
- publication of the annual AMF performance reports as well as mid-term evaluations, to increase the transparency on how funds are used and facilitate monitoring;
- at least 30% of national ESF+ programmes under shared management to be spent on social inclusion and reducing poverty, including for integration of third-country nationals;
- socio-economic integration of third-country nationals as a distinct specific objective of ESF+, to ensure attention to the target group;
- at least 4% of national ESF+ programmes to be spend on the two specific objectives addressing social inclusion of the most deprived and material deprivation;
- European Social Charter and Sustainable Development Goals as additional references for ESF+, to ensure its scope includes asylum seekers and persons with an irregular status.

- for details on the various stakeholder positions cf. chapter 3.1 (Annex) of the Policy Options Brief on 'High levels of EU support for migrant integration, implemented by civil society and local authorities'
- for in-depth information on the evidence base supporting stakeholder

proposals cf. chapter 2.1.3 of the same Policy Options Brief

Support in the European Parliament

In the European Parliament, as co-legislator of the future EU funds in the 2021 to 2027 MFF, a wide range of stakeholder positions have been taken up in the ongoing negotiations. The legislative resolution on the **AMF regulation** resulting from the plenary vote of 13 March 2019, based on the report of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) Committee, addresses most of the above-mentioned concerns and will be the Parliament's starting point in the upcoming negotiations with Council and Commission. Notably, it proposes to amend the integration objective of the fund, deleting the focus on early integration foreseen by the Commission, and stipulates to maintain the fund's hitherto name, 'Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)' (EP 2018 e,f, 2019a). With a view to proposals put forward by stakeholders, Parliament has settled on:

- A minimum allocation of 10% of funds to integration and legal migration each in national AMF programmes (however not including a requirement on actual minimum spending); together with a minimum allocation under the Thematic Facility of 10% each to integration and legal migration spending;
- deletion of provision that 40% of national AMF means are to be allocated to Member States according to criteria related countering irregular migration including returns;
- strengthened provisions concerning vulnerable groups, through adding protection measures for vulnerable

persons to the measures implemented through the fund; and adding to the scope of AMF support the early identification of vulnerable persons as well as the provision of psycho-social and rehabilitation services;

- increased transparency on how funds are used and facilitated monitoring of programme implementation through publication of actions, beneficiaries and annual performance reports and detailed provisions on mid-term and retrospective evaluation reports.

Concerning the **ESF+ regulation**, the amendments adopted by the European Parliament on 16 January 2019, based on the report of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, embodies Parliament's eventual stances on the proposals put forward by stakeholders (EP 2018c,d, 2019b):

- At least 27% of national ESF+ programmes under shared management to be spent on social inclusion and reducing poverty, including for integration of third-country nationals;
- socio-economic integration of third-country nationals to become a separate specific objective of ESF+ in the social inclusion policy area;
- at least 3% of national ESF+ programmes to be spend on the two specific objectives addressing social inclusion of the most deprived and/or material deprivation;
- sustainable Development Goals as additional reference for ESF+, to ensure its scope includes asylum seekers and persons with an irregular status.

→ for details on the EP amendments to the Commission proposals cf. chapter 3.1 (Annex) of the Policy Options Brief

on 'High levels of EU support for migrant integration, implemented by civil society and local authorities'

3.2 Meaningful needs assessment – to base AM(I)F national programming and Partnership Agreements on structured and standalone assessment of needs and challenges

Advancing this policy option is informed by the frequent under-use of AMIF for integration purposes, neglecting needs in Member States and overtly focusing on migration management. It aims to forego flawed needs assessments at the beginning of the programming phase that fail to capture the full range of needed support action in the process of formulating Partnership Agreements (PAs) and national programmes. Pursuing this option seems even more urgent, as previous standards in priority-setting for asylum and migration funds are questioned under the future AM(I)F. As proposed by the Commission (and not fundamentally amended by the European Parliament), provisions on needs assessment are not very detailed and would give considerable leeway to Member States in deciding their spending priorities.

Alternative proposals put forward by stakeholder organisations react to these setbacks for evidence-based policymaking (ECRE & UNHCR 2018a: 51-56). While the current AMIF has foreseen a formal, high-level Policy Dialogue between Member States and the Commission to establish strategic priorities for national programming, the AMF proposal makes no reference to such a process. Instead, the proposed regulation tasks Member States

with preparing Partnership Agreements, to be approved by the Commission. Without a formal Policy Dialogue process also the current levels of transparency (e.g. the Commission duty to present the outcome of Policy Dialogues to the European Parliament) will decrease. With regard to the PAs, there is no requirement foreseen asking for a standalone assessment of needs and challenges that would serve as justification for particular policy objectives in these basic documents of national programmes. In contrast, the 2014 to 2020 AMIF requires programming to be based on an assessment of needs present in Member States at a particular date, where possible supported by statistical data. With regard to the national programmes, no guidance on assessment of challenges is foreseen either on which to base national programming; leaving Member States with a lack of clarity on the overall approach to be used. In addition, the templates for PAs and national programmes do not require Member States to draw on specific types of data or evidence to justify policy choices. Stakeholders point out the danger that politically motivated priority-setting takes precedence in this context. Last not least, the AM(I)F proposal newly introduces an association of EU agencies (EASO/EUAA and Frontex/EBCG) to the process of national programme development, but without any requirement of their input and subsequent programme amendments to be made public or open to the scrutiny of national Monitoring Committees.

Stakeholder proposals

Specific stakeholder proposals (ECRE & UNHCR 2018b) put forward as reaction to

the Commission proposals and relevant for this policy option include:

- Standalone assessment of needs and challenges relevant to implementation of shared management funds (following an amended Partnership Agreement template) as a basis for programming, in the form of a baseline situation including statistical and qualitative data from independent sources;
- Commission approval of PAs and National Programmes based on an assessment of how far selected priorities and objectives address the needs and challenges identified in the needs assessment;
- Scrutiny of EU agency programming inputs by national Monitoring Committees, and a process by which agency input can be challenged if thought to extend beyond their areas of competence;
- Reinstatement of the formal, high-level Policy Dialogue process previously seen under AMIF for the future AM(I)F, together with a strengthening of the scrutiny role of the European Parliament.

Support in the European Parliament

In the ongoing legislative process structured needs assessment in programming has not featured prominently in the amendments put forward by MEPs and in positions of the European Parliament. Amendments to the Common Provisions Regulation, adopted by the European Parliament in February 2019 (EP 2019c) with regard to preparation, content and approval of PAs and national programmes (Art. 7 to 9 and 16 to 18) concerned mainly the partnership principle

(c.f. 3.4 below) and time limits. Vaguely, the EP added an “integrated approach to address the demographic challenges and/ or specific needs of regions and areas” as element of PAs and to be set out in national programmes (EP 2019c). Concerning the AM(I)F, MEPs’ efforts at amending the Commission proposal with regard to programming (Art. 13 AMF regulation) mostly focused on adding the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights to the EU agencies that are to be associated at an early stage to the development of programmes (EP 2018 e,f, 2019a).

3.3 Policy option mainstreamed, longer-term policies – to promote comprehensive integration policies with a long-term orientation and mainstreaming them on Member State and EU level

Advancing this policy option is informed by the overtly short-term character of integration policies and the weak consideration of integration objectives across relevant policy areas in many Member States. EU funding programmes have the potential to improve the quality of integration policies in terms of their long-term orientation and of mainstreaming them into all areas which impact on the integration outlook and well-being of migrants and refugees – such as housing, employment, education and health. On Member State level, the policy option stresses EU support for ongoing, seamless and well-integrated measures aimed at enabling the inclusion of migrants and refugees in all walks of life, with no funding gaps emerging along the integration pathway. On EU level, the policy option relates to a stronger emphasis

on social inclusion goals in overall EU economic and social governance, and how these goals translate into specific objectives of EU programmes conceived to facilitate integration.

Proposals put forward by stakeholder organisations address the fact that EU integration funding up to now focuses on short term needs related to the arrival and reception context in many Member States, with comparatively little funding used for e.g. long-term labour market integration. Moreover, governments have wide discretion on whether EU funds implemented on national level become available for longer-term integration measures or would in any way contribute to mainstreaming of migrant integration across policies. As a result, measures that receive EU support often are piecemeal, poorly integrated into coherent, longer-term strategies and not linked to an all-of-government and all-of-society response to immigration. What is more, policies aimed at longer-term and more comprehensive integration are under threat where governments perceive them as creating pull factors or being unpopular with the own citizens.

Stakeholder proposals

Specific stakeholder proposals put forward as reaction to the Commission proposals and relevant for this policy option include:

- A proper balance among social and macroeconomic objectives in the European Semester process, to ensure adequate investment for social inclusion and poverty reduction;

- more regular monitoring through the social aspects of the European Semester of how Member States implement enabling conditions, including the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- mainstreaming of integration support across the ESF+, with third country nationals as recipients of measures under all the specific objectives and an enhanced equality clause;
- strong coordination on EU level and between Managing Authorities in Member States of the actions and priorities implemented under AMF, ESF+ and ERDF shared management, to the point of establishing cross-Fund national integration Monitoring Committees;
- priorities of the European Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals to be addressed in national operational programmes for ESF+ implementation;
- ongoing, effective support for early and long-term integration and foregoing of possible funding gaps due to the way Member States implement AMF and ESF+.

→ for details on the various stakeholder positions cf. chapter 3 (Annex) of the Policy Options Brief on 'Comprehensive and mainstreamed, longer-term support for the integration of migrants'

→ for in-depth information on the evidence base supporting stakeholder proposals cf. chapter 2.3 of the same Policy Options Brief

Support in the European Parliament

In the European Parliament a number of the concerns brought forward by stakeholder organisations have been taken up. With regard to the **ESF+ regulation**, amendments adopted by Parliament in the plenary vote on 16 January 2019 (based on the Report of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee) reflect Parliament's eventual positions on the legislative proposals tabled by the Commission (EP 2018 c,d, 2019b). With a view to the stakeholder proposals, these amendments refer to:

- The inclusion of challenges identified in the Social Scoreboard under the European Semester in the provisions on thematic concentration of national ESF+ spending;
- additional general objectives of the ESF+ stressing inclusive societies, the quality of employment, education and training, integration and social cohesion, eradication of poverty, non-discrimination and access to basic services, among others;
- additional specific objectives of the ESF+, among others related to the inclusiveness of education and training systems, services for access to housing, and access to equal social protection, including for disadvantaged groups and the most deprived people;
- highlighting of integration challenges as the context in which the ESF+ will be implemented, and acquisition of language skills, reduction of segregation and non-discriminatory education systems, among others, as goals of the fund;
- compulsory inclusion of Managing Authorities in coordination mechanisms

with other EU funds, in order to deliver integrated approaches; with specific reference to coordination of ESF+ with the AMF but also ERDF and the Rights and Values programme;

- inclusion of the EU Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals in the Union initiatives whose implementation is to be supported from ESF+;
- a separate specific objective of ESF+ solely dedicated to the promotion of long-term socio-economic integration of third country nationals, including migrants;
- clarification of the scope of integration measures supported from ESF+ as focusing on legally residing third-country nationals or on those in the process of acquiring legal residence, including beneficiaries of international protection.

Amendments to the **Common Provisions Regulation**, adopted by the European Parliament on 13 February 2019 based on the report of the Committee on Regional Development (EP 2019c), refer to:

- Inclusion of the overall policy objectives of the Structural Funds (including implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights) in the needs assessment leading to Partnership Agreements between Commission and Member States, thus going beyond Country-Specific Recommendations;
- progress in support of the European Pillar of Social Rights, territorial needs and demographic challenges to be taken into account in reporting of Structural Funds' implementation, mid-term reviews and adjustments following mid-term reviews;

- arrangements for implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights as horizontal enabling condition, applicable to all specific ESF+ objectives;
- provision that enabling conditions are also seen as prerequisite for inclusive and non-discriminatory (and not only effective and efficient) use of EU support;
- access to non-segregated education and training as part of the national strategic policy framework for the education and training system which is required as thematic enabling condition;
- a concrete action plan to combat segregation through access to quality services for migrants and refugees as part of the 'national strategic policy framework for social inclusion and poverty reduction' which is required as thematic enabling condition.

Amendments to the **AMF regulation** in the EP legislative resolution of 13 March 2019, based on the report of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) Committee, further address some of the above-mentioned stakeholder concerns (EP 2018e,f, 2019a):

- Stress on the complementarity, coordination and coherence among AMF and the Structural Funds when implementing the specific objective related to integration and social inclusion of third-country nationals, as well as in the annual performance reports of Member States;
- scope of AM(I)F defined as supporting integration measures for third-country nationals and actions supporting Member States' capacities in the field of integration that are generally imple-

mented in the early stages of integration, complemented by interventions to promote the social and economic inclusion of third-country nationals financed under the structural funds.

→ for details on the EP amendments to the Commission proposals cf. chapter 3 (Annex) of the Policy Options Brief on 'Comprehensive and mainstreamed, longer-term support for the integration of migrants'

3.4 Policy option broader participation

– to ensure funds can be accessed by civil society and local/ regional authorities, and that these actors are fully involved in the funds' governance

Advancing this policy option is informed by the ambition of local actors, both public and societal, to autonomously pursue integration priorities in line with the needs on the ground. The local level is where success or failure of integration processes is determined, with key public services such as housing and early childhood education, but also policies to combat poverty or social exclusion widely in the hand of municipalities. Civil society, local and regional authorities are uniquely placed to offer early integration support, pursue community building among newcomers and citizens, and shape the social climate in which reception and integration take place. However, local integration actors often do not have enough leeway to fully exploit their potential due to various constraints that often are related to lack of funding. EU programmes, their funds as much as their concepts and objectives, can be crucial to galvanize effective and

lasting integration strategies on local level, pursued by public bodies and NGOs. Cities, regions and civil society thus are key stakeholders and potential beneficiaries of EU funding instruments for the integration of migrants and refugees.

Proposals put forward by stakeholder organisations respond to a reality that by far does not live up to the actual role of civil society and local/regional authorities in migrant integration. While NGOs are widely recognised as main beneficiaries of EU funding in the integration area, their participation in EU programmes is often hampered by specific funding rules developed by Member States for programmes implemented on national level (under 'shared management'). Other barriers to participation relate to EU rules, including on co-financing and administrative burdens that are problematic especially for smaller organisations. In what concerns municipalities, they have been grossly underrepresented as beneficiaries of recent EU integration funding in spite of their decisive role in handling the 2015/16 peak in arrivals. Moreover, they have experienced serious obstacles in accessing EU funds resulting from national implementation structures and -decisions. In the governance of the relevant programmes, the voice of local and regional authorities, civil society and social partners is underrepresented or even absent, leading to little involvement of these actors in programme planning, implementation and monitoring.

What is more, the payment of technical assistance resources to Member States can be critical for the capacity of organisations and entities to access national pro-

programme resources and/or effectively implement actions for which they have already received funding. As proposed by the Commission, common rules for the shared management Funds will introduce a flat rate mechanism for the payment of technical assistance resources to Member States, in which these funds are paid in the form of a 2.5-6% top up of each interim payment. The payment of technical assistance is thus linked to progress in implementation, with Member States implementing programmes more slowly receiving less resources to build the capacity of programme partners. Linking technical assistance to progress in implementation in the manner set out in the new proposals therefore risks withholding support from the contexts and partners amongst which the need for it is most acute.

Stakeholder proposals

Specific stakeholder proposals put forward as reaction to the Commission proposals and relevant for this policy option include:

- A new EU funding instrument offering direct financial support to cities in return for receiving refugees and asylum seekers, linked to resettlement and/or EU relocation programmes;
- reasonable minimum allocations for local authorities and civil society organisations across all priorities within national AMF programmes under shared management;
- a maximum EU co-financing rate of 80% for national AMF programmes and encouragement of matching national funds, with Member States required to provide a minimum of 50% of the national co-financing contribution from

national resources and a recommendation to provide 100% grant funding wherever possible;

- the extension of the proposed 90% co-financing rate for integration actions led by civil society and local/regional authorities across all AMF objectives;
- removal of the flat rate mechanism for the payment of technical assistance and of the link between implementation progress and payment of technical assistance; instead payments to be undertaken as for other programme priorities/objectives based on reporting of eligible expenditure;
- earmarking for local authorities and civil society of a significant part of funding from the AMF Thematic Facility, to support integration and reception actions implemented locally;
- a strong and mandatory Partnership Principle in all relevant funds, to ensure meaningful multi-stakeholder and multi-level programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- an EU-level Partnership Principle, applied to the AMF Thematic Facility and with regular stakeholder consultations on the planning and implementation of activities;
- inclusion of civil society stakeholders in the ESF+ Committee, to reflect their key role in the design and delivery of the fund, in line with the idea of an EU-level Partnership Principle.

➔ for details on the various stakeholder positions cf. chapter 3.2 (Annex) of the Policy Options Brief on 'High levels of EU support for migrant integration, implemented by civil society and local authorities'

→ for in-depth information on the evidence base supporting stakeholder proposals cf. chapter 2.2.3 of the same Policy Options Brief

Support in the European Parliament

In the ongoing legislative process, most of the stakeholder positions have been taken up by Members of the LIBE Committee. The EP's legislative resolution on the **AMF regulation** of March 2019 stipulates (EP 2018e,f, 2019a):

- Establishment and development of regional/local integration strategies, as well as capacity building of integration services provided by local authorities added to the fund's scope of support; however, no provisions on minimum allocations of national AMF programmes to civil society organisations and local/regional authorities;
- encouragement of Member States to provide matching national co-financing to EU-funding of at a maximum 75% of eligible expenditure;
- a minimum allocation of between 5% of the AMF Thematic Facility to local and regional authorities implementing integration actions;
- enshrining of a strong partnership principle in the regulation in addition to the provisions of the Common Provisions Regulation, with partnerships to include local and regional authorities as well as NGOs, human rights institutions and equality bodies;
- the Commission to regularly engage with civil society organisations in the development and implementation of

work programmes of the Thematic Facility; and to consult concerning actions eligible for higher co-financing and the further development the monitoring and evaluation framework.

With regard to the **ESF+ regulation**, the amendments adopted by the European Parliament also reflect key proposals put forward by stakeholders (EP 2018c,d, 2019b):

- Enshrining of a far-reaching partnership principle in the ESF+ regulation, asking for meaningful participation of social partners, civil society organisations, equality bodies, national human rights institutions and other relevant or representative organisations;
- appointment to the ESF+ Committee of Member State representatives of civil society, equality bodies or other independent human right institutions, as well as of a Union level civil society representative;
- allocation of 2% of the ESF+ funds in shared management to the support and capacity building of partners (as civil society organisations, etc).

→ for details on the EP amendments to the Commission proposals cf. chapter 3.2 (Annex) of the Policy Options Brief on 'High levels of EU support for migrant integration, implemented by civil society and local authorities'

4. WAY FORWARD: SUSTAINED EFFORTS AND QUALITATIVE MONITORING

4.1 Needs for action at a critical juncture

Preparations for the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework have reached a critical stage as of spring 2019. While Commission, Council and Parliament start engaging in the final stages of negotiations, there are still some persisting disagreements on the overall architecture and governance of the funds. Among others, Member States are still divided about the scope of integration objectives and the extent of Member States' obligation to use EU funds for integration purposes. Both with regard to AM(I)F and ESF+, these controversies crystallise in debates on required minimum allocations to integration objectives in national programmes. To ensure that the integration of migrants and refugees remains a core objective of the proposed AM(I)F regulation, stakeholders continue to point out that the suggested weighting key for the allocation of AMF funding to the Member States for their national programmes should be revised, so that allocation based on integration and legal migration indicators (weighting 30% as proposed by the Commission and unchanged in the EP position) is not overtaken by allocation based on return indicators (weighting 40% as proposed by the Commission and unchanged in the EP position). They also continue to insist that minimum allocation requirements for the integration objective in national programmes should be included to ensure that Member States adequately invest in these areas.

With regard to the ESF+ as well, Member State positions are still wide apart, ranging from ideas for mandatory integration spending going even beyond the EP position, as floated by e.g. Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, to questioning the very existence of an ESF+ strand targeting the most deprived (ex-FEAD), as voiced by some net contributor Member States. Intense Council debate also has taken place about the inclusion of AM(I)F in the Common Provisions Regulation and implications for the partnership principle. Governments reluctant to give civil society and local/regional authority stakeholders a say in programme development and -implementation have been pressing hard to remove AM(I)F from the binding provisions foreseen in the proposed CPR. Not the least, strong linkages exist between the debates on internal and external funding. In particular, Member States are divided about the respective priorities and objectives of the NDCI fund and the articulation of the external dimension of the three JHA funds.

At the same time, on national level, Member States are gearing up planning and operational preparations for the implementation of the new generation of EU instruments. Already now, governments discuss priorities, define objectives and start drafting Partnership Agreements. Within the next one-and-a-half year, in each Member State the groundwork will be laid and key decisions be taken on how much, where and how EU funding will be availa-

ble for the integration of migrants and refugees far into the next decade. The challenge is fourfold:

- to fully exploit the potential for increased use of AM(I)F, ESF+ and other instruments for the integration of migrants and refugees, and in particular to ensure the use of ESF+ in Member States which up to now have made only little or no use at all of ESF+ for this purpose – following the policy option described in chapter 3.1;
- to promote a need-based approach to the services funded through AM(I)F and ESF+, avoiding the establishment of barriers to certain target groups on the basis of their residence status (e.g. through unnecessary reporting indicators which would dissuade people with irregular status from accessing services) – following the policy option described in chapter 3.2.
- to ensure complementarity and coherence in programme planning with a view to long-term integration support and avoiding funding gaps – following the policy option described in chapter 3.3. One way to achieve this is proper coordination among the implementation structures of the various funds within Member States, ideally involving joint monitoring committees on integration assessing proposals for more than one fund. In line with good practices in some countries that could be scaled up and extended to the rest of the Union, another way to ensure complementarity and coherence is to install a single ministerial authority responsible for the integration priority across funds;

- to ensure comprehensive compliance with the partnership principle and same high consultation standards in AM(I)F and ESF+; for local and regional authorities, civil society organisations and refugees/migrant-led organisations to have a say in the national and operational programmes, as well as in their monitoring and evaluation – following the policy option described in chapter 3.4;

To meet these challenges, at this juncture all key actors need to commit and follow up on a specific course of action:

- The *Commission*, to make every effort to promote the enhanced opportunities under the next MFF to Member State authorities and integration stakeholders, inform Managing Authorities, facilitate joint and coordinated programme planning, push for full implementation of the partnership principle and encourage meaningful involvement of civil society and local and regional authorities in the needs assessments that inform Member States' programming;
- *Member States*, to explore and embrace the opportunities provided by the future instruments, to anticipate ways for strategic, long-term use of the funds in order to leverage objectives of national integration policies, to tackle cross-ministerial and cross-fund coordination challenges in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, to acknowledge the potential for more efficient and better embedded policies that comes with structured involvement of local/regional and civil society actors, and to allow for early

and meaningful participation of stakeholders in decisions on the strategic orientation of the national programmes;

- The *European Parliament*, in the upcoming trilogue negotiations in autumn 2019 to hold to the improvements in terms of stronger partnership provisions and coordination among the funds achieved in the first reading; among them the high consultation standards introduced in the AM(I)F and ESF+ regulations independent from the CPR provisions, EU-level partnership consultations, as well as mandatory coordination among the Managing Authorities of AM(I)F and the Structural Funds;
- *Integration stakeholders* in civil society and on local/regional levels to devote their full attention to the developments, actively contribute to national debates, point out efficient ways of using the funds for comprehensive and long-term integration support and insist on meaningful and regular involvement in needs assessments, programme development, implementation and evaluation. A joint, transnational initiative can help to better play this role.

4.2 Towards a stakeholder initiative for a sustainable, comprehensive evidence base supporting partnership-led programme implementation

Currently, in many Member States integration stakeholders in civil society and on local level lack resources to advocate in a timely and sustained manner for purposeful use of EU funds for migrant integration, and to push for meaningful participation in programme development and implementation. Realtime evidence is lacking on the Europe-wide uptake of EU instruments for migrant integration and the state of play concerning partnership-led implementation. Today, assessments of the partnership principle and how funds are used are done on an ad-hoc basis, mostly in form of one-off surveys conducted through stakeholder membership organisations or as retrospective analyses of the programme planning and evaluation reports produced by Member States and the Commission. As things stand, it is difficult to obtain, and keep up to date, comprehensive knowledge about the state of programme implementation and the consultation standards applied across Member States.

To fill this gap, an EU-wide mechanism should be developed for ongoing, regular monitoring of how stakeholders are involved and different funds are used, and of the quality of coordination and coherence among the instruments, including the empowerment of partners through capacity building and resources to participate in monitoring committees. Transnationally networked, this initiative would provide the improved evidence base for pushing towards compliance with the

partnership principle, purposeful use of AM(I)F and structural (ESF+) funds to support integration, and coordination and collaboration among the implementing authorities. Moreover, it would contribute to a qualitative monitoring of programme implementation, where e.g. AM(I)F mid-term reviews would also be based on content and effectiveness of the projects.

By this it would resemble a proposal floated by the Dutch government in the ongoing negotiations, to amend the mid-term review as foreseen in the draft AM(I)F regulation with a view to strengthening its role and added value for the allocation of the second tranche of funding. The allocation should not solely be determined by the degree of Member States' underspending but instead be based on a qualitative analysis of Member States' efforts, in combination with an updated analysis of the actual needs of Member States. With limited chances to win wider support among governments, this proposal can nevertheless inspire a stakeholder-led EU-wide mechanism fulfilling the function of qualitative monitoring.

If established across Member States, such a mechanism could become a powerful instrument. It would ensure that robust mid-term review procedures are in place and would provide a source of information for stakeholders and other EU actors on how funding instruments are utilised to support integration. It would enable integration stakeholders to move to a more proactive involvement, better fulfil their watchdog function in regard to the partnership principle and feed into advocacy for better use of EU funds for integration of migrants and refugees. In practice, such

an initiative could entail four major components:

- *Implementation monitoring component*, with annual 'barometer reports' on the quality of partnership-led implementation, coherence and coordination among funds as well as conclusions about their effective use; based on a monitoring and assessment tool with a few core questions or indicators for regular analysis (possibly implemented through a survey among stakeholders with a revised European Code of Conduct on Partnership as benchmark, supplemented by qualitative interviews, reflection and validation roundtables);
- *Financial and material empowerment and capacity building component*, providing adequate resources and with national meetings to inform civil society and local/regional level stakeholders about their role in partnership-based needs assessment and programming as well as the potentials of the funds to support integration; employing coordinators in each Member State as multipliers and drivers of a sustained and continuous conversation;
- *Qualitative evaluation component*, gathering evidence on quality, impact and long-term effectiveness of funded activities, leading to conclusions about the funds' utilisation to comprehensively support integration in a long-term perspective, and producing evidence for the mid-term review process;
- *Transnational benchmarking and mutual exchange component*, with EU-wide benchmarking of compliance with the partnership principle and of

proper use of funds; including regular European platform meetings for EU-level agenda-setting and recommendations for EU actors, as well as mutual exchange and information on good practices.

As an initiative independent from the Commission and Member State authorities, the mechanism would be based on the collaboration of integration stakeholders including civil society organisations, refugees/migrant-led organisations and local and regional authorities. It would need to build on the commitment among stakeholder or-

ganisations to coordinate and manage the process in Member States; possibly supported by a European network node. Discussions among the potential carriers of such an initiative are in order to clarify its funding, project partnership and operational implementation perspectives. If implemented as self-sustained civil society and local level network, sponsorship questions need to be solved. If implemented through EU funding, a legislative initiative would be necessary to provide a mandate and the resources that would ensure full independence.

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is a project funded under the Horizon 2020 Programme that aims at creating a platform for regular collaboration and exchange between Europe's well-developed networks of migration researchers, stakeholders and practitioners to foster evidence-based policymaking. Being a Coordination and Support Action (CSA), ReSOMA is meant to communicate directly with policy makers by providing ready-to-use evidence on policy, policy perceptions and policy options on migration, asylum and integration gathered among researchers, stakeholders and practitioners.

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