

RAPPORT INTERIM TA' EVALWAZZJONI AMIF

CCI	2014MT65AMNP001
Titlu	Malta National Programme AMIF 2014-2020
Verżjoni	2017.0
Il-perjodu ta' zmien kopert	01/01/2014 - 30/06/2017

Context:

The National Programme (NP) for AMIF was launched in November 2015 and by the end of June 2017, nine (9) calls for applications had been issued. Through these calls, thirteen (13) projects have been approved which are equivalent to a commitment of 43% of the Fund.[1]

In the period under review, the implementation of the programme was still in its early stages mainly due to the late adoption of the regulations and national programmes as well as the overlap with the closure procedures of previous programmes. In this regard, an effective assessment of the progress made in achieving the targets of the programme can only be made once the implementation of the programme reaches a satisfactory level. At the time of reporting slow progress was registered with respect to forced return measures as well as the take up by Third Country Nationals (TCNs) of integration measures; however, it is expected that overall implementation will gain momentum during 2018.

Since the adoption of the NP in 2015, apart from the updates to the NP to reflect the additional relocation pledges taken by Malta as per Council Decisions 2015/1523[2] and 2015/1601[3], no major changes in the development needs have been identified. In this respect, it is considered that the main strategic direction of the programme continues to apply to the current needs on the ground.

Methodology:

The interim evaluation has been conducted taking into account the feedback received from beneficiaries, policy makers, the Responsible Authority(RA) as well as the stakeholders who sit on the national programme's Monitoring Committee. In this regard, a qualitative and quantitative[4] approach was adopted in the carrying out of this evaluation exercise in line with the relevant EC guidelines.[5]

Main findings:

The projects being implemented are addressing the objectives outlined in the NP which in turn was drafted based on an assessment of the needs for the 2014-2020 period. Furthermore, the NP and ongoing projects are addressing the priorities identified in the Policy Dialogue Meeting that was held at programming stage in June 2013. In this regard, the partnership principle was not only implemented at programming stage but is also being applied at implementation stage.

In addition, projects are coherent with relevant national policies on which the NP was drafted. These include the Strategy for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants which outlines the need to increase capacity and improve living conditions of irregular migrants and asylum seekers.[6] Furthermore, the Directorate for Human Rights and Integration within the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality is also drawing up a Migrant Integration Strategy & Action Plan which is expected to establish an Integration Unit which will provide for various services for migrants.[7]

Complementarity is observed between the projects being supported by the Fund as well as with national initiatives and projects implemented through other funds. The fact that most

Managing / Responsible Authorities related to the implementation of Union Funds are grouped under the same Ministry facilitated discussions in ensuring coherence and complementarity between the different programmes. Furthermore, coherence and complementarity are being ensured through the Inter Ministerial Coordination Committee (IMCC) which brings together all relevant stakeholders involved in the coordination, management and implementation of Union funds. These structures follow up on the coordination mechanisms which were also adopted at programming stage and which are applied at application and project selection stage.

Whilst it is still premature to measure the extent of which investments under AMIF have brought added value due to the early implementation stages of the programme, the benefits of improving migration management and facilitating the integration of migrants, is not only considered of added value on a national scale but to the Union as a whole. In this regard, AMIF support to equip Malta with improved mechanisms within the sector also contributes towards combating the migration crisis.

Taking into account the nature of the interventions supported by the Fund, such as equipping migrants with improved skills and competences as well facilitating their integration within society, it is expected that the positive effects of the projects supported by the Fund will last beyond the scope of the Fund. Furthermore, whilst implementation is still in its initial phases making it premature for an assessment as to whether the costs incurred are proportionate to the benefits achieved, projects are being implemented within budget and the human resource requirements originally envisaged. From a simplification point of view, during the implementation of the programme, the Responsible Authority (RA) continued to improve and simplify procedures and the implementation of the multi-annual programming approach has led to positive developments from an implementation perspective. On the other hand, there is generally a need for more simplified procedures and application forms and the introduction of more simplified cost options.

Mid-term Review:

The RA submitted its contribution towards the mid-term review by 15 September 2017 based on discussions held with the relevant stakeholders in line with the regulatory requirements. Through this exercise, the RA has identified various changes which will necessitate adjustments to the NP, including new actions to further support health service provision to migrants in Malta, further support for the integration of TCNs (especially those working in the health sector) and actions to combat radicalisation through preventive measures, amongst others.

Furthermore, with reference to the Commission's Action Plan on Integration (June 2016), the necessary structures are being put in place to implement Malta's own Strategy and Action Plan, particularly through the setting up of an Integration Unit. A new action is also envisaged as part of the Return Measures whereby a Return and Support Facility for Return and Reintegration of Irregular Migrants will be set up. This action is expected to provide temporary accommodation, psychosocial support and reintegration orientation to returning migrants which will facilitate their return and reintegration into their local communities.

Conclusions and recommendations:

From this evaluation exercise, whilst implementation is progressing, an in depth assessment of the results achieved was not possible in view that the majority of projects were still in the initial phase of the project life cycle. Lengthy procurement processes are also factors which are contributing towards the slow implementation of projects. In this regard, increased support to beneficiary organisations, particularly during the first six (6) months of project implementation, may also contribute towards facilitating the implementation of the project. The introduction of additional simplification methods, particularly for beneficiaries, is also being recommended.

The programme is experiencing a low absorption rate particularly with respect to measures aimed for the integration of TCNs as well as measures of forced return as a result of the developments within the sector. Given the volatility of the sector, the priorities outlined in the NP for such measures should be analysed and reconsidered with a view to take into account the situation on the ground.

In addition, under Specific Objective 2 (Integration/legal migration) a degree of fragmentation and overlap between projects was noted. Most of the projects under SO 2 overlap in terms of content, although these address different target groups. In this regard, additional coordination is required, particularly where similar projects are identified so as to ensure that the provision of similar services is further streamlined in order to avoid duplication of efforts and possibly encourage the grouping of projects. This should provide better quality services for migrants whilst at the same time reduce administrative burden in the management and coordination of such projects.

[1] The commitment excludes technical assistance.

[2] COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece.

[3] COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece.

[4] Such assessment was made through the data collection exercise carried out for the compilation of result and impact indicators as well as data regarding the financial implementation of the Programme.

[5] Guidance on the Common Monitoring and evaluation framework for AMIF and ISF, May 2017.

[6] Strategy for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants, pg. 3.

[7] Supported through EIF 2007-2013.