Asylum study backs shared responsibility between EU countries

One of the crucial questions facing EU asylum policy is the extent to which countries share the demands of asylum seekers. A new study by Parliament’s internal policies department on "burden sharing between member states for the reception of asylum seekers" says sharing responsibility between states is economically feasible and logical. It also underlines the currently uneven distribution of asylum costs across Europe with countries like Malta, Spain and Italy shouldering the heaviest burden.

In a series of reports adopted last year as part of its first reading of the "asylum package" MEPs backed minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, a system to compare fingerprints, setting up an asylum support office and international protection.

These reports set out Parliament’s position, including the principle that all 27 EU members should share the burden of receiving asylum seekers.

In Parliament’s first reading in May last year, MEPs called for a binding mechanism to be set up before 2012. This point seems to be the hot potato which is blocking the package in the Council on Ministers.

Financial compensation per applicant

According to the study in 2007 Europe received just 14% of the world's refugees. Some 220,000 asylum requests were received by all EU countries. This corresponds to less than one asylum seeker per 2,200 European citizens.

The study points out three options for responsibility sharing at European level. These include greater cooperation and harmonisation (i.e. aiming to improve equalisation of costs per applicant), financial compensation such as a set amount per applicant or a fund-based mechanism. It also backs the physical relocation of asylum seekers.

"Bring this package to fruition"

For Spanish Socialist Antonio Masip the rapporteur for one of the four reports in the package (minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers): "it is right time to sum up different wills and criteria in order to bring this package to fruition for moral reasons, for being consequent, for democratic Europe".

In October, the Civil Liberties Committee deplored the reluctance of the Council to introduce a binding mechanism in asylum. "This matter is about solidarity, and voluntary solidarity is a joke. Some countries do not want to help," Maltese MEP Simon Busuttil said at the time.