

# INFO FLASH 17/01

The European Commission has drawn conclusions on past initiatives, such as [aid programmes under the European Social Funds \(2007-2014\)](#), has adopted [stronger rules to fight terrorism financing](#), and has proposed to set a [new capacity building initiative for micro-credit and social finance providers](#) and to [reinforce the Schengen Information System to better fight terrorism and cross-border crime](#). In addition, it has issued [data on social protection across the EU](#) and on [EU citizens' main concerns](#), a publication on [child returnees from conflict zones](#), a [comparative analysis on non-discrimination law in Europe](#) and an [assessment of Social Investment Synergies](#).

On 1/01, [Malta took over the Presidency of the Council of the EU](#), a body that is responsible for approving and debating over a big number of Commission proposals with the European Parliament and whose Presidency has the advantage of giving an orientation to the EU policy output. Malta has prioritised migration, terrorism and radicalisation on top of its agenda, as [its official programme](#), a [briefing note by Weber-Shandwick](#) and [a press release by ECRE](#) indicate and assess.

As for EU agencies, [Frontex has created a new pool of return experts](#) who will support the return of migrants across the EU, [while FRA presented its major goals for 2017](#) as well as [its calendar of activities](#).

At national level, ECRE reports that [the suspension of Dublin procedures to Greece set to end on 15 March 2017](#) as first step towards the full restoration of the system in Greece, while [German ministers agree tougher rules for migrants posing security risk](#). In Italy [a large-scale expansion of detention centres might be implemented](#) for tougher migration control, and [the number of Nigerian women trafficked to Italy for sex almost doubled in 2016](#).

## EU INSTITUTIONS

### European Commission

**(5/01) The European Social Fund has helped almost 10 million Europeans to find a job between 2007 and 2014.** The European Commission has published an evaluation report of investments under the European Social Fund (ESF) during the 2007-2013 period, with specific reports for each Member State. The [report](#) shows that by the end of 2014, at least 9.4 million European residents found a job with support from the Fund. 8.7 million gained a qualification or certificate. Other positive results, such as increased skills levels, were reported by 13.7 million participants. According to the evaluation, between 2007-2014, the European Social Fund has provided essential support to implementing national and EU priorities for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including the Europe 2020 targets and

country-specific recommendations in the framework of the European Semester. Full press release [here](#).

**(22/12) EIF and European Commission launch new capacity building initiative for micro-credit and social finance providers.** The [European Investment Fund \(EIF\)](#) and the European Commission are announcing a new initiative to help micro-credit and social enterprise finance providers develop their businesses under the [EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation \(EaSI\)](#). The new 'EaSI Capacity Building Investments Window' will reinforce the capacity of selected financial intermediaries in the areas of microfinance and social enterprise finance. Through equity investments (such as seed financing, risk capital) mostly, EIF will support the development of these finance providers, for instance by opening a new branch, investing in human resources, developing a new IT tool or financing certain expenses. Ultimately, these investments will help increase the offer and opportunities for micro-borrowers and social enterprises. Full press release [here](#).

**(22/12) Autumn 2016 Standard Eurobarometer: Immigration and terrorism continue to be seen as the most important issues facing the EU.** Europeans continue to see immigration and terrorism as the major challenges facing the EU at the moment, and they strongly support the political priorities of the European Commission. Immigration and terrorism continue to be seen as the most important issues facing the EU, albeit at a slightly lower level than at the last survey in spring 2016. Support for the European Union's priorities and policies remains strong, and has increased since spring 2016. These are two key results of the latest [Standard Eurobarometer survey](#) published today, together with the Special Eurobarometer survey "Future of Europe". Immigration and terrorism are seen as the major challenges facing the EU. At national level, the main concerns are unemployment and immigration. The economic situation is in third place. Full press release [here](#).

**(22/12) European Commission welcomes progress in relations between the European Union and Switzerland.** Following the Swiss Parliament's adoption of the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals on 16 December 2016 and the meeting of the EU-Switzerland Joint Committee on 22 December, [the Commission welcomes the progress in the bilateral relations between the European Union and Switzerland](#) in several areas. The balance achieved around the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals on 16 December 2016 should make it possible to preserve the integrity of the contractual commitments between the European Union and Switzerland. However, the implementing order will have to provide certain clarifications and guarantees on key points. Questions about access to information about job vacancies and full respect for the rights of frontier workers are particularly important. The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, who has been personally involved in the search for a solution with his Swiss counterparts for the past eighteen months, said: "The Swiss authorities and the European institutions have worked tirelessly to find a solution that would guarantee full respect for one of our founding principles: the free movement of persons. The Commission will closely monitor the implementation of this solution. 2017 could be a milestone in the development of closer relations between the European Union and Switzerland, with a view to enhancing still further the vitality of our area of freedom - of all forms of freedom - to the benefit of all our citizens".

**(21/12) Security Union: Commission proposes to reinforce the Schengen Information System to better fight terrorism and cross-border crime.** The Commission has proposed to strengthen the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the Schengen Information System (SIS), as announced in the [Communication](#) setting out the way forward towards the

achievement of an effective and sustainable EU Security Union and as reiterated in President Juncker's [State of the Union Address](#). Consulted 2.9 billion times in 2015, SIS is the most widely used information sharing system for border management and security in Europe. The proposed improvements will further enhance the ability of the system to fight terrorism and cross-border crime, improve border and migration management and ensure an effective information exchange between Member States to increase the security of European citizens. As concluded by the Commission in its evaluation report on SIS, also presented today, the system has a clear added value at EU level and has been an outstanding operational and technical success. The evaluation also identifies areas for technical and operational improvements to further increase the effectiveness of the system – which can only be as efficient as the data it is fed. Full press release [here](#).

### **(21/12) Security Union: Commission adopts stronger rules to fight terrorism financing.**

The European Commission has adopted a package of measures to strengthen the EU's capacity to fight the financing of terrorism and organised crime, delivering on the commitments made in the [Action Plan against terrorist financing](#) from February 2016. The proposals being presented by the Commission will complete and reinforce the EU's legal framework in the areas of money laundering, illicit cash flows and the freezing and confiscation of assets. Presented alongside the third Progress Report on the Security Union, today's proposals will ensure a strong and coordinated European response in the fight against terrorism financing, bringing the EU one step closer towards an effective and genuine [Security Union](#). With today's proposals, as highlighted in the third Progress Report towards an effective and genuine Security Union, the European Commission is strengthening the capacity of the EU to fight terrorism and organised crime, making it harder for terrorists and criminals to finance their activities whilst making it easier for the authorities to detect and stop their financial movements. Detecting suspicious financial flows and cutting off the sources of financing is one of the most effective ways to stop potential terrorist attacks and criminal activities. The tracking of financial flows can also provide police and law enforcement authorities with crucial information and effective tools for their investigations. Full press release [here](#).

## **European Parliament**

**(3/01) EU Council: Maltese MEPs share their expectations for their country taking over the presidency.** Malta has taken over the rotating presidency of the EU Council from Slovakia. This means that for the next six months the small island state plays a key role in setting the agenda, finding compromises and addressing a range of challenges such as the migration crisis and the expected start of the Brexit negotiations. [Maltese MEPs were asked what their hopes and expectations were](#) for their country's first ever presidency of the EU Council.

## **European Council / Council of the EU**

**(1/01) 2017 Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union Priorities.** Malta has taken over the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the EU Institution who gathers 28 Ministers of Member States governments and is responsible for passing and discussing EU legislation with the European Parliament on a number of policy areas. Malta has put migration, terrorism and radicalisation at the core of its programme for the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 2017. You can access the Presidency programme [here](#). The commented list of priorities by Weber Shandwick is available [here](#).

## Others

**(10/01) Frontex - Frontex creates a new pool of return experts.** Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has launched a pool of experts who will support the return of migrants across the EU. The experts drawn from member states and Schengen associated countries will be at the disposal of Frontex. The creation of the pool is part of agency's expanded mandate. The return pool will ultimately consist of 690 return monitors, return escorts and return specialists. Its size was based on past return operations, risk analysis and return activities foreseen for this year. "Our ability to draw on a pool of qualified return officers and experts will help increase efficiency and provide already overstretched national authorities with much needed support. This is particularly important in Greece and Italy, which received record numbers of migrants last year," said Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri. In December, Frontex issued the first call for voluntary contribution to the new pool. In the first round of responses Frontex received replies from member states with contributions that met 57 % of the pool's needs. Full press release [here](#).

**(3/01) FRA - Looking forward to 2017. This year the Agency turns 10.** To mark the occasion, a series of high profile events are planned, starting with the FRA 10 year symposium in late February in Vienna. This is to publicly acknowledge and give thanks to the host country that has greatly supported the Agency over the last ten years. Other events will focus on the Fundamental Rights report 2017 and its focus on 10 years of fundamental rights achievements. This will take place in Brussels with the support of the Maltese Presidency. Then another anniversary event in Brussels will showcase the main results from the Agency's second minorities and discrimination survey. This is the largest EU-wide survey of experiences of and attitudes towards some of Europe's most marginalised communities, including Roma, Muslims, and other minority/migrant groups. With intolerance and hate an increasing concern across many Member States, the results should galvanise efforts to address this worrying trend. Full press release [here](#). Full 2017 calendar of activities [here](#).

**(21/12) Social protection in 2014 - 28.7% of EU GDP spent on social protection - Highest ratios in France and Denmark.** Since 2011, social protection expenditure in the European Union (EU) has increased slightly, from 28.3% of GDP in 2011 to 28.7% in 2014, according to data from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. In 2014, the two main sources of funding of social protection at EU level were general government contributions from taxes, making up 40% of total receipts, and social contributions at 54%. Report [here](#).

## COUNCIL OF EUROPE

**(11/01) Council of Europe worried about Slovenia's asylum rules (via POLITICO.eu).** Slovenian government plans to toughen asylum rules have caused concern at the Council of Europe, its Secretary-General, Thorbjørn Jagland, said. In a [letter](#) to Slovenia's Prime Minister Miro Cerar, Jagland wrote that although it is "understandable" that countries which have seen influx of refugees and asylum seekers "amend their approaches," it's "vital" that national reforms "uphold important human rights guarantees. "I am concerned by amendments ... proposed by your government which, if adopted, will change the conditions of entry and expulsion of migrants and asylum seekers into Slovenia, raising a number of issues under European Convention on Human Rights," Jagland wrote. Slovenia's government backed amendments to asylum laws that give, in exceptional circumstances, the authorities powers

to turn down asylum applicants at the border and automatically expel migrants and refugees who entered the country illegal, local press agency STA [reported](#). Full article [here](#).

## **CIVIL SOCIETY**

**(14/01) The Guardian - Aid in reverse: how poor countries develop rich countries.** We have long been told a compelling story about the relationship between rich countries and poor countries. The story holds that the rich nations of the OECD give generously of their wealth to the poorer nations of the global south, to help them eradicate poverty and push them up the development ladder. Yes, during colonialism western powers may have enriched themselves by extracting resources and slave labour from their colonies – but that’s all in the past. These days, they give [more than \\$125bn \(£102bn\) in aid](#) each year – solid evidence of their benevolent goodwill. This story is so widely propagated by the aid industry and the governments of the rich world that we have come to take it for granted. But it may not be as simple as it appears. The US-based Global Financial Integrity (GFI) and the Centre for Applied Research at the Norwegian School of Economics [recently published](#) some fascinating data. They tallied up all of the financial resources that get transferred between rich countries and poor countries each year: not just aid, foreign investment and trade flows (as [previous studies](#) have done) but also non-financial transfers such as debt cancellation, unrequited transfers like workers’ remittances, and unrecorded capital flight (more of this later). As far as I am aware, it is the most comprehensive assessment of resource transfers ever undertaken. Full article [here](#).

**(13/01) ECRE - Italy: Large-scale expansion of detention centres for tougher migration control.** Following Italy’s change of government, a [Circular](#) outlining a stricter policy on migration control by the Head of the Italian Police was [distributed](#) to police authorities across Italy. One of the measures was large-scale use of detention to control irregular migration and promote returns to third countries. The Circular echoes the latest position of the Ministry of Interior, which has committed to an [expansion](#) of detention centres ([CIE](#)) with reference to a target of one CIE in every Italian region. At the end of 2015, 7 CIE were operational across the country according to the [Roadmap on Relocation](#). ASGI has sharply [criticised](#) the proposal for yet again encouraging the reopening of detention centres despite the widely acknowledged failure of such policies in the past. High costs, degrading conditions and limited impact on returns have been highlighted by various political bodies, including the [Senate](#), and have led previous governments to dramatically reduce the number of CIE in the country. On the other hand, the [“hotspot” approach](#) has reinvigorated systematic resort to detention, leading to critical violations of human rights against refugees and migrants entering Italy. Full press release [here](#).

**(13/01) ECRE - Malta prioritises migration as it takes over Presidency of the Council of the EU.** On the first of January Malta took over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union from Slovakia. The Republic of Malta set out its [priorities](#) and migration is a key priority. Malta has set out to ensure that migration remains at the top of the political agenda and introduce concrete objectives including strengthening and streamlining of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), revising the Dublin Regulation, transforming the European Asylum Support Office, effectively implementing the relocation system and adopting a holistic approach to the internal and external aspect of migration. This holistic approach will according to the Maltese Prime Minister, Joseph Muscat [resemble](#) the EU-Turkey deal. The questionable legality of the EU-Turkey deal has previously been [commented](#) by ECRE. Maltese Members of European Parliament (MEPs)

have [confirmed](#) this approach. Even though implementing the relocation system is one of the concrete objectives mentioned by the presidency, Malta's Ambassador to Poland, Natasha Meli Daudey, [hinted](#) that some countries would not have to participate in the relocation system if they contribute in a different way. ECRE intends to work closely with the Maltese presidency on the reform of CEAS and has recently published [comments](#) on the proposals. Full press release [here](#).

**(13/01) ECRE - Germany: suspension of Dublin procedures to Greece set to end on 15 March 2017.** Dublin procedures involving transfers to Greece have been [formally suspended](#) by the German Ministry of Interior since January 2011. However, with the latest decision of the Ministry of 30 December 2016 the suspension of Dublin procedures to Greece is set to end on 15 March 2017. This is the date presented by the European Commission as the starting point for the reinstatement of Dublin procedures vis-à-vis Greece in its latest [Recommendation](#). In accordance with the guidance of the Commission, Germany has clarified that vulnerable asylum seekers, including unaccompanied children, will not be subject to such procedures at the moment. The decision to reinstate transfers comes at a time when the Greek authorities face substantial challenges in ensuring an adequate reception system, resulting in unprecedentedly dire living conditions for refugees. Full press release [here](#).

**(12/01) The Guardian - Number of Nigerian women trafficked to Italy for sex almost doubled in 2016.** The number of Nigerian women travelling by boat from Libya to Italy almost doubled last year, with the vast majority of new arrivals victims of sex trafficking and exploitation, according to the [International Organisation for Migration](#). The IOM believes approximately 80% of the 11,009 Nigerian women registered at landing points in Sicily in 2016 were trafficked, and will go on to live a life of forced prostitution in Italy and other countries in [Europe](#). The figure is almost double that of 2015, when 5,600 women were registered by the IOM. The 2016 figures represent an almost eightfold increase from 2014, when 1,450 Nigerian women were registered at landing points in Sicily. Full article [here](#).

**(10/01) POLITICO.eu - Muslim parents must send children to mixed swimming lessons, court rules.** Muslim girls cannot be exempt from mixed swimming lessons, the European Court of Human Rights ruled. The Strasbourg court dismissed an appeal by Muslim parents in Switzerland who argued that their daughter should not have to attend swimming classes alongside boys. The court said the need for a full education prevailed over the parents' wish to have their children exempted from mixed swimming lessons, the ECHR [said](#) in a press release, adding that schools had a "special role" to play in integrating children, especially those from foreign backgrounds. Full article [here](#).

**(10/01) Reuters - German ministers agree tougher rules for migrants posing security risk.** Germany's interior and justice ministers, representing the two blocs in Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling coalition, agreed on tougher measures for asylum seekers whose documents are not in order or who are deemed to pose a security threat. Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere and Justice Minister Heiko Maas resolved to tighten the security rules after the Christmas market attack in Berlin in which a failed Tunisian asylum seeker killed 12 people. "We have agreed on the introduction of mandatory residency, in layman's terms: stricter domicile requirements for asylum seekers who have been deceptive with their identities," de Maiziere, a member of Merkel's conservatives, told reporters. "Secondly, it will now be easier to take people into custody for deportation," he added after meeting Maas, a

member of the Social Democrats - the junior partner in the coalition government. Full article [here](#).

**(9/01) Open Society Foundation - Q&A: A New Way to Access Higher Education for—and by—Displaced Syrians.** The Jamiya Project was established in 2016 with a focus on overcoming the barriers that refugees face in accessing higher education. Jamiya blends online and in-person university courses for Syrians in Jordan, and aims to create a replicable blueprint that can be deployed in future refugee crises. Founder and director Ben Webster talked to us about Jamiya’s distinctive approach to providing education during displacement. Full interview [here](#).

**(6/01) POLITICO.eu - Aussie immigration architect: Europe ‘just making up excuses’.** At a time when European leaders are looking to Australia’s controversial asylum program for inspiration, the man who built it says all that’s needed to make it work on the Continent is the political will. [In an interview with POLITICO](#), Jim Molan, a retired major general and the co-author of the Australian asylum policy, said Europe’s migration crisis is not inevitable. Australia’s success is, he said, “not about the geography; it is about government resolve.” Molan believes Europe could adopt Australia’s three-pillar approach, turning back boats on the Mediterranean, processing asylum seekers offshore and resettling them outside of the Continent, in order to stop the influx.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

**EPRS - [Work-Life Balance In The EU](#)**

**European Commission (RAN) - [Child returnees from conflict zones](#)**

**European Commission (DG EMPL) - [Assessing Social Investment Synergies](#)**

**European Commission - [A comparative analysis of non-discrimination law in Europe](#) (2016)**

**OECD - [Migration: An overlooked tool for local development](#) (Blog)**

**Human Rights Watch – [Word Report](#) (2017)**

**LSE - [How European integration influences the way we think about redistribution of income](#) (Blog)**

**Statewatch - [Eighth report on relocation and resettlement: Commission welcomes increase in relocations and ignores harmful systematic effects](#) (Analysis)**

**Weber-Shandwick – [Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU](#) (Briefing)**

**Coram International - [Strengthening the capacity of professionals in the EU to fulfil the rights of vulnerable children](#) (EU Project)**