

# INFO FLASH 21/02

## EU INSTITUTIONS

### European Commission

**(14/02) A Europe that delivers: Commission presents ideas for a more efficient European Union.** Ahead of the Informal Leaders' meeting on 23 February 2018, the European Commission is today presenting a number of practical steps that could make the European Union's work more efficient, and improve the connection between the leaders of the EU institutions and the citizens of Europe. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said today: "With the Bratislava Roadmap, the Rome Declaration and now the Leaders' Agenda, Europe has rightly been focused on creating a Union that delivers concrete and tangible results for its citizens on the issues that matter to them. We must continue on this path. I have always said that form should follow function – now is not the time for long discussions of institutional reform or Treaty change. There are, however, a number of steps we can take to make our work even more efficient in delivering on our key priorities. There are many options but the goal must be one and the same: creating a Europe that delivers." Full press release [here](#).

**(12/02) Commission report: Employment and social situation in the EU continues to improve.** Backed by a robust economic growth, employment in the EU continued to rise more strongly than expected in the third quarter of 2017, while unemployment figures declined further according to the latest Quarterly Review on Employment and Social Developments in Europe. Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, commented: "Growth is back in Europe. Employment in the EU reached the highest level ever recorded with more than 236 million people in jobs. And unemployment is steadily declining. We should make the most of this positive economic momentum and deliver on new and more effective rights for citizens that we laid down in the European Pillar of Social Rights: fair working conditions, equal access to the labour market and decent social protection. Now is the time to make sure all citizens and workers can benefit from these positive evolutions on the labour market." Compared to a year before, EU employment rose by 1.7%. This corresponds to an additional 4 million people employed, of which 2.7 million in the euro area. Permanent jobs and full-time employment were the main contributors to this expansion. Between the third quarter of 2016 and 2017, the number of employees with permanent contracts grew by 2.8 million. This increase is three times higher than the rise in temporary contracts (900.000). The number of full-time workers surged by about 3 million, up to 181 million, while part-time workers increased by about 300.000 up to 42.7 million. Full press release [here](#).

**(12/02) Border management: European Border and Coast Guard Agency strengthens operational cooperation with Albania.** Today, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos and Fatmir Xhafaj, Minister of Interior of the Republic of Albania, initialled the draft status agreement for operational cooperation between the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Albania. Once in force, the agreement will allow the Agency to provide assistance in the field of external border management and will enable European Border and Coast Guard Agency teams to be swiftly deployed on Albanian territory in case of a sudden shift in migratory flows. Commissioner Avramopoulos said: "I

would like to thank the Albanian authorities for the fruitful negotiations and their commitment to reaching an agreement so quickly. Albania is a frontrunner in the region, and the agreement will serve as a role model for similar arrangements we are negotiating with other partners in the Western Balkans. Closer cooperation between Albania and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency will allow us to be quicker and more flexible in the way we respond to any potential migratory challenges. It is an important step forward and is in the best interests of both Albania and the European Union." Full press release [here](#).

**(7/02) Winter 2018 Interim Economic Forecast: A solid and lasting expansion.** Growth rates for the euro area and the EU beat expectations last year as the transition from economic recovery to expansion continues. The euro area and EU economies are both estimated to have grown by 2.4% in 2017, the fastest pace in a decade. This robust performance is set to continue in 2018 and 2019 with growth of 2.3% and 2.0% respectively in both the euro area and EU. Valdis Dombrovskis, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: "The European economy is outperforming expectations and the robust growth is set to continue into next year. We should continue our work on ensuring that the benefits of this growth are felt by all Europeans. We should use this time to make our economies more resilient and deepen the Economic and Monetary Union." Pierre Moscovici, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, said: "Europe's economy has entered 2018 in robust health. The euro area is enjoying growth rates not seen since before the financial crisis. Unemployment and deficits continue to fall and investment is at last rising in a meaningful way. Economic growth is also more balanced than it was a decade ago - and provided we pursue smart structural reforms and responsible fiscal policies - it can also be more durable. This window of opportunity to reform will not remain open forever: the moment to take the necessary ambitious decisions to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union is now." Full press release [here](#).

## European Parliament

**(21/02) MEPs propose ways to cut cash flows to terrorists.** To cut off the flow of funds to terrorists, EU countries must share intelligence more proactively and track transactions more closely, MEPs said on Wednesday. A key way to fight terrorism is to cut off sources of funding such illicit trade in goods, firearms, oil, drugs, cigarettes and cultural objects, but also slavery and child exploitation, said Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs on Wednesday. They point out that funding for terrorist groups is supplied not only from outside Europe, but also within it, for example by international non-profit organisations, charities, foundations and networks, acting as a cover for abusive practices. Full press release [here](#).

**(7/02) Combating social inequalities in the EU.** The consequences of rising socio-economic inequalities for European citizens [was] discussed by MEPs. Globalisation, technological changes, digitalisation and the economic crisis have increased inequalities in the EU. Over the years, the Parliament has repeatedly called for adequate social protection, particularly for vulnerable groups, such as disabled people, those on low incomes, young people and single parents. In a [resolution](#) adopted in November 2017, MEPs stressed that reducing inequalities was a precondition for economic recovery, decent job creation, social cohesion and prosperity in the EU. The [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), publicly backed by the EU and its member states, aims to directly address some of the root causes of inequalities, while in a broader context, fighting inequalities is also part of the reflection process on the future of Europe. Full press release [here](#).

## European Council / Council of the EU

**(19/02) Macroeconomic dialogue with the social partners, 19 February 2018.** The Council presidency, the European Central Bank and the European Commission met with European social partners on 19 February 2018 to discuss the macroeconomic outlook and how to make the economy more resilient. In his opening statement, Vladislav Goranov, minister for finance of Bulgaria and president of the Council said: "In the last decade, Europe went through a long period of difficulties, suffering inter alia from the insufficient degree of economic resilience. The recent economic and financial crisis revealed that many EU member states had vulnerabilities which proved very costly. Even though the EU economy has recently gained momentum and economy expansion is expected to continue in the near future, a number of challenges remain, most notably on the labour market." "Atypically low wage growth coupled with persisting long-term and youth unemployment in some member states constrain private consumption and economic growth. Therefore, this is the moment to equip our economies with appropriate instruments to better withstand future shocks, to deal with them efficiently and to be able to rebound as quickly as possible while taking the necessary steps to better utilize labour resources." Full press release [here](#).

## Others

**(21/02) EU Committee of the Regions - Cities and regions "central" to women's progress in Mediterranean region.** Local and regional administrations should catalyse improvements in the position of women in the southern and eastern Mediterranean by taking a central role in extending access to education for women, promoting women to public office, and easing their entry to the labour market, the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) argues in a set of recommendations adopted on 21 February. Full press release [here](#).

**(19/02) Eurostat - Access to social services - Almost 4 in 10 children in the EU receive formal childcare services - 7 out of 10 EU households with one or more children are satisfied with the access to these services.** In 2016, 39% of children aged 12 or below in the European Union (EU) received formal childcare services, with 29% paying full or reduced price and 10% using cost free services. The uptake of paid services is similar in urban, suburban and rural areas (about one third of children received paid full or reduced price childcare services in all areas). There is a slight difference with regards to usage of cost free services: 11% for cities, 10% for towns and suburbs and only 6% for rural areas. Full report [here](#).

**(16/02) FRA - Helping to communicate human rights better.** Leading human rights communicators shared their tips on how to make human rights messages more effective. The guidance has been summarised in a meeting report of a seminar held by the Agency from 23 to 24 January. The seminar looked at various ways of being more effective in communicating through practical hands-on examples of best practices in communicating fundamental rights as well as wide-ranging discussions. The summary signposts key actions that human rights communicators at FRA, international organisations, national human rights bodies and civil society should follow up on. FRA is already working on this, exploring ways of building a community of human rights communication practitioners and is drafting a checklist for human rights communications. Full press release [here](#). Seminar report [here](#).

**(16/02) FRA - Intercultural dialogue on integrating migrants and refugees.**

Intercultural dialogue on integrating migrants and refugees. Integration is a two-way process that involves both migrants and the host community considering each other's point of view. This was one of the messages highlighted by the Agency at a peer learning activity event on the role of intercultural dialogue to address migration, refugees and asylum seekers in education. FRA also spoke of the need to [foster inclusive education](#) and gender equality, involving parents, as well as provide adequate training to teachers that also covers fundamental rights. Taken together this would greatly contribute to the [integration of migrants and refugees](#). At the event Member States shared practices covering formal and non-formal education such as recruiting second language teachers, guides on cultural understanding, practical toolboxes and [inter-faith dialogues in communities](#). The event took place on 8 and 9 February in Athens. It was organised jointly by the Greek Ministry of Education and the European Commission. Full press release [here](#).

**(15/02) EASO - Call for applications Migration Media Award 2018.**

The 2018 edition of the Migration Media Award is now accepting applications until 15 May 2018. The Migration Media Award ([www.migration-media-award.eu](http://www.migration-media-award.eu)) funded by the European Union, hosted over 35 winning stories in the 2017 edition showcasing journalistic excellence on migration in the Euro-Mediterranean region. In line with the quality and number of applications received last year, this year's edition will reward up to 48 published stories resulting from time-intensive, un-sensationalistic, in-depth reporting and contributing to balance the narrative on migration, making it, evidence based, nuanced and less polarising. The awards will consist in funding from 750 to 7000 euros towards the production of a second story. Journalists or media houses based in either EU countries or EU South Partner Countries are eligible to apply by submitting an already published journalistic work along with a proposal for a second production. Both productions, actual and intended, need to address one or more of the following themes in the Euro Mediterranean region: Diaspora, Labour migration, Vulnerable groups, Legal and irregular migration. More information [here](#).

**(15/02) European Economic and Social Committee - Turkey's role in the refugee crisis is crucial but there is room for improvement.**

EESC calls for uniform protection of refugees in Turkey and for the establishment of a mechanism to monitor compliance by both sides with the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement on Refugees. At its plenary session on 14 February, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted [an opinion](#) examining the role of Turkey in the refugee crisis. Despite recognising Turkey's efforts in hosting more than three million refugees, the EESC stressed the need for Turkey to grant them the non-discriminatory protection required by international law. Full press release [here](#).

**(14/02) EU Committee of the Regions - Future EU budget: Undermining Cohesion Policy risks undermining Europe's future.**

The President of the European Committee of the Regions, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, warned today that EU cohesion funds must not be cut and must continue to be made available for all regions and cities if the European Union wanted a more united, inclusive, greener and prosperous future. President Lambertz was reacting to a [document](#) released today by the European Commission which sets out options for the EU budget post-2020, and includes significant reductions of the funds for EU cohesion policy. Full press release [here](#).

**(13/02) EU Ombudsman - Ombudsman says Member States must open up their opaque negotiations on EU laws.**

Following a detailed inquiry, the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, has found that the Council of the EU - through practices that inhibit the scrutiny of

draft EU legislation - undermines citizens' right to hold their elected representatives to account. This constitutes maladministration. The Ombudsman specifically criticises the Council's failure systematically to record the identity of Member States taking positions during discussions on draft legislation, and the widespread practice of disproportionately marking documents as not for circulation, or "LIMITE". The approach falls short of what is expected of the Council in terms of legislative transparency. The Ombudsman is now asking the Council systematically to record Member State positions in Council working parties and in COREPER ambassador meetings and, in principle, to make these documents proactively available to the public in a timely manner. Ms O'Reilly is also calling for clear criteria for using the 'LIMITE' status and that the status be reviewed before a law is adopted. Full press release [here](#).

**(9/02) FRA - How the current migration situation in the EU is having an impact on local communities.** Providing adequate and affordable housing for migrants remains one of the main challenges for local communities, according to the Agency's latest focus report on the migration situation in the EU. It looked at how the presence of large numbers of people needing international protection affects local communities in terms of housing, education, the local economy and social responses. While numbers are falling in most locations looked at in 2017 compared to 2016, challenges remain. These include: tackling negative social responses; supporting (social) integration; providing education and healthcare, and addressing the transition from education to employment. FRA already published a report on the impact of migration on local communities in July 2016. This updated version examines how the situation has developed in the seven Member States covered previously (Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Sweden). It also assesses the situation in the seven additional Member States currently covered by the Agency's overviews (Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Spain). Full press release [here](#). Publication [here](#).

**(9/02) FRA - FRA takes part in cities of refuge advisory group.** The Agency took part in the first meeting of the advisory group for the research project '[Cities of Refuge](#)'. The project will look at how the migrant situation poses challenges at the local level. It will explore the relevance of human rights on how local governments welcome and integrate refugees. FRA will contribute with its evidence-based advice on the situation of migrants and refugees in the EU and other ongoing research into communicating rights. The project's field research will run from 2018 to 2019. The advisory group also includes representatives from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) and the Mayor of Middelburg. The meeting took place in Middelburg in the Netherlands on 30 January. Full press release [here](#).

**(8/02) EIB - 3.7 billion euros to tackle migration and build resilience in Europe's Neighbourhood - EU Bank welcomes European Parliament vote.** Today's vote gives the green light to the EU Bank for an extra 3.7 billion euros in support of the Bank's Economic Resilience Initiative to target migration in the EU's Southern Neighborhood and the Western Balkans. It allows for an increase in financing for Europe's Eastern Partnership countries, including Ukraine and confirms the EIB as the key EU partner in development finance by increasing the overall guarantee for EIB financing outside of the EU by an extra 5.3 billion euros. This will in effect allow for 32.3 billion euros of financing out of Europe for the 2014-2020 period. Full press release [here](#).

**(6/02) Future of Europe: cities and regions want a reinvented European Union based on solidarity, multi-level governance and proximity with the local and regional level.**

Results of a pan-European study from the London School of Economics (LSE) collecting the views of local and regional authorities and regional parliaments on the future of Europe and the role they wish to play in a renewed Union were presented on 6 February at the meeting of the Committee of the Regions' Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs ([CIVEX](#)). A majority of respondents said that their favoured path for a reformed EU would be through strengthened "multi-level governance" and greater focus on areas relevant to citizens' daily lives rather than treaty changes or new EU ministerial positions. Having more clarity in the distribution of competences between the various levels of governments is, in their views, of greater importance than having more power. A clear majority of cities and regions also insist on cohesion being the number one EU policy priority and that such policy should be available to all EU regions. Full press release [here](#).

## **COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

**(16/02) Sweden should enhance protection of asylum seekers and persons with disabilities.** "Sweden's renewed commitment to participate in the relocation of asylum seekers and to increase resettlement are positive signals, but it's time to lift the restrictions imposed on asylum seekers at the height of the 2015 migration crisis", says the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, in a report released today following his visit to the country in October 2017. While noting the urgency of strengthening European solidarity and creating safe and legal avenues for people seeking protection in Europe, the Commissioner calls on Sweden to lift the restrictions on the right to family reunification and to give refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection the same rights in this regard. "Sweden should move beyond emergency mode and return to the levels of protection in place before the surge of arrivals", said the Commissioner. Concerned by the humanitarian consequences of the amendment to the Law on the Reception of Asylum Seekers, he calls on the authorities to ensure that the basic needs of those rejected asylum seekers who cannot be returned and are at risk of destitution are met. Full press release [here](#).

**(13/02) Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: workable strategies.** In a new [report](#) published today, the Council of Europe's [Lanzarote Committee](#) analyses the strategies used by 26 European countries(\*) to protect children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust (extended family and persons close to the child who exercise influence over the child). According to the report, states-parties to the Council of Europe's Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse ([Lanzarote Convention](#)) are undertaking effective steps in this field. Enabling children to take an active part in the development and adoption of policies is a highly promising practice. Almost all parties' national authorities cooperate with civil society organisations and the private sector in awareness-raising, education and training of people working with children to prevent child sexual abuse. The report stresses the important role of the media in informing about child sexual abuse paying particular attention to the full respect for the privacy and the rights of the child. In Croatia and Romania, for instance, it is prohibited to reveal the identity or any other information about the private life of a child. Full press release [here](#).

**(8/02) Training on reception and integration of migrants and refugees for local authority officials in Athens.** On 8-9 February 2018 in Athens, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees ([SRS](#)), together with the [municipality of](#)

[Athens](#), is co-organising a training session for local authority officials on their interaction with refugees and migrants in terms of emergency assistance, social assistance, housing and integration. Social workers, interpreters and other staff working with almost 4,000 asylum seekers and relocation candidates currently in Athens will be among the participants. The training will include sessions on refugee experiences, cohesion and integration, particular needs of children, with or separated from their families, as well as discussions based on real-life scenarios and exchanges of good practices. The programme was developed by [Migration Yorkshire](#) and will be delivered by Ms Dinah Beckett, the Regional Coordinator for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Mr Bill Dennis, the Integration and Partnerships Manager at Migration Yorkshire. Both facilitators have been working with local authorities by providing guidance and training in the context of migrants and refugees. Full press release [here](#).

## **CIVIL SOCIETY**

**(14/02) ECRE - European Ombudsman: lack of transparency regarding EU Member States' positions during negotiations amount to maladministration.** On 13 February 2018, the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, published her [recommendations](#) in a case regarding the (lack of) transparency at the Council of the European Union by failing to record and make publicly available the positions of the different EU Member States during negotiations on legislative proposals. The recommendations are a result of a detailed inquiry carried out by the Ombudsman in consultation with the Council of the European Union and by virtue of a [public consultation](#) with different stakeholders. The Ombudsman has found that the current practice of the Council constitutes maladministration. According to the European Ombudsman, "it's almost impossible for citizens to follow the legislative discussions in the Council between national government representatives. This 'behind-closed-doors' approach risks alienating citizens and feeding negative sentiment". Full press release [here](#).

**(8/02) ECRE - Italy strengthens engagement in controversial migrant management initiatives in Libya.** The Italian government has announced an additional [80 million euro investment](#) in its African Fund to fight illegal migration and the deployment of troops in Libya "[to combat illegal immigration and counter terrorism threats.](#)" The deployment of troops is condemned as a violation of Libyan sovereignty and a [report](#) by ISS Institute for Security Studies and The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime describes the tight link between security and migrant management in Libya as counter-productive. The Italian government has announced an additional investment in the African Fund bringing the total to 240 million Euro's with the ambition of "increasingly effective management of migratory flows" based on "solidarity and security" according to Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano. A similar double agenda is reflected in the transfer of Italian troops from Afghanistan and Iraq to North Africa, according to Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni aiming to combat illegal migration and counter terrorism threats. Full press release [here](#).

**(8/02) ECRE - European countries continue to have difficulties in identifying and protecting victims of human trafficking.** Two recent reports, one by the [OSCE](#) and one by [a group of civil society organizations](#) lead by Forum Réfugiés-Cosi on the TRACKS project, reveals gaps in the way national authorities identify and address the vulnerabilities of human trafficking victims. Trafficking victims have specific reception needs and cannot be subjected to the same procedures as regular asylum seekers. Both reports agree that, amongst other things, harmonizing practices across Europe and increasing information-sharing between authorities is necessary. Full press release [here](#).

## PUBLICATIONS

**MPI** - [Mainstreaming 2.0: How Europe's Education Systems Can Boost Migrant Inclusion](#)

**MPI** - [Designing Civic Education for Diverse Societies: Models, Tradeoffs, and Outcomes](#)

**ECDPM** - [Focus on Migration: Moving backward, moving forward?](#)

**EuradioNantes** - [A difficult agenda?](#) (podcast in French)

**EuradioNantes** - [Asylum and Immigration Statistics: Analysis v. Communication](#) (podcast in French)