

# INFO FLASH 20/03

## EU INSTITUTIONS

### European Commission

**(15/03) EU supports the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) with €82 million.** Today the European Union has made available €82 million for the 2018 operating budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). This funding will provide access to education for 500,000 children, primary health care for more than 3.5 million patients and assistance to over 250,000 vulnerable refugees. High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini said: "Millions of people – men, women and children – depend on UNRWA for vital services: education, healthcare and social services, humanitarian assistance and employment. Supporting UNRWA is a humanitarian and political duty. It is in our collective interest of building peace and security in the Middle East and for the prospects of a negotiated two-state solution. I have shared this message of urgency with our partners participating in today's meeting in Rome, dedicated to UNRWA's funding crisis. As the Agency faces difficult times, we are – and we will continue to be – strong, consistent and reliable supporters of its work". Full press release [here](#).

**(14/03) EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey: the Commission proposes to mobilise additional funds for Syrian refugees.** Following through on its commitment to support Syrian refugees in Turkey, the European Commission is today mobilising additional funding for the Facility for Refugees which has so far given 500.000 children access to education and is supporting 1.2 million refugees with monthly cash transfers. Today's decision establishes the legal framework for the second tranche of €3 billion, as foreseen in the EU-Turkey Statement, mobilising €1 billion from the EU budget. The first tranche of the Facility set up in 2016 was made up of €1 billion from the EU budget and €2 billion from Member States' contributions. The Commission proposes to continue this arrangement, so that the successful and effective work of the Facility for projects benefiting refugees in Turkey can continue. Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, said: "Today the Commission takes the first step in the mobilisation of additional support under the Facility for Syrian Refugees in Turkey. The publication of the second annual report clearly highlights the positive results achieved so far and how vital and effective the Facility is, in supporting the most vulnerable refugees and their host communities in Turkey, thus reducing migratory pressures. I call on Member States to fulfil the commitments taken to mobilise an additional €3 billion, allowing us to continue our indispensable assistance." Full press release [here](#).

**(14/03) European Agenda on Migration: Continuous efforts needed to sustain progress.** Ahead of the March European Council, the Commission is reporting today on progress made under the European Agenda on Migration and sets out further key actions to be taken, including as set out in the Commission's roadmap from December 2017 towards a comprehensive deal on migration by June 2018. The decrease in irregular arrivals has been confirmed throughout 2017 and the first months of 2018, while work is ongoing to save lives, tackle root causes, protect Europe's external borders, and further strengthen cooperation

with international partners. However, with the overall situation remaining fragile, additional efforts, notably stepped up financial resources, will be needed jointly from the Member States and the EU to ensure a continued, effective response to the migration challenge. Full press release [here](#).

**(14/03) Questions and Answers: Adapting the common EU visa policy to new challenges.** The EU has a common visa policy for short-stay visits to the Schengen area, comprising of a set of harmonised rules setting out the countries whose nationals require a visa to travel to the EU and those who do not, the procedures and conditions for issuing short-stay visas, a uniform format for visa stickers and a common Visa Information System (VIS) that records all visa applications and decisions. This means that, for citizens from non-EU countries that are required to hold a visa when travelling to the Schengen area, the procedures and conditions for the issuance of visas are the same. Currently, the visa requirement applies to travellers from 105 non-EU countries or entities. Having common rules also means that a short-stay visa issued by one of the Schengen States entitles its holder to travel and visit all 26 Schengen States for short stays (stays of up to 90 days in any 180-day period; issued for travel purposes only). The visa policy serves various objectives, in particular preventing irregular immigration, as well as safeguarding public order and security. At the same time, the visa policy also aims at facilitating travel to the EU for legitimate and bona fide travellers, supporting tourism and trade, and thus boosting growth in the EU. In 2016, almost 14 million Schengen visas were issued (see the latest statistics on Schengen visas). Full factsheet [here](#).

**(13/03) Commission adopts proposals for a European Labour Authority and for access to social protection.** Today, the European Commission is taking more concrete new initiatives to further deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights. More specifically, the Commission presents its proposal for a European Labour Authority, as announced by President Juncker in his 2017 State of the Union address, as well as an initiative to ensure access to social protection for all workers and self-employed. These initiatives are accompanied by a Communication on the monitoring of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which will be closely linked to the European Semester of policy coordination. Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, Valdis Dombrovskis, said: "Europe is now steadily growing and employment is on the rise, but we have to ensure that growth is more inclusive to the benefit of all. This package sets out a number of steps to make that happen: by making sure the rules for people to live and work across the European Union are well known and enforced, by following up on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, pushing the broader momentum for social rights, and by focusing on access to social protection. A stronger social Europe is a more sustainable Europe." Full press release [here](#). Fact sheet [here](#) and [here](#).

**(12/03) EU expands its support to Libyan municipalities to enhance access to basic and social services for migrants and Libyans.** A new programme worth €50 million, to improve the living conditions and resilience of vulnerable populations in key Libyan municipalities has been adopted under the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (North of Africa window). The new actions will benefit migrants, refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, returnees and host communities alike. Formulated jointly by the European Commission and Italy, the new programme will enhance access to basic and social services for vulnerable people and support local governance, in particular in the Libyan municipalities most affected by migratory flows. This new programme will support the capacities of local public authorities and administrations in providing basic services – health, education, water and

sanitation as well as social services – while improving timely and quality access to these services, in particular for the most vulnerable people. It will cover 24 Libyan municipalities, ensuring a wide and balanced coverage across the country. The programme will be implemented by the Italian Cooperation, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Full press release [here](#).

**(8/03) Frequently asked questions: Action Plan on financing sustainable growth.** The signing of the [Paris Agreement on 12 December 2015](#) and the adoption of the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) on 25 September 2015 marked a noticeable shift in global attitudes towards climate change and environmental degradation. The fact that over 170 countries have now ratified the Paris Agreement sends a powerful signal: the necessity of transitioning to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and circular economic system can no longer be ignored. To achieve the EU's 2030 climate and energy targets agreed in Paris, including a 40% cut in greenhouse gas emissions, around €180 billion of additional investments a year are needed. The scale of the investment challenge is beyond the capacity of the public sector alone. This is why the EU is already providing massive impetus to help attract the required investments. In particular, the extended and reinforced [European Fund for Strategic Investments](#) (EFSI 2.0), in force since 31 December 2017, has a 40% climate-smart investment target. The financial sector has a key role to play in reaching those goals, as large amounts of private capital could be mobilised towards such sustainable investments. However, we also need to ensure that the regulatory framework supports a re-orientation of private capital flows towards sustainable investments while ensuring financial stability. Full fact sheet [here](#).

**(6/03) EU Civil Protection Forum 2018: EU and Tunisia agree to boost cooperation.** Today the European Commission signed an administrative arrangement with Tunisia to boost ties in civil protection and disaster risk management. The document, which was signed at this year's [European Civil Protection Forum](#) in Brussels, outlines key areas of cooperation on disaster prevention, preparedness and response on issues such as forest fires, floods, and search and rescue missions. The signature of this arrangement is an important step in the reinforcement of the [EU-Tunisia Privileged Partnership](#). On the occasion, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides said: "Global challenges such as natural disasters require joint efforts and strong partnerships. The agreement is a win-win for both sides and will mean practical results for people during times of need. It is a tangible sign that EU cooperation with Tunisia is deep and strong. We are ready to support Tunisia as a key civil protection partner in our wider southern neighbourhood. This year's EU Civil Protection Forum has been a great success and this is one of the concrete outcomes." Under the new arrangement, Tunisia will benefit from training for experts, the setting up of joint emergency response plans as well as closer cooperation with the EU's Copernicus satellite system. The move is part of the EU's increasing cooperation with Tunisia in a number of fields. Full press release [here](#).

## European Parliament

**(14/03) Funding Europe's future: EU's post-2020 budget must match policy goals.** MEPs have set out their position on the next long-term EU budget, which should finance new priorities as well as make up for any shortfall caused by Brexit. The European Parliament adopted two resolutions on the expenditure and revenue sides of the next multi-annual financial framework (MFF), to apply from 2021. Full press release [here](#).

## European Council / Council of the EU

**(16/03) African Union - European Union relations: joint visit of AU and EU ambassadors to Central African Republic.** On 7-9 March, the Political and Security Committee of the European Union (EU PSC) travelled to the Central African Republic (CAR) for a joint field visit with the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU PSC). The two PSCs met with the President and the cabinet of ministers of CAR, with the National Assembly, with the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General in CAR, as well as with the Force Commander of the UN mission - MINUSCA. They also met with the panel of facilitators of the African initiative for peace and reconciliation in CAR and had an informal meeting with representatives of the civil society. EU and AU PSCs conveyed common messages on continued engagement and support to the efforts for reconciliation, state building, justice and peace and solidarity with the people of CAR and reconfirmed the need for close EU-AU-UN cooperation in the country. Full press release [here](#).

## Others

**(15/03) EESC - What is not allowed in the real world, must also be a no-go in the virtual world.** EESC calls on Commission to fight violent and discriminatory online content more effectively. The EESC acknowledges the Commission's Communication Tackling Illegal Content Online – Towards and enhanced responsibility of online platforms as a first and useful step but is not satisfied with its scope. It therefore calls on the Commission to establish programmes and effective measures to provide a stable and consistent legal framework for the efficient removal of illegal content. Full press release [here](#).

**(8/03) EU Committee of the Regions - Tackling terrorism: local leaders welcome EU plans to invest in cities to protect communities.** The President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has welcomed a European Union plan to provide funding to build urban defences against terrorist attacks, stressing the role of local authorities in both the prevention and fight against violent radicalisation. Speaking in Brussels, he said that strengthening public protection must go hand-in-hand with tackling social exclusion and warned that proposals to cut EU cohesion policy would therefore undermine these efforts. Full press release [here](#).

**(8/03) EESC - George Dassis calls for a united, democratic, social and free Europe.** The future of democracy in Europe was debated at a two-day European-level conference organised by EESC president George Dassis in the auditorium of Athens' Acropolis museum on 1 and 2 March. Facing an audience of actively engaged participants from EU institutions, Greek government, civil society organizations and universities, George Dassis clearly made the case that the future of democracy is directly linked to a peaceful and federal Europe. "Populism, which is rising dangerously in European countries, cannot be fought with words. The European Union must provide tangible answers to citizens' need for a safe life and for work for themselves and a future for their children", said EESC President George Dassis. "We want a Union that can deliver equal opportunities for all. To tackle populism, to counter the frustration felt by the most vulnerable people in our countries, we must now bring social aspects to the fore, without of course letting the EU economy fall apart." Full press release [here](#).

**(6/03) Eurofund - Evidence-based research is fundamental to gender equality in Europe.** As more women enter the labour market, the EU and Member States reaffirm their commitment to promoting gender equality and progress towards closing the gender pay and

employment gaps. Ahead of International Women's Day on 8 March we invite you to explore the issue of gender equality in depth, to read about the different areas in which gender equality is most urgently needed. Eurofound assists in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies for all EU citizens and those that call Europe home. Evidence-based research is a fundamental stepping-stone on this path to gender equality. Full press release [here](#).

**(6/03) EESC - The 4th European Migration Forum to address labour market inclusion of migrants.** Today sees the opening of the [European Migration Forum](#), a platform for dialogue between civil society, institutions and authorities on the topic of integration of third-country nationals into the labour market. Held for the fourth consecutive year by the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the 2018 Forum has, as its main theme, the challenges and opportunities involved in integrating migrants into the EU's labour markets. With the Multiannual Financial Framework for EU finances under preparation, this year's Forum will also focus on current funding opportunities from EU sources to be used for migrant integration. Full press release [here](#).

## COUNCIL OF EUROPE

**(7/03) Protecting human rights online: new guidelines on internet intermediaries.** The Council of Europe today adopted policy guidelines addressed to its 47 member states on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries such as search engines and social media. The power of such intermediaries as protagonists of online expression is such that their role and impact on human rights, as well as their corresponding responsibilities, should be clarified. In its [Recommendation on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries](#), the Committee of Ministers – the executive body of the organisation- therefore calls on states to provide a human rights and rule of law-based framework that lays out the main obligations of the states with respect to the protection and promotion of human rights in the digital environment, and the respective responsibilities of intermediaries. Full press release [here](#).

## CIVIL SOCIETY

**(19/03) Social Platform - International Federation of Social Workers: Social workers for transformational and sustainable social protection in Europe.** Making the most of the European Pillar of Social Rights for a better life for people goes far beyond the area of employment. Strengthening peoples' resilience and enhancing their capability to react to risks of life require sustainable and transformative social protection. Making the Social Rights a reality on the ground needs an active engagement of social workers. Some people's ability to use social rights for a better life is affected by factors such as their age, disability, income or geographical location. Social workers help people solve and cope with such problems in their everyday lives, reducing fears and giving assurance and confidence to ensure that such problems do not result in a further impoverishment. Full press release [here](#).

**(16/03) ECRE - Austrian Presidency: to focus on external borders rather than internal solidarity.** Revealing its first visions of the Up-coming [Austrian Presidency](#) of the Council of the European Union, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz is announcing a [focus](#) on 'securing external borders' rather than 'only dispute over redistribution.' [Euroactiv](#) quotes Chancellor Sebastian Kurz for the following statement at a news conference on the priorities of the Austrian Presidency: "Our aim is very clear – that in Europe there should not only be a dispute over

redistribution (of refugees) but also, at last, a shift of focus towards securing external borders.” The Chancellor is elected for the [Austrian Peoples Party](#) (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP) in government coalition with the Freedom Party of Austria ([Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ](#)) the alliance and government programme marked a step to the right and the introduction of what has been widely [interpreted](#) as an anti-migrant agenda. Full press release [here](#).

**(16/03) ECRE - European Court of Human Rights: lack of access to the asylum procedure from 2009 to 2012 in Greece violated the applicant’s fundamental rights.** On 15 March 2018, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) in case A.E.A. v. Greece (application no. 39034/12) and found that Greece had violated the human rights of a Sudanese national who was unable to apply for asylum in Greece from 2009 to 2012 due to the systemic deficiencies of the Greek asylum system at the time. The Sudanese national arrived in Greece in April 2009 and was issued with an automatic expulsion order upon his arrival. He was then prevented from having access to the asylum procedure between April 2009 and July 2012, despite successive attempts and the support of NGOs. As a result, he lived in destitution and had no access to social services. In July 2012 the Greek authorities registered his asylum application, which was rejected a year later. Full press release [here](#).

**(16/03) ECRE - Weekly Editorial: EU-Turkey – Deconstructing the deal behind the statement.** This month marks the two-year anniversary of the ignominious EU-Turkey deal. Although rebranded and formalised as a “Statement”, in part to avoid the parliamentary and judicial scrutiny that an international agreement entails, at its heart there is a deal, an agreement for the mutual benefit of the two parties. The true heart of the deal for the EU, its benefit, is the blocking of departures of people from Turkey. As most of those who arrived during the crisis were refugees, this means the containment of refugees, mainly Syrian, in Turkey. This action of preventing of departures or reducing their facilitation, is not even explicitly mentioned in the Statement, it is dressed up in point 3, that Turkey will “take any necessary measure to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration opening...” But there is no doubt that this is what is important to policy-makers who claim that the deal is a success because the measure of success is exactly this: people were prevented from leaving (and thus the EU was saved). Full press release [here](#).

**(15/03) EUObserver.com - Finland has world's most happy migrant population.** Finland takes the top spot as the world's happiest country according to the [World Happiness Report 2018](#), which ranks 156 countries by their happiness levels and was released on Wednesday. Finland's immigrants are also the happiest immigrant population in the world. The four top-ranked countries are all Nordic, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland while Bulgaria ranks lowest among EU states at number 100 on the list. Full article [here](#).

**(14/03) Social Platform - Public consultation on the next EU budget – an opportunity for social cohesion.** Last week, the European Commission ended a group of consultations on EU funds, aiming at gathering input and advice to draft the Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU for the years following 2020. The next EU budget will face a tough challenge due to the decrease in contributions that will take place after Brexit. Many scenarios are described by the European Commission, depending on the willingness of EU leaders and their commitments in terms of budget priorities. The European Council Summit on 23 February agreed that the EU will spend more on stemming irregular migration, on defence and on security. At the same time, very little assurance has been given on the future of cohesion policy. Full article [here](#).

**(14/03) Social Platform - 2018 country reports - A step in the right direction.** With the release by the Commission last week of the winter package, which includes the [2018 country reports](#), we got to the second stage of this year European semester cycle, the governance process that coordinates Member States' economic and social policies and reforms. Compared to the autumn package of stage one, when with the release of the [Annual Growth Survey](#) the assessment focuses on the broader picture and on EU-wide trends, the country reports allow us to zoom in on Member States' socio-economic achievements and challenges. These documents are of utmost importance because they are the basis on which national governments elaborate their [National Reform Programmes and Stability/Convergence Programmes](#) – the documents that detail the specific policies and reforms each country will implement to achieve the [Europe 2020 goals](#) and to comply with the [EU's general fiscal rules](#) – and because they give a clear indication of what challenges the Commission is likely to address in the [Country Specific Recommendations](#) that will be put forward before summer: whatever does not appear in the executive summary of the country reports will not be considered when formulating the recommendations. Full press release [here](#).

**(9/03) ECRE - Libya: return operations running but slow resettlement is jeopardizing the evacuation scheme.** [According](#) to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) 15.000 migrants have been returned from Libya to their country of origin and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has assisted in the evacuation of more than 1,300 refugees from Libya thereby fulfilling the targets announced at the AU-EU-UN Taskforce [meeting](#) in December 2017. However, a modest 25 of the more than 1000 migrants evacuated to Niger have been resettled to Europe and the slow pace is [jeopardizing](#) further evacuations. More than 1000 of the 1300 migrants evacuated from Libya are hosted by Niger and Karmen Sakhr, who oversees the North Africa unit at the UNHCR [states](#) to the EU Observer that the organisation: “were advised that until more people leave Niger, we will no longer be able to evacuate additional cases from Libya.” Full press release [here](#).

**(9/03) ECRE - Push backs and police violence on the rise at Croatian border, report finds.** Various organisations providing daily support to refugees and asylum seekers in Croatia have recently published a [new report](#) pointing to a substantial increase of the number of pushbacks and police violence at the Croatian border. The report is the result of thousands of testimonies from people who have suffered from police brutality, humiliation or serious threats when crossing the border from Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia. Asylum seekers report being hit with sticks, deprived of their belongings and threatened with guns by the Croatian police. They are also denied access to asylum procedures after crossing the border, especially when volunteers offering legal advice are not able to assist them throughout the procedure. Asylum seekers are often put into vans or forced to walk back to the other side of the border. Full press release [here](#).

**(8/03) Social Platform - Building Social Europe 1/4 - Unlocking the Pillar's potential through policy.** It's nearly twelve months since the European Commission released its first concrete proposals for a [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), which aims to deliver new and improve existing social rights for people in the EU. As Social Platform we welcome the Pillar; it's the right tool to bring about the necessary policy changes to address key trends, such as poverty and social exclusion, job precariousness and in-work poverty, and barriers to accessing social protection. However, its success hinges on the use of a comprehensive implementation approach encompassing policy, governance, funding and civil dialogue. In this series of four 'Build Social Europe' blogs I'll take a look at each of these areas in turn, and

layout Social Platform's recommendations on how the EU institutions and Member States can turn the Pillar from words into action. Full press release [here](#).

## **PUBLICATIONS**

**EPC** - [European Pillar of Social Rights: Member states must shoulder the responsibility of delivery](#)

**CEPS** - [More focus needed on integrating migrant women](#)