

INFO FLASH 31/10/2022

EU INSTITUTIONS

European Commission

(26/10) Border management: EU signs agreement with North Macedonia. Today, the European Union and North Macedonia signed an agreement on operational cooperation in border management with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). The President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and the Prime Minister of North Macedonia Dimitar Kovačevski witnessed the signing of the agreement by Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, and Czech Ambassador to North Macedonia Jaroslav Ludva representing the Czech Presidency of the Council, on behalf of the EU, and by Interior Minister Oliver Spasovski, on behalf of North Macedonia. Strengthened operational cooperation between Western Balkans partners and Frontex will contribute to addressing irregular migration and further enhance security at the EU's external borders. Frontex already deploys around 300 officers in the region, including via joint operations at the Union's external borders with Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia under the current status agreements. To ensure the implementation of the status agreement, an Operational Plan will be agreed directly between Frontex and the national authorities of North Macedonia. It will allow Frontex to assist North Macedonia in border management, carry out joint operations and deploy personnel both to the border with the EU, as well with borders of neighbouring Western Balkans partners. This will help to address increasing irregular migration and cross-border crime. Full press release [here](#).

(21/10) The 7th European Migration Forum: Young migrants and refugees should get the same support, regardless of their origin. European organised civil society and citizens have shown unprecedented solidarity with Ukrainian refugees, throwing open their homes, helping these refugees enter the labour market and quickly integrating Ukrainian children into European schools. The EU should now learn from this success story to help all refugees and migrants, the 2022 Forum said. Full press release [here](#).

(18/10) Expert report identifies promising approaches on how to best invest in education and training. Today, the Commission publishes the final report of the Expert Group on Quality Investment in Education and Training, "*Investing in our future: quality investment in education and training*". The experts' report focuses on how to best invest public money in four major areas of education and training expenditure in the EU: teachers and trainers, education infrastructure, digital learning, and equity and inclusion. The expert group identifies promising education and training practices in national contexts, which can serve as inspiration for governments and education institutions across the EU. These include initiatives to reduce teachers' work-related stress, promote their well-being, and raise their pedagogical digital competences; one-to-one tuition and peer tutoring programmes; school building and renovation programmes to increase the quality of facilities; and quality early childhood education and care. Such national practices and reforms of education policies are regularly shared in the context of the [European Education Area](#) strategic framework through the [EEA Working Groups](#), to inspire positive change throughout the European Union. Full press release [here](#).

(12/10) Commission kick-starts work on the European Year of Skills. Following the announcement by President Ursula von der Leyen in her [2022 State of the Union address](#), the Commission has adopted today its [proposal](#) to make 2023 the European Year of Skills. The green and digital transitions are opening up new opportunities for people and the EU economy. Having the relevant skills empowers people to successfully navigate labour market changes and to fully engage in society and democracy. This will ensure that nobody is left behind and the economic recovery as well as the green and digital transitions are socially fair and just. A workforce with the skills that are in demand also contributes to sustainable growth, leads to more innovation and improves companies' competitiveness. Full press release [here](#).

(11/10) Commission steps up action to tackle disinformation and promote digital literacy among young people. Today, the Commission published [Guidelines](#) for teachers and educators in primary and secondary schools, on how to address disinformation and promote digital literacy in their classrooms. The guidelines provide practical support for teachers and educators and include definitions of technical concepts, class-exercises and how to encourage healthy online habits. This toolkit covers three main topics: building digital literacy, tackling disinformation, and assessing and evaluating digital literacy. Full press release [here](#).

European Parliament

(18/10) Frontex: MEPs refuse to discharge EU border agency over its management in 2020. MEPs refused to discharge the 2020 budgets for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the Council, and granted discharge to the European Economic and Social Committee. 345 MEPs voted in favour of the committee recommendation to refuse [discharge](#) to Frontex, 284 voted against (in favour of granting discharge) and 8 abstained. MEPs criticise the “magnitude of the committed serious misconduct” under the previous executive director of the agency, who resigned on 28 April 2022, following the release of a revealing report by the EU’s anti-fraud office, OLAF. The agency failed to protect the fundamental rights of migrants and asylum seekers and, according to media report, was involved in the illegal pushbacks of at least 957 refugees between March 2020 and September 2021, Parliament says. Full press release [here](#).

(18/10) End discrimination and admit Bulgaria and Romania to Schengen, MEPs demand. The European Parliament urges member states to allow Romania and Bulgaria to join the Schengen free-travel area without delay. In a resolution adopted on Tuesday, MEPs say the Council should adopt a decision on Romania and Bulgaria’s accession to the Schengen free movement area by the end of 2022. This should ensure the abolition of checks on persons at all internal borders for both countries in early 2023. The resolution was adopted with 547 votes in favour, 49 votes against, and 43 abstaining. Noting that the Schengen area is “one of the greatest achievements of the European Union”, MEPs criticise the Council’s failure to take a decision on admitting Bulgaria and Romania, even though the two countries have long since fulfilled the necessary conditions. Maintaining internal border controls is discriminatory and has a serious impact on the lives of mobile workers and citizens, MEPs say. By obstructing imports, exports and the free flow of goods from freight ports, they also harm the EU single market. Full press release [here](#).

European Council / Council of the EU

(17/10) Ethiopia: Declaration of the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the intense fighting in the northern part of the country. Reports of intense fighting in northern

Ethiopia, including recent offensives around Adi Daero and Shire, stand in stark contrast to the repeatedly stated commitments by both the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The European Union deplores the dramatic escalation of violence and the irreparable cost to human life, including the confirmed death of a humanitarian worker in Shire who was deployed to bring relief to a population in distress. While the civilian population bears the brunt of the conflict, International Humanitarian Law manifests the clear imperative of unhindered humanitarian access and protection of those delivering emergency relief. Respecting international humanitarian law and human rights is not an option; it is an obligation for all. Full declaration [here](#).

Others

(13/10) CoR - Schengen and migration rights should not be compromised in crises. Restrictions at the EU's internal borders should be re-introduced in crises only as a last resort and with EU consensus, in ways that minimise disruption for border regions, and are limited in time, the European Committee of the Regions has said in response to European Commission proposals to change the Schengen Border Code. The revisions – which would cover the 'Schengen Area' that enables free movement within 22 EU and non-EU countries – follow the experience of uncoordinated closures of national borders during the COVID pandemic. Full press release [here](#).

(12/10) CoR - Europe needs a stronger, modern and simplified cohesion policy to fight growing inequalities. With a set of opinions adopted at its plenary session, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) recalled the paramount role of cohesion policy in reducing disparities between EU regions while helping the Union to achieve a just transition, reducing the dependence from fossil fuels and becoming more energy independent. The ongoing war against Ukraine and the energy crisis accentuated even more the need for a strong cohesion in Europe, while the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that the urgent actions at the EU, national, regional and local level are needed to ensure digital cohesion between territories. Full press release [here](#).

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

(26/10) Publication of the ICC Policy brief on Long-term sustainable housing solutions for the intercultural city. The Intercultural Cities programme is pleased to announce the publication of the Policy brief on “Long-term sustainable housing solutions for the intercultural city”. Housing, and especially the long-term process of creating and settling into a home plays a key role in successful migrant integration. In building intercultural cities, housing is both an area of concern and an opportunity to put the core intercultural integration principles into effective action. However, housing inequality is a significant issue for migrants in Europe. They are more likely to find themselves in overcrowded accommodation, find housing more difficult to access and/or pay for, and are more subject to suffer the negative effects of gentrification. Moreover, the present geopolitical crisis has also put additional pressure on sustainable housing, in particular cities that are on the frontline of providing refuge to people fleeing Ukraine. Initiated to respond to the concerns expressed by the Polish cities that are member of the Intercultural Cities programme, this policy brief focuses on exploring good practice and solutions from cities and communities who seek sustainable and long-term housing solutions for residents. The solutions proposed here are therefore not specific to frontline cities but have been developed in many countries for a variety of

migrants, both forced and voluntary with the view to respond to both emergency and long-term needs and reap the full benefits of migration. Full press release [here](#).

CIVIL SOCIETY

(21/10) EUROCITIES - How to integrate undocumented migrants? An interview with Zurich's Head of Integration Office. Zurich has a plan: all the population must benefit equally from the city's offers and services. And that includes migrants and refugees. The way to achieve this is by offering information in multiple languages and various formats, promoting diversity, designing and providing accessible services, and focussing on vulnerable groups. On 16 and 17 November, Zurich will take part in the [10th Integrating Cities Conference](#), the world's largest summit on migration and integration in Europe's cities. The event will gather politicians and city experts, EU member states, European Parliament and European Commission officials, as well as NGOs, migrant groups, activists and academics. As a teaser for the conference – and to give you one more reason to [register](#) for it – we interviewed Christof Meier, Zurich's Head of Integration Office. He explains how the Swiss city has been dealing with the influx of Ukrainian refugees and talks about Zurich's innovative approach to undocumented migrants. Full press release [here](#).

(14/10) EUROCITIES - Interview with the Deputy Mayor of Utrecht on the integration of refugees. Since the Russian war against Ukraine broke out, over 7 months ago, European cities have done their best to welcome as many refugees as possible. We are talking about millions of people fleeing Ukraine and seeking refuge and shelter all over Europe and cities welcoming them, finding them housing, jobs and schools. Utrecht is one of those cities and between 16-17 November, it's host to the [10th Integrating Cities Conference](#), the world's largest conference on migration and integration in Europe's cities, gathering politicians and experts from cities, member states, and the European Parliament and European Commission, as well as NGOs, migrant groups, activists and academics. As a teaser to the conference, and also to give you even more reasons to [register](#), we present you an interview with Rachel Streefland, Utrecht's First Deputy Mayor, Asylum and Integration explaining the importance of the event as well as the challenges Utrecht has faced so far and the city's initiatives to welcome and integrate refugees. Full press release [here](#).

(14/10) ECRE - European Parliament Assesses Croatia's Readiness to Join Schengen. This week the LIBE Committee in the European Parliament (EP) discussed Croatia's accession to the Schengen zone. The exchange was part of the development of the EP's opinion on Croatia's accession, which is a prerequisite for the final decision, which must be taken by the European Council in unanimity. During the [exchange in the LIBE Committee](#), MEPs remarked that while they consider Croatia to be ready to join the Schengen area, representatives of four different political groups highlighted concerns regarding Croatia's management at the external border, the reports on push-backs and denial of asylum as well as the questions related to the border monitoring mechanism. The [different MEPs involved in developing the EP's opinion](#) will be providing amendments to the [draft report](#) prepared by the rapporteur in the coming weeks with voting expected in the coming month. The [Czech Presidency](#) of the Council of the EU would like Member States to take a decision on the Schengen accession of Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania at the December European Council. Full press release [here](#).

(13/10) PICUM - Immigration detention in transit zones: what European courts say. Immigration detention is understood as the deprivation of liberty of a person because of their migration status. In the EU, states typically apply immigration detention to prevent entry to their territory, to carry out return/deportation procedures, during asylum procedures, and in

the context of Dublin transfer procedures. Currently, immigration detention mostly happens in prison-like centres that are located in the territory of the state. But in certain cases, people may be detained in so-called “transit zones” at the state borders or in airport terminals. At land state borders, people have been detained, for instance, in buildings similar to detention centres or in prefabricated housing; in airports, people are generally detained in lounges, airport police cells, or in buildings next to the airport itself. Often, states do not officially consider detention in transit zones as immigration detention, or deprivation of liberty. This means that this type of detention is less regulated than the one that happens in “traditional” immigration detention centres, and often comes with less safeguards. But European courts, such as the European Court of Human Rights and the EU Court of Justice, have indicated how this practice should be controlled. Full press release [here](#).

(11/10) ICMC - ICMC Co-Organizes Workshop on the Long-Term Expansion of Community Sponsorship for Refugees. On 26-27 September, ICMC and the Canadian Embassy to the Holy See co-organized a hybrid workshop on the community sponsorship of refugees. Participants called for improved dialogue, sustainable funding, and support for volunteers. Full press release [here](#).

(3/10) PICUM - Immigration detention and de facto detention: what the law says. Detaining someone because they do not have the right papers to live in the country they are in should never be an option. Detention is always harmful, disproportionate and ineffective. At PICUM, we are against the use of immigration detention in all circumstances, and we call on Member States and the European Union to put an end to it. An increasing number of [international bodies](#) have also stated that detention for immigration control purposes should be progressively ended. A lot of confusion surrounds the term “detention” in the context of migration. We developed a briefing where we reply to frequently asked questions on the existing legal framework and case law on immigration detention and de facto detention, drawing from the evolving and recent jurisprudence from EU and international bodies. This briefing is addressed to policy-makers working on legal reforms, and civil society organisations advocating for migrants’ rights. Full press release [here](#).

PUBLICATIONS

ECRE/PICUM - [ECRE-PICUM Policy Note: Displacement from Ukraine – the EU’s Financial Response](#)

ECRE - [ECRE Policy Paper: Quo Vadis EU Asylum Reform? Stuck Between Gradual Approach, \(Mini\)-Package Deals and Instrumentalisation](#)

Council of the EU General Secretariat – [Think Tank Review](#) (October)

EPC - [Refugee protection in the EU: Building resilience to geopolitical conflict](#)

EPC - [EU responses to Ukrainian arrivals – not \(yet\) a blueprint](#)

EPC - [Keeping a cool head: How to improve the EU migration crisis response](#)