

INFO FLASH 21/12

The European Commission has centred its activities around the European Agenda on Migration. It presented its [reports on progress made under the Agenda](#) and on the [first deliverables under the Partnership Framework on migration with third countries](#), as well as country-specific programmes on [Burkina Faso](#), the [Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin](#), the [Horn of Africa](#) and a [joint programme with the IOM](#). In addition, it launched [a new call for projects to help cities solve urban challenges](#).

The European Parliament held discussions on the [importance of educating children in emergency situations](#) and a debate with the ACP countries whose participants pointed out that "[Zero immigration has never existed and never will](#)". The Council has approved the [EU's legislative priorities for 2017](#), stroke a compromise with the Parliament on [reinforcing checks of the Schengen external borders](#) and [started negotiations on Eurodac](#) as part of the Common European Asylum System reform.

The Fundamental Rights Agency has looked at the [cooperation between EU justice and home affairs agencies and the Council](#) and at the [fine-tuning EU's migration approach to better safeguard rights](#), while pointing at the [insufficient attention paid to separated migrant children](#).

Among the relevant publications and websites, it is worth mentioning the latest [Think Tank Review](#) of the Council of the EU General Secretariat, the [EU Catalogue of project funded under the the ESIF](#) and the [OECD report on the 2017 Perspective on Global Development](#).

EU INSTITUTIONS

European Commission

(16/12) Urban Agenda: new call for projects worth €50 million to help cities solve urban challenges. The Commission has launched a second call for projects worth €50 million under the Urban Innovative Actions initiative. Cities can directly apply and get EU funding for innovative urban projects. In Vienna, a one-stop-shop of public services was set up to accompany migrants in their integration path in the city. In Madrid, four hubs were established in neighbourhoods with high unemployment rates, to create jobs in the energy, mobility, recycling and food sectors while promoting the solidarity economy. Those are two of the [eighteen winning projects](#) of the first Urban Innovative Actions call launched last year. Today the Commission is launching a second call to reward the most innovative projects put forward by the cities themselves. The new call, with a budget of €50 million from the [European Regional Development Fund](#) (ERDF), will reward the most innovative projects in three categories, in line with the priorities of [the Urban Agenda for the EU](#): the integration of migrants, urban mobility and the circular economy. The call runs from today until mid-April 2017. Full press release [here](#).

(15/12) €170 million to tackle the root causes of instability, irregular migration and forced displacement in the Horn of Africa. To help tackle the root causes of instability, irregular migration and forced displacement in the Horn of Africa, the European Commission has adopted a new set of programmes. The package of 11 measures is worth €170 million and was decided by the third Operational Committee meeting of the Horn of Africa region of

the [EU Trust Fund for Africa](#). It complements 24 previously adopted actions amounting to €436.5 million for the Horn of Africa, which were approved in three packages in [December 2015](#), [April 2016](#) and [October 2016](#). Of the previously adopted actions for the Horn of Africa, €204 million have already been contracted. Among these are national projects in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, and four regional projects. Full press release [here](#).

(15/12) EU and IOM launch initiative for migrant protection and reintegration in Africa along the Central Mediterranean migration routes. The European Union, through the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), the governments of Germany and Italy, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have launched a new initiative to support African countries in responding to the urgent protection needs and tragic loss of life of migrants along the Central Mediterranean migration routes and in strengthening migration governance. The new "EU Trust Fund for Africa and IOM initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration of Returnees along the Central Mediterranean migration routes", benefiting from a €100 million allocation, will cover the Sahel and Lake Chad region and neighbouring countries, including Libya. More information [here](#) and [here](#).

(14/12) EUR 381 million to tackle the root causes of irregular migration in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin. The European Commission has announced the launch of 28 new measures in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin for a total amount of EUR 381 million. Adopted under the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa following the Valletta Summit, these measures will increase stability in the region and tackle the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. Full list of programmes in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Chad [here](#).

(14/12) Commission reports on first deliverables under the Partnership Framework on migration with third countries. The Commission [has reported on first deliverables under the Partnership Framework on migration with third countries](#). Concrete progress has been made under the Partnership Framework with third countries on migration, as presented in the second progress report by the European Commission. The partnerships between the European Union and its Member States' and with the five priority countries, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal have been deepened and further developed. Over the last months, 20 high level visits by the HR/VP, a number of EU Commissioners and Member States' ministers took place, backed by several missions at technical level. Financial assistance to support the objectives of the [Valletta Action Plan](#) has been stepped up, with an additional €500 million added to the EU Trust Fund for Africa. This brings its worth to almost €2.5 billion. To date, 64 programmes, worth approximately EUR 1 billion have already been approved under the EU Trust Fund for Africa. To increase the impact of other instruments, EUR 726.7 million will be added to the EU budget in 2017 to further support the development actions in the external dimension of migration. Results in the priority countries are taking shape, including first decreases in migratory flows. In Niger, the number of people crossing the desert has dropped from 70,000 in May to 1,500 in November. In addition, 102 smugglers have been sent to justice and 95 vehicles have been seized. 4430 irregular migrants have been repatriated with the assistance of IOM and around 2700 irregular migrants from the priority countries have been returned from the EU to their respective countries of origin. European Migration Liaison Officers will be deployed to all five priority countries in early 2017. In parallel, 1165 mobility actions under the [Erasmus+](#) framework have been financed with the priority countries to strengthen legal and regular migration channels. In the next months, the full potential of the Partnership Framework will be further exploited. Building on the first

results, the EU will continue to address migration in all its aspects during the implementation of the Partnership Framework to ensure a sustainable process, in line with the commitments made under the Valletta Action Plan of November 2015.

(13/12) Fairness at the heart of Commission's proposal to update EU rules on social security coordination. The European Commission has presented a revision of the EU legislation on social security coordination. This is part of the [2016 Commission Work Programme](#) and the Commission's efforts to facilitate labour mobility, ensure fairness for those who move and for taxpayers, and provide better tools for cooperation between Member State authorities. The proposal modernises the current rules to ensure that they are fair, clear and easier to enforce. Free movement of people would not be possible without EU rules on coordination of social security. These rules guarantee that you do not lose your social security protection when moving to another Member State. They exist since 1959 and are regularly modernised to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and respond to the social and economic reality in the EU. Today's proposed update reflects the political commitment of this Commission to fair labour mobility. It is a balanced proposal that facilitates free movement of workers and protects their rights, while reinforcing the tools for national authorities to fight risks of abuse or fraud. It makes a closer link between the place where contributions are paid and where benefits are claimed, ensuring a fair financial distribution of burden between Member States. Full press release [here](#).

(8/12) Commission reports on progress made under the European Agenda on Migration. The Commission [reported](#) on progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and on the EU's relocation and resettlement schemes. The Commission also adopted a fourth Recommendation today that takes stock of the progress achieved by Greece to put in place a fully functioning asylum system and sets out a process for the gradual resumption of Dublin transfers to Greece. European Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans said: "Our comprehensive European approach on migration is showing positive results. We can see this in the continued implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and the dramatic decrease in the number of irregular migrants arriving in Greece. We also see it in the progress made by the Greek authorities in rectifying deficiencies in the country's asylum system, which has allowed us to recommend the gradual resumption of Dublin transfers to Greece as of 15 March 2017. This will provide further disincentives against irregular entry and secondary movements, and is an important step for the return to a normally functionally Dublin and Schengen system." Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos said: "Both Italy and Greece have made herculean efforts in recent months in managing the refugee crisis. The fact that today we close the infringement cases on the fingerprinting and registration of migrants is proof of that. This November was a record month for relocation with over 1,400 persons transferred, and Member States must build on this progress by further intensifying and sustaining their efforts. Our aim is to relocate all those in Italy and Greece who are eligible for relocation within the next year. These efforts, together with a lasting reduction in arrivals from Turkey thanks to the EU-Turkey Statement, are necessary building blocks for a gradual return to the Dublin system for Greece.

(7/12) Investing in Europe's youth: Commission launches European Solidarity Corps. The European Commission launched the European Solidarity Corps, just two months after President Juncker [announced](#) it and as a first deliverable of the priorities for action identified in the [Bratislava Roadmap](#). Young people between the ages of 18 and 30 can now sign up for new opportunities to make an important contribution to society across the EU, and to gain invaluable experience and acquire valuable skills at the start of their career. The Commission

also presented a series of measures to boost youth employment, improve and modernise education, more investment in skills of young people, and better opportunities to learn and study abroad. With the new European Solidarity Corps, participants will have the opportunity to be placed with a project either for volunteering or for a traineeship, an apprenticeship or a job for a period between 2 and 12 months. Full press release [here](#). Q&A available [here](#).

(7/12) The European Union strengthens its support for Burkina Faso with € 800 million. Mr Neven Mimica, European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, was in Paris to participate in the international conference on Burkina Faso for the funding of the National Economic and Social Development Plan (PNDES). The National Economic and Social Development Plan lays the foundations for implementing the objectives of the new government by 2020. The European Commission intends to provide substantial support, worth € 800 million, for the plan. The first financing agreement, for € 136 million, is a Good Governance and Development Contract to consolidate the rule of law and governance and increase the government's budgetary capacity between 2017 and 2020. This assistance will make it possible to support the implementation of the National Economic and Social Development plan and to strengthen dialogue with the government on the macroeconomic framework and public finances. The priority areas for this dialogue are demographics, social protection, civil registration, the independence and operation of the justice system, the fight against corruption, mobilisation of internal resources and the efficiency of public spending. The second financing agreement, for € 54 million, is aimed at improving the population's access to drinking water and the treatment of waste water. The third financing agreement, for € 15 million, is to promote sound management of public finances, supporting convergence with regional standards and strengthening the national statistics system and macroeconomic forecasting. More information [here](#).

European Parliament

(19/12) ACP-EU: "Zero immigration has never existed and never will". The 32nd session of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and European Union (EU) member states was held in 19/12. Keynote speaker said that the EU must manage migration flows in a human way, in line with their values. Fortress Europe is not working. In addition, it was stressed that the history of humanity is the history of migrations, and Zero immigration has never existed and never will because no coercive, repressive or security measure will ever be able to prevent a human being from trying his luck wherever he thinks he will be able to give his destiny the basic dignity to which any human being has a right. Full press release [here](#).

(13/12) Stop inciting fear and hatred of migrants and refugees, urge MEPs. EU member states should "refrain from inciting fear and hatred among their citizens towards migrants and asylum-seekers for political gain", [MEPs say in a resolution on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU](#). "The European Union should not just deal with societal, legal and economic problems. The EU must also deal with the issue of fundamental rights and should set a good example", said rapporteur József Nagy (EPP, SK). The resolution addresses key fundamental rights challenges in the EU in 2015, notably in the fields of migration, protection of children and online threats. The rights to free movement and life-saving abortion are also stressed.

(12/12) Opening - Schulz reiterates need for tolerance and solidarity to fight terrorism. President Schulz [reiterated the need to use the weapons of tolerance, solidarity,](#)

[friendship and humanity](#) to fight Daesh, al-Shabaab and other terrorist organisations. He cited the bomb attacks in Turkey, Egypt and Somalia this weekend as the latest examples of a scourge that has plagued the whole world in 2016 and conveyed Parliament's deepest sympathy to the families and friends of the victims of all these human tragedies. To halt the terrorists' efforts to spread fear among peoples and societies, we must reaffirm our values, tolerance, solidarity, friendship and humanity. This will be harder than dropping bombs, but our values are worth defending, insisted Mr Schulz. "If we were to give up the fight for these values, then the terrorists would have won."

(8/12) New Asylum Agency must ensure EU countries respect common asylum rules, say MEPs. The EU Agency for Asylum must coordinate information exchange among member states and ensure they protect fundamental rights, said Civil Liberties Committee MEPs. The committee backed a proposal to strengthen the current European Asylum Support Office (EASO), which will become the EU Agency for Asylum, and provide it with the means to assist member states in crisis situations, but also to monitor how national authorities apply EU legislation. The new Agency will assess all aspects of the common asylum policy, such as reception conditions, respect for procedural safeguards, the right to legal aid and access to interpretation, and adequacy of financial and human resources. To do so, it will be entitled to make unannounced on-site visits to EU countries. It would rely on an "asylum intervention pool", formed by no less than 500 experts contributed by member states, who could be deployed in cases where the asylum and reception systems of an EU country are subject to "disproportionate pressure". The Agency will also have a Fundamental Rights Officer, in charge of managing the newly-created complaint mechanism and monitoring and ensuring respect for fundamental rights in all the Agency's activities. Full press release [here](#).

(8/12) Visa suspension mechanism: Parliament and Council negotiators strike a deal. The EU Commission and member states will be able to reimpose visa requirements faster and more easily under new rules [agreed by Parliament and Council negotiators](#). Parliament's rapporteur for the proposal, Agustín Díaz de Mera (EPP, ES), noted that "the changes agreed provide flexibility for the rapid activation of the suspension mechanism". He also underlined that the deal "will facilitate the immediate consideration of the two visa liberalization proposals for Georgia and Ukraine." According to the deal, visa requirements may be reintroduced for a non-EU country in one or more of the following cases: a substantial increase in the number of nationals of that country refused entry or irregularly staying in the EU territory; a substantial increase in unfounded asylum applications; a lack of cooperation on readmissions (returns of migrants). Visas could also be reintroduced in the event of threats to public policy or internal security related to nationals of the third country concerned.

(7/12) Emergency Lessons: the importance of educating children in emergency situations. Some 462 million children live in countries affected by war or natural disasters and about 75 million of them need educational support. The EU and Unicef launched the Emergency Lessons campaign this year to highlight the importance of education for children affected by emergencies. On 6 December children, [teachers and volunteers visited the Parliament in Brussels to talk about their experiences](#). Children's education can be disrupted or even abandoned when emergencies hit, be it from natural disasters, military conflicts or health crises, such as an Ebola outbreak. As schools give children a sense of normality, Unicef sees education as critical as food and medicine, enabling young people not only to survive, but also to thrive. The Emergency Lessons initiative is a partnership between the European Commission's department for humanitarian aid and civil protection and the United Nations Children's Fund, which is better known under the abbreviation Unicef. The event at the

Parliament was organised by the development committee and supported by Christos Stylianides, commissioner responsible for humanitarian aid and crisis management; MEP Linda McAvan and Unicef Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth.

European Council / Council of the EU

(15/10) European Council conclusions on migration and Cyprus. On 15 December 2016 the European Council [adopted conclusions on migration and Cyprus](#). On the external dimension of migration, the European Council recalled its October conclusions concerning the Eastern Mediterranean by reiterating its commitment to the EU-Turkey statement and underlining the importance of a full and non-discriminatory implementation of all aspects. The new Partnership Framework of cooperation is an important tool for addressing illegal migration and its root causes, particularly with regard to the Central Mediterranean route. The European Council underlined the need to enhance support for the Libyan coastguard, including through EUNAVFOR MED operation Sophia, so as to increase its capacity to prevent the loss of life at sea and break the business model of smugglers. It also recalled the importance of adequate resources being put at the disposal of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the European Border and Coast Guard. On the internal dimension of migration, the Council stressed an effective application of the principles of responsibility and solidarity remains a shared objective and that Member States should further intensify their efforts to accelerate relocation, in particular for unaccompanied minors, and existing resettlement schemes.

(15/12) Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Prime Minister of Denmark to minimise the negative effects of the Danish departure from Europol, following the referendum in Denmark on 3 December 2015. Following the referendum in Denmark on 3 December 2015, we agree on the need for operational arrangements, minimising the negative impact of Denmark's departure from Europol on 1 May 2017, for the mutual benefit of Denmark and the rest of the European Union in the combatting of cross-border serious and organised crime and international terrorism. Such arrangements must be Denmark-specific, and not in any way equal full membership of Europol, i.e. provide access to Europol's data repositories, or for full participation in Europol's operational work and database, or give decision-making rights in the governing bodies of Europol. However, it should ensure a sufficient level of operational cooperation including exchange of relevant data, subject to adequate safeguards. Full press release [here](#).

(13/12) Council approves the EU's legislative priorities for 2017. On 13 December 2016, the Council [approved the EU's legislative priorities for 2017](#) as agreed beforehand with the European Parliament and the Commission. This will help the three EU institutions to pool their efforts and to ensure substantial progress in fields where they are most needed. Among other things, in 2017 the EU will give priority treatment to legislative initiatives in the following policy areas: 1) giving a new boost to jobs, growth and investment through strengthening the European fund for strategic investment, modernising trade defence instruments, improving waste management in a circular economy, making progress on the banking union and on the capital markets union; 2) addressing the social dimension of the EU, in particular through enhancing the youth employment initiative, improving social security coordination, allowing easier access of accessible products and services to the market and creating a European solidarity corps, 3) better protecting EU citizens' security, in particular through better protecting external borders (via an entry-exit system, smart border and a

European travel information authorisation system), stronger rules on buying and possessing firearms, fighting terrorism, money laundering and terrorist financing and information exchange on third country nationals; 4) reforming the EU's migration policy in a spirit of responsibility and solidarity, notably through revising the EU's asylum rules and enhancing investments in third countries to address the root causes of migration.

(9/12) Common European Asylum System reform: Council ready to start negotiations on Eurodac. The Council endorsed a mandate for negotiations with the European Parliament on the recast of the Eurodac regulation. On the basis of this mandate, the presidency will start negotiations with the European Parliament as soon as the latter has adopted its position. Ministers adopted the text on the understanding that the parts relating to other files of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) reform will be revisited once there is agreement on them. The mandate will also be updated in the light of the discussions on the issue of interoperability of information systems. The aim of the reform is to adapt and reinforce the Eurodac system and to expand its scope, with a view to facilitating returns and helping tackle irregular migration. The new proposal, as it stands now, will extend the scope of the Eurodac Regulation to include the possibility for member states to store and search data belonging to third-country nationals or stateless persons who are not applicants for international protection and are found to be staying irregularly in the EU, so that they can be identified for return and readmission purposes. The expansion of the scope and simplification of the access of law enforcement authorities to Eurodac should help member states maintain security in the EU. Besides collecting an additional biometric data - facial image, it will also allow member states to store more alphanumeric data in Eurodac, such as names, dates of birth, nationalities, identity details or travel documents of individuals. Full press release [here](#).

(7/12) Schengen Borders Code: agreement to reinforce checks at external borders. On 7 December 2016, the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) [approved a compromise text](#) agreed with the European Parliament on an amendment to the Schengen Borders Code to reinforce checks against relevant databases at external borders. The amendment obliges member states to carry out systematic checks on all persons, including persons enjoying the right of free movement under EU law (i.e. EU citizens and members of their families who are not EU citizens) when they cross the external border against databases on lost and stolen documents, as well as in order to verify that those persons do not represent a threat to public order and internal security. This obligation shall apply at all external borders (air, sea and land borders), both at entry and exit. However, where a systematic consultation of databases on all persons enjoying the right of free movement under Union law could lead to a disproportionate impact on the flow of traffic at a sea and land border, member states may carry out only targeted checks against databases, provided that a risk assessment shows this does not lead to risks related to internal security, public policy, international relations of the member states or a threat to public health. As regards air borders, the institutions agreed that member states may use this possibility, but only during a transitional period of 6 months from the entry into force of the amended regulation. This period may be prolonged by a maximum of 18 month in exceptional cases, where at a specific airport there are infrastructural difficulties requiring a longer period of time for adaptations to allow for the carrying out of systematic consultations of databases without disproportionate impact on the flow of traffic.

Others

(22/12) FRA - A year in review: the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2016. 2016 saw Europe's fundamental rights resolve being severely tested. Fundamental rights and freedoms were challenged in many areas, including migration and inclusion. In response, the Agency stepped up its efforts convened to provide practical support to safeguard the fundamental rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Full article [here](#).

(20/12) FRA - Insufficient attention paid to separated migrant children. The lack of information and specific guidance for handling migrant children who are separated from their parents but travelling with other adults hampers efforts to properly protect such children from potential exploitation and abuse. This is one of the findings from [the latest summary report of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\) on migration-related fundamental rights](#) in selected EU Member States. It identifies what needs to be done to address the shortcomings in existing approaches and points to promising practices that could be used by other Member States. Access [the focus section on separated children](#) and the December [monthly data collection highlights](#). Full article [here](#).

(19/12) FRA - EU justice and home affairs agencies showcase cooperation to EU Council. Throughout 2016 the nine EU Justice and Home Affairs Agencies have been actively cooperating on a wide range of areas. The current and future Chair of the network of these agencies showcased what has been achieved and the future plans at the EU Council on 19 December in Brussels. Migration and security were at the heart of the agencies' common work in 2016. Full article [here](#). Report [here](#).

(16/15) EASO - EASO publishes a Country of Origin Information (COI) report on national service and illegal exit in Eritrea. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) Report entitled '[Eritrea – National service and illegal exit](#)'. The report is an update of the 2015 EASO COI Report Eritrea Country Focus. It provides an overview on aspects related to national service and illegal exit in Eritrea relevant to international protection status determination of Eritrean applicants. In the first ten months of 2016, Eritrea ranked 7th in the top countries of origin in EU+ countries with a total of 31 416 applicants. Full press release [here](#).

(15/12) Eurostat - Asylum in the EU Member States - Number of first time asylum seekers up to almost 360 000 in the third quarter of 2016: Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis were the most numerous. During the third quarter of 2016 (from July to September), 358 300 first time asylum seekers applied for international protection in the Member States of the European Union (EU), up by 17% compared with the second quarter of 2016 (when 305 700 first time applicants were registered). From January to September 2016, more than 950 000 first time asylum seekers were registered in the EU Member States. Full report [here](#).

(14/12) FRA - Integration Network Conference focuses on migration. The Agency [took part in the Integration through Qualification \(IQ\) network's second congress](#) from 6 to 7 December in Berlin. The congress paid special attention to the integration of refugees and to the opportunities for fostering a more inclusive society. The congress paid special attention to the integration of refugees and to the opportunities for fostering a more inclusive society. During the panel discussion on decent work for all – between the law and reality, the Agency highlighted results from its work on [severe labour exploitation: workers moving within or into the EU](#), published in 2015. In particular, the Agency underlined how widespread impunity fosters attitudes tolerating labour exploitation of workers from other countries.

(12/12) Eurojust - Suspected criminal network smuggling Iranian migrants into the UK tackled. On 8 December, 24 people were arrested and several house searches were carried out in Greece as part of a [joint investigation by Greece and the UK, supported by Europol](#). The individuals were arrested on suspicion of being part of an organised crime group believed to be facilitating the smuggling of Iranian nationals from Greece to the UK, often via France and Spain, by using counterfeit documents or impersonating their legitimate owners. A Europol specialist in illegal immigrant facilitation, equipped with a mobile office, was deployed on-the-spot and assisted national authorities throughout the operation.

(9/12) Eurojust - Somali migrant smuggling network in Europe dismantled. On 6 and 7 December 2016, judicial and law enforcement authorities from France and the Netherlands, supported on-the-spot by Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre, [took action against an organised crime network](#) suspected of having smuggled some 500 migrants from Somalia to different destination countries in the European Union along secondary routes. This operation was preceded by extensive and complex criminal investigations supported by Europol, which coordinated the law enforcement authorities in France and the Netherlands. Italian judicial authorities carried out extensive investigations, with several suspects belonging to this network arrested earlier this year. Eurojust held two coordination meetings over the past year, and was instrumental in facilitating the European Arrest Warrant that led to the arrest of one of the key suspects in the Netherlands this week. This cooperation, combined with international telephone interceptions managed by France, led to the identification in Strasbourg of several network logistics experts.

(8/12) Committee of the Regions - New Skills Agenda for Europe: Regions and cities call for greater flexibility for public spending to improve skills and competences. Investment in human capital could be treated as social investment to support the development of skills in Europe, suggests the European Committee of the Regions in its opinion on the New Skills Agenda for Europe. Led by Marie-Louise Rönnmark, Chair of Umeå City Council (SE/PES), the opinion was adopted in the plenary session on 7 December. The [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#), launched by the European Commission in June, seeks to address three major challenges: the lack of relevant skills to match labour market needs, the insufficient transparency of skills and qualifications, and the difficulty to anticipate and forecast skills. According to the opinion drafted by Ms Rönnmark, initiatives taken in the framework of the New Skills Agenda could be regarded as a social investment: "This would give greater flexibility when it comes to public spending and the use of EU funding to improve skills", said the rapporteur adding that local partnerships will be essential for the Agenda's swift and effective implementation. Full press release [here](#).

(8/12) FRA - Fine-tuning EU's migration approach to better safeguard rights. The current migration situation is placing a strain on Member States leading to fundamental rights protection gaps for asylum seekers and migrants. Delays, overcrowding and lack of information impinge on the rights of migrants, particularly children. The latest Opinions from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights shed light on the protection gaps, focusing on the EU's migration hotspot approach and the impact on children of the proposed changes to the EU's Dublin rules for determining which Member State examines applications for international protection. Full article [here](#).

(7/12) Committee of the Regions - Revision of the Posting of Workers directive: Cities and regions call for protective measures against social dumping. The European

Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the first EU institution to position itself on the revision of the Posting of Workers directive. The opinion [adopted in the plenary session](#) on Wednesday 7 December considers the proposal a step in the right direction but calls for more efficient measures to protect posted workers and fight social dumping. The [CoR opinion](#) suggests that the time limit beyond which the law of the host country must apply in full to a posted worker should be reduced from 24 to 12 months. The Committee is also calling for more effective measures against bogus posting and unfair competition on the basis of lower social security contributions. Key recommendations in this field include creating a European register where posted workers would have to be declared by the posting undertaking, as well as introducing reporting requirements for social insurance institutions in the host Member State. The opinion also proposes a European support scheme to protect posted workers against cascade subcontracting practices and suggests the creation of a European directory of occupations and vocational skills to avoid that posted workers' skills are deliberately underestimated.

[COUNCIL OF EUROPE](#)

(15/12) North-South Prize 2016 recognises efforts towards migrants, refugees and democracy. The North-South Center of the Council of Europe is pleased to announce that Ms Guisepina Nicolini, Mayor of the City of Lampedusa, and Ms Mbarka Brahmi, member of the Tunisian parliament have accepted the nomination of the jury of the North South Prize to be the recipients of the 2016 North South Prize of the Council of Europe. With this decision, the jury is recognizing the relevant work of Ms Nicolini and the citizens of Lampedusa in favor of the migrant and refugees crossing the Mediterranean sea and looking for shelter in Southern Italy, as well as the role played by Ms Brahmi in the democratization process in Tunisia. The award ceremony, which will take place in the Portuguese parliament in Lisbon in the first half of 2017, will be delivered by the President of the Portuguese Republic and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Full press release [here](#).

(15/12) Anti-torture committee criticises inadequate safeguards for foreign nationals returned by air from Italy and Spain. In two reports published today on Italy and Spain, the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee (CPT) criticises the lack of adequate safeguards for foreign national returned by air from these countries, in particular concerning the way the individuals concerned are informed of their imminent removal and that appropriate medical examinations are not carried out before the flights. The reports contains the CPT's findings in respect of two return flights that it monitored: one from Rome to Lagos (Nigeria) on 17 December 2015 and the other from Madrid to Bogotá (Colombia) and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) on 18 February 2016. The two joint removal operations of foreign nationals by air were co-ordinated by Frontex (now European Border and Coast Guard) and organized by Italy and Spain, with the participation of other countries. The responses of the [Italian](#) and [Spanish](#) authorities were also published. Full press release [here](#).

(6/12) National human rights structures: protecting human rights while countering terrorism. "A series of terrorist attacks has deeply traumatised Europe. In Brussels, Paris, Copenhagen, Ankara and beyond, shock was followed by fear of further attacks and a sense of urgency about preventing them", says Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, in his latest Human Rights Comment published today. "Preventing and combating terrorism is a clear duty of all states, which must respect and protect every one's life and security. However, states' duty to prevent and combat terrorism should in no way be fulfilled at the expense of human rights standards and the common values in which European societies are grounded. This would be a mistake, since laws and policies that are human rights

compliant preserve the values the terrorists are trying to destroy, weaken the pull of radicalisation, and strengthen the public's confidence in the rule of law and democratic institutions." Full press release [here](#).

CIVIL SOCIETY

(16/12) ECRE - Germany to accelerate deportations of asylum seekers, whose application has been rejected. In the coming months, the German federal government will significantly [increase the deportations](#) of asylum seekers, whose application for international protection have been rejected. To achieve this objective, several new immigration detention centres will be developed with the aim to improve the German deportation system and save expenses, as [advised](#) by a recent McKinsey report. Full article [here](#).

(12/12) Social Platform - How to best tackle hate and intolerance. Annica Ryngbeck reports on the [European Union High Level Group](#) meeting on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, that gathered representatives from all EU Member States and civil society representatives.

(9/12) ECRE - Lack of information on legal procedures leaves refugee children from Calais waiting distressed in reception centres. Lack of information on the side of the Home Office has caused psychological stress for unaccompanied refugee children who have been distributed around France from Calais. ECRE's member organisations [France terre d'asile](#) and the UK [Refugee Council](#) have urged the French and British governments to provide sufficient protection and information to these children. Full article [here](#).

(9/12) ECRE - UNHCR presents new vision aimed at better protecting refugees in the EU and globally. On Monday 5 December, [UNHCR](#) presented a [paper](#) outlining proposals on how to reform the Common European Asylum System to better manage migration and enhance the spirit of partnership and solidarity. The paper contains four proposals aimed at making the EU more engaged, prepared and committed to protection and integration. The reform proposals include initiatives such as a common European registration system, accelerated and simplified procedures for asylum determination and prioritization of family reunification. It further suggests a common approach to unaccompanied and separated children, a distribution mechanism for Member States under pressure of a high number of arrivals and an efficient system for returning individuals who are not in need of protection to their countries of origin. Full article [here](#).

(8/12) PICUM - Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants: Increased deportations – Risk of rights violations, no solution to irregular migration. The Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) warned that current EU migration policy focusing increasingly on deportations of irregular migrants, threatens individuals' rights to due process and protection, fails to recognise the capacity of migrants, and misses its aim of reducing irregular migration in Europe. The EU is engaging in readmission agreements which increasingly link foreign aid to curbing migration obliging third countries to deter migrants from leaving. Most recently, the agreement between the EU and Afghanistan foresees an unlimited number of deportations of Afghans from Europe, despite ongoing conflict in the region. Full article [here](#).

(7/12) Social Platform - Will the EU defend humanitarian assistance to migrants? 2015 saw 1.3 million people apply for asylum in the European Union. Fleeing war, poverty and

persecution, many have risked life and limb to enter the EU via land and sea, with thousands of lives lost for daring to dream of a life in peace and safety. It's well known that Greece and Italy are the two countries handling the majority of new arrivals to our shores, doing the best they can with stretched resources amidst unprecedented migration flows. Lesser known is the reality faced by civil society organisations and individuals on the ground; namely, that they could face sanctions, fines and imprisonment for offering humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees, in part due to the EU Facilitation Directive. Full article [here](#).

(6/12) ENAR - EU must address widespread ethnic profiling by police. The European Network against Racism (ENAR), Open Society Justice Initiative and the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup are calling on the European Union to address the urgent challenge of ethnic profiling by police forces across Europe—which leads to individuals being singled out for identity checks or searches purely because of their race, ethnicity or perceived religion.

(5/12) Joint statement: Remove systemic barriers to tackle the Roma public health emergency (via [Social Platform](#)). Europe is facing a Roma public health emergency: We, the undersigned organisations are extremely concerned about the alarming health situation of the Roma in Europe and the lack of awareness and actions concerning their situation. It is unacceptable and unfair that, in too many cases, belonging to this ethnic minority results in poor physical and mental health. We are especially worried about the Roma in specific vulnerable situations such as Roma living with disabilities, young Roma, Roma children, women and their families, Roma elderly and Roma who are homeless or affected by chronic or infectious diseases. In the case of children, a lack of early years health services has a detrimental impact on their overall development in the long run, thus contributing to a widening of the health gap and a need for more expensive interventions later on. As well as consideration of the social and environmental factors such as housing, employment and education which determine Roma health, urgent assessment and action is needed to assess discrimination, anti-gypsyism and the additional existing barriers preventing proper access by Roma to Healthcare.

PUBLICATIONS

Eurofund - [Approaches to the labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers](#)

Council of the EU General Secretariat - [Think Tank Review](#) (December 2016)

OECD - [Perspectives on Global Development 2017: International Migration in a Shifting World](#)

European Structural and Investment Funds - [Project Catalogue](#) (database)

Tom Liefaard, Julia Sloth-Nielsen - [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Taking Stock after 25 Years and Looking Ahead](#)

EPRS - [The EU And The Fight Against Terrorism](#) (Think Tank Review)

EPRS - [Rural Areas And Poverty](#) (Briefing)