

INFO FLASH 29/02/2024

EU INSTITUTIONS

European Commission

(29/02) Commission proposes amendment to EU budget 2024 in record time to continue delivering on EU priorities. Today, the European Commission adopted a proposal to amend the EU budget for 2024 to reflect the changes made following the agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027. This amended budget will enable the Union to continue delivering this year on the EU's common priorities, for the benefit of European citizens and beyond. In particular, it will reinforce our support to Ukraine, boost investments in critical technologies and defence, and provide additional resources to support partners in the Western Balkans. Thanks to this amendment, the EU budget will be also better equipped to help Member States affected by natural disasters and countries facing humanitarian crises. Full press release [here](#).

(27/02) EU provides initial €171 million in humanitarian aid for Greater Horn of Africa region. People in the Horn of Africa are facing mounting humanitarian needs as the region is plagued by multiple conflicts, climate extremes and economic shocks. Around 65 million are estimated to be in immediate need of assistance. The EU announced today an initial allocation of €171 million in humanitarian aid to the region. This funding is **in addition** to €72 million already announced for Sudan. Overall, the total initial allocation for humanitarian aid to the Greater Horn of Africa in 2024 is **€243 million**. The funding will support humanitarian projects in Djibouti (€500,000), Ethiopia (€38 million), Kenya (€11.5 million), Somalia (€37 million), South Sudan (€49.5 million), and Uganda (€27.5 million). A further €7 million will be allocated to disaster preparedness programmes across the region. Main priorities for EU funding are: addressing the acute food and nutrition crisis in the region, improving access to basic services, providing education and protection to children in humanitarian crises, and setting up systems to help anticipate the impact of disasters through contingency planning and early action. Full press release [here](#).

(20/02) Report from experts on Cohesion Policy proposes ways to maximise the effectiveness and impact of Cohesion Policy in the future. Today, the independent Group of High-Level Specialists on the Future of Cohesion Policy presented its report, which assessed the functioning of Cohesion Policy and included recommendations on how to ensure the Policy continues to promote prosperity and convergence across the EU. These recommendations will add to the ongoing reflections and body of opinions from many stakeholders and institutions on the future of Cohesion Policy. Full press release [here](#).

(8/02) Europeans show strong support for EU civil protection in Eurobarometer survey. Today, the European Commission published the results of the Special Eurobarometer measuring public opinion about European civil protection actions in the Member States. Results show a strong consensus among the citizens of the European Union that civil protection activities should be coordinated across the EU. An overwhelming majority of respondents (94%) in the 27 EU Member States thinks that when a disaster strikes in an EU country that is too big to deal with on their own, other EU countries should provide help.

Nearly the same number (91%) are supportive of the EU helping any country in the world affected by a disaster. The survey results show clear support for the EU's role in crisis management, with nine in ten respondents stating that it is important that the EU helps coordinate the response to disasters in the EU and other countries. According to the survey, also nine in ten Europeans agree that coordinated EU action should be increased to deal more effectively with disasters and crises in the future. The proportion of EU citizens who want a stronger role has increased by 6 percentage points since 2020, from 84% to 90%. Full press release [here](#).

(6/02) Easier access to EU funding for rural areas thanks to EU Rural Toolkit. Today, the Commission launched a new interactive guide mapping all funding opportunities available at EU level for rural areas. EU funds and programmes that can foster sustainable growth and well-being in rural areas abound. However, identifying the most appropriate option is not always straightforward for potential beneficiaries. The Rural toolkit gathers funding opportunities from 26 different EU funds, from the Common Agricultural Policy to Cohesion Funds, Horizon Europe and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. In just a few clicks, rural entrepreneurs and local authorities can find out the best funding available to help them develop their project. This newly launched comprehensive gateway to EU funding and support initiatives available for rural areas in the EU aims to equip applicants with the knowledge and tools needed to address local needs. Beneficiaries may be local authorities, institutions, businesses, associations and individuals. Full press release [here](#).

(5/02) First evaluation of the Frontex Regulation delivers overall positive assessment despite challenges. On 2 February, the Commission adopted the evaluation of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation (Frontex Regulation) together with an Action Plan to support its implementation. With this first evaluation of the Frontex regulation, which is a legal obligation, the Commission has assessed the impact, effectiveness and efficiency of Frontex. Ensuring a robust and efficient management of the EU's common external borders has been a key priority of this Commission, in line with European integrate border management concept. Frontex plays a decisive part in this effort by supporting the Member States in managing the external borders and addressing migratory challenges, in full compliance with fundamental rights. Full press release [here](#).

(5/02) Commission calls for eradication of Female Genital Mutilation worldwide. Ahead of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on 6 February 2024, the European Commission and the High Representative/Vice-President reaffirm the EU's strong commitment to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation worldwide. Full statement [here](#).

(31/01) EU and social partners in Val Duchesse commit to strengthening social dialogue to tackle labour challenges. Today, at the Val Duchesse Social Partners Summit, the European Commission, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU and European social partners signed a '[Tripartite Declaration for a Thriving European Social Dialogue](#)'. The Declaration stands for a renewed commitment to strengthen social dialogue at EU level and to join forces in addressing key challenges in our economies and labour markets. The aim is to support thriving businesses, quality jobs and services as well as improved working conditions. Social dialogue – the dialogue between workers' and business' representatives – is a fundamental component of the European social model, contributing to economic prosperity, improving living and working conditions, fostering the competitiveness of EU businesses, and helping to anticipate and manage change, for instance in the context of the green and digital transitions. Full press release [here](#).

(31/01) The EU announces EUR 117 million in humanitarian aid for Chad and Sudan in 2024. The European Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, is currently visiting Chad to ascertain the humanitarian situation in the country and meet with the authorities. During this visit, the Commissioner will announce new funding of EUR 45 million in EU humanitarian aid for Chad. This funding aims to address the most pressing humanitarian needs in Chad, notably those of refugees, returnees and host communities affected by the Sudanese conflict in the east of the country, those of internally displaced persons affected by the Lake Chad Basin conflict in western Chad, and the most vulnerable members of the population whose survival is threatened by starvation and malnutrition. This new EU humanitarian funding will address the most urgent protection and humanitarian aid needs, including providing emergency food, medical care, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, and children's education during a crisis. The EU is also allocating an initial sum of EUR 72 million to Sudan in 2024 to help the country cope with the impact of the conflict and the resulting huge humanitarian needs for 24.8 million people, roughly half the Sudanese population. This funding will provide essential services and protection to people displaced by conflict or other disasters. This will include supporting education in emergencies, helping pupils affected by the conflict to continue their schooling, a particularly urgent need as 3 million children have been displaced, making Sudan the country with the largest number of displaced children in the world. Full press release [here](#).

(29/01) Horizon 2020 evaluation shows that investment in EU research and innovation greatly pays off. Horizon 2020, the EU's research and innovation programme running from 2014 to 2020 with a budget of nearly €80 billion, made a major contribution to building an EU society and economy rooted in knowledge and innovation and benefitted Europeans far beyond what could have been achieved at national or regional level. Enabling rapid response to the COVID-19, Ebola and Zika outbreaks and making a decisive contribution to climate science are just some examples of the tangible impact of Horizon 2020. Each euro in costs linked to the programme will ultimately bring five euros in benefits to EU citizens by 2040, proving the high value for money of investment in research and innovation for the European society. These are some of the key conclusions of the ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020 published today. Full press release [here](#).

(28/01) Global Gateway: European Commission and African Development Bank Group unlock new funding for African infrastructure projects. On the sidelines of this week's Italy-Africa Summit, the European Commission (EC) and the African Development Bank Group have formalised a new Financial Framework Partnership Agreement to boost investments in infrastructure projects in Africa. The European Union's contribution to co-finance operations with the African Development Bank has significantly increased over the last two years, now amounting to €972 million in blending operations and guarantees. This figure will further increase after the signing of the new Financial Framework Partnership Agreement. Full press release [here](#).

(26/01) “« Never again » is now”, President von der Leyen says ahead of International Day of Holocaust Remembrance. 27 January marks the International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the 79th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Ahead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, President von der Leyen released a statement ([here](#)).

(24/01) Commission proposes to improve European Works Councils to strengthen transnational social dialogue. Today, the Commission proposes to revise the European Works Councils (EWCs) Directive to further improve social dialogue in the EU. EWCs are information and consultation bodies that ensure that employees are involved in decisions related to transnational issues. They concern companies with more than 1,000 employees operating in at least two EU or European Economic Area (EEA) countries. Meaningful information and consultation of employees in key company decisions can help anticipate and manage changes, such as those linked to the green and digital transitions, like addressing labour shortages or introducing new technologies. In transnational settings, European Works Councils can play a key role in these respects. Full press release [here](#).

(15/01) Commission finds that EU personal data flows can continue with 11 third countries and territories. Today, the European Commission successfully concluded its review of 11 existing adequacy decisions. These decisions had been adopted under the EU data protection legislation that preceded the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In its [report](#), the Commission finds that personal data transferred from the European Union to Andorra, Argentina, Canada, Faroe Islands, Guernsey, the Isle of Man, Israel, Jersey, New Zealand, Switzerland and Uruguay, continues to benefit from adequate data protection safeguards. Therefore, the adequacy decisions adopted for these 11 countries and territories remain in place and data can continue to flow freely to these jurisdictions. The review has demonstrated that the data protection frameworks in these countries and territories have further converged with the EU's framework and strengthened protection of personal data in their jurisdictions. The GDPR has inspired positive changes such as the introduction of new rights for individuals, the reinforcement of the independence and powers of authorities responsible for the enforcement of privacy laws or the modernisation of rules on international transfers. Full press release [here](#).

(10/01) Commission gives young people a stronger voice in EU policymaking as a legacy of the European Year of Youth. Young Europeans will have greater influence on EU policies. Building on the achievements of the 2022 European Year of Youth, today the Commission announced [several actions](#) that give young people a greater say in the decisions that affect them and deepen the youth dimension in a range of EU policies. Putting the needs of young people centre stage, these actions engage young people in a meaningful way ahead of the 2024 European elections and beyond. Full press release [here](#).

European Parliament

(8/02) Provisional deal on first EU-wide rules for platform workers. Parliament and Council negotiators reached a provisional deal on Thursday morning on a bill aiming to improve the working conditions of persons performing platform work. The Platform Work Directive aims to ensure that people performing platform work have their employment status classified correctly and to correct bogus self-employment. The agreed text also introduces the first ever EU rules on algorithmic management and the use of artificial intelligence in the workplace. Full press release [here](#).

(6/02) First ever EU rules on combating violence against women: deal reached. EU legislators reached a provisional deal on rules to combat gender-based violence and protect its victims, especially women and victims of domestic violence. The informal agreement reached by Parliament and Council negotiators on Tuesday includes measures to prevent rape, tougher rules on cyber violence, and better support for victims. For the first time, there will be EU-wide rules on the criminalisation of certain forms of gender-based violence and

better access to justice, protection and prevention. Member states will aim to raise awareness that non-consensual sex is considered a criminal offence. Full press release [here](#).

(6/02) Deal on mid-term revision of EU's long-term budget. Following talks with EU member states, MEPs reached an agreement on the revision of EU's long-term budget, addressing unforeseen challenges like Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On Tuesday, negotiators from the Parliament and the Council of the EU reached a provisional political agreement regarding the update of the EU's long-term budget. This update reflects the demands put forward by the Parliament in December 2022, calling for a reform of the EU budget to respond more effectively to evolving needs and unforeseen circumstances, to address funding gaps, provide a structural solution for NextGenerationEU borrowing costs, and ensure a stable financing solution for Ukraine. This revision will also integrate the Ukraine Facility and the "Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform" (STEP), once agreement on it is reached, into the EU's multiannual financial framework. Full press release [here](#).

(23/01) Trafficking in human beings: deal on new EU rules. Parliament and Council negotiators reached a provisional deal to revise rules on preventing and combating human trafficking on Tuesday. The informal agreement reached by Parliament and Council on Tuesday night will expand the scope of the current directive to include forced marriage, illegal adoption, exploitation of surrogacy and better support for victims. Full press release [here](#).

(23/01) MEPs warn that European values are being eroded across the EU. A draft report on the state of the rule of law in 2023 endorsed by the Committee on Civil Liberties on Tuesday paints a concerning picture of the state of European values. Reacting to the latest Commission's annual rule of law report, MEPs are deeply concerned that democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights across the EU are eroding, in a draft report adopted with 42 votes in favour, ten against, two abstentions. They also criticise specific countries where major problems are identified. Full press release [here](#).

(18/01) Time to criminalise hate speech and hate crime under EU law. MEPs call on the Council to finally make progress on legislation to ensure an adequate level of protection from hate for everyone in Europe. The Council should adopt a decision to include hate speech and hate crime among criminal offences within the meaning of Article 83(1) TFEU (so-called "EU crimes") by the end of the current legislative term, Parliament says in the report adopted on Thursday with 397 votes in favour, 121 against, and 26 abstentions. These are crimes of a particularly serious nature with a cross-border dimension, for which Parliament and Council can establish minimum rules to define criminal offences and sanctions. Full press release [here](#).

European Council / Council of the EU

(1/01) The Belgian presidency programme. The Belgian presidency programme sets out the priorities and main directions of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the EU. The Belgian term takes place from the 1st of January to the 30th of June 2024. Belgium assumes the rotating presidency for the thirteenth time, at a moment when the European Union stands at a crossroads, dealing with the consequences of the Russian illegal aggression in Ukraine, the pandemic, the energy crisis, disinformation, extreme climate events, and a renewed conflict in the Middle East. The Belgian presidency will work towards better protecting European citizens, strengthening our cooperation, and preparing our shared future. It will focus on six thematic areas, and will provide particular attention to maintaining our

unwavering support to Ukraine. As the current institutional cycle concludes, the presidency will support a seamless transition to the next one. It will support the adoption of the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 and prepare discussions on the future of the European Union. Full programme [here](#).

Others

(28/01) EEUA - EU received over 1.1 million asylum applications in 2023. In 2023, EU+ countries received 1.14 million applications for international protection, reaching a 7-year high. Syrians continued to lodge the most applications, with Afghans remaining the second largest applicant group, albeit with significantly fewer applications than the previous year. An increase in Palestinian applications was also noted towards the end of the year. Full press release [here](#).

(16/01) EEUA - A newly harmonised approach to vulnerability in the EU's protection systems. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) has adopted a new Strategy on Vulnerability. With vulnerability assessments becoming an important part of the Agency's operational and technical support to EU+ countries; the Strategy provides an overarching framework for our work in this field, and aims to equip asylum and reception practitioners with a clear understanding of how to operationalise the concept of vulnerability – in all aspects of the Common European Asylum System. Full press release [here](#).

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

(23/02) GRETA calls on Italy to better prevent human trafficking for labour exploitation and ensure effective sanctions for traffickers. The Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) has urged the Italian authorities to take further action against human trafficking, notably by strengthening measures to combat trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, ensuring effective sanctions for human traffickers, and providing compensation to victims. Full press release [here](#).

(5/02) ICC national networks – Release of their 2023 annual reports. The Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme is happy to announce the publication of the yearly reports of the ICC National Networks of Italy (Città del Dialogo), Portugal (RPCI), Spain (RECI) and Ukraine (ICC-UA). The annual reports inform about the progress of ICC national coalitions of cities, showcasing how to align national with international priorities for the benefit the whole ICC Network. Full press release [here](#).

CIVIL SOCIETY

(22/02) Eurocities - Cities building bridges for digital inclusion. Imagine a morning routine for someone in today's digital age. As soon as we wake up, we reach for our smartphones to check our social networks. With a quick scroll, we catch up with friends and family in various corners of the globe. We rely on smart devices to pay our bills through the bank app, make an appointment to renew our ID or driving licence, or apply for a job. But not everyone has equal access to such digital experiences. In an interconnected, digital world, people who struggle with access to infrastructure or lack digital skills are being left behind. Full article [here](#).

(19/02) PICUM - Revision of the long-term EU budget: what implications for migration and asylum policy 2024-2027? After many months of complicated negotiations and a failed attempt to find a deal in December, the European Council finally adopted a revision of the EU's long-term budget (the so-called 'Multiannual Financial Framework' (MFF) 2021-2027') at its extraordinary meeting on 1 February. Compared with the European Commission's original proposal, the revised MFF is significantly lighter in terms of additional funding that EU member states will be required to provide (€ 21 billion down from € 65.8 billion) and includes a combination of financial cuts and reallocation of resources, mainly at the expense of development and cohesion funding. In short, EU leaders managed to reduce extra contributions to the EU budget while further strengthening the focus on migration control and border management. The European Parliament's rapporteurs endorsed a provisional political agreement with the Council negotiators on 6 February, and the final text will likely be adopted at the next plenary. Full article [here](#).

(16/02) Eurocities - A social agenda that delivers for people. Across Europe, many people in cities are facing significant daily challenges, including access to affordable housing and essential public services, securing a job that offers a decent salary, paying energy bills and putting healthy food on the table. These challenges have been made worse by the rise in the cost of living, putting more middle-income households at risk of poverty and vulnerable groups at risk of social exclusion. In addition, several cities are dealing with ageing populations, rising homelessness and issues concerning the availability and affordability of early child education and care. Full article [here](#).

(15/02) ECRE - Op-ed: Revision of the long-term EU budget: What implications for migration and asylum policy 2024-2027? After many months of complicated negotiations and a failed attempt to find a deal in December, the European Council (EUCO) finally adopted a revision of the EU's long-term budget (the so-called 'Multiannual Financial Framework' (MFF) 2021-2027') at its extraordinary meeting on 1 February. Compared with the European Commission's (EC) original proposal, the revised MFF is significantly lighter in terms of the additional funding that EU member states (MS) will be required to provide (€ 21 billion (bn) down from € 65.8 bn) and includes a combination of financial cuts and reallocation of resources, mainly at the expense of development and cohesion funding. In this way, EU leaders managed to reduce the impact of the revision on their own countries' contributions while further strengthening the focus on migration control and border management. The European Parliament's (EP) rapporteurs endorsed a provisional political agreement with the Council negotiators on 6 February, and the final text will most likely be adopted at the next EP plenary at the end of the month. Full article [here](#).

(8/02) Eurocities - Recognising cities' role in realising the EU Child Guarantee. The European Child Guarantee is a landmark initiative aimed at overcoming child poverty and social exclusion within the EU, by guaranteeing children's access to key services, such as education and healthcare. The goal of this instrument, adopted unanimously by the European Council in 2021, is that every child in the EU has the opportunity to thrive and develop to their full potential, irrespective of their socio-economic background. A key aspect of the Child Guarantee is its recognition that local authorities play a crucial role in delivering services and support to vulnerable children. Local governments provide education, health, housing and social services to all children in need and are at the forefront of work to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Cities are instrumental in making the Child Guarantee a reality and in achieving the target to lift at least five million children out of poverty by 2030, as outlined in the action plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights. If the objectives of the EU Child

Guarantee are to be realised, cities must play a central role in its further development, as well as the implementation of its policies and funding. Full article [here](#).

(7/02) PICUM - New EU Directive on Violence Against Women leaves out migrant women. EU lawmakers have reached a political agreement on a new EU Directive on violence against women that prioritises migration control over women's rights and needs, according to leaked documents seen by the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM). The draft Directive, whose final text will need to be voted by the European Parliament and the EU Council in the coming weeks, fails to protect undocumented women from immigration enforcement should they report violence and abuse to police. Full article [here](#).

(30/01) Eurodiaconia - Eurodiaconia publishes the report "Funding Overview of Sustainability Opportunities for Social Services". The EU and its member states have allocated a substantial budget of €550 billion within the current long-term budget (2021-2027) that will go towards the objective of reaching climate neutrality. In 2021, the EU took a critical step by adopting the EU Climate Law, which legally binds the EU to the Green Deal and commits it to achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Realising this ambitious goal necessitates substantial investments spanning over all sectors. Such profound transformations inevitably put our social fabric to the test. Consequently, it is crucial for social services to remain flexible and adaptive in order to become more sustainable and support individuals throughout the green transition. Full press release [here](#).

(18/01) Eurocities - The role of culture in shaping a better Europe. Cities are actively supporting the European Green Deal and have often proven more ambitious on the ground. Ahead of the EU elections, in the '[A better Europe starts in cities](#)' Eurocities manifesto, local governments are asking the EU to increase targets set for the Green Deal: "at least a 90% net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2040". Cities also understand that the fight against climate change needs an integrated approach and that all sectors can contribute to creating a positive ripple effect. Full article [here](#).

(13/01) PICUM - 81 Civil Society Organisations call on MEPs to vote down harmful EU Migration Pact. Amidst warnings from over [50 Civil Society Organisations](#), EU lawmakers reached a political agreement on the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum in December. The agreement is a continuation of a decade of policy that has led to the proliferation of rights violations in Europe. Moreover, it will have [devastating implications](#) for the right to international protection in the bloc and greenlight abuses across Europe including racial profiling, default de facto detention and pushbacks. Tomorrow, MEPs will be presented with a final chance to reject the files in a Committee vote, and give a political signal against the adoption of a Pact that would undermine fundamental rights. Full statement [here](#).

(10/01) "Cities are key implementers of the European Pillar of Social Rights". Cities are determined to build a more inclusive Europe by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights at local level. Through the political campaign [InclusiveCities4All](#), Eurocities' initiative for a fairer and more inclusive Europe, we are demonstrating that cities are essential, trusted partners of the EU in developing and implementing measures that work for everyone. Eurocities welcomed [ten new Social Heroes](#) in 2023: Brussels, Dusseldorf, Kadikoy, Munich, Nuremberg, Oslo, Paris, Riga, Stockholm and Zurich. But how does the EU value local engagement in the Pillar's principles? And what are the Commission's plans concerning the Pillar? Full article [here](#).

PUBLICATIONS

EPRS – [Ten issues to watch in 2024](#)

EPRS – [Priority dossiers under the Belgian EU Council Presidency](#)

EPRS – [International Holocaust Remembrance Day: The fragility of freedom](#)

EPRS – [Zero tolerance for female genital mutilation](#)

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

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

ECRE - [Transitioning out of the Temporary Protection Directive](#)

ECRE - [The Right to Work for Asylum Applicants in the EU](#)

ECRE - [The Rights of Refugees and Asylum Applicants with Disabilities](#)