

Discovering hands from Germany wins first prize in the EESC 2017 Civil Society Prize for genuine entrepreneurship and outstanding work on employment

Initiatives from Greece, Belgium, Italy and Spain are awarded the other prizes

The five winning initiatives show what is being done by numerous NGOs across Europe to help some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society enter the labour market. Each of the winning projects demonstrates, in its own way, the vital role played by grassroots organisations in making labour markets more inclusive and in encouraging people of all ages and backgrounds to move into employment or entrepreneurship.

“It is a great pleasure and a privilege to present this prize to the winners. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate them, but also to pay well-deserved tribute to all the individuals and civil society organisations whose hard work and commitment to making people’s lives better is an example to everyone,” said EESC President Georges Dassis.

The German project [Discovering hands](#), which trains blind and visually impaired women to use their superior tactile sense to improve early breast cancer detection, was awarded EUR 14 000. The four other initiatives from Greece, Belgium, Italy and Spain were awarded EUR 9 000 each. [REvive Greece](#) helps refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to integrate into host countries by teaching them computer programming and connecting them with young European entrepreneurs. [DUO for a JOB from Belgium](#) is an intergenerational and intercultural mentoring programme which offers a free six-month individual service for young migrant job seekers provided by people over 50 years of age who have professional experience in a similar field to theirs. The Italian [Progetto Quid run by Cooperativa Sociale Quid](#) is an ethical fashion brand which helps vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as asylum seekers and victims of slavery, prostitution and domestic violence to enter the labour market. The Spanish [Laundry ID](#) project by the [Institute of Robotics for Dependency \(IRD\)](#) aims to create jobs for people with disabilities in a laundry service which has been technologically redesigned and adapted to their needs.

The five winning initiatives were chosen from a list of over 100 projects. The high number of entries for the 2017 Civil Society Prize shows that unemployment continues to be a real issue in Europe, with one in ten people being unemployed and one in four at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Civil society initiatives are often able to help people who are most isolated from the labour market in a more personalised manner, which is crucial for

meeting their needs.

The Civil Society Prize, now in its ninth edition, is awarded for “excellence in civil society initiatives”. Each year, the prize covers a different aspect of the EESC’s activities. The 2016 prize was dedicated to civil society organisations working to improve the lives of refugees and migrants.

Further details about the 2017 Civil Society Prize are available [here](#). You can watch the video of the winning projects here.

[Opening Remarks of First Vice-President Frans Timmermans: Press Conference on the way forward for EU migration policy](#)

Good morning to all of you. As you know, we’ve discussed migration many times in this press over the last three years. We’ve seen many challenges. With the Member States, international organisations and the NGO’s we’ve worked together, towards security at our borders, better management and control within our borders, and stability beyond our borders.

On the one hand we saw the sad plight of refugees, fleeing from war and persecution but also migrants simply in search of a better life. On the other hand we saw the fact that some of our citizens felt overwhelmed with so many people arriving so suddenly without any certainty that governments had control over it or that Europe had control over it. Without any idea if and when this was going to stop. And with questions about whether our welfare societies might buckle under the strain.

We need to do this for our citizens. We need to be here for our citizens. We need to manage this issue for our citizens. But also for the people who need protection. Let me be very clear. This issue will be with us for at least another generation, if not two. If there is anybody who thinks that if the short term crisis is over, the issue migration can sort of fade into the background, that would be mistaken.

We now need to move from an ad hoc crisis response to structural solutions that can provide a safety net to any EU country that is acutely exposed to very high migration pressures. We have to admit that the instruments such as we have them now, do not provide the answer to that challenge.

Solutions that we need to find must simultaneously protect our common borders, save lives, stop the smugglers, relieve inhumane suffering, give refuge to those in need and return those who have no right to stay; and also

solutions that focus on tackling the root causes of migration in close cooperation and partnerships with third countries, especially in Africa.

We need to be realistic: this is an issue that needs policy and needs an integral approach. Migration is and will be a permanent feature of our life. And issues such as climate change, geopolitical upheaval, poor governance, and demographic developments all will have their influence on migratory flows.

And no matter what people may want you to believe: there is no sea wide enough, no fence high enough, to prevent people from coming if desperation takes a hold. If they don't see any alternative, they will climb even the highest wall. That's not what we need to do.

Europe is the continent of solidarity, and our doors will remain open for those in need of protection. But we must be able to manage arrivals collectively in an organised and more structural view. The only way we can ensure that those who need protection will receive protection, is if we can also ensure that those who are not entitled to protection return to their places of origin or stay where they belong.

Our citizens deserve to have a robust, resilient, future-oriented European migration policy which is fair to all member states and calls upon all member states to show solidarity and responsibility.

As I alluded to earlier, experience shows that unilateral policies are expensive, erode our mutual trust, harm the Schengen system and ultimately will all fail. Only a truly comprehensive approach by us all, Commission, Parliament, Council and Member States will deliver real results to the challenge of migration.

You know that we have already put many proposals on the table. Out of the main 23 border and migration proposals presented, 15 are still outstanding and need to be adopted. It is essential that Parliament and Council now move forward quickly. Because without all these building blocks – all building blocks are necessary – you cannot have a comprehensive solution. If you leave one or two of the building blocks out that will not work. The others will fail as well.

This then is our contribution we want to make to the debate in the European Council next week and we hope and trust that Heads of State or Government will agree to this path, and give the necessary political impetus.

You know, people in our Member States, they don't care at all if it's the Commission, the Parliament or Council that has to make the next move. Because for many we're all the same. Every Citizens' Dialogue I do, people say: "Europe is failing us." They're not saying: "The Commission is failing us, or the Parliament is failing us or the Council is failing us." They're saying collectively we're not providing the solutions we should be providing. So everyone has to take its responsibility. And we need to do so before a next crisis catches us unawares.

And we have made progress over the years. Our joint efforts to respond to the migration and refugee crisis have led to tangible results, with irregular arrivals significantly down in both the Eastern and the Central Mediterranean.

We have set up in record speed the European Border and Coast Guard to strengthen control of our external borders and provide rapid assistance to Member States who are exposed to severe migratory pressure.

We reached out to partner countries to tackle the root causes of migration. The EU-Turkey Statement has resulted in the reduction of dangerous journeys across the Aegean by 97%, virtually eliminating the tragic loss of life, delivering a blow to the criminal business of the people smugglers.

The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey has ensured that 1 million of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees in Turkey receive monthly cash transfers. And 2 million Syrian refugees will get access to primary healthcare service.

The launch of the first EU-wide resettlement scheme in July 2015 and the EU-Turkey Statement has offered legal pathways to almost 26,000 people.

But, we're not there yet. We have been struggling with relocation, with preparing and outfitting refugee accommodation for the winter, with the bad and deteriorating conditions in Libya, with increasing numbers of arrivals from Northern Africa, low returns from Europe and the fact that internal border controls persist.

On a side note let me say that with regard to relocation, we are today referring Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland to the Court, as they have given no indication, even after the reasoned opinion issued last summer, that they will respect their legal obligations and contribute to showing solidarity with Greece and Italy.

So what's the way forward? We must stay the course and further consolidate our comprehensive migration approach by putting in place the remaining building blocks of the internal and external dimensions of migration policy.

If you put all these bricks together, you have a very strong building. If you leave one brick out, the building will remain weak.

Before the summer of 2016, we've put forward a package of instruments to reform the EU's asylum policy. Everyone agrees on the importance of these reforms – but a year and a half after the proposals were made, the legislative process between the Council and Parliament has not advanced on some parts of the package, and the momentum seems to actually be fading.

The most contested aspect of these reforms is the Dublin Regulation, and more specifically the use of compulsory relocation as an expression of solidarity.

Taking into account positions expressed by the European Parliament and the Council discussions, one way forward could be to adopt an approach where the component of compulsory relocation would apply to situations of serious crisis, while in less challenging situations, relocation would be based on

voluntary commitments from Member States. In those situations it could be possible to envisage solidarity being provided in different forms.

The Commission will do its best and play its role in helping the Parliament and Council to reach a compromise that is the right one for this Union and a fair one for all Member States.

In any event, everyone has to pull their weight. For that, the only means for the Union to function is when we share its benefits, share its burdens and help each other in difficult times.

As the Treaty states: the area of border checks, asylum and immigration shall be governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including financial implications, between the Member States.

While we can and should cooperate with third countries to tackle root causes of migration, we cannot control them. But we can determine what goes on in our own house. So let's get it in order.

Beyond reforming our common European asylum system, there are a number of important things that must be done in parallel to manage migration better. And all those elements require political will, real commitment, and of course money.

We need to consolidate the progress achieved together so far and deliver on the comprehensive reform package by June next year – this is what we propose to EU leaders today.

We understand this won't be easy. But the only way to confront an issue as complicated and as big as migration, is to find a comprehensive set of solutions that are proportionate to the challenge of getting back to Schengen and finally moving from an ad hoc to a structural approach.

In today's Communication we set out a step-by-step roadmap of what could be done from now until June next year.

First, the internal dimension. With regard to the asylum reform package: the EU Asylum agency and Eurodac proposals can be adopted by March. The same goes for a political agreement on the Qualification Regulation. This would facilitate reaching political agreement on the Reception Conditions Directive and the Resettlement Framework by May and starting trilogues on the Asylum Procedures Regulation also by May.

In parallel, the broad outlines with regard to solidarity and responsibility in the Dublin Regulation should be identified by April paving the way for an agreement at the meeting of EU leaders in Sofia in May, swiftly followed by a position from the Council to start negotiations, and a final political deal on the overall reform during the June European Council.

Furthermore, we need to complete the pledging exercise for the new resettlement scheme by February, increase returns capacity and commit the necessary assets of staff for the European Border and Coast Guard by March, and launch the first pilot projects on legal migration for key partner

countries and agree at least three further readmission arrangements by May.

Then on the external dimension: to ensure full and sustained implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, the next 3 billion Euro allocation should be mobilised soon.

In Libya, the EU must do more – much more – to help protect migrants and refugees, and by February help at least 15,000 persons stranded in Libya to voluntarily return to their countries and carry out 1000 resettlements from Libya to Europe through the UNHCR emergency scheme. By March, the existing funding gap of 340 million Euros to the North Africa Window of our Trust Fund should be closed, with contributions hopefully by all Member States.

By May, we need to adopt the first wave of projects under the European Sustainable Development Fund. The work of the EU-African Union Task Force should be supported too.

In conclusion, by agreeing how to fairly balance and share solidarity and responsibility, the EU can respond to one of the biggest concerns of its citizens.

This will inspire the confidence of our citizens that we can jointly control migration, that we can rebuild mutual trust and secure the unity between our Member States which, ultimately, is our greatest asset.

And most important of all, it will help us continue to see people in need as fellow human beings who deserve European solidarity. Not people to be feared because they disrupt us. People we can help, because they come into a European Union that is able and willing, with all its assets, to make sure that people who seek protection because they flee from war and prosecution actually get that protection.

[Stepping up support for security and sustainable development in partner countries](#)

The addition of CBSD, as a new type of assistance, to the [Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace](#) (IcSP) will allow the EU to support partner countries more effectively in building their capacity to prevent and manage crises on their own.

High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** said: *“Investing in the security of our partner countries, at their request, is in the EU’s and our partners’ interests. The EU is not only a political actor and an economic partner, but also a critical security provider, notably in Africa. We have*

already trained more than 30.000 policemen and women, soldiers, judges: with this new measure, we'll now be able to complete our support by providing them the necessary tools to perform their duty. This will help empower our partner countries to tackle their own security, governance and stability, essential prerequisite for a sustainable development."

Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven **Mimica** added: *"There can be no real development without ensuring stability and people's security. In order to achieve sustainable development, the EU will assist partner countries in providing effective and accountable security services to their citizens, which are consistent with democratic norms, good governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights."*

The amendment to the IcSP will allow for assisting military actors to perform development and human security-related tasks, under exceptional and clearly defined circumstances: where non-military actors cannot perform them, where there is a threat to the existence of functioning State institutions or the protection of human rights, and where a consensus exists between the partner country concerned and the EU that military actors are key for preserving, establishing or re-establishing the conditions essential for sustainable development, including in crises and fragile or destabilised contexts and situations.

Areas of possible support to partner countries foreseen under CBSD include:

- training, such as in the areas of human rights, good governance or human resource management;
- advice and technical cooperation;
- provision of equipment and infrastructure improvements, such as IT-systems, protective gear, health- or training-related facilities.

Concretely, this could entail for example the support to mine clearing, civil protection tasks in emergencies, or reconstruction or rehabilitation of civil infrastructure.

Through supporting concrete good governance measures, the CBSD assistance will also contribute to enhancing efficiency, civilian oversight and democratic control of the military.

The funding cannot be used for, weapons, ammunition or any kind of lethal equipment. There are clear safe-guards in place to ensure that the support will help to achieve development objectives only.

First support measures under the CBSD amendment are expected to materialise in early 2018.

Background

In some cases, lasting solutions to conflict and insecurity will not be possible without the contribution of the military, which is an integral part of the security and institutional setup of states. The addition of CBSD assistance to the IcSP will allow supporting military actors, in exceptional circumstances, and only in cases when the military performs a development

objective, in our partner countries. To this end, €100 million will be added to the IcSP financial envelope for the period of 2018-2020.

The amendment to the IcSP follows up to the Commission's commitments under the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which recognises the link between security and development and underlining the importance of just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

For More Information

Council Press Release, 07/12/2017 – [Contributing to global stability and peace: Council adopts improvements to the EU's assistance instrument](#)

[MEMO – Questions and Answers: Measures in support of security and development in partner countries](#)

[Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace](#)

Questions and Answers: Measures in support of security and development in partner countries

The addition of Capacity Building in support of Security and Development (CBSD), as a new type of assistance, to the IcSP will allow the EU to support partner countries more effectively in building their capacity to prevent and manage crises on their own.

What is the purpose of the Regulation amending the IcSP Regulation?

Regulation (EU) No 230/2014, which establishes an [Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace](#) (IcSP) has three components: crisis response, conflict prevention and actions addressing global, trans-regional and emerging threats. This amendment extends the EU's assistance to the military actors of partner countries, under exceptional and clearly defined circumstances, with a sustainable development objective. The initiative is designed to support partner countries to prevent and manage crises on their own, contributing to national and regional stability and allowing for sustainable development, as well as the achievement of peaceful and inclusive societies.

Why is it necessary to provide assistance to the military actors of partner countries?

The European Union subscribed to the internationally agreed United Nations' *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* – and in particular its Sustainable

Development Goal (SDG) 16 on 'peace and justice' – which stresses the link between security and development and underline the importance of just, peaceful and inclusive societies. SDG 16 requests to “strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacities at all levels, in particular in developing countries, for preventing violence and combatting terrorism and crime”.

In some cases, lasting solutions to conflict and insecurity will not be possible without the contribution of the military, which is an integral part of government and institutional setup of states.

The [European Council Conclusions of 19/20 December 2013](#) emphasised “the importance of supporting partner countries and regional organisations, through providing training, advice, equipment and resources where appropriate, so that they can increasingly prevent or manage crises by themselves”.

In April 2015, the European Commission and the High Representative adopted a [Joint Communication on capacity building in support of security and development](#). This Communication identified gaps in the EU’s ability to provide support in building the capacities of partners in the security sector. The Joint Communication concluded that there was no EU budget instrument designed to provide comprehensive financing for security capacity building in partner countries, in particular the military component. This hampers the EU’s ability to achieve external action objectives, including fostering conditions for peace, human security and sustainable development. Through the amendment of the IcSP this situation should be remedied in the short and medium term.

This assistance will be exceptional:

- when authorities cannot address a crisis through civilian means;
- when there is a serious threat to the functioning of State institutions with implications for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and where civilian State institutions cannot cope with this threat;
- and when there exists a consensus that the involvement of the security sector, and in particular the military, is key for preserving, establishing or re-establishing the conditions essential for sustainable development.

What kind of activities will be financed?

The amendment of the Regulation introduces the possibility of a new type of EU assistance measures, enabling support to enhance partners’ capacity to prevent, prepare for and respond to crises.

The assistance may cover support to the military in the form of training, mentoring and advice or supply of equipment in pursuit of development objectives such as IT-systems, protective gear, health- or training-related facilities.

Funding of recurrent military expenditure, the provision of arms and

ammunition or lethal equipment and training that is designed to contribute to the fighting capacity of the armed forces is completely excluded.

The addition of CBSD to the IcSP aims to promote good governance in the public administration, including the ministries of defence and the armed forces, which are an integral part of the executive branch of government. Activities could include support to enhance efficiency, transparency, accountability, civilian oversight and democratic control of the armed forces, in particular with regard to the legal framework; organisation and administration, including standards and ethics; human resources management (e.g. recruitment, training, remuneration, career development, disciplinary measures, retirement); asset management; financial management, including budget and procurement; internal control and inspection, reporting, audit, judicial oversight, Parliamentary control; public communication, media relations and interaction with civil society.

EU financial support under the CBSD amendment of the IcSP could allow the military to perform development and human security-related tasks, when civilian actors cannot perform them, notably the reconstruction/rehabilitation of civil infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges, schools, hospitals), mine clearing, the removal and disposal of explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordinance, disarmament and demobilisation of ex-combatants, the collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons and civil protection tasks in emergencies.

With regard to specific pieces of equipment and infrastructure upgrade interventions for the military, it may cover IT systems (including software), transport vehicles (for example those for troops or cargo), communication means, uniforms and protective gear, surveillance and mine clearance equipment, training-related equipment and facilities, functional infrastructure (such as buildings, barracks), medical and sport facilities, water and sanitation infrastructure, the power supply, logistic and storage facilities, furniture, and stationery.

CBSD assistance measures should be underpinned by the following principles:

- ownership by the partner country, alignment to the partner's long-term development strategies, harmonisation of support and coordination of interventions among actors to avoid duplication, focus on results and mutual accountability (development effectiveness principles);
- respect for human rights and adherence to international law and international humanitarian law;
- coherence with other EU actions as part of a broader EU comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises.

Why can this support not be financed through our Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)?

CSDP missions or operations and their budgets are not designed to provide equipment to security sector actors of partner countries.

The expenditure for military operations to be financed pursuant to Article

41(2) TEU by the [Athena mechanism](#) concerns expenditure arising out of the functioning and the equipment of the EU CSDP missions/operations. CSDP missions provide training to military and civilian security forces of third countries.

Due to the design of the Athena mechanism today, it cannot provide the equipment and help ensure sustainability for training purposes or to follow up on the operationalisation of the defence units the CSDP missions have trained.

Athena as it stands now is not an instrument for the benefit of third parties, including developing countries.

Where would the money come from?

No additional financial resources would be mobilised to operationalise CBSD within the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.

To support our partner countries in providing stability and security for their citizens through CBSD, the IcSP financial envelope will be increased by €100 million for the period 2018-2020, primarily through redeployment within Heading IV (*'the EU as an external actor'*) of the general budget of the Union, excluding the use of funds allocated to the Development Cooperation Instrument.

Support to health or education or any other development activity will not be diverted. This is not about turning development tools into a militarised approach. It is about using sources of financing in a coherent way and responding effectively to the needs of the population in our partner countries.

Turning this approach into practice will also be important with regard to implementing the Global Strategy with all EU instruments used in complementarity.

For more information

[Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace](#)

Council Press release

[Regulation proposal for amending Regulation \(EU\) No 230/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council establishing an Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace](#)

Commission welcomes Member States'

agreement on the European Accessibility Act, but calls for more ambition on responsibilities of public authorities.

The European Commission welcomes the general approach found by the Member States at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumers Council today on the Commission's proposal to make many everyday products and services accessible to people with a disability ([European Accessibility Act](#)).

Following the agreement, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, said:

"Last Sunday, we celebrated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. There can be no doubt: we need to do more to ensure equal opportunities for the increasing number of people with disabilities in Europe.

Two years after I put this proposal on the table, Member States have finally come to an agreement. Today's general approach is a very important signal to 80 million people with disabilities in the European Union. The Accessibility Act will establish the world's largest market for accessible products, which will not only bring down prices, but will contribute to enabling disabled persons to participate in society and the labour market. It also responds to our shared responsibility to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This being said, I would have wished for a more ambitious approach by the Member States. In particular, I regret that the agreement does not include harmonised requirements to be used by public authorities when buying accessible products and services or when spending EU funds, nor to make the 112 emergency number fully accessible. This is a missed opportunity for public authorities to take the lead on accessibility.

This agreement is of course not the end of the process and I look forward to starting the final negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission as soon as possible. This initiative will bring concrete improvements to so many people's lives. Therefore 2018 must be the year of delivery for the Accessibility Act.

Last but not least, following the agreement found in July, I am very happy with the Council's final approval to add 13 new or stricter exposure limits to EU legislation to better protect workers from cancer-causing substances. This is a milestone in the protection of workers' health and safety, in particular against cancer at the workplace which is the first cause of work-related deaths in the EU. I am now looking forward to a swift deal between the European Parliament and the Council on the second list of substances,

which we have submitted in January 2017.”

Next steps

The agreement on the Accessibility Act between Member States paves the way for final negotiations with the European Parliament, which already adopted its position in September 2017.

As for the final adoption of the first revision of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive, this will now be published in the Official Journal of the European Union. The Directive will enter into force as of the 20th day following the publication. Member States will then have 2 years to implement the updated rules.

For More Information

[Press release: Commission proposes to make products and services more accessible to disabled persons](#)

[Press release: Commission welcomes agreement by Parliament and Council to protect workers better against cancer-causing chemicals.](#)