[India: Safer, eco-friendlier and faster commuting in Pune as the EIB supports the city metro rail with EUR 600 million]

- **The first tranche worth EUR 200 million from the EIB will finance construction of 2 new lines of city metro rail, 30 stations and purchase of 102 new rail cars;**
- **The Pune Metro Rail will enable easier and affordable access to jobs, healthcare and education, improve economic outlooks in the city, and increase the air quality while reducing greenhouse emissions;**
- **New metro rail system to become a source of employment and improve safety for women and young girls travelers;**

The European investment Bank will invest EUR 600 million in construction of two new lines of the metro rail and acquisition of 102 modern metro cars in the city of Pune, India. The new metro rail system will reduce commuting hours for more than three million people living in the city. This is the fourth EIB investment in metro rail systems in India; to date the EU`s Bank supported metro rail systems in Bhopal, Bangalore and Lucknow. With the Pune investment, the total amount of the EIB approved support for metro rail systems in India reached EUR 2 billion.

Pune metro system will have 31 km of tracks, both over- and underground, with 30 stations, and increase the coverage of the public city transport network. Once completed, the Pune metro rail will create 900 new jobs and allow around 600,000 safer, affordable, punctual, and faster commutes each day.

On top of creating affordable and accessible public transport network and a reliable alternative to heavily congested streets, the new metro will reduce pollution and greenhouse emissions and improve the quality of air across the city. With easier access to the local job market, healthcare and education for the people, Pune metro rail will make a positive impact on the quality of life and doing business, and contribute especially safety of woman travelers.

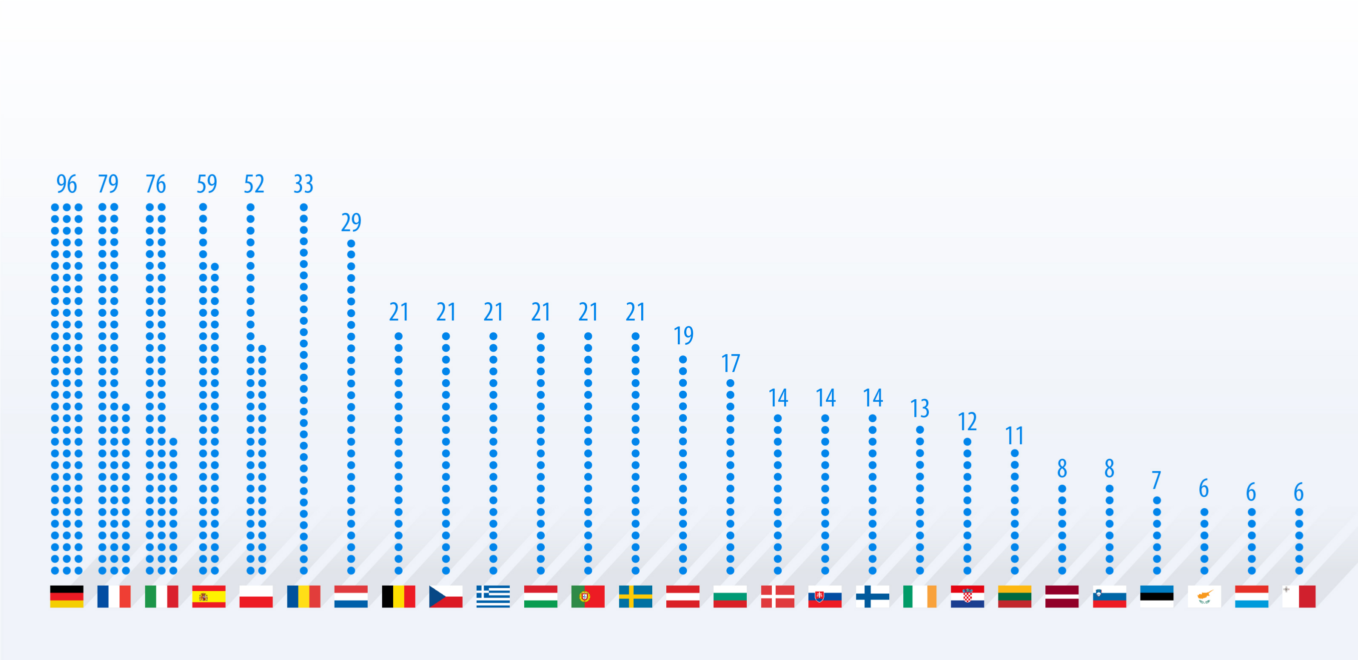
Andrew McDowell, Vice President of the European Investment Bank said: "Pune metro rail will improve the living conditions of three million people in Pune. It will enable more accessible and affordable access to workplaces, healthcare, education and markets, while protecting the environment and improving the quality of air in the city. This is a good example of how international cooperation and local know-how can make tangible improvement for people and businesses alike, and at the same time contribute to climate action and protection of the environment. I am very proud to see cooperation between Europe and India growing through projects like this."

H.E. Ugo Astuto, the EU Ambassador to India said: "The fight against the climate change is a common priority for both the European Union and India. We have been partnering with India on its sustainable urbanization agenda including development of world-class transport across cities. This agreement further demonstrates the close cooperation between the EU and India in financing related projects."

About SDG Goals Contribution

Pune Metro Rail project will support India achieve a number of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) namely SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 11 (Sustainable cities) and SDG 5 (gender equality).

Article – Infographic: how many seats does each country get in in the European Parliament?



Distribution of seats: no losers

The redistribution of seats ensures that no EU country lost any seats, while some gained from one to five seats to redress underrepresentation in light of demographic changes.

The seat distribution takes into account the population of member states and follows the principle of degressive proportionality. That means that countries that are smaller in terms of population should have fewer MEPs than bigger countries. At the same time, MEPs from larger countries should represent more people than MEPs from smaller countries. In this way, smaller countries have a relatively stronger presence in Parliament.

EASO publishes a COI report: Syria – Exercise of authority in recaptured areas

Today, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) report titled "Syria – Exercise of authority in recaptured areas". This report is part of a series of Syria reports produced in 2019-2020. These reports cover actors of protection, internal mobility, key socio-economic indicators, and targeting of individuals. The reports provide information relevant for international protection status determination for Syrian asylum seekers, and will be used in the development of a country guidance note on Syria.

Syrians continued to be the top citizenship applying for asylum in the EU+ uninterruptedly since 2013, although the number of applications lodged between January and November 2019 (some 65 600) was lower than in the same period in 2018 (about 69 900). Three in every four Syrian applications (almost 75%) were lodged in four EU+ countries.

Syrian applicants also received more first-instance decisions than any other citizenship group. Since the beginning of 2019, Syrian applicants received some 72 200 decisions. Syria was also the country of origin whose nationals had the most cases pending at first instance in the EU+. At the end of November 2019, there were some 49 000 Syrian applications awaiting a first-instance decision, some 80% of which were pending in just five EU+ countries.

The report, EASO COI Report: Syria – Exercise of authority in recaptured areas, concerns the Syrian territories, which have been outside the control of the Government of Syria and returned to its control through so-called reconciliation agreements. It explores how these agreements were reached, their consequences for the population of the respective areas, as well as how the Government of Syria exerts its control in the aftermath.

The report was drafted by the Country of Origin Information (COI) specialists on Syria from Norway (Landinfo), as referred to in the acknowledgments section in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology, and was reviewed by COI experts from the Netherlands. Additionally, external expert reviews were carried out by ACCORD.

Additional information to complement this report can be found in the following EASO reports:

Photo: © iStock/Derek Brumby

A quarter of a century providing evidence for better policies and actions on drugs in Europe

This year, the EMCDDA celebrates 25 years of monitoring the drug situation in Europe. In the quarter of a century since the agency embarked on its first work programme in 1995, we have seen revolutionary changes, both in the extent and nature of the drugs problem, and in the world in which we live. Keeping pace with an increasingly dynamic drug phenomenon, while remaining relevant to policy and practice, requires constant reflection, innovation and agility. This is why we will be developing a new business model as we pursue our vision to contribute to a healthier and more secure Europe.

When the agency first opened in Lisbon, with a staff of 17, the EU of then 15

Member States was in the midst of a major heroin epidemic, with drug policy largely influenced by HIV transmission, AIDS and overdose deaths. Our monitoring at that time centred on a handful of 'traditional' illicit drugs — mainly heroin, cannabis and cocaine. Today, Europe's drug market is far more volatile and complex, driven by globalisation, the internet and rapid changes in technology. As a result, we are also monitoring 780 new psychoactive substances, many of which were unknown when the agency was first established.

The creation of the EMCDDA symbolised a major political decision to build drug-related policies on evidence rather than ideology. By improving the comparability of drug data across the EU, we have given countries a 'common language' with which to describe the extent and effects of drug use. We can now be proud of our internationally-recognised European drug monitoring system, including early-warning mechanisms to ensure rapid responses to new substances and emerging threats. This has contributed to a deeper and broader understanding of the problem, earning the agency the reputation as the trusted reference point on drugs in Europe. And as we expand our reporting to include data from innovative sources, we will build a better and timelier knowledge base to inform drug policies in the years to come.

For the past 25 years, the EMCDDA has provided strategic analysis in a policy area that cuts across health and security. Part of the agency's unique value is its comprehensive coverage of this multifaceted problem. With our Strategy 2025, we are committed to adding value to the work of EU and national drug policymakers and professionals. This will bring about better informed drug policy and action, in line with the EU balanced approach to reduce drug supply and demand.

Our achievements to date would not have been possible without close collaboration with national, European and international partners, particularly the EU institutions, the Reitox network and our host country, Portugal. Working in partnership will continue to be central to our activity, as the European drugs problem becomes increasingly linked to, and influenced by, global developments in the drugs field.

Although today's drugs problem is less visible 'on the streets' than it once was, we are confronted with a rapidly growing and violent drug market, which is increasingly global, joined-up and digitally enabled. Availability of highly potent and pure products at lower prices is a cause for increasing concern and represents a clear wake-up call for policymakers. As we celebrate our first 25 years of monitoring and look to the future, I firmly believe that drugs must, once again, receive the attention they deserve.

Alexis Goosdeel, EMCDDA Director

[Belgium: PMV supports SMEs with flexible long-term loans thanks to the EIB]

- **EIB and PMV sign EUR 60 million loan agreement for setting up a "Corporate Loans Platform" (CLP) for SMEs of not less than EUR 100 million.**
- **In time, working with external partners, up to EUR 200 million in total will be made available to larger Flemish SMEs.**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Flanders Participation Company (PMV) have signed a EUR 60 million loan agreement with a view to setting up a new platform, managed by PMV, for loans to Flemish SMEs. This will allow PMV to expand its range of flexible financial instruments with long-term loans for larger SMEs as an alternative to issuing bonds.

PMV is putting up EUR 40 million, which means that initially there will be EUR 100 million available. By collaborating with external financiers the aim is to increase this amount to EUR 200 million. The loans are designed to enable companies to diversify and improve the balance of their debt structure, making them better able to withstand future interest rate rises.

The loans (EUR 5-15 million) will have terms of between five and ten years, with a fixed or variable interest rate of between 2% and 4% and repayment in full on the final due date, or with a repayment schedule following a grace period.

PMV intends using flexible long-term loans to provide SMEs with growth or investment plans with the opportunity to further diversify their funding and provide them with solutions supplementing traditional bank loans. "*These are very cheap today, but will be less available in the very long term. By diversifying their funding sources, SMEs will become more resistant to future interest rate rises or other market fluctuations. They will also be able to free up working capital to fund further growth. Large companies have been diversifying their funding sources like this for a very long time through debenture loans, which is not so easy for SMEs to do. This partnership with the EIB makes it possible to offer an advantageous interest rate*." says **Filip Lacquet**, corporate finance group manager at PMV.

EIB Director General **Jean-Christophe Laloux** added: "*The EIB is more than just a bank; it's a European institution with a very clear purpose: to improve people's lives through its investments. SMEs are the driving force of the Flemish economy and are responsible for a very sizeable share of employment. At a time of geopolitical, economic and climate uncertainty, it's important for us to give these businesses some support.*"

These PMV funding solutions take account of the needs of the borrowing companies and supplement traditional bank financing. Banks or other loan providers must take on at least 50% of total debt financing before a company can have recourse to a PMV loan. PMV will manage the platform and be responsible for making and implementing the deals. It is targeting the flexible long-term loans at businesses with a prudent financial profile and a relatively low gearing ratio. The new lending formula follows talks with numerous businesses and a study by the Roland Berger research agency.

Background information:

The Flanders Participation Company is a do and dare company that is shaping the future of the Flemish economy. It provides funding for promising businesses, from the day they first open their doors, through their various growth stages and even on to operating internationally. PMV offers bespoke financial solutions to all companies with a good business plan and a strong management team – providing capital, loans and guarantees. It also implements projects, working with and for the government, and other partners, that are important for prosperity and wellbeing in Flanders. PMV manages a portfolio of EUR 1.2 billion.