

Capital Markets Union: Agreement reached on measures to improve the EU's investment fund market

In turn, investors across the EU will have access to a much larger choice of fund products at better value.

Commission Vice-President Valdis **Dombrovskis**, responsible for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *"Today's agreement will cut red tape and improve clarity for fund managers who want to market their products across the EU. This will lead to more choice for investors, at lower costs – an important milestone for the Capital Markets Union. To give an example, we want fund managers based in Milan to be able to easily offer their funds in Riga, without compromising on investor protection."*

Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"This step removes a stumbling block to cross-border investments in the EU, a significant step in completing the Capital Markets Union. Funding has to flow freely across the EU so it can best benefit companies to get them the financing they need to grow."*

Investment funds are an important tool to channel private savings into the economy and increase funding possibilities for companies. The EU investment funds market amounts to a total of €14.3 trillion. However, this market has not yet achieved its full potential. 70% of the total assets under management are held by investment funds authorised or registered for distribution only in their domestic market. Only 37% of Undertakings for Collective Investment in Transferable Securities (UCITS) and about 3% of alternative investment funds (AIFs) are currently registered for distribution in more than 3 Member States. This is partly due to regulatory barriers that currently hinder the cross-border distribution of investment funds.

Today's agreement will remove some of these barriers for all kinds of investment funds, making cross-border distribution more transparent, while removing overly complex and burdensome requirements and harmonising diverging national rules. Increased competition will give investors more choice and better value, while safeguarding a high level of investor protection.

More specifically, the main changes introduced by the new rules will:

- Clarify customer service obligations for asset managers in their host Member State. This should ensure that investors have access to a uniform, high level of customer service across the EU without imposing on asset managers the cost of maintaining a physical presence or local facilities in all host markets.

Next Steps

This political agreement will be followed by further technical work before the European Parliament and the Council can formally adopt the final texts.

Background

The legislative package agreed today was [presented by the Commission in March 2018](#) and forms part of the [Capital Markets Union Action Plan](#). A new Directive amends the existing UCITS and AIFM Directives and covers a limited number of issues which linked to access to the internal market (Art. 53 TFEU). A new Regulation covers issues linked to the functioning of the internal market (Art. 114 TFEU).

[Press release on the proposal for new rules on the cross-border distribution of funds](#)

[Q&A MEMO on the proposal for new rules on the cross-border distribution of funds](#)

[Capital Markets Union on the DG FISMA website](#)

[Joint Statement by First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Jourová on the agreement on the digitalisation of company law](#)

The European Parliament and the Member States reached today a provisional agreement on new rules allowing companies to be able to register, set up new branches or file documents to the business register online. Going digital will make the process of setting up a business more efficient and cost effective.

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** and Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra **Jourová** welcome this agreement: *“The digitalisation of company law will help entrepreneurs create and run companies more easily, especially when they want to operate in different EU countries. By using digital tools, companies will save time and money when they launch a new business or branch and update information available on business registers. Strong safeguards and the exchange of information between Member States will prevent fraud. It is now essential that discussions with the Parliament and Council progress quickly on the other part of our Company Law package – the proposal on company mobility – so that it can be adopted before the European elections. It will provide for clear procedures for companies who want to*

move and grow in the Single Market, with strong safeguards to protect employees and prevent abuses, including for tax purposes.”

Background

There are currently only 17 Member States that provide a fully online procedure for registering companies. Under the new rules, companies will be able to create businesses and branches online with all necessary checks and protections in all Member States. It will be possible to file company information fully online, which will cut costs and administrative burden. More information from business registers will be available for free to stakeholders, especially on those who represent companies, which will contribute to bringing more trust in business transactions. Based on the new cross-border information exchange system Member States may block a director disqualified in one Member State from registering a company or becoming a director in another Member State. The amendment to [the Directive relating to certain aspects of company law](#) was part of [the company law package](#) proposed as part of the Commission’s [Single Market Strategy](#) and proposed by the European Commission in April 2018. The text must now be formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU in the coming weeks.

For More Information

All information on the Company law package is available [online](#).

[Questions and Answers about Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting \(FGM/C\)](#)

The EU has actively participated in international cooperation to promote the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. Discussion on Female Genital Mutilation is included in human rights and political dialogues with partner countries and in annual dialogues with civil society organisations. Moreover, the EU supports several projects worldwide contributing to the elimination of the practice.

What is FGM/C?

Female genital mutilation consists of the (partial or complete) removal of the external female genitalia, and the infliction of other injuries to the female genitalia for no medical reasons. There are several variations, including partial or complete removal of the clitoris, of the labia minora and majora, the narrowing of the vaginal opening by joining the two sides of the wound, leaving only a small opening for urine and menstrual fluids, and any other non-medical injury such as scraping, incising, pricking or burning. Female genital mutilation causes pain, infection, problems with sexual

intercourse, problems with urination, problems with childbirth, and death.

It is estimated that at least 500,000 women in Europe have undergone FGM/C and 200 million women worldwide. If the practice continues at the current pace, 68 million girls will be cut between 2015 and 2030 in 25 countries where FGM is routinely practiced and data available.

FGM is also defined by the Council of Europe's [Istanbul Convention](#), which requires its criminalisation. Its victims have to be protected in accordance with the Convention's support and protection measures in those Member States that have ratified the Convention. The European Commission has proposed the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention in March 2016 (see [press release](#)).

What does the EU do?

As an issue of great concern the European Union tackles FGM in various ways in its internal and external action, which includes better legal protection and improved access to support for victims, instilling social change and capacity building of practitioners. The actions are based on the focus areas of the [Communication](#) towards the elimination of female genital mutilation from 25 November 2013, on fighting harmful practices such as FGM, as violence of any kind against women and girls, as well as on the [Gender Action Plan from 2016- 2020](#).

1. Knowledge

Estimates show that there may be as many as 200 million victims of female genital mutilation (FGM) worldwide, including at least 500,000 in the EU. These are estimates and there is no official data available on measuring the actual scale of the phenomenon.

It is difficult to estimate the number of victims and girls at risk, and there is little reliable information regarding how, by whom and where it is carried out. Therefore, improving data collection has been a priority.

[European Institute for Gender Equality](#) has carried out research on the prevalence of female genital mutilation in the European Union. It plays a leading role in providing information and supporting Member States to prevent and combat this harmful practice. In November 2018, EIGE published [a study on the prevalence of FGM in Belgium, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus and Malta](#). This study supports the European institutions and EU Member States in providing more accurate qualitative and quantitative information on female genital mutilation and its risk among girls within the EU, taking into account new patterns of migration.

On 6 February 2017 the Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men has published [an opinion on combating FGM/C](#) and other harmful practices containing recommendations to the European Commission and to the Member States.

In 2016, a [prevalence study](#) funded under the Commission's Daphne III programme, was carried out to develop a common definition and methodology on FGM prevalence. It shows that over half a million first-generation immigrant

women and girls in the EU, Norway and Switzerland had undergone FGM before their arrival.

2. Prevention

Prevention is essential and relies on sustainable societal change, as FGM is often deeply rooted in communities' societal and social norms, causing a social pressure on parents to have their daughters cut. Sometimes, it is claimed that undergoing FGM will be beneficial for the girl and preserves her honour.

To change these social norms, the European Union funds grassroots activities, including through its [Spotlight Initiative](#) that focus on health education, children's rights and laws prohibiting FGM. The aim is to help counter the belief that girls need to be cut and raise awareness among those in contact with victims of FGM and girls at risk of FGM.

The EU dedicated the year 2017 to the fight against violence against women. The actions included the funding of projects that deal with FGM/C, as well as an awareness campaign and a dedicated [website NON.NO.NEIN – Say No, Stop Violence against Women](#) providing the main platform for these actions.

This campaign was extended and intensified during 2018. In 2018, the campaign focused on disseminating accurate information and messages about the Istanbul Convention. Outputs of the 2018 campaign implemented in collaboration with the Council of Europe and the European Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls (comprising over 25 European civil society networks) include a [GIF](#) addressing domestic violence in the context of family values; a [harassment-free zone icon](#) addressing sexual harassment printed on stickers, posters and used online; and [an information leaflet](#) explaining the content of the Istanbul Convention and countering myths.

In February 2017, a [web-based platform](#) on Female Genital Mutilation was launched to train judges, nurses, asylum officers, doctors, teachers, police officers and other professionals who are in contact with girls at risk and women who undergone FGM, and to better equip them to prevent it and support these victims. EUR 4.5 million were dedicated to [nine transnational projects](#). Their aim was to prevent, inform about and combat violence against women, young people and children linked to harmful practices.

Combating violence against children is a priority for the European Commission. At the 9th European Forum on the rights of the child, **10 Principles for integrated child protection systems** were proposed. They aim to prevent and respond to violence against children, including gender-based violence, FGM and other harmful practices. The Commission funds [projects to strengthen national child protection systems](#), for instance through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, including projects promoting integrated approaches to child victims, such as children's houses.

In 2016, the [10th European Forum on the rights of the child](#) was dedicated to the protection of children in migration. Discussions particularly focused on the risks of gender-based violence and harmful practices for children in

migration. In order to support the preventive work of health professionals, training packages have been developed, which address FGM as a specific topic in the training [modules](#) among the wider aim of improving the quality of and access to health services for migrant and ethnic minorities. Further, training packages for health professionals have been developed, to improve the quality of and access to health services for migrant and ethnic minorities. FGM/C is a specific topic in the online [training modules](#).

3. Prosecution

FGM is a crime in all EU Member States. In many EU countries it is also possible to prosecute for conducting FGMs abroad, following the principle of extra-territoriality. This prevents families from taking their daughters to their country of origin to have them mutilated there.

- Criminalisation of FGM is also required under the Istanbul Convention and its victims therefore also fall under the scope of the Convention's prevention, support and protection measures, in those Member States that have ratified the Convention (the criminalisation of FGM is a Member State competence). On 13 June 2017, the Istanbul Convention was co-signed by the Commission and Council Presidency on behalf of the EU. The terms of the Conclusion and the related code of conduct on the respective roles of implementation of EU and Member States are currently negotiated in the Council of the EU.
- A correct and timely implementation of the [Victims' Rights Directive](#) ensures that victims of FGM are able to access free confidential specialist support services, including trauma support and counselling, as well as shelters in emergency situations. It also puts in place measures to protect victims against any threat of physical or emotional harm during criminal investigations and trial. In addition, children will be subject to specific protection measures taking into account of their age and maturity. The Victims' Rights Directive applies to all victims of crimes without discrimination and regardless of their residence status, ensuring that it also applies to individuals such as undocumented migrants.
- A [Mutual Learning Seminar](#) for Member States and independent academic experts organised by the Commission in April 2016 examined and discussed good practices in tackling female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and other harmful practices through legislation, improving the evidence base on FGM and the role of awareness raising and training.
- The Commission also disseminates training materials on FGM for legal practitioners, through the [European e-Justice Portal](#). The e-learning course 'United against female genital mutilation' addresses the issue of FGM in the context of health and asylum services. It is aimed at legal practitioners and provides an introduction to understanding FGM as a human rights issue and as a specific form of gender based violence, and its implications in the area of asylum.
- The European Commission published an [analysis of European court cases related to FGM](#) in 2016, in an effort to identify what has allowed states to effectively prosecute.

4. Protection

Girls and women at risk or victims of FGM need particular support when they arrive on the EU territory. EU legislation is in place: a woman or a girl at risk of suffering FGM is eligible for international protection and her specific needs should be taken into account.

- Under the recast Asylum Procedures Directive and the recast Reception Conditions Directive, Member States have now an obligation to identify applicants with special procedural and reception needs, due to their gender or as consequence of serious forms of sexual violence. If such needs are identified, Member States need to provide adequate procedural and reception support to these vulnerable applicants.
- Relevant provisions of the Asylum Procedures Directive provide, for instance, that personal interviews shall be conducted by persons competent to take into account, among other things, the applicant's cultural origin, gender and vulnerability. In addition, Member States should, wherever possible, select an interviewer and interpreter of the same sex of the applicant if the latter requests it.
- Relevant provisions of the Reception Conditions Directive also provide that victims of female genital mutilation should receive the necessary medical and psychological treatment, and staff working with victims of female genital mutilation should have appropriate training.
- The European Asylum Support Office have developed an online training platform for immigration and asylum officials in Member States on gender-specific issues related to asylum and the application of EU law in this area; first trainings will take place this year.
- The reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) put forward by the Commission in May and July 2016 aims to reinforce the protection safeguards available to persons with specific needs, including unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Europe. They mention that specific needs of female **applicants who have experienced gender-based harm** should be taken into account. This includes ensuring access, to medical care, legal support, appropriate trauma counselling and psycho-social care at different stages of the asylum procedure.

5. External action

The EU is supporting projects worldwide dedicated to the elimination of sexual and gender biased violence, and more especially FGM in 19 countries in Africa (total amount of approximately EUR 13.8 million).

An example of this EU support includes a project dedicated to the strengthening of the capacities of the African Court on Human and People's Rights to combat sexual violence against women and its consequences. It also encompasses an EUR 11 million EU contribution to the UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programmes on the Abandonment of FGM/C which aims at:

- supporting 17 countries to enact legal and policy frameworks with appropriate resources and implementation for eliminating FGM;
- providing timely, appropriate and quality services to girls and women at risk of or having experienced FGM in select districts in programmes countries, and;
- supporting activities so that a majority of individuals, families and

communities in programme areas accept the norm of keeping the girls intact.

Among the main results, 16 countries have national coordination and action plans to end FGM in place and 10 have national budget. In 2017, three additional countries (Sudan, Mali and Somalia) introduced legislation to stop FGM. Cross-border collaboration have been initiated in East Africa. The database "Data For All" allows all partner organisations to measure progress and capture data.

3.3 million women and girls benefited from an access to prevention, protection and care services, and 21,176 communities involving 11,431,220 individuals made public declarations on FGM abandonment. New partnerships have been established with health workers to address the medicalization of FGM.

The Commission also supports effort towards the elimination of the FGM practice in the Southern Neighbourhood, for example in Egypt, with the project: "Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Empowerment of Families' Joint Programme" that started in December 2011 and ended in 2017.

This experience has shown that projects and strategies should encompass a multi-level, multi-thematic and coordinated approach, paying specific attention to issues at the margins. Some pillars can contribute to a change of attitudes: engaging with justice, health, religious and political authorities and practitioners, from communities at grassroots level to national level, and to change social norms by engaging with women, men girls and boys.

The joint European Union – United Nations Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls launched in September 2017 is a partnership bringing together the EU, the United Nations, the civil society and government partners (€ 500 million). The thematic focus of the Spotlight Initiative in Africa is on gender-based violence and harmful practices. Eight countries have been selected (Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) where the EU is investing substantive amounts to end FGM and child marriage through comprehensive and integrated approaches, tackling those issues at multiple levels.

Fighting against harmful practices including FGM/C is a priority for EU external action as recognised both under the [EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019](#), the [Gender Action Plan II "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020"](#), as well as the [EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security](#).

The 2008 EU [Guidelines](#) on Violence against Women and Girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them, as well as revised in [2017 Guidelines on the Promotion and protection of Rights of the Child in external actions](#), clearly sets the fight against violence and discrimination against women and girls as a key objective of the EU's external human rights policy. It provides guidance to EU delegations and the Embassies of the EU Member States

in partner countries on actions they can carry out to address these issues.

The EU contributes to eliminating FGM/C globally. It has actively participated in international cooperation to promote the elimination of FGM/C and regularly raises FGM/C in its human rights and political dialogues with partner countries, UN and regional organisations and in annual dialogues with civil society organisations.

The EU is furthermore part of the Donor Working Group on FGM, which brings together key governmental and intergovernmental organisations, and foundations committed to supporting the abandonment of the practice. The EU participates to each of its annual gathering and hosted its meeting in Brussels in December 2017, preceded by the European Forum to build bridges on FGM organised by End FGM European Network with EU support.

What happens next?

[The Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men](#) brings together representatives of EU countries, social partners at EU level and NGOs who assist the Commission in formulating and implementing activities aimed at promoting gender equality. On 2 February 2017, the Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men published an [opinion](#) on combating FGM/C and other harmful practices that contains recommendations to the European Commission and to the Member States. This platform will continue its work in exchanges of relevant experience, policies and practices between EU countries, social partners at EU level and NGOs to combat FGM.

The Commission also commits to continue implementation of measures set out in the Communication [Towards the elimination of female genital mutilation](#) and use appropriate instruments to eradicate FGM/C and build on this experience to tackle other harmful practices.

Under the [Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme](#), the funding will continue for Member States' and civil society-led projects tackling gender-based violence, including FGM/C. In 2018, the European Commission selected 33 projects for a total initial budget of EUR 12.7 million. Furthermore, the 213 proposals which were received for another call for proposals published in 2018 are currently being evaluated (the indicative budget for that call is 13.3 million). Finally, another call published at the beginning of January 2019 will be open for submission from 31 January to 13 June 2019. The overall indicative budget is of EUR 11.7 million with an envelope of EUR 7 million specifically dedicated to gender-based violence (the rest of the funds being allocated to violence against children). This includes projects focusing specifically on combatting FGM/C, empowering girls and women in communities potentially affected by FGM, supporting victims, and supporting professionals, who are in contact with girls at risk and women who have undergone FGM/C, through a web-based platform on female genital mutilation. It also contributes to projects as aimed at working with boys and men via awareness raising [campaigns](#).

For More Information

[Joint Statement on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation](#)

[NON.NO.NEIN – Say No! Stop Violence against Women](#)

[“Spotlight Initiative”](#)

Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: [Towards the elimination of female genital mutilation](#)

Joint Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: [Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy \(2015-2019\)](#)
[“Keeping human rights at the heart of the EU agenda”](#)

[Gender Action Plan II “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020”](#)

[EU guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them](#)

[Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019](#)

[Istanbul Convention](#)

[Daily News 05 / 02 / 2019](#)

Security Union: Commission recommends negotiating international rules for obtaining electronic evidence [updated with correct links 05/02/2019 at 12:31]

Today, the European Commission recommends engaging in two international negotiations on cross-border rules to obtain electronic evidence. With the majority of criminal investigations requiring access to evidence based online and often outside the EU, there is an urgent need to equip police and judicial authorities with the quick and efficient tools fit for modern reality. Following up on the European Council Conclusions from [October 2018](#), the Commission is presenting two negotiating mandates, one for negotiations with the United States and one on the Second Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe “Budapest” Convention on Cybercrime. Both mandates, which need to be approved by the Council, include specific safeguards on data protection, privacy and procedural rights of individuals. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *“Crime and terrorism don’t stop at Europe’s borders. The evidence needed to investigate these crimes is even harder to pin down within borders and jurisdictions. For this reason, today we propose to step up our security cooperation with the United States and the Council of Europe, in order to ensure access to the critical electronic evidence needed for criminal*

investigations by European authorities.” Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra **Jourová** said: *“Criminals use fast, modern technologies to organise their crimes and cover up their evidence. Much of the data needed to track down these criminals is stored in the U.S. or by U.S. companies. It is time to work on a comprehensive EU-wide agreement with the United States to speed up the access of our law enforcement authorities to this evidence. Such an agreement will strengthen our security, while protecting the data privacy and procedural safeguards of our citizens.”* Commissioner for the Security Union Julian **King** said: *“We cannot allow terrorists or criminals to find refuge online abusing modern technology. We need to close the legal loopholes and together, at the international level, continue to squeeze the space in which they operate.”* The [full press release](#) as well as Q&As on the [negotiating mandate with the U.S.](#) and the [Second Additional Protocol](#) are available online. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Kasia Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444; Melanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

Venezuela crisis: EU mobilises additional humanitarian assistance

As many people continue to suffer from the severe socio-economic crisis in Venezuela, the Commission has allocated today additional humanitarian assistance of €5 million to help those most in need. This is in addition to the humanitarian assistance totalling €34 million for the crisis in 2018 alone. *“Helping the Venezuelan people in need is a priority for the European Union. We are stepping up our emergency aid to help the most vulnerable who lack access to food, medicines and basic services and have been forced to leave their homes. We will also continue to support Venezuelans and host communities in neighbouring countries.”* said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides**. To help facilitate humanitarian assistance to partners on the ground, the EU intends to open a humanitarian office in Caracas. The EU support includes the provision of emergency healthcare, access to safe water and sanitation as well as to education. It will further address the population’s protection, shelter, food and nutritional needs. Read the full press release [here](#). (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

Juncker Plan supports innovative maker of car-parts in Spain

The Investment Plan for Europe, or Juncker Plan, is backing a €26 million European Investment Bank (EIB) loan to Spanish company Cikautxo, specialised in rubber and plastic components for the automotive sector. The financing will help the company develop lighter car parts for electric and hybrid cars and boost its research and development activities in fuel efficiency. The loan will also help the company increase its production capacity in its Spanish facilities, in the province of Biscay, as well as at its Czech, Romanian and Slovak sites. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *“Electric cars are crucial for the transition towards a more sustainable Europe. This €26 million EFSI-backed loan to Cikautxo to develop innovative products for electric and hybrid cars is helping to put the EU at the forefront of clean transport. Thanks to the support of the Investment Plan, hundreds of jobs*

will be created in Spain and regional development will be supported in Czechia, Romania and Slovakia.” A press release is available [here](#). Spain is the fourth largest beneficiary of the Juncker Plan relative to GDP, with more than €8 billion of EFSI financing set to trigger over €46 billion of investments. As of end of 2018, the Juncker Plan already mobilised €375.5 billion of investment across Europe and supported 858,000 small and medium businesses. (For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

Erasmus+: new status for Serbia opens up fresh opportunities for citizens and organisations

Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, and the Minister for Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia, Mladen Šarčević, will today sign an agreement upgrading Serbia’s participation in the [Erasmus+](#) programme. The signing ceremony will take place in Brussels and will mark the move of Serbia from a Partner to a Programme Country under Erasmus+. Ahead of the signature, Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *“I am very pleased to welcome Serbia as a fully-fledged Erasmus+ Programme Country. This new status will allow Serbia to participate in more actions in the fields of higher education and youth, start its involvement in sport, vocational education and training as well as in actions for school and adult education staff.”* Serbia is already an active partner in the Erasmus+ programme: since 2014, almost 7,000 Serbian students and staff have experienced a learning period abroad, and around 4,300 Europeans have gone to Serbia to study or teach. By becoming an Erasmus+ Programme Country, Serbia participates in Erasmus+ on an equal footing with EU Member States, as is already the case for Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Serbia started preparations to become a Programme Country in 2016. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

Security Union: Commission welcomes political agreement to close gaps between information systems

Today, the European Parliament and the Council reached political agreement on the [Commission’s proposal](#) to close important security gaps by making EU information systems for security, migration and border management work together in a more intelligent and targeted way. A [political priority for 2018-2019](#), this interoperable framework will ensure that border guards and police officers have access to the right information when and where they need it to perform their duties. Welcoming the agreement, First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *“Today we agreed to give law enforcement officials the right tools help them catch criminals and better protect Europeans. Law enforcement, border guard, and migration officials anywhere in the EU will be able to work directly and instantly with all the available information. Europeans expect to be kept safe in Europe, and today we increased our collective ability to do just that.”* Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *“Today we deliver on a quintessential piece of our security infrastructure. In the future, all the dots between our different information systems will be interlinked. This is the European Union at its best: empowering and supporting our border guards*

and police officers with the right tools to do their job and protect European citizens.” Commissioner for the Security Union Julian **King** added: “This is about responding to calls from those at the frontline, police and border guards. It is not about creating one big database or collecting more data, but using existing information in a smarter and more targeted way to help law enforcement do their job, all while fully respecting fundamental rights.” The [full press release](#) and two factsheets on [EU Information Systems](#) and [closing the information gap](#) are available online. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Kasia Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444)

Capital Markets Union: Agreement reached on measures to improve the EU’s investment fund market [updated on 05/02/2019 at 12:31]

The Commission has welcomed the political agreement reached by the European Parliament and EU Member States today on new rules to make it easier, quicker and cheaper for EU asset managers to sell funds to a wider range of investors. In turn, investors across the EU will have access to a much larger choice of fund products at better value. Investment funds are an important tool to channel private savings into the economy and increase funding possibilities for companies. The EU investment funds market amounts to a total of €14.3 trillion. However, this market has not yet achieved its full potential. Commission Vice-President Valdis **Dombrovskis**, responsible for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: “Today’s agreement will cut red tape and improve clarity for fund managers who want to market their products across the EU. This will lead to more choice for investors, at lower costs – an important milestone for the Capital Markets Union.” Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: “This step removes a stumbling block to cross-border investments in the EU, a significant step in completing the Capital Markets Union. Funding has to flow freely across the EU so it can best benefit companies to get them the financing they need to grow.” Today’s agreement will remove some of the regulatory barriers for all kinds of investment funds such as making cross-border distribution more transparent, while removing overly complex and burdensome requirements and harmonising diverging national rules. A press release is [online](#). (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)

La Commission se félicite de l’accord conclu sur le tout premier plan de gestion de la pêche pluriannuel en Méditerranée occidentale

Ce matin, le Parlement européen et le Conseil sont parvenus à un accord politique provisoire fondé sur la [proposition](#) de la Commission relative à une gestion pluriannuelle des eaux de la Méditerranée occidentale. L’accord mettra la région sur la voie du rétablissement et du maintien des stocks de poissons démersaux à des niveaux durables, tout en assurant la viabilité sociale et économique des pêcheurs et des plus de 16 000 emplois qui dépendent de ces stocks. Ce plan pluriannuel concrétise l’engagement politique pris dans la [Déclaration MedFish4Ever](#) de sauver les stocks de poissons de la Méditerranée. La Commission européenne a [proposé en mars dernier](#) le tout premier plan pluriannuel de gestion durable des stocks de poissons de la Méditerranée occidentale, couvrant principalement des zones

concernant la France, l'Italie et l'Espagne. Le commissaire chargé de l'environnement, des affaires maritimes et de la pêche, Karmenu **Vella**, a déclaré: *"Je suis heureux qu'un accord ait été trouvé sur notre proposition concernant la région de la Méditerranée occidentale, qui constitue un progrès décisif dans la concrétisation de l'engagement de l'UE en faveur de la reconstitution des stocks de poissons dans la Méditerranée et à prévenir la perte d'emplois dans les secteurs dépendant de la pêche. La mer Méditerranée est très surexploitée, comme nous le savons, et ce premier plan pluriannuel donne les assurances nécessaires pour améliorer la situation – une situation gagnant-gagnant pour nos pêcheurs et nos océans, qui fixe la barre pour de nouveaux progrès dans la région."* Le plan de gestion pluriannuel vise à ramener les stocks de poissons démersaux (c'est-à-dire les poissons qui vivent et se nourrissent au dans les fonds marins) à des niveaux garantissant leur viabilité sociale et économique. En raison de la pêche non durable, les captures de ces stocks ont considérablement diminué d'environ 23% depuis le début des années 2000. À ce taux, plus de 90% des stocks évalués seraient surexploités d'ici 2025, ce qui mettrait environ 1 500 navires à risque financier. La proposition adoptée, avec son approche à long terme, créerait plus de stabilité et plus de transparence dans la mesure où les États membres concernés adapteraient conjointement les objectifs de pêche actuels à des niveaux viables par l'intermédiaire du Conseil. Il garantit également une approche cohérente avec les autres plans pluriannuels de l'UE, notamment avec le plan pour la mer du Nord. Les principales mesures du plan comprennent un régime de l'effort de pêche de l'UE pour tous les chalutiers opérant dans la Méditerranée occidentale et une zone de fermeture de trois mois pour la protection des juvéniles. La pêche récréative jouera également un rôle plus important. Enfin, les mesures de contrôle s'appliqueront pleinement afin de surveiller le régime de l'effort de pêche. Plus d'informations sont disponibles [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Daniela Stoycheva – Tel.: +32 229 53664)

Keeping children safe in the digital world: Commission announces the creation of new expert group on child safety online

Today it is [Safer Internet Day 2019](#) and we are celebrating it along with the creation of a new Expert Group on Safer Internet for Children to help improve coordination and cooperation between EU Member States and propose concrete actions to keep children safe when using the internet. Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, said: *"I am pleased to announce the creation of the expert group today, on Safer Internet Day 2019. On this day, we focus more than ever on ways to enhance safe, positive and inclusive use of digital technology, especially among children and young people. This year's slogan, Together for a Better Internet, is a timely reminder that no country or organisation can act effectively on its own when it comes to internet safety. The coordination and cooperation between Member States is just as important in that regard as the valuable work it will do on proposing concrete actions."* Commissioner **Gabriel** made the announcement during a visit to Child Focus, the Belgian safer internet centre, to mark Safer Internet Day 2019. She met with Bulgarian- and French-speaking school pupils in Brussels to discuss their experiences and awareness of how to stay safe when online. She then participated in a citizens' dialogue with about 500 pupils of the

European school. Commissioner Gabriel also used the occasion of Safer Internet Day to highlight the successful awareness-raising campaign [#SaferInternet4EU](#) which she launched on 5th February 2018 and reached around 15,500 schools and nearly 30 million EU citizens with hundreds of initiatives, events and tools to protect children from online threats. For more information about the new Expert Group on Safer Internet for Children see [here](#) and for more information on Safer Internet for the EU see this [Factsheet](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083 – Marietta Grammenou Tel.: +32 229 83583)

Mergers: Commission clears the creation of a joint venture by Stena Rederi and Hyundai Glovis

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the creation of a joint venture by Stena Rederi of Sweden, part of the Stena Sphere, and Glovis Europe of Germany, controlled by Hyundai Glovis of South Korea. The joint venture will mainly operate short-sea transport services on Pure Car and Truck Carrier (PCTC) vessels in Europe. Stena Rederi supports the shipping activities of its parent company Stena by providing shipbuilding, crewing and technical services. Glovis Europe provides logistics services for finished vehicles and parts, and supports the global deep-sea activities of its parent company Hyundai Glovis, an integrated global logistics and distribution company. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because of the limited activities of the joint venture and the absence of horizontal overlap or vertical relationship between its activities and those of its parent companies in the European Economic Area. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9223](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of the Transmission Operator for the Race Bank offshore windfarm by DTC and IRCP

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over Diamond Transmission Partners RB (Holding) Limited (“Diamond Transmission Partners”) by Diamond Transmission Corporation Limited (“DTC”) and by Infrared Capital Partners Limited (“IRCP”), all of the UK. Diamond Transmission Partners is the holding company of the Offshore Transmission Owner for the Race Bank offshore windfarm, active in the transmission of electricity from this windfarm to the UK's onshore National Electricity Transmission System. Diamond Transmission Partners is currently solely controlled by DTC. DTC is a holding company with activities in the electricity transmission sector. IRCP is an infrastructure investment management company active in financial advice and managing investments on behalf of investment funds. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because the companies' activities do not overlap. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's

[competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9141](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Daiwater by Allianz, DIF and InfraRed Capital Partners

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the proposed acquisition of joint control over Daiwater Investment Limited (“Daiwater”) of the UK by Allianz SE (“Allianz”) of Germany, DIF Tamblin Limited (“DIF”) of England and Wales, and InfraRed Capital Partners (Holdco) Limited (“InfraRed”) of the UK. Daiwater is the holding company of Affinity Water Limited (“AWL”) and Affinity for Business (Retail) Limited (“AfB”). The principal activities of these entities relate to the provision of water supply and, in the case of AfB only, sewage systems as well. Allianz is a global financial services group active in insurance and asset management. DIF is an independent fund management company. InfraRed is an investment manager focused on infrastructure and real estate. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns because of the lack of overlaps between the companies’ activities. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission’s [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9230](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Eurostat: Le volume des ventes du commerce de détail en baisse de 1,6% dans la zone euro, baisse de 1,4% dans l’UE28

En décembre 2018 par rapport à novembre 2018, le volume des ventes du commerce de détail corrigé des variations saisonnières a diminué de 1,6% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 1,4% dans l’UE28, selon les estimations d’Eurostat, l’office statistique de l’Union européenne. En novembre 2018, le commerce de détail avait augmenté de 0,8% dans la zone euro et de 1,0% dans l’UE28. En décembre 2018 par rapport à décembre 2017, l’indice corrigé des effets de calendrier des ventes de détail a augmenté de 0,8% dans la zone euro et de 1,2% dans l’UE28. Par rapport à 2017, le volume moyen des ventes de détail a progressé en 2018 de 1,4% dans la zone euro et de 2,0% dans l’UE28. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d’informations: Lucía Caudet – Tél. +32 229 56182; Victoria von Hammerstein-Gesbold – Tél.: +32 229 55040)

Eurostat: La santé des enfants dans l’UE en 2017

Au sein de l’Union européenne (UE), en 2017, plus de 95% des enfants présentaient un état de santé général considéré comme bon ou très bon. Ce pourcentage ne change que légèrement avec l’âge: de 96,5% pour les enfants de moins de cinq ans, il passe à 95,9% pour les enfants de cinq à neuf ans et à 95,2% pour les enfants de dix à quinze ans. Le pourcentage d’enfants dont l’état de santé général était considéré comme mauvais ou très mauvais était inférieur à 1% pour tous les groupes d’âge. Au cours de cette même année, moins de 5% des enfants dans l’UE étaient considérés comme ayant des limitations d’activité en raison de problèmes de santé: 3,7% présentaient des

limitations d'activité modérées et 1,2% des limitations importantes. La proportion augmente avec l'âge pour chacune des deux catégories de limitations. En effet, parmi les enfants âgés de moins de cinq ans, 2,2% présentaient des limitations d'activité modérées et 0,6% d'importantes limitations d'activité, ces taux s'établissant respectivement à 4,1% et 1,2% pour les enfants âgés de cinq à neuf ans, et à 4,4% et 1,6% pour les enfants âgés de 10 à 15 ans. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Anca Paduraru – Tél.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tél.: +32 229 87624)

STATEMENTS

'The future of Europe's industry': President Juncker opens the 2019 EU Industry Days

President **Juncker** opened the 3rd annual edition of the EU Industry Days this morning with a keynote speech, in which he said: *"This is about preparing us for the future. Our economy is transforming before our eyes and the world around us is changing faster than ever. And if Europe is to succeed, it cannot afford to fight that transformation. Rather, it must be the first to adapt to it, the first to shape it. And I believe our industry can lead the way."* Looking back on the history of European competition rules, President **Juncker** recalled: *"In nearly 30 years since the first European merger rules came into place, we have approved more than 6,000 deals – and blocked less than 30. We believe in competition – as long as it is fair for all. We will never play politics or play favourites when it comes to ensuring a level playing field."* In his address, President **Juncker** also spoke about the EU's approach to trade: *"We are not naïve free traders. We will not trade for the sake of it or compromise on our principles for a quick deal. I cannot accept that those who work hard to make ends meet suffer at the hands of those who dump, de-regulate or distort the market. This is why we have shown our teeth by raising tariffs on cheap steel coming from China or taken a no tolerance approach on the forced transfer of technology. It is why we have modernised our trade defence instruments and have just recently agreed new rules on screening foreign investment in areas that may affect security or public order."* The EU Industry Days are taking place in Brussel from 5-6 February 2019 and are the Commission's annual flagship conference on industrial policy, which bring together key industry representatives, public authorities and civil society to discuss the future of EU industry against the backdrop of the Commission's 2017 Renewed Industrial Policy Strategy. The full speech has been published [here](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456)

Joint Statement on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

Ahead of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on 6 February 2019, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission **Federica Mogherini**, Commissioner European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement

Negotiations Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven **Mimica** and Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra **Jourová** reaffirmed the European Union's strong commitment to eradicate worldwide Female Genital Mutilation in the following statement: *"Every girl and woman has the right to live a life free of violence and pain. And yet, more than 200 million women and girls across the world have been forced to undergo the painful and traumatic practice of Female Genital Mutilation, including 500,000 living in Europe. Millions more girls are at risk of being cut: 68 million girls in 25 countries by 2030. Female Genital Mutilation is a severe violation of human rights and of women's physical integrity. It is a practice that amounts to torture and a degrading treatment that cannot be justified. Neither on the basis of custom, nor tradition, culture or religion. It is a crime in all European Union Member States. We have recently seen the first convictions of persons that conducted female genital mutilation and we expect to see anyone committing these crimes in the European Union or organising them in a third country to be brought to justice. Eventhough many challenges remain, this an important first step towards justice for the victims. The European Union is at the forefront of global efforts to end Female Genital Mutilation by 2030. We have supported partner countries in criminalising this harmful practice, and we are committed to do even more. The EU and the UN have launched the global Spotlight Initiative, with the aim to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation, child marriages and other harmful practices against women. To promote sustainable social change, the EU will fund projects to combat gender-based violence at grassroots level. To end this practice, we will work hand-in-hand with actors at all levels: authorities, community leaders, parents, parliaments, the judiciary, civil society, youth and the media, and other relevant stakeholders. We remain committed to do everything in our power to eliminate this criminal practice."* The [joint statement](#) and a [MEMO](#) are available online. (For more information: Carlos Martín Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: + 32 229-65322; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253)

Joint Statement by First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Jourová on the agreement on the digitalisation of company law

The European Parliament and the Member States reached today a provisional agreement on new rules allowing companies to be able to register, set up new branches or file documents to the business register online. Going digital will make the process of setting up a business more efficient and cost effective. First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** and Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra **Jourová** welcome this agreement: *"The digitalisation of company law will help entrepreneurs create and run companies more easily, especially when they want to operate in different EU countries. By using digital tools, companies will save time and money when they launch a new business or branch and update information available on business registers. Strong safeguards and the exchange of information between Member States will prevent fraud. It is now essential that discussions with the Parliament and Council progress quickly on the other part of our Company Law package – the proposal on company mobility – so that it can be adopted before the European elections. It will provide for*

clear procedures for companies who want to move and grow in the Single Market, with strong safeguards to protect employees and prevent abuses, including for tax purposes.” There are currently only 17 Member States that provide a fully online procedure for registering companies. Under the new rules, companies will be able to create businesses and branches online with all necessary checks and protections in all Member States. It will be possible to file company information fully online, which will cut costs and administrative burden. More information from business registers will be available for free to stakeholders, especially on those who represent companies, which will contribute to bringing more trust in business transactions. Based on the new cross-border information exchange system Member States may block a director disqualified in one Member State from registering a company or becoming a director in another Member State. The amendment to [the Directive relating to certain aspects of company law](#) was part of [the company law package](#) proposed as part of the Commission’s [Single Market Strategy](#) and proposed by the European Commission in April 2018. All information on the [Company Law package](#) and the [statement](#) are available online. (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: + 32 229 58659)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vice-President Dombrovskis and Commissioner Thyssen attend conference on EU social dialogue

Tomorrow, 6 February, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, Valdis **Dombrovskis**, and Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, will attend the conference “Promoting and Reinforcing the EU Social Dialogue” taking place in Brussels. At the conference, EU social partners will present and sign their work programme for 2019 – 2021. The signing ceremony will be followed by an intervention of Vice-President **Dombrovskis**, which will be published here. Ahead of the conference, the Vice-President stated: *“It has been almost four years since we launched the New Start for Social Dialogue. It came at what was still a challenging time for the EU, economically and socially. We recognised the need for a New Start, to increase the role of social partners in the design and implementation of our ambitious reform agenda. The Commission has delivered on its commitments under the New Start. We worked closely with you on national level reforms, especially through the European Semester, where you have been involved in all key milestones of the process.”* Then, a high-level roundtable discussion on the future of EU social dialogue will take place in presence of Commissioner **Thyssen**, who declared ahead of the event: *“Social dialogue is at the heart of the European Pillar of Social Rights and of this Commission. We need upward convergence in the quality of industrial relations in the EU. Good progress was made since the launch of the New Start for Social Dialogue. But the discussion about the future of work is also a discussion about the future of social dialogue, in particular when it comes to reaching out to non-standard forms of employment. So we must continue our*

efforts to support improvements to the institutional setting for social dialogue and the capacities of social partners in the Member States."

Participants in the discussion include Mr Marius-Constantin Budai, the Minister for Labour and Social Justice of Romania, Mr Luca Visentini, Secretary-General of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Mr Markus Beyrer, Director-General of BusinessEurope, Ms Valeria Ronzitti, Secretary-General of the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises (CEEP) and Véronique Willems, Secretary-General of SMEunited. The full programme of the conference can be found [here](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Commission organises high-level conference on the role of science in 21st century policy-making

Tomorrow, Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport, responsible for the [Joint Research Centre](#), will speak at a conference on the importance of science in today's policy-making process. Over two days, this event will bring together senior policy-makers and leading scientists to foster dialogue about the role of science in tackling emerging challenges such as the rise of fake news or engaging citizens in political decision-making. Ahead of the event, Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *"This year Europeans will cast their votes on how they want our Union to develop. Their choice will be influenced by their values, perceptions, fears and hopes relating to the major societal challenges facing us. 'Science meets Parliaments' will showcase the latest insights on these issues and invites participants to discuss how scientists and policy-makers can work together more effectively for the benefit of citizens."* Commissioner **Navracsics**, Dimitrios Papadimoulis, Vice-President of the European Parliament, and Jerzy Buzek, Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy of the European Parliament will speak at the opening session. This will be followed by a keynote speech by Yascha Mounk, a leading expert on the challenges facing liberal democracy and the rise of populism. Participants also have the opportunity to visit an exhibition showcasing how science contributes to sound and successful public policies. Also during the event, an EU pilot project to bring science and policy closer to citizens called ["Science meets Parliaments/Science meets Regions"](#) will be launched. As part of this project, 26 events will take place across Europe through 2019, exploring how scientists, citizens and policy-makers can work together for local solutions to issues such as water management, preserving coastal economies or the impact of migration. The conference will take place in the European Parliament's Yehudi Menuhin Space and is open to journalists, who can register [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

Joint Statement on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

Ahead of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on 6 February 2019, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission **Federica Mogherini**, Commissioner European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations **Johannes Hahn**, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development **Neven Mimica** and Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality **Věra Jourová** reaffirmed the European Union's strong commitment to eradicate worldwide Female Genital Mutilation in the following statement.

“Every girl and woman has the right to live a life free of violence and pain. And yet, more than 200 million women and girls across the world have been forced to undergo the painful and traumatic practice of Female Genital Mutilation, including 500,000 living in Europe. Millions more girls are at risk of being cut: 68 million girls in 25 countries by 2030.

Female Genital Mutilation is a severe violation of human rights and of women's physical integrity. It is a practice that amounts to torture and a degrading treatment that cannot be justified. Neither on the basis of custom, nor tradition, culture or religion.

It is a crime in all European Union Member States. We have recently seen the first convictions of persons that conducted female genital mutilation and we expect to see anyone committing these crimes in the European Union or organising them in a third country to be brought to justice. Eventhough many challenges remain, this an important first step towards justice for the victims.

The European Union is at the forefront of global efforts to end Female Genital Mutilation by 2030. We have supported partner countries in criminalising this harmful practice, and we are committed to do even more.

The EU and the UN have launched the global Spotlight Initiative, with the aim to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation, child marriages and other harmful practices against women. To promote sustainable social change, the EU will fund projects to combat gender-based violence at grassroots level. To end this practice, we will work hand-in-hand with actors at all levels: authorities, community leaders, parents, parliaments, the judiciary, civil society, youth and the media, and other relevant stakeholders.

We remain committed to do everything in our power to eliminate this criminal practice.”

Background

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons, as defined by the World Health Organisation.

FGM is carried out for cultural, religious and/or social reasons on young girls between infancy and the age of 15. FGM constitutes a form of child abuse and violence against women and girls; it has severe short- and long-term physical and psychological consequences.

Female Genital Mutilation is a form of violence against women criminalised under the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention. The Convention is signed by all EU Member States, and 20 Member States so far have ratified it, an EU citizen can be prosecuted for conducting FGM/C abroad.

Over the past 10 years, the European Union has achieved important milestones on this topic. Thanks to the European Union, cooperation with UNICEF, UNFPA and civil society organisations, about 3.3 million women and girls have accessed protection and prevention services. More than 20,000 community groups in Africa have publicly called for the elimination of genital mutilation. Supported by a strong partnership between the European Union, the African Union and champion African states, 12 African countries have put in place national budget lines to end the practice. Regional and national networks of religious organisations are also in place in the Arab states to counteract the practice.

The European Union remains committed to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which addresses female genital mutilation through its Goal number 5 on Gender Equality and specific target 5.3 on the elimination of harmful practices.

Many girls and women living within the European Union are also at risk or have suffered from FGM. The [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) has carried out research on the prevalence of female genital mutilation in the European Union and has recently published [a study on the prevalence of FGM in Belgium, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus and Malta](#). This study provides more accurate qualitative and quantitative information on female genital mutilation and its risk among girls within the EU, taking into account new patterns of migration.

For more information

[Q&A – Female Genital Mutilation and EU action to eliminate this practice](#)

[EU-UN Spotlight initiative](#)

[Study on the risk of FGM in 6 EU countries](#) (Belgium, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy and Malta)