

[Media advisory – Press briefing ahead of Environment Council of 17 December 2020](#)



The **press briefing** ahead of Environment Council will take place on **Monday, 14 December at 19:00**. This briefing will be “off the record”.

Please note that this press briefing will take place remotely.

In order to participate and ask questions, EU accredited journalists should register using [this link](#).

Those who already registered for the previous briefings of Environment Council do not need to do it again.

- **Deadline for the registration: Monday, 14 December at 18:00**

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants shortly after the deadline.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[Press release – New volunteering programme for young people in Europe and beyond agreed](#)



“Today’s agreement is excellent news for young people in the EU and beyond. The programme will start in January 2021 and Parliament managed to secure many gains for volunteers. Volunteering will be the main activity of the programme, which has been our priority from the very beginning. We are now able to guarantee a higher quality of volunteering activities, by obliging hosts to offer new, useful skills and competences. Similarly, from now on we will be able to include many more people with fewer opportunities”, said Michaela Šojdrova (EPP,CZ), rapporteur on the European Solidarity Corps (ESC).

More value and better conditions for volunteers and target groups

MEPs ensured that host organisations will need to prove the quality of the volunteering activities on offer, with a focus on learning, and gaining skills and competences. Similarly, the organisations will need to prove they comply with occupational health and safety regulations.

Parliament also succeeded in better protecting target groups. Special clearance will be needed for volunteers working with children and people with disabilities. Programmes will also be required to prove that they contribute to positive societal changes in local communities.

Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities

Thanks to MEPs, the Commission and member states will have to present how they plan to include people with fewer opportunities. Young people will be able to volunteer in their own country, in particular those with fewer opportunities.

Higher age limit for humanitarian aid volunteers

Since humanitarian action poses specific challenges, MEPs insisted that the age limit of humanitarian aid volunteers be extended to 35 with a possibility to hire experts and coaches without the age limit.

Greener volunteering

In line with the European Green Deal, volunteering activities will have to respect the “do no harm” principle and the programmes will later be evaluated taking into account their contribution to the EU’s climate objectives, such as choosing climate-neutral means of transportation.

Next steps

The agreement reached today still needs to be formally approved by both Parliament and Council.

[EASO publishes a MedCOI report on the Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\)](#)

Today, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Medical Country of Origin Information (MedCOI) Report on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

MedCOI as a project was initiated to improve access to medical Country of Origin Information for national migration and asylum authorities in Europe. This project was transferred to EASO between 2017 and 2020, to become EASO business as usual as from 2021. While as under the MedCOI project, implemented by The Netherlands and Belgium, the Country of Origin Information reports on the health care situation were not publicly available, EASO intends to publish all MedCOI reports on the EASO COI Portal and website. This is the first such MedCOI report published by EASO.

The report starts with a general introduction to the country and the healthcare system organisation. Separate sections are dedicated to human resources in healthcare, the pharmaceutical sector, blood transfusion policies, patient pathways, insurance aspects and out-of-pocket expenditure. Lastly, separate chapters contain accessibility information on specific disease groups: cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, haematology, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, nephrology, neurology, psychiatry, pulmonology, and finally tuberculosis.

This report was drafted by International SOS (Intl.SOS) and reviewed by experts of the following organisations: EASO, MedCOI Sector, Third Country Research Unit, Asylum Knowledge Centre; Belgian Desk on Accessibility (BDA) at the Belgian Immigration Department; Department for Asylum and Migration Policy at the International and European Affairs Unit within the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic; Country of Origin Information (COI) Unit at the Ministry of Immigration and Integration within the Danish Immigration Service; and COI Information Desk / Documentation of COI documents and case law at the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

The report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The report can be downloaded from the following link:

https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2020_DRC_MedCOI_report.pdf

Article – Coming up in plenary: Sakharov prize, EU summit, Covid-19, drinking water



Sakharov prize

President David Sassoli will present the [2020 Sakharov Prize](#) for Freedom of Thought to the democratic opposition in Belarus represented by several laureates, including opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, during a ceremony on Wednesday.

EU summit

Also on Wednesday, MEPs will discuss the results of the [EU summit on 10-11 Decembert](#) with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and

European Council President Charles Michel. The main topics on the agenda were the EU's long-term budget, the recovery package, the Covid-19 vaccine and measures as well as the 2030 target to combat climate change.

EU's long-term budget

After EU leaders reached an agreement at the summit on the EU's long-term budget and recovery package as well as the link to the rule of law, Parliament is ready to apply a fast track procedure to allow a vote on the [final package](#) as well as on the EU's 2021 budget during December's plenary session. That would ensure EU support for people and businesses from the start of next year.

Covid-19

On Wednesday, MEPs will discuss an EU strategy to ensure the [fair distribution of vaccines](#). They are also expected to approve the €47.5 billion [React-EU package](#) to help governments mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 crisis across the EU and support jobs, businesses, healthcare and struggling sectors such as tourism and culture.

Find out more about [10 things EU is doing to support the economic recovery after Covid-19](#)

[Press release – Agreement on EU instrument supporting border management and common visa policy](#)



The fund will support strong and effective European integrated border management at the external borders, as well as a common visa policy to ensure a harmonised approach for issuing visas and to facilitate legitimate travel. MEPs insisted that 10% of the fund be earmarked for visa policy in national programmes.

Strengthened fundamental rights framework

During the talks, Parliament's negotiators succeeded in strengthening the provisions on fundamental rights. Actions implemented under the instrument will be carried out in full compliance with the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights and its international obligations regarding fundamental rights, in particular the principles of non-discrimination and the right to not be returned to a country where you might face inhumane treatment.

Protecting the vulnerable and unaccompanied minors

In order to better help those in need of international protection, Parliament also secured support for measures to identify vulnerable persons and unaccompanied minors. The development of integrated child protection systems at the external borders and actions supporting member states in issuing visas on humanitarian grounds will also be funded.

Quote

After the agreement, rapporteur [Tanja Fajon \(S&D, SI\)](#) said: "In future, Europe's borders will be safer and more centred around people. With more funds for visa policy, search and rescue operations, and enhanced provisions on fundamental rights – including the protection of vulnerable persons and a referral mechanism – we will hopefully make our borders more humane."

Next steps

The deal will now be finalised before being formally adopted by Parliament and the Council.

Background

The fund will also support the European Border and Coast Guard, the implementation of the hotspot approach, and the interoperability of various IT systems. These include the Entry-Exit System, the Visa Information System, the European Travel Information and Authorisation System, Eurodac and the Schengen Information System.