



EU Update

I N T H I S E D I T I O N

Although October only saw limited progress on the Brexit negotiations, across the EU there were a number of policy announcements and initiatives that progress goals in the fields of trade and environment. These announcements were marred by the investigation into the claims against Frontex and ongoing loss of immigrants' lives at sea.

The EU has adopted a new Enforcement Agreement, promoted market access for small-to-medium companies and is working against current overcapacity issues for steel in the **Finance, Trade and (Digital) Internal Market** section.

The **Migration** section covers the ongoing plight of those living in the Lesbos island replacement camp, a new strategy for Roma in Europe and the claims regarding Frontex's role in illegal border pushbacks.

Finally, the **Environment** section covers the launch of the Renovation Wave Strategy, Methane Strategy and the State of the Energy Union Report, highlighting many key initiatives to continue progress towards the European Union's green goals, in a time when there is much more to be done.

November sees the number of coronavirus cases soaring across most Member States and restrictions being reimplemented across many. As EU leaders call unity and strength, many fear the outlook in terms of easing restrictions and the economy is grim.

November 2020

Elise Racine—Research Associate

On the 28 October, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council reached an agreement regarding the EU's Enforcement Regulation that promises to empower the Union to better protect its trade interests. A direct response to the [WTO Appellate Body crisis](#)—which has paralyzed the organization's dispute settlement system—the proposal provides the EU with the ability to react even if the WTO has not delivered a final ruling. [Current regulation](#) requires a dispute to progress through all WTO procedures (including the appeal stage) before the Union can take action. The [agreement will also](#) apply to the dispute settlement provisions included in the EU's regional and bilateral trade agreements, and the scope of the regulation will be extended to services and certain trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights. Moreover, it encompasses a commitment from the Commission to develop the Union's anti-coercion mechanisms. In line with President Ursula von der Leyen's [Political Guidelines](#), the decision follows the appointment of the Commission's first ever [Chief Trade Enforcement Officer](#) in July earlier this year. Ultimately, the proposed amendment will offer the EU a vital tool with which it will be able to enforce its rights and defend its interests at a particularly volatile and uncertain time in international trade.

To further promote trade, especially by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the Commission also launched the [Access2Markets](#) online portal this month. [As stated by Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis](#), this "one-stop-shop will help European firms to make the most of the EU's network of trade agreements and get the best access to the markets, products and inputs they need to grow and

to stay competitive." The European Union currently has trade agreements with [70+ countries](#), and new deals are in the works. This complex trade landscape can feel overwhelming, especially to smaller businesses. These small businesses, however, [represent 88% of all EU exporters, account for one third of all EU exports, and supply 13 million jobs](#). Consequently, supporting SMEs is an essential component of an effective approach to post-COVID economic recovery. Considering that participation in international trade is [an increasingly important source](#) of growth for these companies, a tool like Access2Markets, which provides help in over 120 foreign markets, is a much-needed resource. The goal for this system is to better enable SMEs to weather the current economic malaise and pursue new opportunities abroad.

In other news, the EU, along with 28 members of the Global Forum on Steel Excess Capacity [called on G20 leaders](#) to tackle the overcapacity crisis that has not only harmed Union steel producers, but threatens the industry's long-term viability. In addition to [providing 2.6 million jobs](#) (both directly and indirectly) in the EU, the steel sector is a vital industry for modern economies. With the COVID-19 pandemic [widening the gap](#) between capacity and demand, it is critical that overcapacity is properly addressed. The [2020 G20 Riyadh Summit](#) later this month presents a key opportunity to advance the issue. Between the summit and other economic cooperation discussions, November will be a busy month. Civil society members are invited to participate in both the [EU-Japan Economic Partnership Progress Seminar](#) and the [7th Public Session of the Trade and Sustainable Development Sub-committee under the EU-Colombia/Ecuador/Peru Trade Agreement](#).





an-

Four weeks after fires destroyed the Moria camp on the Greek island of Lesbos, thousands of refugees and asylum seekers are still living in dire and unsanitary conditions, soon to be worsened by the upcoming winter. Most of them are currently hosted on a temporary tented site, sadly renown as “Moria 2.0”, which has little access to water and basic sanitation and is not equipped to provide necessary protection against the elements and low temperatures. On October 8, the situation was even more exacerbated by heavy rains, which flooded many tents. On October 26, the MEPs brought attention to this situation and quizzed representatives of the European Commission about the conditions within the emergency site.

On October 7, the European Commission adopted a new 10-year plan to support Roma in the EU. There are seven key areas of focus: equality, inclusion, participation, education, employment, health, and housing. For each area, the Commission has put forward new targets and recommendations for Member States on how to achieve them and called on Member States to submit national strategies to reach those objectives by September 2021.

On October 22, the Presidency of the EU Council, together with the European Commission, met with their counterparts from the Western Balkans at the

nual EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs. During the videoconference, the EU and the Western Balkans reaffirmed their common interest in increasing bilateral cooperation for more efficient migration management, also involving EU Member States and EU agencies.

On October 23, an exposé by investigative portal Billingscat, together with other media outlets, claimed that Frontex, the EU Border and Coast Guard Agency, has been involved in pushbacks of migrants at the border between Greece and Turkey. These claims have been also discussed by the MEPs, as well as by the European Commission, who demanded Frontex to investigate these allegations. The agency defied the EU Commission’s request and strongly rejected any suggestions of involvement in pushbacks of migrants at the border.

As stated by the IOM, “the central Mediterranean continues to claim migrants lives at an alarming rate”. During October, two new shipwrecks occurred, with a consequent loss of the lives of at least 20 people, including two children. The first one occurred on October 19, off the coast of Libya, and claimed at least 15 lives. Whereas the second one occurred on October 22, off the coast of Lampedusa in Italy. In this case, five migrants are presumed dead.

Want to read more?

Get insights into how a movement is trying to help relocate 189 inhabitants of the Lesbos camp:

[The “Let’s Bring Them Here Movement”: When the Civil Society Mobilises](#)

In October, the EU made several strides towards climate ambitions set out by the European Green Deal, focusing on energy. [On 14 October](#), Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, and Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, presented the [Renovation Wave Strategy](#), [Methane Strategy](#), and [State of the Energy Union Report](#), confirming EU commitments towards a climate neutral future despite a global recession.

As [second waves](#) of COVID-19 surge across Europe, countries again employ stricter lockdown and social distancing measures—highlighting the importance of our homes, buildings, and infrastructure as people spend more time indoors. With the pandemic continuing into winter, new challenges are placed on energy and resource needs as many existing buildings across Europe lack energy efficiency, rely on fossil fuels, and use older technologies. Given that homes and buildings are [responsible for](#) 40% of the EU's total energy consumption and 35% of its greenhouse gas emissions from energy, [investing in renovations](#) plays a key role in reaching the EU's 55% emission reduction target by 2030.

The Renovation Wave Strategy therefore comes at a time when [“renovation offers a unique opportunity](#) to rethink, redesign and modernize our building to make them fit for a greener and digital society and sustain economic recovery.” This will improve overall energy efficiency, reduce energy consumption, and decrease energy poverty, while also creating homes more resilient to the effects of climate change. The Renovation Wave also adds growth to local economies by creating a predicted 160,000 green jobs by

2030 in the construction sector and is identified as one of the flagships to help rebuild our economy.

To reach the 2030 emission reduction target, the EU must also directly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. After CO₂, [methane is the second largest contributor](#) towards climate change. The majority of human-made methane emissions comes from waste, agriculture, and energy—with energy being the area where the greatest efficiencies for reducing emissions can be gained. Methane emissions from agricultural waste can also be captured [to produce biogas](#)—a form of renewable energy—with further investments helping to support local economies in rural areas. Overall, the Methane Strategy aims to reduce methane emissions to promote efforts towards EU's decarbonization efforts, climate neutrality, and zero-pollution ambitions.

The [2020 State of the Energy Union Report](#) (the first State of the Energy Union Report since adopting the European Green Deal) assesses the Energy Union's contribution towards achieving climate and sustainability goals. The Report also emphasizes the significance of the energy sector in the EU's recovery plan. [Simson stated](#), “now is the time to turn these plans into reality and use them to lead us out of the COVID-19 crisis with new jobs and a more competitive Energy Union.”

Although the EU is on the right track towards its current 2030 targets, there is still work as [Timmermans emphasizes](#), “these plans demonstrate that Europe can meet ambitious climate targets when everybody puts their shoulder under it and when we all take our fair share.”

