

EU rural development policy and the integration of migrants

SUMMARY

Over the last few years, Europe has seen a significant increase in the number of migrants arriving at its borders. The European Commission's 2016 action plan on the integration of third-country nationals has highlighted the resources that are available from the European structural and investment funds to support the integration process, with potential measures covering education, housing, health, social inclusion and labour market related investments.

Although migration is predominantly an urban phenomenon, opportunities are available within the framework of the European Union's rural development policy to assist local rural communities with the new situation. Several rural communities have launched projects to support migrants arriving in rural areas, illustrating the role that civil society and local municipalities, associations and bodies can play in the migrant integration process.

A number of rural development organisations have pointed out the potential assistance that rural areas can offer migrants, whose arrival could play a role in revitalising areas suffering from under-population and/or economic decline. The European Parliament has emphasised the importance of providing support for migrants' social inclusion and integration into the labour market. Addressing migration is also included in the European Commission's work programme for 2017.



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Background

Migrants¹ constitute a diverse group of people whose motives for migration, skill levels, needs and capabilities vary widely. According to data from the [International Organization for Migration](#), 387 739 third-country nationals arrived in Europe by sea and by land in 2016, and those who arrived in 2015 numbered [more than 1 million](#). The majority came from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq but many also came from Eritrea, Somalia, Nigeria or Pakistan. Member States are confronted with the need to address the implications of this significant arrival of migrants, which has impacted on them in [different ways](#). In general terms, Greece and Italy are the major points of entry, with migrants transiting through Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Austria. Germany, Sweden and Austria are the main destination countries. As a result, the European Union's immigration policy has acquired a prominent role.

[Immigration policy](#) is regulated at both European Union (EU) and national level. At EU level, the legal basis is established by Articles 79 and 80 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU). There are common rules on entry and legal residence in a Member State, which include provision for the purposes of family reunification. At national level, Member States are responsible, inter alia, for determining admission rates for third-country nationals seeking work in their territory and for establishing [integration policies](#) for legally resident third-country nationals.

The Commission's [action plan on the integration of third country nationals](#) (June 2016), shows that the EU plays a central role in the assistance, development and coordination of activities and policies of the Member States. This action plan proposes a more strategic and coordinated approach to the use of EU funds to support national integration² measures. It highlights the European structural and investment funds³ (ESIFs) as an important funding source to support integration measures covering education, housing, health, social inclusion and labour market related investments.

Migrants and the challenges facing rural Europe

While there is a lack of detailed statistics on the number of migrants from third countries who settle in rural areas, the [International Immigration Outlook](#) (OECD, September 2016) shows that, in all OECD countries, migrants are overrepresented in urban areas.

This phenomenon may be explained by a number of factors. These include: a perception that migrants may have of there being more jobs and housing opportunities in cities; the existence of support initiatives and organisations in urban areas with the capacity to facilitate their integration; the presence of a 'social network' involving friends, acquaintances and families with whom they hope to achieve family reunification.

Conversely, rural areas may be seen as lacking a support framework in terms of local organisations, the availability of language courses and translation services, coupled with a perceived limited experience of integrating migrants. To this may be added a perception of [social isolation](#) due to the absence of a 'social network' comparable to that of their counterparts living in urban areas.

In addition to the above factors, there is considerable diversity in rural areas across the EU. According to Eurostat, [predominantly rural regions](#)⁴ represent [51.8 % of EU territory](#), have a population of [112.1 million people](#) and a population density of [50.5 inhabitants/km²](#) (in 2013). (By contrast, population density in the EU is 116 inhabitants per km².) Further diversity is evident in the [settlement patterns of rural](#)

[communities](#): from mountains to plains, from remote areas to peri-urban zones, from sparsely populated regions to densely populated valleys.

In terms of population structure, a general pattern is the [ageing of the rural population](#) (the number of people over 65 has risen by 28 % since 2005) resulting in ever fewer people of working age. A number of rural areas have also experienced population decline. Other challenges facing rural areas include:

- a weak labour market;
- the lack of diversification of their economies;
- [farmland abandonment](#);
- a lack of adequate transport connections and broadband internet coverage;
- high numbers of early school leavers;
- a [lack of education facilities](#); and
- a higher [poverty risk](#).

These challenges, cited in the literature, are also perceived by rural dwellers. The 2015 [report](#) of the second European Rural Parliament⁵ (a [pan-European campaign](#) comprising European countries beyond the EU Member States) gathered the voices of rural communities from 36 countries. Their [concerns](#) include the limited base of rural economies, the lack of opportunities for employment, the loss of population as young people move to the cities, the decline of rural services, the suffering of older people, poverty, and social exclusion among disadvantaged people and ethnic minorities.

The arrival of migrants has the potential to help to breathe new life into [declining villages](#), creating new opportunities for growth in agriculture and non-agricultural activities, reversing depopulation trends, contributing to the sustainability of public and private services and revitalising the labour market.

EU rural development policy instruments

Within the general framework of the common agricultural policy (CAP),⁶ the rural development policy for 2014 to 2020 makes no specific provision for migrants. However, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) ([Regulation \(EU\) No 1305/2013](#)) lays down a series of objectives, priorities and measures that can be adapted to offer support to those rural communities receiving migrants.

One of the objectives⁷ of EU rural development policy is to achieve balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities including the creation and maintenance of employment. Promoting social inclusion (see textbox), poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas is one of the six EU priorities⁸ for rural development. The Commission's [action plan on the integration of third country nationals](#) stresses the potential contribution of the EAFRD to support integration actions under this priority, including job creation, basic services and social inclusion.

[Social inclusion](#) helps to ensure equal access for individuals and communities to opportunities, rights, and resources (such as employment, healthcare, housing, civic engagement, education, etc.) that are normally available to society and are key to social integration. It covers diverse groups or people (youth, migrants, disadvantaged people, Roma, etc.).

Member States and regions draw up multi-annual rural development programmes (RDPs) at the beginning of the programming period. The RDPs define strategies in a Member State or in a region based on their socio-economic and environmental needs while respecting the EU priorities for rural development. The RDPs are designed on the basis of

four to six main EU priorities and their sub-priorities or focus areas.⁹ For each of these, they set quantified targets and choose the measures¹⁰ they will use to achieve them according to the 'menu' of measures established by the EAFRD.

These measures support rural society as a whole and can involve farmers, forest owners, local associations or small and medium sized enterprises. Some can help rural communities in their efforts to integrate and support migrants. Two measures in particular are relevant. The measure 'basic services and village renewal in rural areas' (Article 20 of EAFRD) can provide funds to equip villages with the necessary infrastructure and services to host migrants (such as leisure and culture centres, infrastructure and the provision of access to broadband). The measure 'farm and business development' (Article 19 of EAFRD) can support investments for the development of farms and for business start-ups involving non-agricultural activities in rural areas.

Leader

The [Leader](#) approach (Articles 42 to 44 of the EAFRD), the local bottom-up participatory initiative that must be included in the RDPs, can be also considered a potential source of funding¹¹ to address migration issues in rural areas. Under this approach, [local action groups](#) (LAGs) may take measures to promote employment and social inclusion. Leader brings together and involves public, private and civil-society stakeholders in order to identify needs, to design tailor-made solutions, to implement strategies and to allocate resources at the local level.

This method has been used for more than 20 years and has evolved over time. Its original focus was predominantly territorial, with projects designed for the [development of deprived areas](#) rather than the inclusion of disadvantaged people. Social inclusion was not generally an intrinsic objective of Leader projects, but they achieved social inclusion results, through initiatives such as the development of skills, employment for young unemployed people or access to care services for people with limited mobility. The paradigm shift of Leader from a simply territorial approach towards a [territorial and people-centred approach](#) could maximise the opportunities for social inclusion in rural areas, as was highlighted in a 2016 [workshop](#) on 'The role of Leader/CLLD and networking in supporting social inclusion in rural areas'.

[Leader](#) (Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale – Links between actions for the development of the rural economy) is a community-led local development method built on local potential for mobilising and developing rural communities through local public-private partnerships (local action groups).

More recently, the [Cork Declaration 'A Better Life in Rural Areas'](#) (6 September 2016) outlined the importance of Leader to the design of policies that reflect local needs and adopt a bottom-up approach. Its first point, 'Promoting Rural Prosperity', calls for a better recognition of the potential of rural areas to provide 'innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions for current and future societal challenges' such as the integration of migrants.

Networking in rural development policy

Networking and participation are crucial in the various stages of RDP implementation. They increase the involvement of administrations, organisations and stakeholders, enhance communication with the broader public, improve the quality of the RDPs and supports their evaluation.

In the field of migrant integration, the [European Network for Rural Development](#) (Article 52 of the EAFRD) and the National Rural Networks (NRNs) (Article 54 of EAFRD)

can support rural actors and serve as platforms for the exchange of ideas and dissemination of lessons learned and best practice, in order to foster cooperation and joint learning, and improve the planning and implementation of local projects.

The [NRNs](#) provide a link at Member State level between national or regional administrations and local municipalities and stakeholders for the purposes of policy formulation and implementation. Their structure and organisation may differ from each other and they can set up diverse thematic working groups.

During the previous programming period (2007-2013) the Swedish national rural network founded a working group on the '[Social inclusion of refugees and immigrants in rural areas](#)'. A workshop held in spring 2015 identified [four areas of work](#) for this working group:

- mapping out the situation and potential for new arrivals in rural areas;
- identifying good examples and methods of civil society engagement in integrating migrants;
- supporting employment opportunities for migrants in rural areas; and
- supporting access to housing for migrants in rural areas.

The NRNs of Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Slovenia and Sweden are planning to work on the theme of '[social inclusion of refugees and immigrants](#)' in the current programming period (2014-2020).

Rural development programmes

The adoption of the 2014-2020 RDPs by the Commission was completed in 2015. Leader is being implemented by around 2 600 LAGs covering over 54 % of the EU rural population. Around €161 billion of total public funding (EAFRD and national funding) will be spent on the RDPs ([118 in total](#)). According to the European Commission, Member States have allocated 6.9 % of total public funding to [Leader](#) and 7.4 % and 6.7 % to the measures 'farm and business development' and 'basic services and village renewal', respectively. Broken down by priority, Member States have allocated 15 % of total public funding to [social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development](#).

Member States may request that the Commission amend their RDPs in order to adapt them to new circumstances or needs that arise. To this end, Member States have to observe the conditions, rules of procedure and timetables set by the EAFRD and [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) No 808/2014 of 17 July 2014](#). However, the amendment possibilities provided by these regulations not take into account the new demographic situations arising from migration or the reception of migrants. With a view to addressing this need, [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2016/1997](#) of 15 November 2016 has simplified the rules for amending the RDPs and the national frameworks to support the social and economic integration of migrants. In this regard, the [Commission's proposal for a regulation](#) on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (September 2016) proposes incorporating within the EAFRD the possibility to allow Member States to use available funds immediately, without the submission of a programme amendment, in order to be able to confront significant demographic changes resulting from the arrival of migrants. This proposal is part of the mid-term review of the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF) package and subject to the [ordinary legislative procedure](#).

Projects targeting migrants in rural areas

Several rural communities in Europe have launched projects to support the integration of migrants. Some of them were implemented or started during the previous programming period. The projects are generally '[small scale and 'soft' in nature](#)' and are not intended to solve the migrant crisis but rather reflect the commitment of individuals and communities to offer a response that can benefit both the new arrivals and the host society. Although the majority are co-financed by the EAFRD, there are projects combining the financial support of several EU funds (i.e. co-financed by more than one EU fund). At Member State level, public administrations and private foundations are also implementing and funding their own integration projects.

Projects co-financed by the EAFRD

Many of the projects co-financed by the EAFRD and targeting migrants have been supported under the Leader approach. Its flexibility helps LAGs to design a variety of activities aiming at engaging people, building social capital and community ties or providing coordinated responses in a rural area.

Examples of projects

In **Finland**, the municipality of [Punkalaidun](#) (South-West Finland) implemented the [Immigrant Villages Project](#) (2011-2015) with the support of local action group (LAG) '[Joutsenten Reitt](#)', private funding and voluntary work. Its aim was to facilitate the integration of migrants into the local community by boosting work opportunities in farms, in small enterprises and in the third sector. The municipality appointed an 'integration coordinator' who acted as a contact and guidance person for migrants and as a liaison between them and the local society. This project has had a positive impact on the municipality and migrants. The migrants' arrival has revitalised the decreasing and ageing population and has revived the local economy thanks to the reactivation of agricultural businesses and increasing sales in local shops. The project was declared [Leader project of the year](#) in 2013 and received a certificate of honour at the Satakunta rural gala in autumn 2014. The LAG '[Joutsenten Reitt](#)' has started a new project called 'Immigrants in the everyday life of rural areas' aimed at disseminating the practices of the Immigrant Villages Project in Punkalaidun to other municipalities.

In **Germany**, the project [My Community – make yourself at home](#) (2013-2015) was launched thanks to the initiative of the NGO Caritas Kempten-Oberallgäu. With the guidance of LAG Regionalentwicklung Oberallgäu and the involvement of local stakeholders, governments, churches, organisations and the mobilisation of more than 1 000 volunteers, the project covered 27 municipalities. In the form of working groups, the project implemented a range of integration activities, also focusing on children and young people, across the region. An online platform meanwhile facilitated the dissemination of information.

In **Austria**, the municipalities of the [Elsbeere-Wienerwald Region](#) are implementing a project (2016-2019) aimed at providing a coordinated and complementary response to the large arrival of migrants in the region. The project, managed by a [LAG](#), involves local authorities, the police, the Red Cross, local associations and volunteers. It includes events to bring together local communities and migrants (culinary events, football clubs) and language training courses for migrants.

Projects co-financed by different EU funds

In the current programming period, multi-EU funding offers opportunities to combine different policies. Building [synergies between the ESIFs](#) under specific themes and objectives entails associated benefits for local economies. The combination within the same project of a social policy based more on people, provided by the [European Social Fund](#) (ESF)¹², and a territorial policy based on rural development, provided by the EAFRD, implies synergies that may have positive cumulative effects.

In **Italy**, the project '[Terre & comuni](#)' (February-July 2015, Frosinone) is co-funded by the EAFRD and the ESF. The project, developed by a social enterprise and an LAG, aimed to integrate migrants in a rural disadvantaged area and at risk of abandonment through three objectives: supporting social inclusion of migrants and other disadvantaged people, promoting social innovation and improving quality of life in the area. After a series of training courses and practical initiatives the outcome of the project was positive for locals, migrants and disadvantaged people.

Other sources of funding

Member States and private foundations are also financing integration-related initiatives that include a variety of projects and activities involving local actors, civil society organisations and voluntary participation.

In **Ireland**, [Fáilte Isteach](#) ('Welcome in') is a community-based project that began in 2006 as a local rural initiative involving older volunteers welcoming migrants through conversational English classes. The project has evolved and grown over the last 10 years from a local rural project to a national initiative. Nowadays, Fáilte Isteach helps local organisations across Ireland to organise and coordinate conversational English lessons. The project is funded by the Department of Justice Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration and the [Iris O'Brien Foundation](#). Fáilte Isteach was awarded the [European Economic and Social Committee Civil Society Prize](#) in December 2015.

Implications

The projects cited above illustrate that the arrival of migrants has [implications for both](#) host communities and third-country nationals. A comprehensive strategy for the integration of migrants in rural areas requires a [multi-faceted approach](#), covering such issues as:

- an analysis of the initial conditions and needs of migrants;
- the availability of infrastructure to accommodate migrants and their access to basic services (housing, schools, health);
- local development coordinators such as integration coordinators or local coaches;
- the provision of training and job opportunities;
- participation of migrants in society;
- the engagement and cooperation of local communities;
- volunteering;
- coordinated and complementary activities;
- [networking as a source of capacity building](#);
- information sharing and learning from best practices;
- interactions between migrants, local authorities, stakeholders and civil organisations;
- the promotion of social cohesion and [sustainable rural development](#).

Stakeholders' views

A number of rural organisations have outlined the role and potential of rural territories in the integration of migrants.

The [Euracademy Association](#), a pan-European non-profit organisation focusing on capacity building in European rural communities, prepared a [manual](#) on the occasion of its [14th Summer Academy](#), held in Greece in September 2015. Based on the experiences of several European countries, this manual focuses on the integration of migrants in rural communities and their role in sustainable rural development. The manual proposes a 'business planning for NGOs' including the analysis of strategic priorities, the development of a communication plan and estimation of the human and financial resource implications. The manual highlights networking as a source of capacity building.

The [European Rural Manifesto](#) adopted at the conclusion of the second European Rural Parliament (November 2015) calls for a 'warm-hearted response, based on solidarity between people' to the arrival of migrants in Europe. The manifesto also emphasises that their integration offers opportunities in the form of job creation, investment in housing, services and infrastructures, especially in rural areas with a declining population. The [European Rural Parliament 2016-2017 Action Programme](#) includes 'welcoming and integrating refugees and economic migrants within rural communities' in the first phase of the programme.

In its strategy for the development of rural territories by 2030 ([Making Europe grow with its rural territories](#)), the International Association Rurality-Environment-Development outlines that the promotion of a bottom-up, participatory and inclusive approach in rural areas can contribute to the integration of new populations, such as migrants. It also noted the potential of rural territories to be a space for dialogue between cultures.

As noted by [Euromontana](#) (the European association of mountain areas), in mountain areas the development of human capital is a key issue for sustainable mountain development. In the document '[Toward Mountains 2020](#)', Euromontana acknowledges that mountain areas can be welcoming territories for migrants who can dynamise local development in a context of depopulation.

European Parliament and advisory committees

The **European Parliament** has been actively participating in recent discussions about migrants. It has emphasised the importance of providing support for the social inclusion and integration into the labour market of migrants. In its resolution of [27 October 2016](#) on how the CAP can improve job creation in rural areas, Parliament highlights the positive role of migration in boosting economic growth and fostering social cohesion in rural areas. Parliament also calls on the Member States to strengthen the role of the social partners and social welfare organisations working with the authorities to promote the social and economic integration of migrant workers, including female seasonal workers, migrants and refugees. The resolution of [6 July 2016](#) on the preparation of the post-electoral revision of the 2014-2020 MFF points out that the structural funds can provide a valuable contribution in the context of the refugee crisis. Parliament also considers that the mid-term review of the MFF should take stock of a number of new situations and political initiatives (such as the migration and refugee crisis), together with their respective budgetary consequences, which were not anticipated at the time of the [MFF's adoption](#) in 2013. In its resolution of [8 March 2016](#) on the situation of women refugees and asylum seekers in the EU, Parliament encourages Member States to make use of the

ESIFs in addition to the [Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund](#) to promote refugees' integration into the labour market. Parliament also stresses that the principle of gender parity should be observed in coordination committees and any other body representing refugees, whether in urban or rural areas.

The **European Economic and Social Committee** in its exploratory opinion on the [Integration of refugees in the EU](#) (April 2016) considers that the local level plays a decisive role in integration and communities should be given advice and guidance on well-functioning integration measures. The Committee also points out the active role in this process of local authorities, NGOs, employers and civil society organisations.

In its opinion on the [European agenda on migration](#) (December 2015), the **Committee of the Regions** calls for solutions that involve local, regional and national authorities of Member States. The Committee also urges the EU, national and sub-national authorities to work in close cooperation with civil society, migrants' associations and local communities and to be receptive to their input.

Outlook

Looking to the future, migration is likely to remain on the EU agenda. In the [legislative package](#) (September 2016) for the mid-term review of the MFF, the Commission proposes to increase the EU funding to support integration of migrants and managing migration and to simplify rules under which Member States and other beneficiaries receive EU funds, including the modification of the rural development programmes to face the migration crisis. The [Commission's work programme for 2017](#) includes provision for the mid-term review of the implementation of the [Commission's European agenda on migration](#), consolidating and adopting horizontal actions in different sectors of work, including the implementation of the new migration partnership framework with third countries.

As part of its work programme for 2017, the Commission will continue to work and consult on the modernisation and simplification of the CAP post-2020 to maximise its contribution to the [Commission's ten priorities](#) and to [Sustainable Development Goals](#). In this context, on 2 February 2017 the Commission launched a [three-month public consultation](#) aiming to gather views of stakeholders. The [questionnaire](#) contains a reference on 'help addressing challenges related to migration' in its section 'objectives and governance'. The input from the consultation will help the Commission to draft a communication by the end of 2017. The communication will underscore general objectives, one of them '[build bridges with other policies](#)' including migration.

Main references

European Network for Rural Development, [Migrant and Refugee Integration](#), EAFRD Projects Brochure, 2016.

[Regulation \(EU\) No 1305/2013](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

European Network for Rural Development, [Rural responses to challenges in Europe](#), EU Rural Review No 21, 2016.

Endnotes

¹ The term 'migrant' is used in this briefing as a neutral umbrella term covering 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers', thereby echoing the International Organization for Migration's definition of [migration](#) as: 'a population movement,

- encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other reasons including family reunification'.
- ² [Integration](#). In the EU context, this term implies a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States.
- ³ The [European structural and investment funds](#) include the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.
- ⁴ Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics ([NUTS](#)) of Eurostat classified regions for NUTS level 3 ([urban-rural typology](#)) into [predominantly urban](#), [intermediate](#) and [predominantly rural regions](#) to take into account geographical differences among them.
- ⁵ The [European Rural Parliament](#) is a long-term campaign to express the voice of rural people in Europe.
- ⁶ The rural development policy represents the second [pillar](#) of the CAP and is co-financed from the EU budget (EAFRD) and by the Member States. The first pillar is support to farmers' incomes and is provided in the form of direct payments and market measures and is entirely financed from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund.
- ⁷ Article 4 (Objectives) of [Regulation \(EU\) No 1305/2013](#): a) fostering the competitiveness of agriculture; b) ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources, and climate action; c) achieving balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities including the creation and maintenance of employment.
- ⁸ Article 5 (Union priorities for rural development) of [Regulation \(EU\) No 1305/2013](#): (1) fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas; (2) enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions and promoting innovative farm technologies and the sustainable management of forests; (3) promoting food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture; (4) restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry; (5) promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors; (6) promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.
- ⁹ The focus areas of the priority referred to in this briefing (Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas) are: a) facilitating diversification, creation and development of small enterprises and job creation; b) promoting local development in rural areas; c) enhancing accessibility to, and use and quality of ICT in rural areas.
- ¹⁰ A '[measure](#)' is a set of operations contributing to one or more of the Union priorities for rural development and representing the main instruments to implement the RDPs. Member States and regions have flexibility in how the measures are used, therefore increasing their effectiveness in meeting specific priorities and needs.
- ¹¹ Leader is a compulsory feature of all Member State RDPs, and at least 5 %, and in the case of Croatia 2.5 %, of the total EAFRD contribution to the rural development programme must be reserved for Leader (Article 59 'Fund contribution', point 5 of [Regulation \(EU\) No 1305/2013](#)).
- ¹² The [ESF](#) is Europe's main instrument investing in people. It focuses on: promoting social inclusion and combating poverty; promoting employment and supporting labour mobility; investing in education, skills and lifelong learning; and enhancing institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administration. The ESF is co-financed by the EU and the Member States.

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