The EO express brings you an overview of the European Ombudsman's recent activities, including inquiry openings, key findings, speeches and events. It is published six times a year.

Recent inquiry developments

European Commission should implement a more robust approach to 'revolving doors', says Ombudsman

The Ombudsman has asked the Commission to implement a more robust approach in how it deals with the movement of staff to the private sector. Among her suggestions, the Ombudsman said the Commission should forbid jobs temporarily if they pose risks that cannot be offset by restrictions or if restrictions cannot credibly be monitored and enforced. The Ombudsman also suggested the Commission publishes the decisions on staff members' new jobs faster. The Ombudsman's suggestions follow a broad inquiry of 100 sample decisions taken by the Commission from 2019 to 2021.

Ombudsman opens inquiry into time taken by Commission to deal with access to documents requests

Following an increase in complaints regarding delays for access to document requests, the Ombudsman has asked the Commission how many requests it received in 2021 and the average time it takes to deal with them. The Ombudsman has also asked for the number of confirmatory requests—when people resubmit the same request as they are dissatisfied with the institution's response—it received in 2021. The aim of the inquiry is to identify a
systemic approach for reducing handling times and is part of the Ombudsman's broader goal of supporting the public's fundamental right of access to documents.

Ombudsman asks EIB to improve transparency around the projects it finances

The Ombudsman has asked the European Investment Bank (EIB) to be more transparent regarding the potential environmental impact of projects it finances. To enable the public to more easily request access to documents, the Ombudsman suggested the EIB publish lists of
project documents that contain environmental information. The EIB should also clearly point out whenever a project concerns ‘emissions into the environment’, because citizens have greater transparency rights when this is the case. The Ombudsman's suggestions follow a complaint from three NGOs that the EIB publishes too little information too late, which gives the public little chance to draw attention to potential environmental problems before the EIB takes financing decisions.

**Ombudsman asks Commission to improve monitoring of EU Structural and Investment Funds**

The Ombudsman has asked the Commission to improve how it monitors whether EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESI) are promoting the right to independent living for persons with disabilities and elderly people. The Ombudsman's proposals include providing clearer guidance to EU countries and Commission staff on the need to promote deinstitutionalisation through ESI funds, setting out indicators on how to define the process of deinstitutionalisation, encouraging EU countries to make it easier for organisations representing persons with disabilities to participate in monitoring committees, and pursuing enforcement of the rules more proactively.
Ombudsman opens access to documents cases on national recovery and resilience plans

The Ombudsman has opened four separate cases into how the European Commission dealt with access to documents requests related to EU-funded national recovery and resilience plans. The inquiries concern documents related to the recovery plans of Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The cases follow a broader investigation into how the Commission intends to ensure transparency and accountability in relation to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which the Ombudsman launched earlier this year.
European Network of Ombudsmen conference on best practices for helping refugees and the digitalisation of public administration

At the 2022 European Network of Ombudsmen conference on 27 April, Ukrainian Ombudsman Liudmyla Denisova gave an overview of the humanitarian situation in Ukraine following Russia’s invasion. The discussion focused on how ombudsmen across Europe can help Ukrainian and other refugees. The conference’s second session looked at the difficulties many people face due to the digitalisation of public services and what ombudsmen can do to help them. Read the conference report.

Ombudsman publishes 2021 annual report

The Ombudsman published her 2021 annual report on 18 May. The report provides details on a wide range of inquiries from 2021, including whether Frontex’s complaints mechanism could be made more accessible, how the Commission ensures Croatian authorities respect fundamental rights in border management operations, and how the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) can enable greater public scrutiny and understanding of its work. The report also documents the Ombudsman’s work on improving public access to documents, including through the publication of a guide for EU institutions, and presents various statistics on the number and type of complaints received by the Ombudsman in 2021.
In preparation for the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2023, the Ombudsman met with Swedish Minister of Justice Morgan Johansson in Stockholm and discussed transparency with Judge Helena Jäderblom, who helped shape the EU's access to documents regulation. She also met her Swedish counterparts, members of Sweden's parliamentary committees on the constitution and on EU affairs, and with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). In Copenhagen, the Ombudsman held
discussions with the Danish Parliamentary Ombudsman.