A SHORT

GUIDE to the EU

A version of this publication containing links to online content is available here in PDF and HTML format:
https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/short-guide-eu/en

A Short Guide to the EU

European Commission
Directorate-General for Communication
Editorial Service & Targeted Outreach

1049 Brussels
BELGIUM

Contact: COMM-A2@ec.europa.eu

This document should not be considered as representative of the European Commission's official position.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

© European Union, 2023

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is implemented by Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). Unless otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated.

For any use or reproduction of elements that are not owned by the European Union, permission may need to be sought directly from the respective rightholders.

All photos © European Union unless otherwise stated.

Print ISBN 978-92-68-07131-1 doi:10.2775/523891 NA-05-22-433-EN-C
PDF ISBN 978-92-76-60532-4 doi:10.2775/20502 NA-05-22-433-EN-N
HTML ISBN 978-92-76-60559-1 doi:10.2775/276262 NA-05-22-433-EN-Q

A SHORT GUIDE TO THE EU

Ever wondered which EU countries use the euro or what it means to be part of the Schengen area? What the European Green Deal is and how it will make your life better? What exactly the EU does for you and where the money comes from to pay for it all? Read on to find out everything you need to know about the EU.

WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN UNION?

The European Union (EU) is a unique economic and political union between 27 European countries. They work together to improve the lives of people in Europe, and even further afield.

The EU has worked for the peace, prosperity and well-being of its citizens for over 60 years. From six founding countries – or Member States – in the 1950s, it has grown into a union of 27 countries with a population of almost 450 million people.

What started as an economic project to help raise living standards in post-war Europe has led to the creation of the world's largest single-market area, where people, goods, services and money can move freely. Over the decades, the EU has widened its scope to areas where cooperation between countries brings better results. The countries that belong to the EU believe that by working together they are stronger and better able to tackle today's big challenges, such as climate change and the digital transformation of our society, major health and security threats like the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

This guide contains lots of useful information about the EU and what it does, and tips on where to get more information.

27
countries

448.4
million citizens

24
languages

United in
Diversity

9
May
Europe
Day

347
million people who use the euro every day in 20 countries

A UNION OF VALUES

While Europeans may speak different languages and have different traditions, they share the same set of values, on which the EU was founded. These are respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

These values are set out in the EU treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which brings together all the personal, civic, political, economic and social rights enjoyed by people within the EU.

If you are a citizen of one of the 27 countries that make up the EU, you are also a citizen of the EU. This gives you some important extra rights, such as the freedom to move, live, work and study in any EU country and the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in local and European elections, even when living in another EU country. You also have the right to make a petition to the European Parliament, to apply to the European Ombudsman and to write to any EU institution in one of the 24 official languages of the EU.

As well as protecting the rights of its citizens and people living in the European Union, the EU also promotes human rights and fair elections worldwide. Every year, the European Parliament awards the Sakharov Prize to an individual or organisation that fights for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In 2022,13.7 million people in the EU were citizens of a different EU country from the one they lived in.

LIVING IN THE EU COMES WITH SOME IMPORTANT RIGHTS AND BENEFITS, SUCH AS THE FOLLOWING.

I am **protected from discrimination** on any grounds, including sex, race, religion, ethnic or social origin, disability, age or sexual orientation.

I have the right to have my **personal data** protected.

I can shop online and buy from any EU country with confidence, thanks to strong EU **consumer protection.**

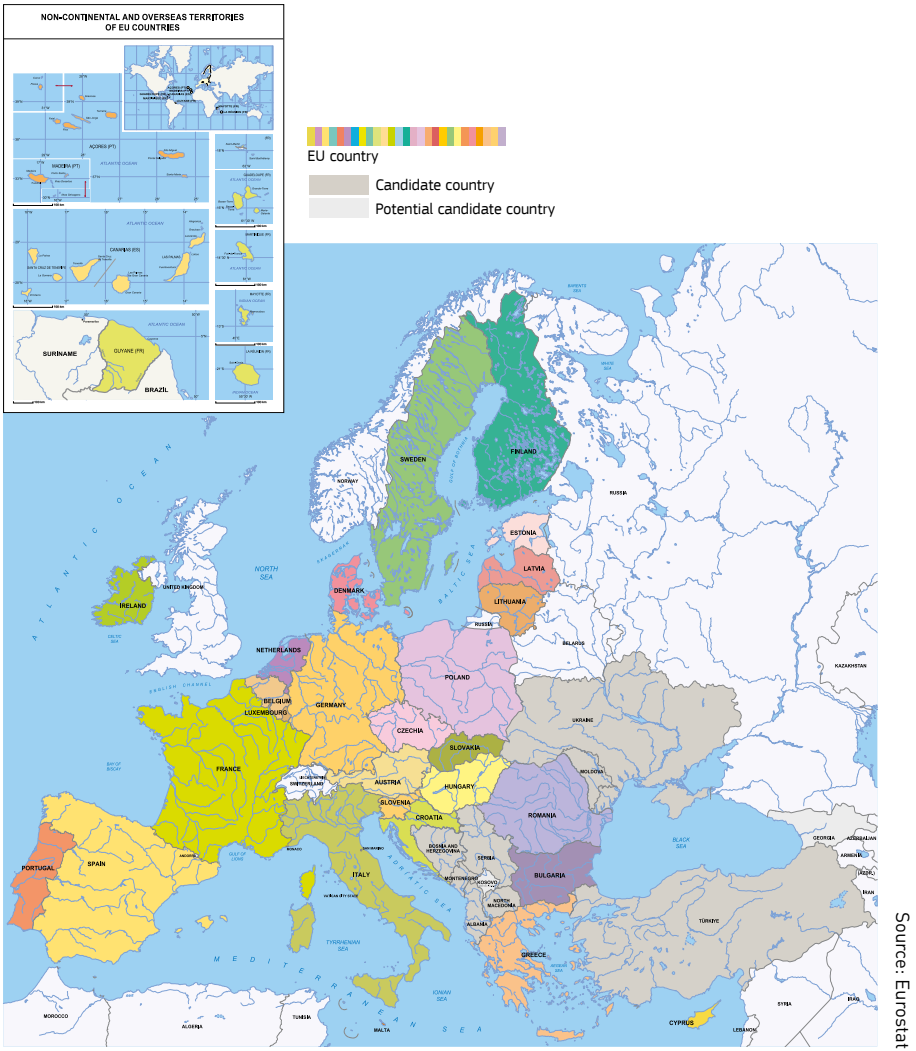
My health is protected by tough **EU environmental standards**, such as rules on the quality of air and water.

Find out more about your rights.

THE EU AT A GLANCE

Thanks to the single market, people, goods, services and money can move around the EU's 27 countries almost as freely as within a single country.

Twenty-three EU Member States and four non-EU countries – Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland – belong to what is known as the Schengen area. This means you don't have to show your passport when crossing the borders between these countries.



Source: Eurostat

AUSTRIA
1995 | 9.1 M | €

BELGIUM
1958 | 11.8 M | €

BULGARIA
2007 | 6.4 M
Lev (BGN)

CROATIA
2013 | 3.9 M | €

CYPRUS
2004 | 0.9 M | €

CZECHIA
2004 | 10.8 M
Koruna (CZK)

DENMARK
1973 | 5.9 M
Krone (DKK)

ESTONIA
2004 | 1.4 M | €

FINLAND
1995 | 5.6 M | €

FRANCE
1958 | 68.1 M | €

GERMANY
1958 | 84.4 M | €

GREECE
1981 | 10.4 M | €

HUNGARY
2004 | 9.6 M
Forint (HUF)

IRELAND
1973 | 5.2 M | €

ITALY
1958 | 58.9 M | €

LATVIA
2004 | 1.9 M | €

LITHUANIA
2004 | 2.9 M | €

LUXEMBOURG
1958 | 0.7 M | €

MALTA
2004 | 0.5 M | €

NETHERLANDS
1958 | 17.8 M | €

POLAND
2004 | 36.8 M
Złoty (PLN)

PORTUGAL
1986 | 10.5 M | €

ROMANIA
2007 | 19.1 M
Leu (RON)

SLOVAKIA
2004 | 5.4 M | €

SLOVENIA
2004 | 2.1 M | €

SPAIN
1986 | 48.1 M | €

SWEDEN
1995 | 10.5 M
Krona (SEK)

Joined the EU
Population in millions in 2023
€ Currency
Not part of the Schengen area

Source: Eurostat (online data code demo_gind)

Coordination of EU humanitarian assistance for Ukraine, Rzeszów, Poland, 9 March 2022.

WHAT IS THE EU DOING TO TACKLE THE BIG ISSUES WE FACE TODAY?

In recent times, the EU has faced unprecedented challenges: a financial crisis and a global pandemic, followed by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis. These historic events have demonstrated the need to be able to respond together quickly and determinedly to new situations. At the same time, the EU has continued and even stepped up its action to achieve its green and digital goals.

COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic led to human tragedy, lockdowns and economic slowdown, putting the EU

and the rest of the world to the test. As well as taking action to contain the spread of the virus through vaccination programmes, the EU worked to support national health systems and help get Europe back on its feet. The EU has been one of the leading contributors to COVAX, the global initiative for fair access to COVID-19 vaccines and is working with its international partners to ensure the world is prepared for future pandemics.

The EU also introduced a common system of vaccination certificates, which made it easier for people in the EU to travel again. Building on this, the World Health Organization has now established a global certification system to make travelling easier and at the same time protect people.

The new European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority will ensure that the EU has the medicines and equipment it needs when health threats strike.

To ensure a rapid economic recovery from the pandemic, the EU set up a special recovery fund of more than €800 billion, known as NextGenerationEU. By investing in projects and initiatives that make the EU greener and more digital, the recovery fund is also making the EU better prepared to deal with future challenges. For example, in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the global energy crisis, it is already supporting EU countries in their efforts to phase out Russian fossil fuels and transition to clean energy.

EU spending 2021-2027

RUSSIA'S WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU responded rapidly in support of Ukraine and its people. This included providing humanitarian aid, emergency assistance, financial and operational support, military assistance and support at the EU border and in the Republic of Moldova.

As part of its humanitarian assistance, the EU has been providing food, shelter, and medical aid to people affected by the conflict. It also took the exceptional measure of granting temporary protection to millions of people fleeing Ukraine, providing them with access to accommodation, schools, healthcare and jobs in the EU.
The EU's financial assistance has helped stabilise Ukraine's economy, restore infrastructure and improve defence and security capabilities.

The EU has also led the international condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and imposed hard-hitting sanctions on Russia and those complicit in the war. These measures seek to isolate Russia economically and limit its capacity for military aggression.

The EU, together with its Member States and financial institutions, has mobilised over €50 billion in overall support for Ukraine.

Find out more about EU support provided to Ukraine.

TACKLING THE ENERGY CRISIS

Russia's war of aggression has massively disrupted the world's energy system by causing price hikes and uncertainty over gas supply, worsening an already difficult situation on the energy market following the pandemic.

What is the EU doing to address this?

Phasing out Russian fossil fuels.

Accelerating the production of renewable energy (hydrogen, wind, solar), which is an important part of its commitment to become climate neutral by 2050.

Reducing bills for citizens and businesses.

Reducing energy demand.

Increasing gas storage for winter.

Enabling EU countries to buy energy together to get better prices.

Strengthening rules to ensure that any EU country receives help in the case of an emergency.

Investing in infrastructure so that all EU countries have at least 2 sources of gas supply.

Find out more about EU's work to secure safe, clean and affordable energy.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The European Green Deal is the EU's strategy to create a modern and competitive European economy. It aims to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050, at which point we will produce no more greenhouse gases than our ecosystems can naturally absorb.

As a first milestone on this ambitious path, the EU has set a new target of cutting its net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. All sections of society and the economy will have to play their part – from industry, energy and transport to food production, agriculture and construction. There will be financial support for those regions, industries and workers that face the greatest challenges. In July 2021, the European Commission proposed a package of measures to make sure that the EU achieves its objectives under the European Green Deal.

At least 30 % of the EU's spending between 2021 and 2027 will be on tackling climate change and its effects.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

The benefits of the target to cut net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

- At least 42.5 % renewables in the EU's energy mix by 2030.
- Protected and restored European forests; three billion additional trees planted by 2030.
- Cleaner public transport and more sustainable fuels.
- One million additional green jobs in the EU by 2030.

© LIFE06 NAT/E/000209/Aixa SOPEÑA.

We can all do our bit, from reducing food waste and recycling more to taking a bike instead of a car, or even planting a tree. If you want to get involved, check out the, European climate pact which brings people and organisations together to share information on climate action. Help us build a greener Europe!

The Iberian lynx is back from the verge of extinction in Portugal and Spain thanks to the efforts of many, including the work of projects funded by the EU's LIFE programme.

The return of the species is one of Europe's greatest animal conservation success stories.

The EU has funded the conversion of two passenger and goods ferries from heavy oil to more environmentally friendly electric batteries. They operate on the busy route between Helsingør (Denmark) and Helsingborg (Sweden). The converted ferries help to improve air quality in these densely populated areas.

Natura 2000 is the world's largest network of protected areas, safeguarding thousands of havens for Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

- At least 55 % fewer deaths from air pollution by 2030.
- A fair transition, based on European solidarity.
- One million electric charging points across the EU by 2025.
- A modernised and resilient EU economy.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

We all need to be digitally savvy in today's society, whether it's for online banking and shopping at home or using technology in our jobs.

To get everyone up to speed, and ensure Europe's position as a world leader in technology, the EU is investing in everything from digital skills and supercomputing to high-speed connectivity and better cybersecurity.

A technician examines a microchip in a materials analysis lab, Dresden, Germany, 8 February 2022. Labs like this are crucial to ensuring the EU can produce its own microchips and become technologically independent.

The EU is working to ensure that the online world is safe and fair for people and businesses alike. Thanks to EU rules, today we have more control over our personal data and how it is used by others.

Find out more about EU rules for a safer digital space.

HELPING PEOPLE FIND WORK

The European Social Fund Plus helps people to get a job (or a better job), including those who face disadvantages. Each year the fund helps some 10 million people find a job or improve their skills.

The EU is helping young people to enter the job market. For example, the youth guarantee scheme aims to ensure that anyone under 30 receives an offer of good-quality employment, education, apprenticeship or training within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.

Volunteering is a great way of contributing to local communities at home or abroad, while developing new skills and making friends. The **European Solidarity Corps** gives young people the chance to volunteer for work in projects in their own country or abroad. The **EU aid volunteers initiative** offers over-18s the opportunity to participate in humanitarian projects worldwide.

A 27-year-old man working on construction projects, Setúbal, Portugal, 5 August 2021.

STEPPING UP THE FIGHT AGAINST CANCER

The EU is determined to turn the tide against cancer. With €4 billion of funding, Europe's beating cancer plan maps out a new EU approach to cancer prevention, treatment and care. EU funding has already led to groundbreaking research – from 3D modelling of tumours to detecting cancer through a person's breath.

A nurse setting up the machine for a patient's MRI scan, Liège University Hospital, Belgium, 24 January 2020.

A UNION OF EQUALITY

The EU is building a Europe of equality. This means that women and men should get equal pay for equal work, people with disabilities are able to participate equally in all areas of life, and racism is not tolerated. It means that people should not be excluded or marginalised, and people should be free to love who they want.

Migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background play a key role in European society, including as essential workers. The EU is working to ensure everyone can participate fully in society by focusing on things such as better access to education, jobs, healthcare and housing.

Find out more about the priorities of the European Commission.

PROTECTING PEOPLE

The safety and security of people in Europe, in both the physical and the digital worlds, is a top priority for the EU. It works daily to tackle threats such as terrorism, organised crime, the illegal drug trade and human trafficking.

The COVID-19 crisis and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have also highlighted the threats and challenges that disinformation poses to our societies. The EU is working with social media companies and online platforms to limit the spread of misleading information and fake news in Europe. The European Digital Media Observatory supports the work of independent fact checkers and aims to become the European hub to fight online disinformation.

EUROPE MEANS CULTURE

What do the Oscar-winning films *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Son of Saul*, *The Father* and *Another Round* have in common? They all received support from the EU's Creative Europe MEDIA programme.

Is your city the next European Capital of Culture? The prized title has been awarded to more than 50 cities across the EU. It puts the spotlight on local artists and each city's unique cultural wealth.

Explore Europe's art and culture from your armchair! The Europeana digital platform gives access to over 58 million items from the collections of more than 4000 cultural institutions.

THE EU IN THE WORLD

The EU works closely with its neighbours and with countries around the world to build new partnerships and promote its values and interests. Through joint efforts in areas such as digitalisation, climate, energy, transport, health, and education, the EU seeks to address global challenges and create a more connected and prosperous global community.

The EU also makes trade deals with other countries, most recently with New Zealand. These deals expand the trade that supports the EU economy and creates jobs.

Together, the EU and its member countries are the biggest donor of development assistance in the world. In 2021, they provided €71.6 billion or 41 % of the total assistance (latest available data). Together they also contribute more than half of all global aid to education in more than 100 countries around the world.

Find out more about EU's strategy to connect the world.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT THE EU DOES FOR ME?

You can live and work in another EU country. Check the EURES portal for job vacancies and practical advice.

You can retire to any EU country (plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland) and receive your state pension there.

You can study or do a training course in another EU country. More than 10 million people have taken part in the Erasmus programme since it began in 1987.

The EU scrapped roaming charges in 2017 to make it cheaper to keep in touch with friends and family as you travel across the EU. Your digital subscriptions travel with you too!

If you fall ill while visiting another EU country the European Health Insurance Card ensures you can get state-provided healthcare. You will be treated under the same conditions and at the same cost as the people insured in that country.

WiFi4EU hot spots in public areas in thousands of local communities around the EU mean you can connect to the internet for free. Look out for this symbol:

WiFi4EU

You can use one single currency – the euro – in 20 EU countries.

You can rest easy when travelling in the EU. You are protected by a full set of passenger rights whether you go by air, rail, ship, bus or coach.

Toys have to meet strict safety rules before they can be sold in the EU.

EU rules mean you can cancel or return online purchases within 14 days with no reason required.

People in the EU benefit from some of the world's strictest standards for safe and healthy food.

Bank savings of up to €100 000 are always protected.

Find out more about what the EU does for you.

A family cycling during Car Free Sunday, Brussels, Belgium, 20 September 2020.

WHAT IS THE EU DOING TO IMPROVE THINGS WHERE I LIVE?

Between 2021 and 2027, the EU plans to invest €378 billion in its regions. With investment from the Member States added to the total, this will reach € 550 billion.

The EU invests locally in towns and regions to boost jobs and the economy and improve quality of life. It aims to make a difference in five key areas:

Modernising transport and energy to fight climate change.

Helping people to get into employment and education, or helping to include them in society.

Small and medium-sized businesses.

Research and innovation.

Protecting and improving the environment.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND PLACES

Take a look around your area and you will soon find a school, a bridge, a hospital or another project that has benefited from EU funding.

Thousands of projects have received support from EU regional programmes over the years. Below are just a few examples of projects that are, or soon will be, making a difference to people's lives across the EU.

RAISING HEALTHCARE STANDARDS IN POLAND

The largest public hospital in Toruń has been transformed into one of Poland's leading medical facilities, thanks to a €52.7 million EU-supported renovation. Centralised, high-quality healthcare means patients now wait less time for treatment.

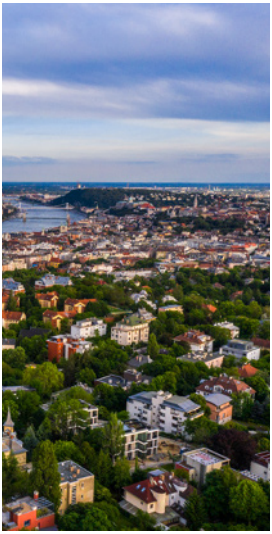
BETTER ROAD CONNECTIONS IN GREECE

Residents, tourists and businesses in Greece will all benefit from an important new section of motorway. EU funding worth €255 million is supporting the construction of the missing link between Lamia and Xyniada. This will connect the regions of central Greece and western Thessaly to the main motorway network.

© Hebi B. / Pixabay

SUSTAINABLE SWIMMING IN BELGIUM

A swimming pool renovation at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Free University of Brussels) is making a splash for sustainability. The new facility uses 60 % less energy and emits 500 tonnes less CO_2 annually than the old pool, and is open to swimmers from outside the university. The project received just over €2 million in EU funding.



GREENER CITIES AND REGIONS

A more reliable and efficient energy supply in Czechia, 21 new electric trains to improve Croatia's rail network and measures to increase flood safety in Hungary are among 14 green projects that will benefit EU citizens. More than €1.4 billion of EU funds is being invested in seven EU countries in areas such as environment, health, transport and energy.

© iStock.com/kyrnny

HIGH SPEED BROADBAND CONNECTS RURAL ROMANIA

The EU-supported RO-Net project has connected 400 000 people, over 8 500 businesses and almost 3 000 public institutions in remote rural areas of Romania to broadband. Around 665 villages and towns now have access to online healthcare, education and shopping. People can also sell products from local households and farms online.

© iStock.com/ FatCamera

GREEN PLAYGROUNDS IN PARIS

Concrete schoolyards across Paris are being turned into cool, green islands capable of storing water and reducing heat. Supported by almost €5 million in EU funding, the OASIS project is helping to protect Parisians from the effects of climate change, while creating spaces where children can have fun.

Find out about projects in your region that have received EU funding.

How can I get help with funding?
Researcher, farmer, entrepreneur or artist? Find out about who's eligible for funding.

EU PIONEERS

Konrad **ADENAUER**

Ursula **HIRSCHMANN**

Anna **LINDH**

Melina **MERCOURI**

Jean **MONNET**

Robert **SCHUMAN**

Altiero **SPINELLI**

Simone **VEIL**

Louise **WEISS**

© Associated Press, Konrad Adenauer
© Historical Archives of the European Union, Ursula Hirschmann
© Nationaal Archief COO, Melina Mercouri

From resistance fighters and political leaders, to a world famous actor, find out more about the women and men who inspired the creation of the Europe we live in today.

EU MILESTONES

1950

9 May

The **Schuman Declaration.** France's Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposes to pool coal and steel production so that no single country can make weapons to turn against another.

Robert Schuman signing the Treaty of Paris establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, Paris, France, 18 April 1951.

1952

23 July

The **European Coal and Steel Community** is established.

1957

25 March

The **Treaties of Rome** are signed by six countries – Belgium, France, Germany Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. They create a common market, the **European Economic Community**, from 1 January 1958.

1962

30 July

The **common agricultural policy** is launched, helping to safeguard food supplies and supporting farmers and rural areas.

1968

1 July

Customs duties between the six Member States are abolished.

1979

7 to 10 June

For the first time, **European citizens can vote** for who represents them in the European Parliament.

1987

15 June

The **Erasmus** student exchange programme is launched.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany, 11 November 1989.

1989

The collapse of communism triggers a wave of democratic change across central and eastern Europe.

1993

1 January

The launch of the **single market**, where people, goods, services and money can circulate freely.

1 November

The **European Union** is created.

1995

26 March

The **Schengen Agreement** removes border controls between certain Member States. Twenty-three of them now enjoy this advantage.

2002

1 January

Euro notes and coins first appear, and are now used in 20 EU countries.

2012

1 April

The **European citizens' initiative** is launched.

10 December

The EU is awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize**.

2015

12 December

A total of 195 countries, including all the EU Member States, adopt the **Paris Agreement** on climate change.

↘ UN Climate Change Conference (COP21), Paris, France, 1 December 2015.

2017

15 June

Roaming charges end.

2020

January

COVID-19 reaches Europe, sparking the **biggest-ever response to a public health emergency** in the history of the EU.

2021

9 May

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** is launched.

2022

The EU and its international partners **condemn Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine** and offer strong political, financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

Plenary Session of the European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium, 26 April 2021.

HOW DOES THE EU WORK?

Everything that the EU does is based on treaties that contain the rules for how the EU works. These have been agreed voluntarily and democratically by all EU countries.

The EU treaties specify who can pass laws in what areas: the EU, national governments or both. EU countries are responsible for making their own decisions and laws in certain areas of national policy, such as industry, health and education, and the EU provides support.

For many areas, the treaties specify that both the EU and national governments can act. In these cases, decisions are always taken at the closest possible level to the citizens. This means if an issue can be solved at local, regional or national level, the EU will not intervene.

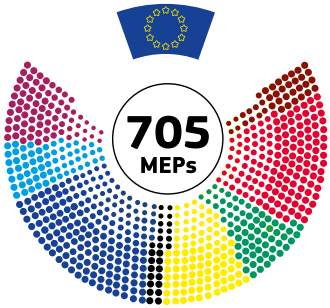
The EU takes action in those areas where its Member States have authorised it to do so and where it makes sense to act together, such as on climate change or when trading across the world. To help achieve their goals, the EU countries have created a number of institutions to make decisions at the EU level and to then carry them out.

WHO DOES WHAT?

The European Parliament, which sits in Strasbourg and Brussels, represents the interests of the citizens of the EU. Together with the Council, it is the main decision-making body of the EU.

The 705 Members of the European Parliament, also known as MEPs, are directly elected by EU voters every 5 years. The next election will take place in 2024. Each EU country elects a number of members, in proportion to its population.

MEPs don't sit in groups based on their nationality, but in political groups that cover several countries, or as independents. Roberta Metsola is the current President of the European Parliament.



- Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
- Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
- Renew Europe Group
- Identity and Democracy
- Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance
- European Conservatives and Reformists Group
- Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
- Non-attached Members

The Council of the European Union, also known as the Council, is made up of the government ministers of all the EU countries. Together with the European Parliament, it is the main decision-making body of the EU. Every 6 months a different EU country holds the presidency of the Council. To ensure continuity, the presidencies work together closely in groups of three on a common agenda over an 18-month period.

This is not to be confused with the European Council, which is made up of the leaders of all the EU countries. It sets the EU's political direction and priorities. Charles Michel is the current President of the European Council.

The European Commission is the EU's civil service. It has the right to propose new actions and new laws, which are then decided on by the Parliament and the Council. It is also responsible for ensuring that EU rules are correctly applied. The Commission is led by President Ursula von der Leyen and her team of Commissioners – one from each EU country.

All countries in the European Union have to follow EU rules and meet the targets they sign up to, otherwise the Commission can take action against them.

The Court of Justice of the European Union ensures that EU law is enforced and applied in the same way in every EU country.

The European Central Bank manages the euro. Its main aim is to keep prices stable in the euro area.

WHO PAYS FOR THE EU?

The money spent by the EU (the EU budget) comes from several sources: customs duties; contributions based on the value added tax (VAT) collected by EU countries; and direct contributions by EU countries. A new source of revenue – a levy on non-recycled plastic packaging waste – was introduced in January 2021.

From contributing to new and better roads, railways and airports to developing rural areas and enabling studying opportunities abroad, the EU budget helps to deliver on the things that matter to people in the EU. As well as leading the digital transformation and the fight against climate change, it also helps to reduce disparities within and between EU countries.

A young mother speaking about the future of Europe while holding her baby, Strasbourg, France, 30 April 2022.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Are you keen on having a say in the future of Europe? Do you want to actively participate in its decision-making process? You can help shape and improve the EU in many ways.

Thousands of Europeans have already shared their hopes and expectations for the years ahead through the Conference on the Future of Europe – the biggest consultation exercise ever carried out in the EU.

The European citizens panels

- 150 citizens randomly selected from the 27 Member States
- with diverse backgrounds (different gender, age, education, income, from urban/rural areas)
- 1/3 young people (16-25 years old)

Find out more about the European citizens' panels.

You can also make your voice heard by voting in the European elections every 5 years.

↘ Learn about the next European elections.

Your MEP represents your interests and those of your city or region in Europe and votes on your behalf on laws that are applied across the EU.

↘ Check out which MEPs represent your country.

Have you ever thought an EU law could be improved? Well, you can help make EU rules fit for the future by making suggestions on how to simplify and modernise existing laws. You can also share your views on new policies. You can contribute in any of the 24 official EU languages.

↘ Have your say on the issues that matter to you.

Under the European citizens' initiative you can ask the Commission to propose a new law. First you'll need to gather support for your cause. Once an initiative has gathered 1 million signatures, the Commission will decide on what action to take. So far, nine citizens' initiatives have reached.

The first-ever successful European citizens' initiative, 'Right2Water', led to **new rules** to ensure the safety and quality of drinking water, and easier access to it for vulnerable groups.

A more recent initiative, 'End the Cage Age', will soon lead to a **proposal** to phase out cages for a number of farmed animals.

↘ A citizen asks a question during a citizens' dialogue on learning mobility, Brussels, Belgium, 3 March 2023.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

There are hundreds of **Europe Direct information centres** all over the European Union. You can find the address of the one nearest you at:
https://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en

You can contact Europe Direct:

- by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
- at the following standard number: +32 22999696, or
- by email via: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the **Europa website** at:
https://europa.eu.

You can download or order free and priced **EU publications** from:
https://op.europa.eu/en/publications

Multiple copies of free publications can be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local documentation centre:
https://european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en.

For help and advice for EU citizens and businesses, visit **Your Europe**:
https://europa.eu/youreurope/index.htm

For educational material, games and quizzes, visit **Learning Corner**:
https://europa.eu/learning-corner/home_en

Discover the **Youth Portal** at: https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en

The **European Commission** in your country:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/contact/representations-member-states_en

The **European Parliament** in your country:
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/stay-informed/liaison-offices-in-your-country

The **European Consumer Centres Network**:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/consumer-rights-and-complaints/resolve-your-consumer-complaint/european-consumer-centres-network-ecc-net_en

twitter.com/EU_Commission
facebook.com/EuropeanCommission
instagram.com/europeancommission

twitter.com/europarl_en
facebook.com/europeanparliament
instagram.com/europeanparliament

twitter.com/eucouncil
facebook.com/eucouncil
instagram.com/eucouncil

Publications Office
of the European Union