European Commission

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ME

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ME

If you are between 15 and 18 years old and interested in finding out more about the European Union, then this booklet is for you. It will tell you how the European Union – or 'EU' for short – was built. It will also tell you what values we share, who does what in the EU and how all of this is relevant to your daily life. You will also learn about how the EU deals with today's big challenges, including climate change, the digital world and COVID-19. What the EU is doing today will shape your future tomorrow.

The European Union as we know it today has been built over many years. It is a work in progress, and soon your generation will start shaping its development. So now is the time for you to form your own opinions about the EU. This booklet and the exercises it contains can help you do this:

europa.eu/learning-corner/eu-me_en

An online quiz accompanies this booklet. It's a fun way to revisit some of the issues covered: europa.eu/!tY87Hn

More materials about the EU can also be found in all EU official languages on the Learning Corner website: europa.eu/learning-corner/home_en

If you have any remarks or suggestions about this publication, please send them to:
comm-publi-feedback@ec.europa.eu.

CONTENTS

SINCE ITS CREATION IN 1957, THE EU HAS GROWN FROM 6 TO 27 COUNTRIES. THESE COUNTRIES JOINED FORCES TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE TOGETHER. WHICH COUNTRIES ARE MEMBERS OF THE EU AND WHEN DID THEY JOIN? IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN HOW THE EU BECAME WHAT IT IS TODAY AND WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN UNION?

EU Member States

The European Union is a unique partnership between 27 European countries, known as Member States, or EU countries. Together they cover much of the European continent. The EU is home to around 447 million people, which is around 6 % of the world's population. Citizens of the EU countries are also EU citizens.

EXERCISE 1
WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE EU?

Look at the list of flags and country names on the right. They are all European but they don't all belong to the European Union. Once you have identified the EU countries, locate them on the map. If you need help, take a look at this website: **europa.eu/!cW78Hk**

N.B. The United Kingdom voted to leave the EU in a national referendum in June 2016, and left in 2020.

- ALBANIA
- ANDORRA
- AUSTRIA
- BELARUS
- BELGIUM
- BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
- BULGARIA
- CROATIA
- CYPRUS
- CZECHIA
- DENMARK
- ESTONIA
- FINLAND
- FRANCE
- GERMANY
- GREECE
- HUNGARY
- ICELAND
- IRELAND
- ITALY
- LATVIA
- LIECHTENSTEIN
- LITHUANIA
- LUXEMBOURG
- MALTA
- MOLDOVA
- MONTENEGRO
- NORTH MACEDONIA
- NETHERLANDS
- NORWAY
- POLAND
- PORTUGAL
- ROMANIA
- SERBIA
- SLOVAKIA
- SLOVENIA
- SPAIN
- SWEDEN
- SWITZERLAND
- TURKEY
- UKRAINE
- UNITED KINGDOM
- VATICAN CITY

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE VARIOUS EU COUNTRIES?

Imagine you work for a national tourist board. Choose the two EU countries that you know best and write a short text about them for tourists. For example, how many people live in these two countries and what are their capital cities? What do they have to offer to visitors (food, culture, language and so on)?

?

DID YOU KNOW?

The EU has nine regions which are located far from the European continent. These overseas territories (also known as 'outermost regions') are: French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion and Saint Martin (France), the Azores and Madeira (Portugal) and the Canary Islands (Spain).

EU official languages

The European Union has 24 official languages.

Why so many? The EU would not exist without its Member States and its people. As a democratic organisation, the EU has to communicate with the governments of the Member States and their inhabitants, companies and public bodies in their own languages. Everyone living in the EU has the right to know what is being done in their name and with their taxes, and what rules they have to follow. They should also be able to participate in EU affairs without first having to learn another language.

DOBRÓ ÚTRO / BUENOS DÍAS
DOBRÉ RÁNO / GODMORGEN
GUTEN MORGEN / TERE HOMMIKUST
KALIMERA / GOOD MORNING
BONJOUR / DIA DUIT
DOBRO JUTRO / BUONGIORNO
LABAS RYTAS / LABRĪT
JÓ NAPOT / L-GĦODWA T-TAJBA
GOEDEMORGEN / DZIEŃ DOBRY
BOM DIA / BUNĂ DIMINEAȚA
DOBRÉ RÁNO / DOBRO JUTRO
HYVÄÄ HUOMENTA / GOD MORGON

?

DID YOU KNOW?

You can write to the EU institutions in any of the EU's 24 official languages and you will receive a reply in that language.

UNITED IN DIVERSITY

European values

Have you ever heard the phrase '**United in diversity**'? It's the EU's motto and encapsulates what the EU's values are all about. While each EU country has its own culture, language and traditions, they all share the same common values which they must comply with as members of the European Union.

One fundamental value that unites all EU countries is democracy. This means that only democratic countries can be members of the EU. Other values that are common to all EU countries are respect for human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of people belonging to minority groups.

The EU is founded on **six core values** that form the basis of our society:

- respect for human dignity
- freedom
- democracy
- equality
- the rule of law
- respect for human rights, including those of minorities.

These values have been fought for over many years and have shaped the kind of society we live in today.

The EU's values are set out in the EU treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. These are important legal texts that all EU countries have approved and must therefore respect.

WATCH THE VIDEO:
EU values explained in 1 minute
europa.eu/!uwrcHp
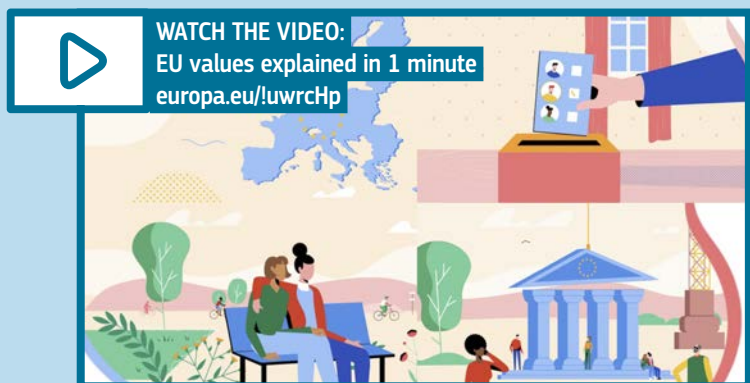
The **EU treaties** contain the rules that guide the work of the EU. They are amended from time to time, for example when new countries join or when there are changes to how the EU works. The most recent treaty is the **Lisbon Treaty**, which was signed in the Portuguese capital in 2007.

Find out more about the **EU treaties**: europa.eu/!gy77mf

The **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** came into force with the Lisbon Treaty. It set out the rights and freedoms that all people living in the EU enjoy, such as personal, economic and social rights. To reflect modern society, the charter includes newer fundamental rights, such as data protection and guarantees on bioethics. It also includes specific

provisions on the rights of under-18s, ensuring that children's rights are part of the human rights that the EU and its Member States are obliged to comply with and protect.

*Find out more about the **Charter of Fundamental Rights** of the EU:*
https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter
*and **the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**:*
https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child_en

EU
EUROPEAN UNION

EU
SINCE 1957

EU
UNITED IN DIVERSITY

EU
27 COUNTRIES

From 6 to 27 EU countries

The EU is made up of very different countries. The EU country with the largest population is Germany, which has around 83 million inhabitants, while the smallest, Malta, has 500 000 inhabitants. In the EU, people speak different languages which use one of three different alphabets (Latin, Greek and Cyrillic). There are different traditions, cultures, foods and festivals in each country.

DID YOU KNOW?

The **European flag** is made up of 12 golden stars in a circle on a blue background. It was adopted in 1984 by the European Union (which was called the European Economic Community at the time) and now flies above buildings, parks and monuments all over Europe. The number of stars never changes – it is always 12. They symbolise unity, solidarity and harmony among the people of Europe.

EXERCISE 3
WHAT DO THE EU'S VALUES AND PRINCIPLES MEAN IN PRACTICE?

Part 1. Put a cross in the correct column for each of the eight questions below.
In small groups, discuss what you think a country can or cannot do if it wants to be part of the EU.

A country …	(A) can join the EU	(B) can't join the EU
1. that does not have freedom of the press		
2. that applies the death penalty		
3. that allows its citizens to protest against the government		
4. in which the parliament is elected on a regular basis		
5. in which the army determines policy and may even intervene in internal affairs with military power		
6. in which people are considered innocent until their guilt has been established by a court		
7. in which there is only one party which is always in government		
8. which protects minorities, even when the majority is against them		

Part 2. In small groups, choose two of the six EU values
listed below and discuss what they mean to you.

► Democracy

► Human dignity

► Freedom

► Equality

► Rule of Law

► Respect for human rights

How did it all begin?

After two destructive world wars in the first half of the twentieth century (1914–1918 and 1939–1945), people were determined that nothing like that should ever be allowed to happen again.

Between 1945 and 1950, some European politicians, including Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and Winston Churchill, began the process of creating the European Union we live in today. Their vision was to unite European countries economically and politically in order to secure lasting peace and prosperity.

On 9 May 1950, France's Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, proposed merging European production of coal and steel. At the time, these were the raw materials used for war – coal as an energy resource, and steel for weapons and machinery. By pooling their production, no one country could secretly arm itself against the others. Following this proposal, the European Coal and Steel Community came into being in 1952. It was founded by six neighbouring countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – and laid the foundations for the EU we know today.

You can discover more about the people and politicians who shaped the European Union over the years in our **EU Pioneers series** here:

europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history/eu-pioneers_en

1957

TREATY OF ROME:
EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

Building on the European Coal and Steel Community

A few years later, the six founding countries decided to extend their cooperation to other economic sectors. The Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, establishing the European Economic Community, and came into force in 1958. Its initial aim was to foster trade and further economic integration between the participating countries.

New members

In 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom (*) joined the European Economic Community. A few years later, with the end of right-wing dictatorships in southern Europe, three countries became eligible to apply for membership. The first of these was Greece, which joined in 1981. Portugal and Spain followed in 1986. In 1993, the European Union was created and Austria, Finland and Sweden joined 2 years later. This brought the EU's membership to 15.

_____
(*) The United Kingdom left the EU in 2020.

Soon after the Second World War, Europe was split into east and west by the 'iron curtain' as the 40-year-long Cold War began. The Berlin Wall was a symbol of this division as it split the city of Berlin in two. After the fall of communism in 1989, the formerly communist central and eastern European countries started a process of democratisation and applied to join the EU.

In 2004, eight countries from central and eastern Europe joined the EU: Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In the same year, the Mediterranean islands of Cyprus and Malta also became members. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined, followed by Croatia in 2013.

The addition of new EU members has expanded the common market and helped maintain peace and prosperity in Europe. Any new member must be prepared to sign up to the treaties and take on board the full body of EU law. It must respect the EU's values, such as the principles of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Beyond its own borders, the EU also maintains strong relationships with neighbouring countries. The European neighbourhood policy supports the security, stability and prosperity of the countries to the immediate east and south of the EU. In addition, the EU's enlargement policy covers potential new members. Beyond the 'neighbourhood' region, the EU's global relations are usually based on trade deals, partnerships and multilateral cooperation.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The current candidate countries for EU membership are: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (*) are potential candidates.

(*) This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

FINLAND
SWEDEN
ESTONIA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
DENMARK
UNITED KINGDOM*
POLAND
NETHERLANDS
IRELAND
GERMANY
BELGIUM
LUXEMBOURG
CZECHIA
SLOVAKIA
FRANCE
HUNGARY
SPAIN
ROMANIA
AUSTRIA
SLOVENIA
BULGARIA
PORTUGAL
CROATIA
ITALY
GREECE
CYPRUS
MALTA

* The UK withdrew from the EU in 2020.

| 2013 |
| 2007 |
| 2004 |
| 1995 |
| 1986 |
| 1981 |
| 1973 |
| 1957 |
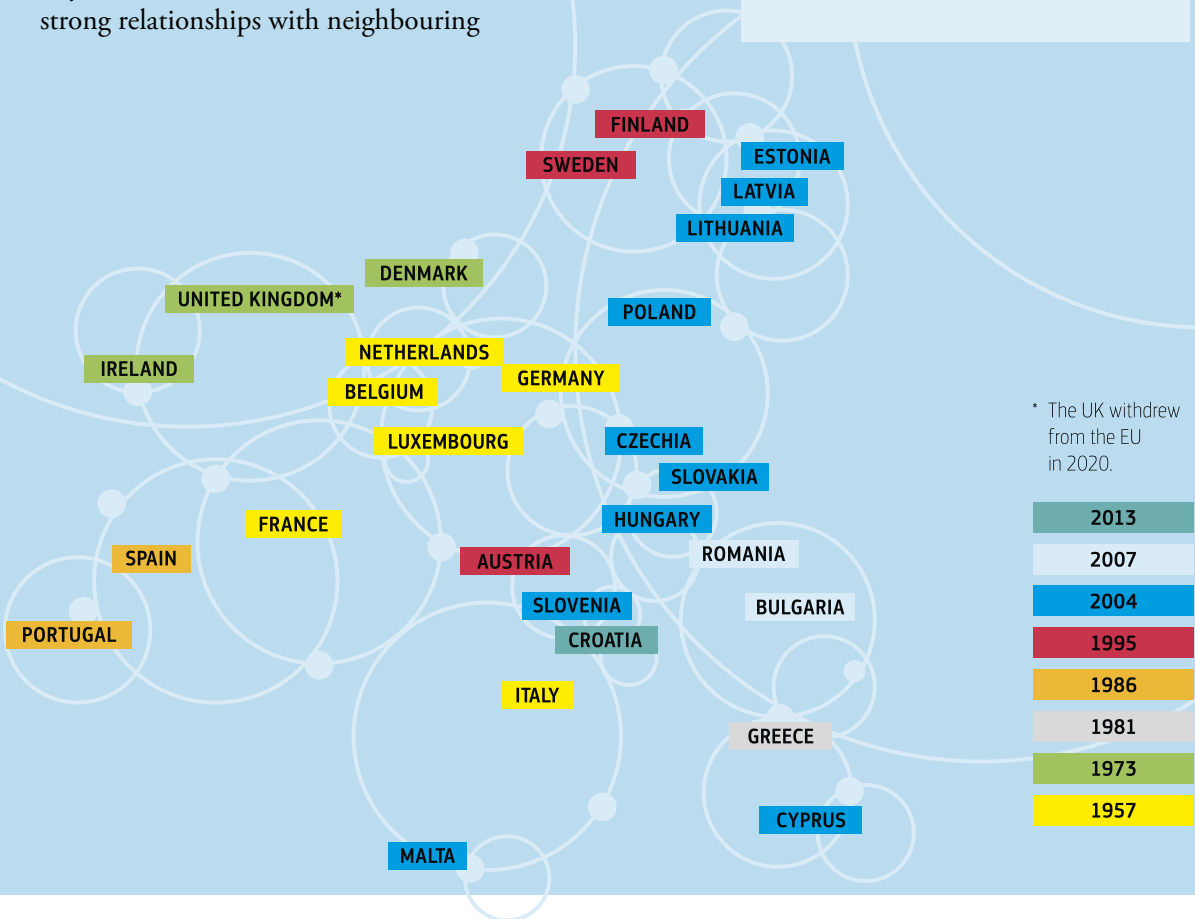
Nobel Peace Prize

The EU was set up to secure lasting peace among its members. Since its establishment, violent internal conflicts and opportunities for war to break out between Europeans have been greatly reduced. In recognition of its work for peace, democracy and human rights in Europe and around the world, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. It decided to donate the EUR 930 000 prize money – plus a further EUR 930 000 from the EU itself – to children who are denied the chance to grow up in peace.

THE EU THROUGH THE AGES

From a continent at war to a peaceful union, follow the EU's journey with our EU timeline:

europa.eu/learning-corner/ eu-timeline/overview_en

EXERCISE 4
WHAT DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION MEAN TO YOU?

As we have seen, the European Union's origins date back to the early 1950s, when it was founded by people who had experienced the atrocities of one, or even two, world wars. These wars resulted in tens of millions of deaths across the continent. At the time, the ambition to unite countries and people that had so recently been in conflict was visionary.

By the time you and your friends were born, the EU had already enjoyed more than 50 years of peace and prosperity, although you may have heard or read stories about difficult experiences in other parts of the world during this time. As young people, **what do you think about this long-lasting peace in Europe? Do you take it for granted or do you sometimes worry about the future? Is democracy alone enough to guarantee peace?** Discuss this with your classmates.

Visit our online version of this chapter

europa.eu/!p7xfYR

YOU OFTEN HEAR IN THE NEWS THAT 'BRUSSELS' HAS DECIDED THIS AND THAT. BUT WHAT DOES THAT ACTUALLY MEAN? EXACTLY WHO OR WHAT IS 'BRUSSELS'? THIS CHAPTER WILL PROVIDE A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE EU. YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT THE MAIN EU INSTITUTIONS, WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES THEY HAVE AND WHAT THEY ARE ALLOWED TO DO. YOU WILL ALSO LEARN HOW YOU CAN INFLUENCE THEIR WORK

CHAPTER 2

HOW DOES THE EU WORK?

Who decides what in the EU?

When you hear discussions about politics, it is often people who are mentioned: the prime minister of your country, for example, or an opposition leader. This is because it is people who take decisions and shape policies. And the same is true for the EU.

The European institutions are simply places where politicians from all EU countries can meet to work together towards concrete results. Let's take a look at the institutions where most of the decisions are made.

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The European Parliament

europarl.europa.eu

As the EU's only directly elected institution, the European Parliament is the collective voice of ordinary people. Members are directly elected by European citizens every 5 years. Anyone with EU citizenship is eligible to vote in these elections. In some EU countries where non-citizens can sometimes vote in sub-national elections, people who fulfil other residency conditions (such as non-citizens legally living in the country) can also vote in European Parliamentary elections.

The last European elections were held in 2019. The next ones will be held in 2024. You have the right to vote from the age of 18 in all EU countries except Austria and Malta, where you can vote at 16, and Greece, where you can vote when you are 17.

DID YOU KNOW?

Young people– between 15 and 30 years old – are the most pro-European of all the generations. In 2019, over 70 % of them said they had a positive view of the EU.

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478

12 SESSIONS A YEAR

STRASBOURG FRANCE

705 MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

UP TO **6** SESSIONS A YEAR

BRUSSELS BELGIUM
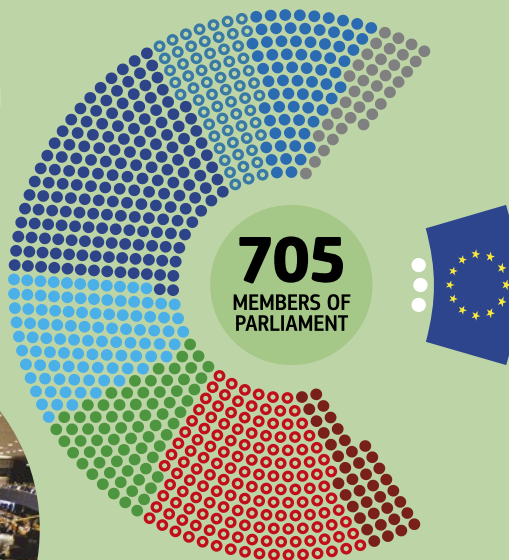
- Group of the European People's Party
- Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
- Renew Europe Group
- Identity and Democracy Group
- Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance
- European Conservatives and Reformists Group
- Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left
- Non-attached members

NB: Situation in October 2021.

The main meetings of the European Parliament, also known as 'plenary sessions', take place 12 times a year in Strasbourg, France, and up to 6 times a year in Brussels, Belgium.

The European Parliament has 705 members, also called MEPs, from all EU countries. The number of members per country varies: more populous countries have more members than smaller, less populous ones. Members from across the EU with similar political views work together in political groups just as in national parliaments, instead of forming groups according to their nationality.

The European Parliament takes decisions on EU laws together with the Council of the European Union. If the Parliament and the Council cannot agree on a piece of legislation, there will be no new law. The Parliament elects the President of the European Commission and has the right to approve or to dismiss the whole European Commission. It also approves the budget of the European Union.

European citizens directly elect the Members of the European Parliament.

YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The next European Parliamentary elections will be held in 2024, and you might be eligible to vote by then. Your representatives work with other Members of the European Parliament in political groups. To form a political group, 25 members are needed, from at least one quarter of the 27 EU countries. At present, there are eight political groups in the Parliament. Members cannot belong to more than one political group at the same time. Other members do not belong to any political group at all and are known as non-attached members.
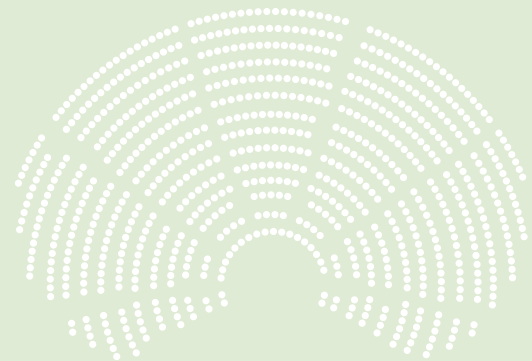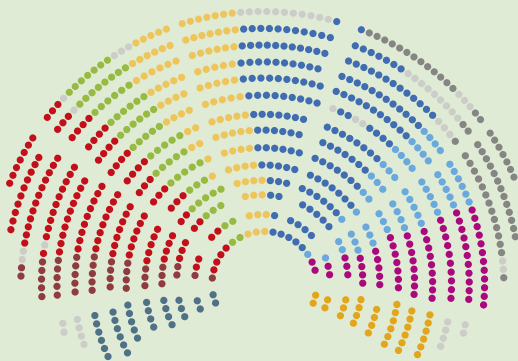
NAME OF MEP

NATIONALITY

POLITICAL GROUP

In small groups, have a look at the map available at the following link and see which parties from your country were successful at the last European elections and which groups they belong to: **europa.eu/!mP79pm**

Here you can see how members are seated in the plenary: **europa.eu/!qp74Dm**

Do you recognise some of the members from your own country?

AT LEAST **4** SUMMITS A YEAR

The European Council

The European Council brings together the elected leaders of EU countries, i.e. the heads of state or heads of government. These leaders meet at least four times per year. Their meetings are often referred to as 'European summits'. The European Council sets the EU's main political priorities and overall policy direction. It is chaired by a president who is elected every 2½ years.

The European Council does not pass EU laws. That is the job of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union – don't mix them up!

EU and national leaders attend a European summit, chaired by the President of the European Council.

The Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union – also known as 'the Council' for short – represents the governments of the EU countries. In the Council, ministers from all EU countries meet to discuss and take decisions on EU policies and laws. Which ministers attend depends on the topic under discussion. For example, if the meeting is about air pollution, then the environment ministers will meet. If the focus is on unemployment, then ministers responsible for employment and social affairs will attend.

The Council is one of the EU's two law-making bodies. So without the ministers from all EU countries, nothing can get done in the European Union.

The rules of voting in the Council are decided by the EU countries. The Council takes most of its decisions by a majority vote, and in some cases unanimously. For the areas where the EU countries have agreed that decisions must be taken by unanimity – for instance for taxation or security issues – this means that all ministers must be in agreement for a decision to be taken.

In many other areas, ministers take decisions by majority vote, for example when passing an EU law on consumer rights, on issues such as the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic or on environmental issues such as how to treat urban waste.

The presidency of the Council is held by a different EU country every 6 months. Following the Presidencies of Portugal and Slovenia in 2021, France and Czechia will hold it in 2022, and Sweden and Spain in 2023.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The Council votes unanimously on:
- most common foreign and security policy issues;
- citizenship (the granting of new rights to EU citizens);
- EU membership;
- harmonisation of national legislation on indirect taxation;
- EU finances;
- certain justice and home affairs issues (e.g. family law, police cooperation);
- harmonisation of national legislation on social security and social protection.

Under unanimous voting, abstention does not prevent a decision from being taken.

Find out more about **the Council** *in this short documentary:*
europa.eu/!Xm48xu

VOTING IN THE COUNCIL

In Council meetings, about 80 % of law proposals are decided by qualified majority vote, also called a 'double majority'. Under qualified-majority voting, each minister casts one vote for or against a proposal, or abstains. As the number of people represented by each minister varies according to the population of their country, a 'double majority' is required to adopt a decision fairly: at least 55 % of EU countries (15 out of 27) representing at least 65 % of the total EU population (around 447 million) must vote in favour for a law to pass.

See here for more details: **europa.eu/!fh76Jm**

Try out the voting calculator on the Council's website to see how this system works with the exercise below: **europa.eu/!rM38Ru**

Imagine your class has collected money for a school trip and you now need to agree on a destination. Someone suggests putting the proposed destination to a vote by qualified majority. Are you all of the same opinion or do you need to take a qualified-majority vote?

Choose someone to represent the European Commission – they have 1 minute to argue in favour of a certain destination. Pick another student to take charge of the Council's voting calculator. Assign each of your classmates the role of a minister from each of the 27 EU countries.

Each 'minister' should then vote for or against the proposed destination – or they can abstain.

Check the result on the Council's calculator. What was the outcome? Were you able to agree on the proposed destination? Discuss your thoughts about this type of voting process with the group.

QUALIFIED MAJORITY

27 **27 Member States**
Minimum 'yes' required for adoption: 55 % = 15

⬆ YES   ⬇ NO   ⊖ ABSTAIN

TOTAL SIMPLE MAJORITY =

% **Population**
Minimum 'yes' required for adoption: 65 %

🧮 use the voting calculator

MALTA HAS
0.11 %
OF THE EU POPULATION

GERMANY HAS
18.54 %
OF THE EU POPULATION
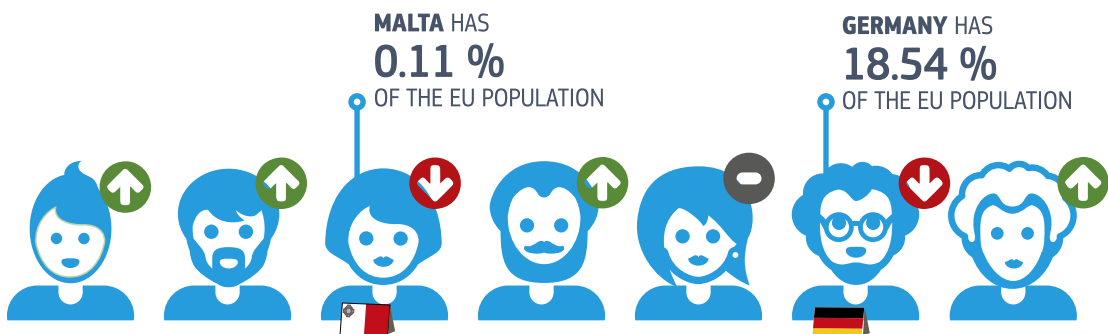
The European Commission

The European Commission is made up of 27 Commissioners – one per EU country. Together with the President of the European Commission, the Commissioners are the EU's executive branch, responsible for the daily running of the EU. Their mandate lasts 5 years.

The European Commission president is nominated by the Member States via the European Council and is formally appointed by the European Parliament. The other Commissioners are proposed by their country's government and approved by the European Parliament. Commissioners do not represent the views of their country of origin but rather the common interest of the EU. Each member of the Commission is assigned responsibility for a specific policy area by the president, such as energy, the economy or the environment.

The European Commission proposes new laws and programmes in the general interest of the EU. Before making a proposal, the Commission seeks the opinions of national parliaments, governments, interest groups, experts and the general public, by inviting them to make comments online.

For more information about how you can make your voice heard in EU policymaking, see section: **Your voice in the EU decision-making (p.25).**

The Commission's proposals are scrutinised in detail by the European Parliament and the Council. These two institutions take the final decision on all EU laws. They can amend proposals or reject them altogether. The European Commission also manages EU policies and the budget, and ensures that EU countries apply EU law correctly.

The European Commission is the 'executive body' of the EU.

European Commission

MANAGES THE BUDGET

DRAFTS NEW EU LAWS

CHECKS EU LAW IS APPLIED
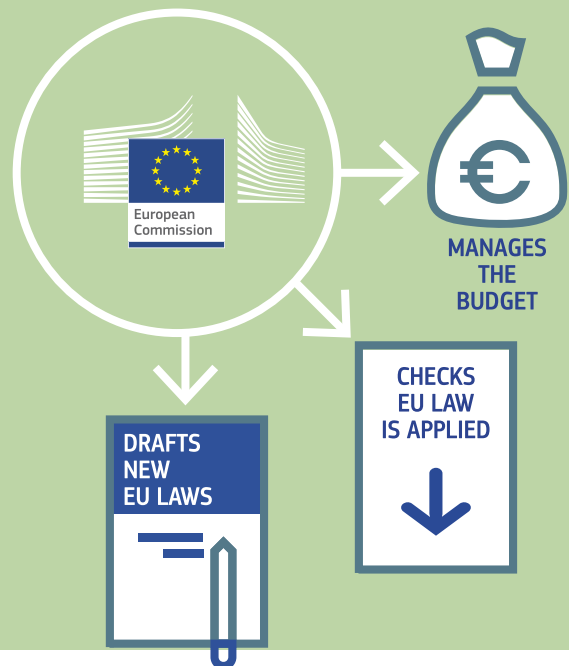
DID YOU KNOW?

The day-to-day work of the Commission is carried out by its administrative staff, experts, translators, interpreters and assistants. Commission officials – like the staff of other EU institutions – are recruited via the European Personnel Selection Office (**epso.europa.eu**).

These officials are citizens of the EU countries, selected by recruitment competitions. Around 32 000 people work for the Commission. That may sound like a lot, but it is in fact fewer than the number of staff employed by most large city councils in the EU.

If this sounds like a career you might be interested in, you can apply for an **EU traineeship** with any of the EU institutions.

Find out more here: **europa.eu/!tu37Kg**

DID YOU KNOW?

You can visit the European institutions!

visiting.europarl.europa.eu/en

Take a tour around the **European Parliament**, the Council, the **European Council** and the **European Commission** in person or online.

europa.eu/!x79j4w

consilium.europa.eu/en/contact/visits

The Court of Justice of the European Union

Over the last 70 years, EU countries have drawn up many EU laws together. The Court of Justice ensures that these laws are interpreted and applied uniformly. If a national court is in doubt about interpreting any of these laws, it can ask the Court of Justice for clarification. Individual EU countries do not always apply EU laws fully. In this case, the Commission or another EU country can bring the matter before the Court. The Court is based in Luxembourg and consists of one judge per EU country.

For more information, see: curia.europa.eu

EXERCISE 7
WHO DOES WHAT IN THE EU?

That was a lot of information to take in! However, it is important to understand what 'Brussels' really is and who is responsible for what in the EU. Take the test below to see how much you remember. Put a cross in the box against the institution or institutions that match the description.

Who …?	European Parliament	European Council	Council of the European Union	European Commission	European Court of Justice
1. makes proposals for EU laws					
2. approves EU laws					
3. consists of (only) one representative/member per EU country					
4. is directly elected					
5. manages the budget					
6. represents the interests of the people					
7. represents the interests of EU countries/their governments					
8. represents the interest of the EU as a whole					
9. decides on the interpretation of EU laws					
10. defines the general political direction of the EU					

Apart from the institutions discussed here, you may have heard of these other EU institutions and bodies:

- the European Central Bank: **ecb.europa.eu**
- the European Court of Auditors: **eca.europa.eu**
- the European External Action Service: **eeas.europa.eu**
- the European Economic and Social Committee: **eesc.europa.eu**
- the European Committee of the Regions: **cor.europa.eu**
- the European Investment Bank: **eib.europa.eu**
- the European Ombudsman: **ombudsman.europa.eu**
- the European Data Protection Supervisor: **edps.europa.eu**

For more information see:
europa.eu/!NX37Dd

EXERCISE 8
LAW-MAKING IN THE EU

The most common procedure for making laws in the EU is called the 'ordinary legislative procedure'. With this procedure, proposals for a new law are examined up to three times (in so-called readings). If no agreement can be reached, the proposal is withdrawn.

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 like industry, health and education. In these areas, the EU only provides support to national governments. In areas where the EU or national governments can act, the EU may only take action if it can do so more effectively.

Find out more about
EU competences:
europa.eu/!Nm66pq

The readings mainly involve three institutions: the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission.
Please put each institution in the correct box in the image.
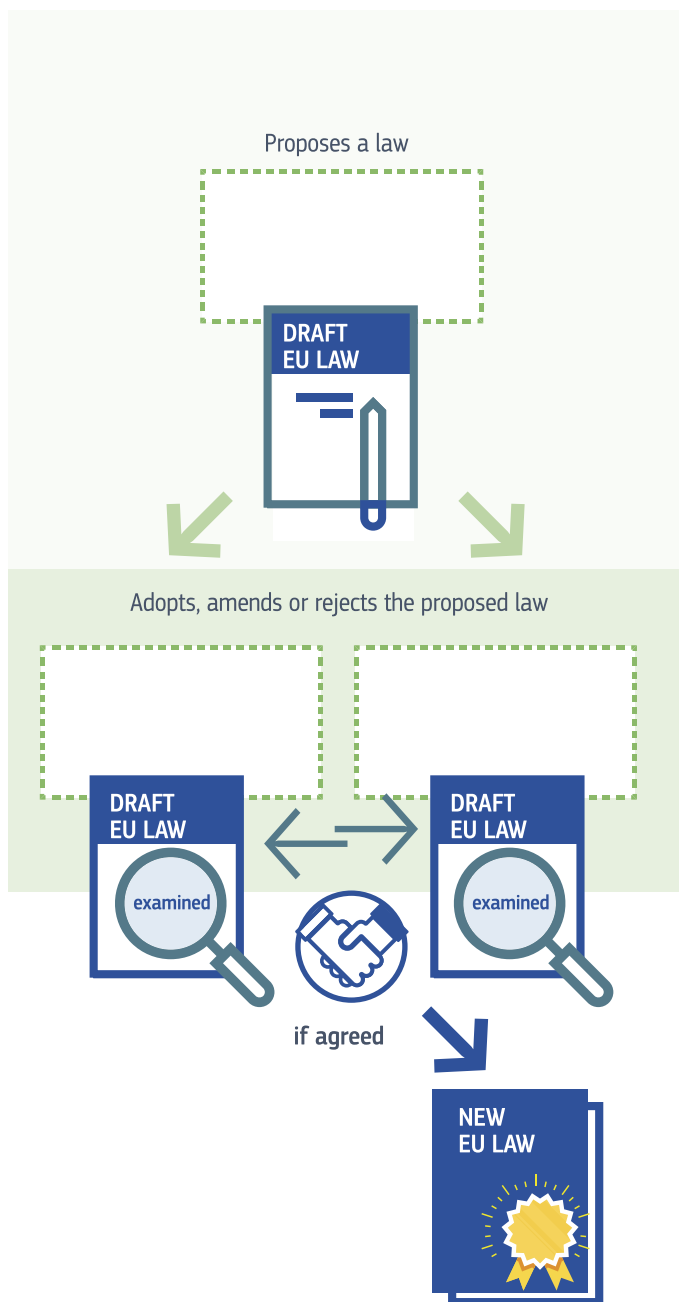
Proposes a law

DRAFT EU LAW

Adopts, amends or rejects the proposed law

DRAFT EU LAW
examined

DRAFT EU LAW
examined

if agreed

NEW EU LAW

WHO IS WHO?

You now know a lot about the European institutions, but do you know the names and faces of the people leading them? Do you know who is the current:

1. President of the European Parliament?
2. President of the European Council?
3. President of the European Commission?
4. High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy?

Your voice in EU decision-making

As a European citizen, you can influence EU policies in several ways.

WATCH THE VIDEO:
How do you shape the EU institutions?
europa.eu/!gwKXmw

Vote in your country

Voting for your Member of the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg makes a huge impact, as does voting for your national government. This is because your head of state and national government both influence the work of the EU.

Your vote in your country's general election

helps choose

the government of your country.

The head of state or government of your country is a member of the European Council.

Your country's ministers for education, environment, etc. take decisions at Council meetings.

Your vote in the European Parliament elections

helps choose

your representative in the European Parliament, who works in a political group together with members from other EU countries.

The largest group in the European Parliament influences the choice of President of the European Commission.

Participate in online consultations

You can make your voice heard by taking part in online public consultations. Before making proposals for new EU laws, and throughout the whole decision-making process, the European Commission seeks the opinions of ordinary people, as well as the public and private sector.

Take part here:
europa.eu/!Tk33yq

Debate the EU

You can also have your say about what is happening in the EU during the many debates that take place both physically and online across the EU.

- EU youth dialogue: **europa.eu/!J3PfDR**
- Citizens' dialogues: **ec.europa.eu/info/events/citizens-dialogues**
- Together.eu: **together.eu**

You can read more about how you can get involved in EU policymaking here:
europa.eu/!nhTNBf

Ask the European Commission to propose a new law

EU citizens can launch or support a **European citizens' initiative** (europa.eu/!JC69Xw). These initiatives ask the European Commission to propose legislation on a specific issue for which the EU is responsible, such as the environment, agriculture or transport. A group of at least seven EU citizens living in seven different EU countries can launch an initiative and collect supporting signatures. Once an initiative has been signed by 1 million people, or slightly over 0.2 % of the EU population, it can be submitted to the European Commission for examination.

The first-ever European citizens' initiative, 'Right2Water', gathered 1.6 million signatures. It led to a proposal for new rules on drinking water.

DID YOU KNOW?

The European Commission has small offices (the offices are called 'representations') in all EU countries, with staff who speak the language(s) of the country. You can talk to them or ask for written information about the EU in your language. There are also local information offices of the Europe Direct network in all EU countries. You can find their contact details at the end of this booklet.

EXERCISE 10
PRIORITIES FOR YOUR REPRESENTATIVE IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

In small groups, make a list of the five main topics that you would like your representative to defend in the European Parliament. As an example, you can read about the Parliament's resolution to reduce plastic bag use in Europe here: **europa.eu/!Bt79yQ**.

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

4. ....

5. ....

AS EUROPEAN CITIZENS WE BENEFIT FROM BASIC THINGS THAT WE OFTEN TAKE FOR GRANTED. THESE INCLUDE A REGION AT PEACE, BEING PART OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST ECONOMIES AND THE FREEDOM TO LIVE, STUDY, WORK AND TRAVEL IN OTHER EU COUNTRIES. WE ALSO BENEFIT FROM LESS OBVIOUS ADVANTAGES – EVERYDAY THINGS THAT MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE. THIS CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS SOME CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF WHAT THE EU DOES FOR ITS CITIZENS.

CHAPTER 3

HOW IS THE EU RELEVANT TO YOUR DAILY LIFE?

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 acts in those areas where the EU countries have authorised it and where it makes sense to act together, like on climate change or trading across the world.

In this chapter, you will find information on what has already been implemented and enacted by the EU (and in **Chapter 4 'What's on the EU's agenda'** you will find information on what is being done to continue this work). Here are just a few of the EU's achievements so far.

Safe and easy travel

Travelling has temporarily become more difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, under normal circumstances, travelling in Europe is much easier today than it used to be. That's because most EU countries, and some non-EU countries, have removed border controls between each other. This removal of border controls is thanks to the Schengen Agreement, named after the village in Luxembourg where it was signed by European countries in 1985.

As a European citizen, you can travel without needing a passport within the 26 'Schengen countries': 22 EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland and Romania are not currently part of the Schengen area. When travelling to or returning from countries that are outside the Schengen area, you will need to present a valid passport or ID card.

If you find yourself in danger in any EU country, you can call the European Emergency number **112**, from any phone, free of charge.

112

DID YOU KNOW?

During the coronavirus pandemic, the **Re-open EU** website and app have provided information on the various restrictions in place, such as national rules on quarantine and testing, to help you plan your journey in Europe (**europa.eu/!xr69Ub**).

The **EU digital COVID certificate** became available to all travellers in 2021. It allows EU citizens and residents to have their certificates issued and verified across the EU, with no language or administrative obstacles in another country.

THE SCHENGEN AREA

Is your country part of the Schengen area? Have you or a member of your family recently travelled to another EU country? Did you have to go through border controls? In 2020, around 2 million Europeans commuted to another EU country every day for work. What do you think Schengen means to them and to the economy in those areas?

Divide yourselves up into small groups and discuss this with your classmates.

GERMANY

FRANCE

Schengen

LUXEMBOURG

Everyone travelling through the EU is:

- protected by a full set of passenger rights when travelling by air, rail, ship, bus or coach (for instance, in certain circumstances they can get compensation if their flight is cancelled);
- protected when buying package holidays, meaning that the company that sold them the holiday must deal with their complaint (for example if they end up in a substandard hotel);
- protected if a tour operator or airline goes bust.

You can check your **EU passenger rights** anytime, anywhere. Simply download the app: europa.eu/!Fk66KJ

? DID YOU KNOW?

When travelling to a country outside the European Union, EU citizens can get help from the consulate or embassy of **any other EU country** if their home country is not represented.

Health and safety while travelling

If you fall ill or have an accident during a visit to another EU country, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, as an EU citizen you have the right to receive public healthcare under the same conditions and at the same cost as people in the host country. Ask your national healthcare provider for your **European Health Insurance Card** (europa.eu/!JH73NV) before you go abroad.

? DID YOU KNOW?

The EU, together with the countries that make it up, is the world's leading donor of humanitarian aid. It provides and coordinates relief assistance to people in areas hit by disasters in Europe and around the globe. This includes assistance following environmental disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and forest fires. In 2021, the **rescEU firefighting fleet** included planes and helicopters from Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden. The fleet was made available to other EU countries and to neighbouring countries in the event of emergency. The **rescEU medical team** also acts during health emergencies and during chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents.

For more information about rescEU:
europa.eu/!jqmtwn

A common currency in 19 EU countries: the euro

Euro banknotes and coins were introduced in 12 EU countries in 2002, and a total of 19 have now replaced their national currencies with the euro. More than 75 % of people in the EU – 340 million of us – use the euro every day.

There are many advantages of using a common currency in a single market where people from different countries trade together. Consumers can compare prices more easily at home, abroad and online. Companies can calculate and charge customers in one currency and are not at risk of exchange rate fluctuations. This keeps prices stable.

*Find out more about **the euro:*** europa.eu/!DJ38wd

DID YOU KNOW?

Euro coins have a common side – used for all coins no matter what euro-area country they were made in – that portrays a map of Europe. However, on the other side, each country has its own design. Do you recognise the symbol on this EUR 2 coin? Can you guess where it comes from?

EXERCISE 12
WHICH COUNTRIES ARE IN THE EURO AREA?

The table below lists all 27 EU countries. Tick the 19 countries that use the euro as their currency.

Austria	France	Malta
Belgium	Germany	Netherlands
Bulgaria	Greece	Poland
Croatia	Hungary	Portugal
Cyprus	Ireland	Romania
Czechia	Italy	Slovakia
Denmark	Latvia	Slovenia
Estonia	Lithuania	Spain
Finland	Luxembourg	Sweden

Study, train, work and volunteer

Thanks to the EU, anyone can take advantage of the freedom of movement between EU countries.

Freedom of movement doesn't just apply to travel and holidays. It also means you can:

- train and study anywhere in the EU under the same conditions as nationals;
- work anywhere in the EU and benefit from the opportunities offered by an EU-wide job market.

Find out more here:
europa.eu/!tK96XW

The youth guarantee scheme

Many young people do not have certain skills and qualifications that employers are looking for. Thanks to the youth guarantee scheme, the EU can help young people gain new and useful skills. This may be in the form of on-the-job training or individual career guidance.

For more information and to enrol, check with your national contact point: **europa.eu/!hD3XR9**

Over 24 million young people who registered on youth guarantee schemes have received an offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeships or traineeships since 2014.

Younger children are also supported through the **European child guarantee**, which is a programme designed for under 18s to fight social exclusion and poverty through education, healthcare, nutrition and housing.

For more information, see
Chapter 4 'What's on the EU's agenda?'.

Erasmus+

You may have already heard about the Erasmus+ programme. This EU initiative helps people to spend a period of time abroad. It is open to young people, students, trainees, teachers and staff working in education, and volunteers from around the world. Students in both university and vocational training can get Erasmus+ financial and organisational support for their stay in 33 countries across Europe and around the world. A European points system ensures that grades earned abroad are credited to your studies at home.

Schools can cooperate with other schools or organisations in other EU countries. Ask your teacher or head teacher to help you check out the opportunities that Erasmus+ provides.

You might also opt for some on-the-job training abroad. Every year, many young Europeans complete part of their apprenticeship in another EU country. The Erasmus+ programme works in partnership with companies and institutions that advertise projects for young people.

WATCH THE VIDEO:
What is Erasmus+?
europa.eu/!rFGPhX

*Find out more about **Erasmus+ opportunities** here:*
https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu *You can also listen to the experiences of young people who have taken part in an Erasmus+ youth exchange:*
https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-112392

*And do check out the dedicated **Erasmus+ app**:*
https://erasmusapp.eu

? DID YOU KNOW?

Since the launch of the first Erasmus programme in 1987, more than 10 million young people have benefited from the opportunities it offers. 10 million more are expected to benefit from the new Erasmus+ between 2021 and 2027. The budget is EUR 28 billion, more than double the sum that was previously allocated to the programme.

The European Solidarity Corps

If you want to make a meaningful contribution to society and show solidarity with your community, then the European Solidarity Corps might be an ideal opportunity. It allows young people aged 18–30 to participate in a wide range of activities, either by volunteering or by taking up a work placement. This could also prove to be a stepping stone into employment for many young people.

Interested? Read more about the European Solidarity Corps here: europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en

Find out about other opportunities for volunteering in the EU here: https://europa.eu/learning-corner/work-and-study_en

WATCH THE VIDEO:
European Solidarity Corps 2020
europa.eu/!7pHQTg

The European Solidarity Corps offers young people

DiscoverEU

Thanks to the European Union's DiscoverEU initiative, you could have the chance to explore Europe with a free travel pass. If you are 18 years old and a citizen of an EU Member State, you can apply for one of the free travel passes and explore the EU for up to 1 month.

*More information about **DiscoverEU:*** europa.eu/youth/discovereu_en

DID YOU KNOW?

In the first four rounds of the DiscoverEU programme, around 70 000 young people received a travel pass.

?

EXERCISE 13
VOLUNTEERING OR STUDYING ABROAD

Can you imagine volunteering abroad or spending part of your studies at a university in another country? In pairs, make a list of four arguments in favour, and four against. Which argument comes out on top? Compare your results with your classmates and discuss them.

Arguments in favour

Arguments against

Free movement of goods, services and capital

Thanks to the EU's single market, it is not only people who can move around freely in the EU, but also goods, services and capital. People, goods, services and capital are sometimes referred to as the four 'pillars' of free movement in the EU. Remember that 'capital' does not only mean 'money'. It also includes investments and loans. This makes it easier for EU businesses to operate in more than one country, and to compete globally. Whatever their size, companies in the EU have access to the national markets of all EU countries and to around 447 million potential customers. Why does this matter? Greater competition leads to lower prices and a wider choice of products and services for the end consumer – and that's you!

EXERCISE 14
WHAT DOES FREE MOVEMENT MEAN FOR YOU IN PRACTICE?

Match the examples to the four aspects of the single market (free movement of people, goods, services and capital) and tick the appropriate box.

Examples	Free movement of people	Free movement of goods	Free movement of services	Free movement of capital
1. I can buy a second-hand car abroad and take it back home without paying customs duties.				
2. I can travel anywhere I like within the EU.				
3. I can study in another EU country.				
4. My parents can have their bathroom renovated by a tiler from another EU country.				
5. My parents can send money to me, without any extra charges, in the country where I am studying.				
6. I can work in another EU country.				
7. I can buy goods online from another EU country without paying customs duties.				

Product and food safety

Throughout the EU, people benefit from high-quality and safe food and goods. The EU has some of the highest food-safety standards in the world. It has put in place compulsory checks throughout the agri-food chain to ensure that plants and animals are healthy, that food and animal feed are safe and that products are correctly labelled.

The EU has also introduced strict safety requirements for a wide range of products, such as toys and electronic appliances. Manufacturers must meet these requirements to sell their products in EU countries. If faulty or dangerous products are being sold across Europe, the EU's Rapid Alert System makes it easy for national authorities to sound the alarm, share the latest information with each other and keep consumers safe.

EXERCISE 15
EUROPEAN LABELS

EU laws have put strict rules in place for the labelling of food, drinks, cosmetic products and electronic appliances. Some labels help protect consumers, while others let them know about certain characteristics of the product. For example, there are labels to indicate which products are organic or energy efficient. Without proper labelling, a product will not be allowed onto the market.

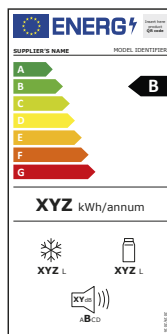Do you recognise the labels below? Where can you find them? What do they mean?

*Find out more about **energy** with this series of short videos:*
europa.eu/learning-corner/eu-energy-policy_en

Consumer rights

When you go shopping in the EU, you are protected by all sorts of laws. For instance, you have a **guarantee of at least 2 years** for products bought in the EU. This means that if your mobile phone breaks down after a year, it will have to be repaired or replaced free of charge, irrespective of where in the EU you originally bought it.

More and more of us are **shopping online**, and EU consumers are now better protected thanks to EU laws that:

- allow you 14 days to return goods bought at a distance, whether online or by phone;
- prohibit hidden charges and costs online;
- ban pre-ticked boxes on websites so that you do not unintentionally pay for unwanted travel insurance or car rental, for example.

Quality telecommunications

Many of us use smartphones and tablets. As an EU citizen, you can:

- benefit from a guaranteed, reasonable-quality, fixed telecoms service at an affordable price, regardless of where you live in the EU;
- shop around and compare prices easily, as operators have to provide transparent, up-to-date information on their prices and tariffs;
- change your telecoms operator without changing your phone number within 1 day.

DID YOU KNOW?

Thanks to EU rules, you can use your phone without any extra charges while travelling in the EU. Also, you won't have to miss your favourite music or TV shows, and can stream the same content you've subscribed to at home, wherever you are in the EU.

Staying safe online

Anyone who spends time online knows how easy it is to come across inappropriate, misleading or even extremist content on the internet.

To keep us safe, the EU code of conduct fights illegal hate speech online by ensuring that requests to remove racist and xenophobic content are dealt with speedily. The **code of practice on disinformation** brings together social networks and the advertising industry, which have agreed to a set of commitments covering everything from transparency to fake accounts. Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, YouTube and other online platforms now assess 90 % of flagged content within 24 hours. The European strategy for a better internet for children has set a gold standard for the protection and empowerment of younger children online.

Check out the map to find **resources in your country:** betterinternetforkids.eu/sic

Keeping your individual data protected and ensuring your privacy online is also a huge priority and the EU considers these part of your fundamental rights. The **general data protection regulation** is an EU law which helps enforce this by setting a legal framework for the collection and processing of personal information from individuals who live in the EU.

Are you concerned about fake news?
With this **toolkit** and the help of your teacher, you can discover how to spot and fight disinformation and start conversations about the important topics raised by the threat of bad information. Among these are issues affecting public health, democracy, and the cultural and legal norms underpinning our societies.

https://europa.eu/learning-corner/spot-and-fight-disinformation_en

Equality and human rights

A range of fundamental rights is guaranteed for everyone living in the EU. Respect for human rights and dignity is enshrined in the treaties and consolidated by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. This prohibits any discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, age or disability.

The EU works hand in hand with Member States to promote respect for others, enforce non-discrimination laws and uphold human rights across the EU and beyond. Human rights considerations are also included in the EU's international trade agreements with other countries.

However, progress starts at home. So far, the EU has taken wide-ranging action against most major forms of discrimination. For example, action in the area of disability policy ranges from laws (the EU Accessibility Act came into law in 2019) to initiatives promoting accessible cities (the EU access city awards).

europa.eu/!KQ76GT

Despite such concrete steps, people continue to suffer discriminatory treatment, harassment and abuse across Europe and the world. To combat the various forms of hatred and discrimination, the EU has launched a plan to increase equality.

See more details in
Chapter 4 'What's on the EU's agenda?'.

Work–life balance and quality of life

The EU is committed to creating a fairer, more socially just society, and a big part of that is ensuring a balance between our lives at work and our lives away from work. In 2019, new EU rules came into force to improve working life for parents and carers. The rules aim to encourage a more equal sharing of parental leave, introduce carers' leave and address women's under-representation in the labour market. When fully applied by all EU countries, the rules should also extend the right to flexible working arrangements to all workers.

Protecting the environment and fighting climate change

The EU has always been at the forefront of the fight against climate change. It leads international agreements on reducing carbon emissions and lowering global temperatures in line with the Paris Agreement. The EU has some of the world's highest environmental standards. These standards protect our natural habitats, biodiversity, drinking water, bathing waters and air quality. The EU's Natura 2000 network of protected natural areas has created spaces where sustainable human activity can coexist with vulnerable and rare species and habitats.

europa.eu/!vC49dj

?

europa.eu/!tDnjbx

DID YOU KNOW?

New rules banning 10 single-use plastic items most commonly found on Europe's beaches – from cotton buds to balloon sticks and straws – came into force in July 2021.

However, the fight against climate change has taken on a new urgency. We now need to step up our efforts to protect people, ensure food security, limit water shortages and address the other consequences of extreme temperature changes. The EU has committed to a European Green Deal, an extensive package of measures to fight climate change, pledging to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

See more details in **Chapter 4 'What's on the EU's agenda?'**.

WATCH THE VIDEO:
Green Deal Proposal
europa.eu/!7F6NCB

EU funding in your region

The countries and regions of the EU are not just different sizes; they also have different levels of wealth. Thousands of projects have received EU funding over the years. These projects have benefited both EU countries individually and the EU as a whole, by creating jobs, boosting economic growth and improving citizens' quality of life.

People are not always aware that the EU has financed or is financing projects close to where they live. However, projects supported by EU funding have benefited them by creating millions of new jobs, developing strategic transport links, upgrading energy infrastructure, rolling out broadband, investing in research and innovation and protecting cultural heritage and areas of natural beauty.

Have a look at these websites and check out some **examples of projects that have received EU funding in your country**. You will see that the EU is much closer to your home than you might have thought: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects and https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/en/portal/1

Thanks to EU funding, you can connect to the internet for free in libraries, parks, museums and other public areas across Europe wherever you see this sign.

DID YOU KNOW?

The **Creative Europe** programme aims to foster Europe's cultural diversity. The **European Heritage Label**, the **European Capitals of Culture** and the **European Heritage Days** encourage more people to discover Europe's shared cultural roots.

Find out more about culture and creativity in the EU: https://ec.europa.eu/culture

EU investment in research

Science has the power to transform the way we live. That's why the EU is investing billions of euro in research and innovation to fight climate change, boost growth and jobs and tackle the other challenges we face. The EU's key funding programme in this area is called **Horizon Europe**. Horizon Europe's previous funding cycle helped accelerate the development of vaccines, invested in projects to protect biodiversity, and used the Galileo satellite to give us more accurate GPS systems and maps. Reflecting its importance for the EU's future, Horizon Europe has been allocated a budget of EUR 95.5 billion for 2021–2027. The focus will be on green technologies, artificial intelligence and much more.

Find out more about ***Horizon Europe:*** europa.eu/!Xf47NRP

See more details about the ***EU budget*** *in* **Chapter 4 'What's on the EU's agenda?'**

EU BUDGET FOR 2021–2027 topped up by NextGenerationEU:

EUR 2 018 BILLION

AROUND **4 %** SPENT ON ADMINISTRATION
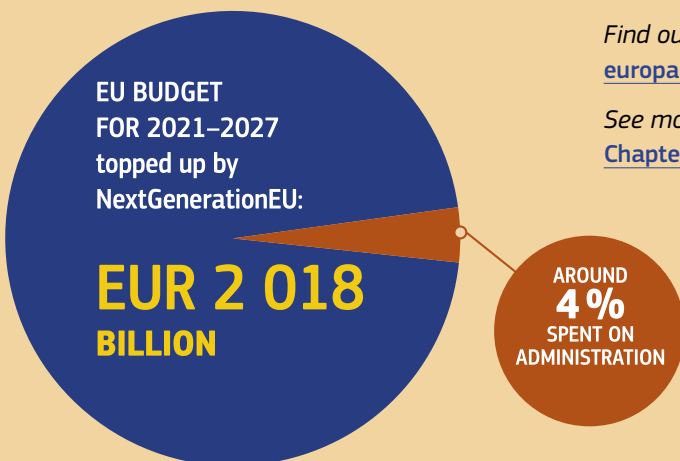
THE EU IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

Here are 10 examples of how the EU works for you in your daily live. Pick the three that are most important to you, compare your answers with those of your classmates and explain the reasons for your choices.

The Schengen Agreement has **removed border controls** between most EU countries. You can now cross most borders within the EU without showing your passport.

You can travel, study, work and live in any EU country. **Free movement of people** is possible thanks to the EU's single market.

When travelling in another EU country you might fall ill or have an accident. With the European Health Insurance Card you are entitled to any medical treatment that cannot wait until you get home. You will receive state-provided **healthcare abroad** and pay the same fees as locals.

The EU has removed barriers to **free trade** between its members. This means that you can produce, sell and buy goods wherever you want in the EU. It also means that consumers have a **larger choice** of products and lower prices.

Air travel has become much cheaper. The EU has broken up national monopolies and has permitted competition in the aviation sector. More cities now have their own airports and there are more direct flights between them. **Passenger rights** have also been strengthened.

Using mobile phones and smart devices abroad has become much cheaper in recent years. EU rules have significantly reduced the costs (by more than 90 % since 2007) by capping prices. **Roaming** charges were abolished in June 2017, which means that when using your phone abroad, you now pay the same as you do at home.

As an EU citizen, **you own your data**. Organisations or companies are not allowed to process your personal information without your consent and you have the right to know what information they hold about you.

EU law protects you whenever you order or buy goods anywhere other than in a shop. For example, if you sign a subscription or contract in the street or buy online, you are allowed to change your mind. You have the **right to cancel your order or return your purchase** within 14 days.

As a consumer you might want to 'buy green'. The **EU's energy label** will help you make the right choice. Many products such as light bulbs, washing machines, refrigerators and televisions carry the EU energy label. This makes it easier to identify the most energy-efficient products, which are classified as 'A'.

You can enjoy **clean bathing and drinking water** in the EU. As environmental pollution knows no boundaries, the EU has introduced compulsory, Europe-wide limits on air and water pollution. EU countries must make sure that these levels are complied with.

Visit our online version of this chapter
europa.eu/!7yxdCJ
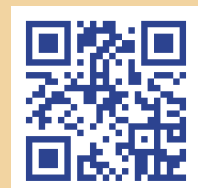
THE EUROPEAN UNION HAS ACHIEVED A LOT SINCE ITS FOUNDING DAYS. IT HAS DELIVERED MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY OF PEACE, STABILITY AND PROSPERITY. IT HAS HELPED RAISE LIVING STANDARDS. AND IT HAS LAUNCHED THE WORLD'S LARGEST SINGLE MARKET AS WELL AS THE EURO. SO WHAT'S NEXT? IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HOW THE EU IS TACKLING TODAY'S CHALLENGES AND WHAT THE EU'S MAIN PRIORITIES ARE FOR THE COMING YEARS.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT'S ON THE EU'S AGENDA?

We live in challenging times. Climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental damage are threatening Europe and the world. At the same time, new digital technologies are transforming the way we live, work and do business. These new digital technologies bring new opportunities, but also new risks. On top of this, the global COVID-19 pandemic, which hit Europe in 2020, has turned our lives upside down. It has shown just how quickly the world can be thrown into crisis, and how important it is for the EU to be ready to respond to new challenges at the same time as dealing with existing ones.

When President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen took office in 2019, she presented **six key ambitions for Europe** for the coming years. These ambitions range from leading the transition to a healthy planet and a new digital world to strengthening the EU's role as a world leader. In response to the global pandemic, the EU has put in place a recovery plan for Europe to ensure that after COVID-19 it is greener, more digital and more resilient, and provides plenty of opportunities for young people. This recovery plan is called NextGenerationEU. This chapter outlines what the EU is doing in each priority area to make this happen.

A European Green Deal

An economy that works for people

Promoting our European way of life

A new push for European democracy

A Europe fit for the digital age

A stronger Europe in the world

*Find out more about the **EU's political priorities** at:* ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_en

'We cannot replace the lost time which the pandemic has taken from young people, but we can build something better and fairer, for them and with them. We have to act now, and young people must play a central role in this change.'

Ursula von der Leyen,
President of the European Commission,
9 May 2021, at the launch of the
Conference on the Future of Europe,
Strasbourg, France.

Europe's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

Europe is recovering from the biggest public-health crisis in its history, which has also led to an unprecedented economic slowdown. The coronavirus pandemic has affected us all in one way or another. Many people suffered illness or bereavement, others lost jobs and income.

When the crisis hit in early 2020, the EU acted swiftly to support healthcare systems, save lives and keep the economy going. It also secured the production, purchase and delivery of vaccines to EU countries. The EU is now working towards greater coordination between EU countries so they can prepare for – and respond together to – future health crises.

The EU aims to repair the economic and social damage caused by the pandemic by investing in projects and initiatives to make Europe healthier, greener, more digital and better able to deal with future challenges. To boost the recovery, the EU is using the EU budget together with a special recovery plan, known as NextGenerationEU. Taken together, this will amount to just over EUR 2 trillion (EUR 2 018 billion) to boost the recovery. See more in the section on 'An economy that works for people' on page 56.
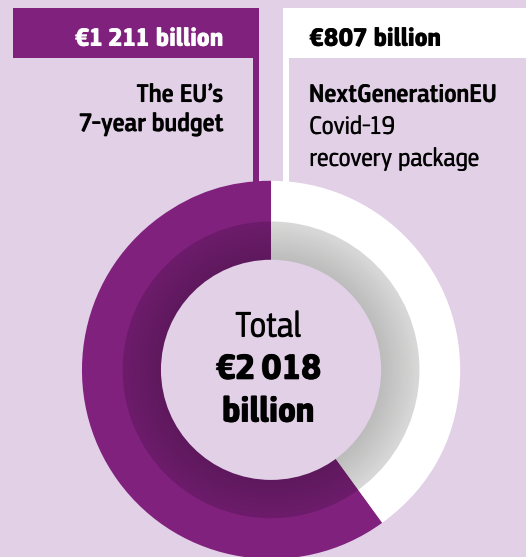
Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en

EU spending 2021-2027

€1 211 billion

The EU's 7-year budget

€807 billion

NextGenerationEU Covid-19 recovery package

Total
€2 018 billion

Funding Europe's recovery

In 2020, EU leaders agreed the biggest-ever package of EU financing to help rebuild after COVID-19 and prepare a better future for the next generation. This package is made up of the EU's long-term budget for 2021–2027 and the temporary fund created to fuel Europe's recovery plan, known as **NextGenerationEU**. The bulk of the funding from NextGenerationEU will provide financial support to EU countries to help them recover from the effects of the pandemic. The money will be used to help them come out of the crisis greener, more digital and more resilient. It plans to achieve this by investing in areas that affect all Europeans such as faster internet connections, clean energy and transport, education and training, and making buildings more energy-efficient.

Find out about your country's recovery plans: europa.eu/!wYRggt

? DID YOU KNOW?

EU countries are in charge of their own national health policies including vaccinating their own citizens against harmful diseases such as COVID-19. The EU, on the other hand, provides support for these efforts. For example, it set up a system connecting national contact-tracing apps and coordinated a common system of EU digital certificates to enable people to travel more easily.

For information and advice on travelling, visit: reopen.europa.eu/en.

DID YOU KNOW?

To help countries cope with the economic slowdown, the EU has put in place a scheme – the SURE initiative – to provide financial support for companies. In 2020 alone, this scheme helped keep around 30 million people in the EU in work.

Find out about the **SURE** *initiative*

europa.eu/!ch64Vq

Solidarity in action

European countries showed true solidarity by **supporting each other** during the pandemic. For example, hospitals across the EU took in patients from other countries and sent medical teams to help their neighbours. The EU also coordinated the delivery of protective equipment to where it was needed most. The EU is committed to ensuring that safe vaccines reach all corners of the world. The Commission and EU countries are leading donors to COVAX, the global initiative that aims to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. They are also supporting vaccination campaigns in partner countries.

Find out more about European solidarity in action:
europa.eu/!wR98Uj

With a little help from the EU, people across Europe – from Italian farmers to Croatian teachers and German small business owners – have been able to weather the coronavirus storm.

Discover their stories: **europa.eu/!FR96Fq**

EXERCISE 17
YOUR EXPERIENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

What did you experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, in your school, your city and other places? Discuss in groups how people reacted in your country and how the EU contributed. Could anything have been done better?

Find out more about the **EU's response to the coronavirus crisis***:*
europa.eu/!wNDRGT

A delivery of medical equipment from rescEU reserve in Prague, Czechia, 24 October 2020.

A European Green Deal

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing the world today. Of the 8 million species on the planet, 1 million are at risk of being lost. Forests and oceans are being polluted and destroyed. It's not surprising that young people, concerned about the state of the planet they will inherit, have led the calls for greater climate action.

The European Union has been leading global efforts to fight climate change. It played a key role in securing the landmark global climate agreement in Paris in 2015. The EU is now determined to become the world's first climate neutral continent – where we produce no more greenhouse gases than our ecosystems can naturally absorb – by 2050.

The **European Green Deal** is the EU's action plan to reach this goal and to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy. It will mean ambitious cuts in greenhouse-gas emissions, investing in green technologies and protecting our natural environment, among other actions. It will also mean addressing the unavoidable consequences of climate change.

DID YOU KNOW?

The EU's goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050 has been set in stone, thanks to the first-ever **European climate law**. This law also makes a legal obligation of the EU's intermediate target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

europa.eu/!KtCumM

Delivering the European Green Deal

Achieving the EU's climate commitments will require action in all areas – from industry, energy and transport to food production, agriculture and construction. This will include increasing the use of clean energy, cutting pollution, making our buildings more energy efficient and rolling out cleaner transport along with fuels to support it. In July 2021, the European Commission proposed a variety of measures to set the EU on a path to reach its 2030 climate target. These include:
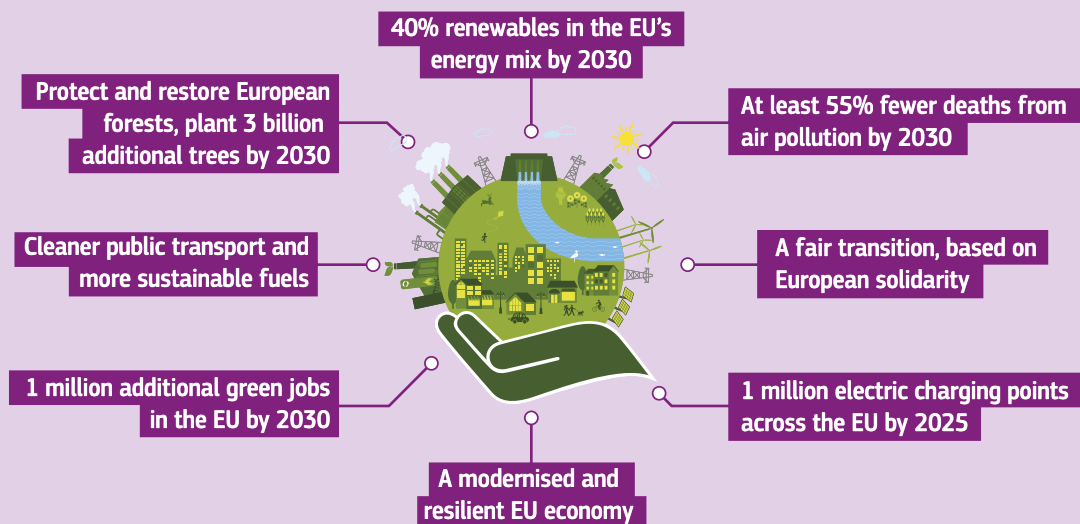
- increasing the share of renewable energy in the EU's energy mix to 40 %;
- reducing emissions from buildings, road transport and shipping by applying the emissions trading scheme to these sectors;
- more ambitious targets for reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from new cars and vans;
- restoring Europe's forests, soils, wetlands and peatlands so they can absorb and store carbon.

The EU will provide financial support for those facing the greatest challenges to ensure no person or region is left behind. To underline its commitment, the EU is dedicating at least 30 % of its spending between 2021 and 2027 to climate-related initiatives.

Products sold in the EU should be designed to last longer, and to be easier to reuse, repair and recycle. They should also incorporate as much recycled material as possible. The **new circular economy action plan**, one of the main parts of the Green Deal, aims to make sustainable products the norm in the EU.

NEW TARGET	LONG-TERM STRATEGY
- 55 %	**Net-zero emission**
2030	2050
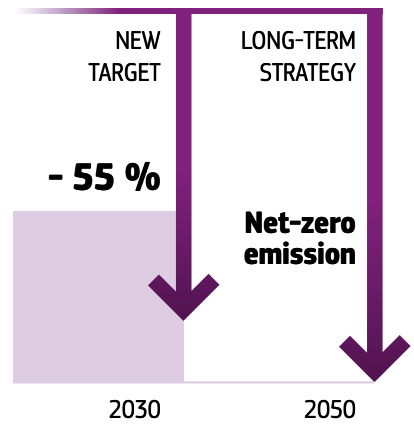
Find out about the Commission's proposal to deliver on the ***European Green Deal***: europa.eu/!XwJXrM

40% renewables in the EU's energy mix by 2030

Protect and restore European forests, plant 3 billion additional trees by 2030

At least 55% fewer deaths from air pollution by 2030

Cleaner public transport and more sustainable fuels

A fair transition, based on European solidarity

1 million additional green jobs in the EU by 2030

1 million electric charging points across the EU by 2025

A modernised and resilient EU economy

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

EXERCISE 18
THE GREEN CHALLENGE

Is there something you can do as a class or school to contribute to building a greener Europe? Your teacher can find inspiration for class discussion in the 'Green challenge' teachers' toolkit. Split into small groups to discuss your ideas.

The 'Green challenge' teachers' toolkit:
europa.eu/!wKxBm7

DING DONG

READY FOR THE GREEN CHALLENGE!

DID YOU KNOW?

Buildings are responsible for 40 % of the EU's energy use and 36 % of energy-related CO_2 emissions. The good news is that, by 2030, 35 million buildings in the EU could be renovated, significantly cutting emissions and creating 160 000 new jobs in the construction sector.

DID YOU KNOW?

Energy production and use accounts for 75 % of EU emissions. Saving energy through energy-efficiency measures and the massive scale-up of renewable energy will directly reduce emissions, air pollution and dependence on fossil fuels.

*Find out more about **energy** with this series of short videos:*
europa.eu/learning-corner/eu-energy-policy_en

Natura 2000 areas are indicated throughout Europe.

Protecting and restoring nature

Nature is our greatest ally in the fight against climate change and outbreak of disease. However, the web of life we depend on is under threat from unsustainable human activities. Making nature healthy again is a central element of the European Green Deal. The EU plans to achieve this by expanding the network of protected areas on land and at sea (a network known as Natura 2000), planting billions of trees and encouraging sustainable farming practices, among other actions. It is also working to make sure that the food we eat is healthy, affordable and produced in an environmentally friendly way. This includes reducing harmful pesticides and increasing organic farming.

Find out more about the EU's 2030 biodiversity strategy: europa.eu/!Hw37Bu

Leading the global fight against climate change

Climate change is a global problem that cannot be solved by the EU alone. The European Union is working with other countries and regions in the world to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. This agreement sets the goal of keeping global warming to 'well below 2 °C' above temperatures seen before the Industrial Revolution, while pursuing efforts to limit this increase to 1.5 °C. Countries meet to discuss progress towards these goals every year at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as the COP (Conference of the Parties).

DID YOU KNOW?

The EU and the EU countries are together the biggest providers of climate finance in the world. In 2019, they contributed EUR 21.9 billion to support developing countries in their efforts to tackle climate change.

Visit the 'Our planet, our future' website to learn more about climate change: europa.eu/learning-corner/our-planet-our-future_en

Find out more about the **European Green Deal** *at:* europa.eu/!Tr74bn

A Europe fit for the digital age

The COVID-19 pandemic has turbo-charged Europe's shift to a digital world. Digital technologies kept families and friends connected, classes operating and businesses working. They have now become an essential part of our lives. However, not everyone has the same access to these technologies or the skills to fully benefit from them.

The EU aims to make the next 10 years Europe's digital decade. It is working to make sure that the digital transformation works for all and not only for a few. This means, for example, ensuring everyone has high-speed internet access and the skills necessary to benefit from the possibilities of the digital world. At the same time, new technologies like artificial intelligence are transforming our world by bringing many benefits but also new concerns. The EU aims to lead the development of new global standards to ensure that Europeans can trust what these technologies have to offer.

The digital transition and smarter use of technologies will also be crucial in helping the EU to become climate neutral by 2050 and achieving the goals of the European Green Deal.

Making Europe's digital decade a reality

In March 2021, the European Commission set out a vision for Europe's digital transformation by 2030, along with a series of concrete targets and a plan to ensure these are delivered. The targets aim to achieve four main goals: a tech-savvy continent – with a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals; top-notch trustworthy and secure digital infrastructures; for Europe to have a large share of digitalised businesses; and modernised public services that respond to the needs of society. The first-ever digital Europe programme, with a budget of EUR 7.5 billion for 2021-2027, will provide funding for projects in important areas such as artificial intelligence, supercomputing, cybersecurity and advanced skills. As part of the EU's recovery plan, EU countries must invest at least 20 % of the money they receive from the NextGenerationEU fund in digital initiatives.

Key targets for Europe's digital transformation by 2030 include:

SKILLS

GOVERNMENT — **INFRASTRUCTURES**

BUSINESS
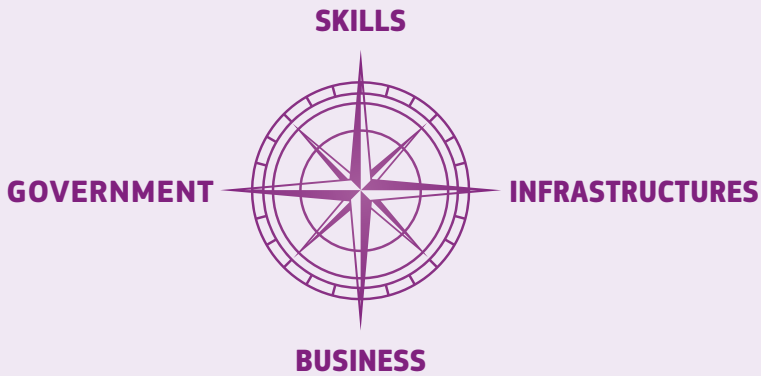
- at least 80 % of all adults to have basic digital skills;
- 20 million specialists in ICT – including more women working in digital fields;
- gigabit connectivity for all EU households and all populated areas covered by 5G;
- Europe to have its first quantum computer;
- three out of four companies to use cloud-computing services;
- all key public services to be available online;
- all citizens to have access to their medical e-records;
- 80 % of citizens to use digital ID.

More information about the digital targets for 2030:
europa.eu/!qg48yY

Skills for the digital age

Digital know-how is essential for study and work. It is also essential to access a growing number of online public services – from opening a bank account to applying to study abroad. Yet today, more than 1 in 5 young people lack basic digital skills. Although responsibility for education and training lies with individual EU countries, the EU provides support in this area. It is supporting EU countries by investing in programmes such as the European skills agenda and the digital education action plan to train Europeans and expand Europe's talent pool.

The European Commission has a wide variety of projects aimed at helping EU countries to improve the level of digital skills. These include the annual EU code week and 'digital opportunity' traineeships, both of which give students in higher education the opportunity to gain hands-on professional experience in digital fields demanded by the jobs market.

Discover the world of digital possibilities with this digital explorers cartoon series: europa.eu/!fPwNr6

Building trust in technology

Artificial intelligence (AI) can help us in many ways, for example through more accurate medical diagnosis and by minimising the environmental impact of farming. However, some people worry that their jobs may be at risk from AI, or wonder whether the technology can be trusted. To address these concerns, the Commission has proposed new rules to make sure that AI systems used in the EU are safe, transparent, ethical, unbiased and under human control.

europa.eu/!FD36qK

EXERCISE 19
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – A QUESTION OF TRUST

What are the advantages and risks associated with AI? Discuss in small groups.

Keeping safe on the internet

The EU has some of the strictest data-protection and privacy rules in the world. These help ensure that the online environment is safe and fair. They also help to protect people, in particular children, from illegal and harmful content. However, online platforms can be misused to spread illegal content such as hate speech or terrorist content, or to sell dangerous goods and counterfeit products. The European Commission **is working** to ensure that what is illegal offline is also illegal online. It is also taking action to strengthen cybersecurity across the EU and to protect its governments, citizens and businesses from global cyber threats. As part of this work, the EU has helped to set up a joint cyber unit to bring together resources and expertise available to the EU and the EU countries. The aim is to effectively prevent, deter and respond to mass cyber incidents and cyber crises.

DID YOU KNOW?

The EU-funded network of safer internet centres helps raise awareness about online safety. Each of these centres has a youth panel, where young people provide valuable tips and advice for their peers based on their own experience of online technologies.

europa.eu/!xy48wN

Find out more about **a Europe fit for the digital age** *at:*
europa.eu/!fG74BH

An economy that works for people

The coronavirus pandemic caused a major shock to European economies, affecting people's livelihoods and businesses in all sectors. Young people, many of whom work in hard-hit sectors such as tourism and hospitality, were particularly affected by job losses.

As well as taking **action to shield** businesses and workers from the economic fallout of the pandemic, the EU has also designed a **recovery plan** to get Europe back on its feet. This plan, called NextGenerationEU, focuses not only on repairing the damage caused by the pandemic but also, as its name suggests, on investing in the next generation of Europeans and the long-term future of the EU. The financing for NextGenerationEU comes on top of the EU's budget for 2021–2027, providing a unique opportunity for all EU countries to speed-up the recovery and accelerate the green and digital transitions across the EU. The total recovery package is worth more than EUR 2 trillion.

The EU is working to strengthen the economy across all countries and regions, with a strong focus on supporting young people. It is also working to reduce inequalities and improve living standards for all Europeans.
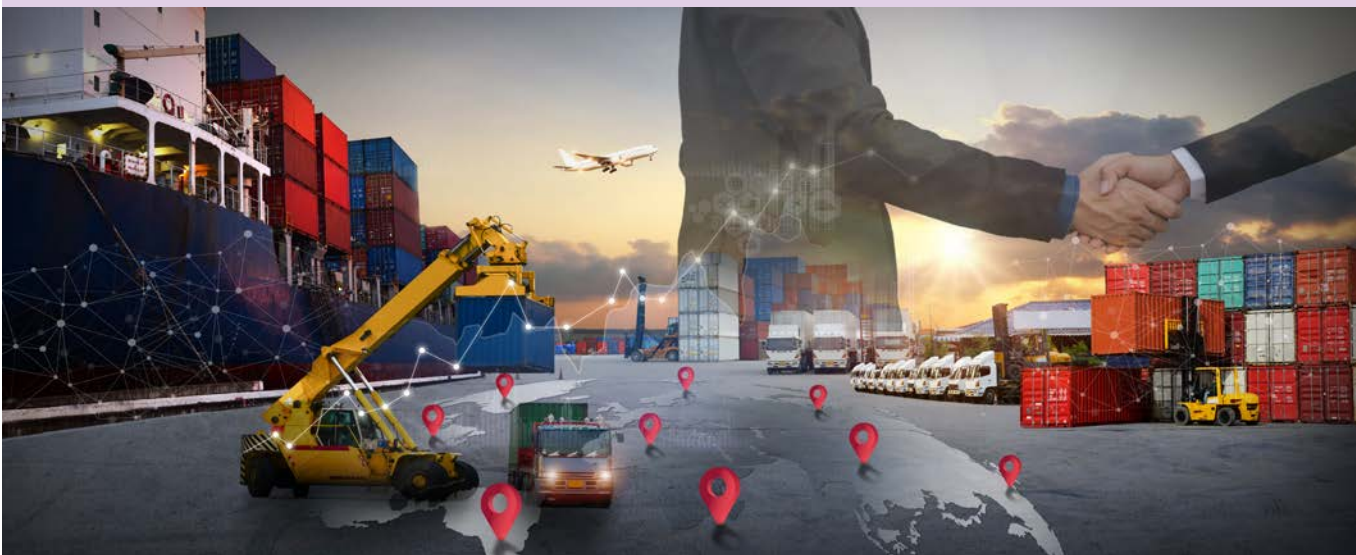
NextGenerationEU

The [NextGenerationEU](#) recovery fund is worth more than EUR 800 billion. It will largely finance reforms and investments in Member States up to 2026. The European Commission will borrow on the capital markets on behalf of the EU over this period. The money raised will be distributed to EU countries to spend on projects and initiatives. To benefit from financial support, EU countries had to set out national plans showing how they would invest the money. These had to include a specific share of their spending on climate and digital initiatives. This will help the EU to achieve its target of climate neutrality by 2050 and contribute to Europe's digital transition, creating jobs and boosting economic growth in the process.

MAKE IT REAL

Investing in the decades ahead with NextGenerationEU

NextGenerationEU
€806.9
billion

NEXTGENERATIONEU: KEY FEATURES

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE FACILITY
€723.8 billion

338.0 billion in grants

385.8 billion in loans

NextGenerationEU contribution to other programmes
€83.1 billion

POWER UP
Clean technologies and renewables

RENOVATE
Energy efficiency of buildings

CONNECT
Roll-out of rapid broadband services

RECHARGE AND REFUEL
Sustainable transport and charging stations

SCALE-UP
Data cloud and sustainable processors

MODERNISE
Digitalisation of public administration

RESKILL AND UPSKILL
Education and training to support digital skills

Source: European Commission

Supporting Europe's youth

The EU is working to ensure that young people have the skills and competences that they need for the rapidly changing world of work – in particular those that will enable them to thrive in the green and digital transitions. The Commission has put forward targeted initiatives to support Member States in reducing unemployment and help young people who are entering the job market. Through the youth employment support initiative, the youth guarantee scheme was reinforced, and it now covers a broader target group of young people aged 15–29. It also provides a boost for apprenticeships, including renewing the European alliance for apprenticeships, which now benefits better both employers and young people, and reforms to make vocational education and training more modern, attractive and flexible.

A new EU initiative called **ALMA** (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) will help young people who are not in any kind of employment, education or training find their way to the job market. It will combine support for education, vocational training or employment in their home country with a work placement in another EU country.

The Commission is also working to improve conditions for those in non-standard forms of employment – such as work organised through digital platforms – which have become increasingly prevalent among young people.

The overall goal is for EU countries to invest at least EUR 22 billion of EU funding on measures to support youth employment between 2021 and 2027. For example, EU resources can be used for bonuses for small businesses to hire apprentices, start-up loans and grants for aspiring entrepreneurs and training sessions to help young people acquire new skills needed on the jobs market.

More information on employment support for young people: europa.eu/!xd44DP

Towards a fair and inclusive recovery

From the right to equal opportunities and employment support to fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living, the **European pillar of social rights** sets out **20 principles** that aim to build fair labour markets and welfare systems that work for everyone. Delivering on these is a shared responsibility for the EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society.

A set of targets for the EU to reach by 2030 aims to ensure that more Europeans have access to both the skills they need and equal opportunities in a more digital, sustainable and inclusive economy.

Being inclusive means ensuring that the needs of all people in society are taken into account. It also means that everyone should have the chance to work and earn their own money. For instance, the European Commission will work to make sure that people with disabilities can take part in training courses and learn new skills, and that they can get a job and be independent.

The Commission is also proposing new measures to ensure that women and men get **equal pay for equal work**. These measures will increase awareness of pay conditions within a company and give more tools to employers and workers to tackle pay discrimination at work.

The new **European social fund plus** will support people, regions and countries in the EU facing challenges that range from recovering from the pandemic to meeting the EU's targets for employment, social inclusion, education and climate (*https://europa.eu/!djQfMd*).

Find out more about the Commission's initiatives to turn the 20 principles of the European pillar of social rights into reality: **europa.eu/!kt34bC.**

YOUR PRIORITIES FOR A FAIRER AND MORE INCLUSIVE EUROPE

Below you can find a list of areas covered in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Choose the three areas that you consider most important, then discuss your choices in small groups.

1 Education, training and lifelong learning

2 Gender equality

3 Childcare and support to children

4 Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals

5 Social dialogue and involvement of workers

6 Work–life balance

7 Fair minimum wages

8 Healthcare

9 Inclusion of people with disabilities

10 Housing and assistance for the homeless

Find out more about **the EU's plans for an economy that works for people** *at:* europa.eu/!MM38Gv

A stronger Europe in the world

The European Union is home to around 447 million people – the world's third largest population after China and India – and plays an important role on the global stage. Operating as a single market with 27 countries, the EU is the world's largest trading bloc. International trade deals generate economic growth for Europe and its partners. They also help to promote European principles and values, such as democracy, human rights, social rights and the fight against climate change.

The EU's relationships with the rest of the world are based on solidarity and cooperation. Challenges like climate change, violent extremism, trafficking and irregular migration do not respect borders, while extreme poverty can only be tackled by working with partner countries in the developing world.

The EU works to make the world a safer place, where people are treated fairly and laws are respected. Its external actions are guided by the principles that inspired its own creation and development, including peace, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU is working to strengthen its partnerships with its immediate neighbours to the east – notably the western Balkans – as well as those further afield (for details on candidate countries for EU membership see **Chapter 1 'What is the European Union?'**).

DID YOU KNOW?

The EU has more than 45 trade agreements in force with almost 80 partners around the world. In 2020, the EU reached a new agreement on trade with Mexico, and its trade deal with Vietnam entered into force.

Following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union on 31 January 2020, the EU and the UK signed the **EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement** on 30 December 2020.

Free and fair trade

Trade deals make it easier for countries to do business with each other and help create more jobs, boosting economic growth. They also give shoppers in the EU a greater choice of products from different parts of the world, along with lower prices. In addition, they help EU companies to compete abroad. The EU has negotiated trade agreements with many countries in the world. Speaking with one voice, it carries considerably more weight in international trade negotiations than any of its individual countries would alone.

Trade policy can play an important role in combating climate change and environmental degradation. The EU aims to make compliance with the Paris Agreement on climate change an essential element in future trade and investment agreements.

The EU is leading efforts to reform global trade rules to make sure they are better able to respond to today's challenges.

International cooperation

The EU works closely with its neighbours and with other countries and international organisations, such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, to tackle common challenges such as COVID-19 and climate change. It aims to build new alliances with countries outside the EU and to strengthen cooperation with multilateral and regional organisations.

The EU–US summit in June 2021 marked the beginning of a renewed transatlantic partnership and set a joint agenda for cooperation between them in the post-pandemic era.

The EU co-finances the business school that enables young Africans to become pilots, cabin crew or flight engineers. President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen visits the Ethiopian Aviation Academy in Addis Ababa on 27 February 2020.

The EU is building stronger and deeper cooperation with **Africa**. It has proposed a series of partnerships around shared interests and values focusing on key areas such as the green transition, digital transformation, migration and mobility.

?

DID YOU KNOW?

The EU has 140 offices, known as **delegations**, throughout the world. Their role is similar to embassies. They play a vital role in representing the EU and its citizens and building networks and partnerships.

DID YOU KNOW?

The EU, together with the countries that make it up, is the world's leading donor of **humanitarian aid**. It provides and coordinates relief assistance to people in areas hit by disasters in Europe and around the globe.

EXERCISE 21
THE EU IN THE WORLD

Here are some examples of the EU's role on the world stage. Pick the three that are the most important to you and explain your reasons for choosing them. Compare your answers with those of your classmates.

1 The EU has led and supported peace talks around the world to stop conflicts.

2 The EU stands for democracy and the rule of law throughout the world. It has made human rights a central aspect of its relations with other countries.

3 The EU has taken a lead in the global fight against climate change.

4 The EU promotes and financially supports equality and women's empowerment across the globe.

5 The EU and the EU countries together constitute the world's largest donors of development aid and humanitarian aid.

Find out more about the **EU's work for a stronger Europe in the world:**
europa.eu/!gR8BVU

Promoting our European way of life

The European Union is more than a single market for goods and services. It is a union of people who share a set of common values. These values are spelled out in the EU treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which guarantee rights to people living in the EU. These values, including democracy and the rule of law, are the foundation of our societies. For example, no democracy can thrive without independent courts guaranteeing the protection of fundamental rights and civil liberties, or without an active civil society and free media.

The European way of life is inclusive, which means no one should be left out. Everyone living in the EU should have the opportunity to thrive, participate and lead, regardless of differences based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The European Commission is putting in place policies and actions that challenge discrimination and the stereotypes that are all too often present in society.

Building on lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic, the EU is working to strengthen its response to health crises while also taking action to improve all aspects of citizens' health.

Building a union of equality

The European Union has some of the most extensive anti-discrimination legislation in the world. However, more still needs to be done to address inequalities that persist in the EU and to ensure that everyone can participate in European life. The Commission is stepping up its work in all areas – from action to combat racism and antisemitism to action to ensure that people coming to Europe and those from ethnic minorities are not marginalised or excluded from society. The Commission is also continuing its work to ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy their rights and have the same chances in life as everyone, and to **combat discrimination against LGBTIQ people**.

More information about the EU's plans to combat all forms of discrimination: **europa.eu/!rk44Jn**

DID YOU KNOW?

Around 87 million people in the EU have some form of disability.

Find out how the EU plans to protect the rights of people with disabilities over the next decade: **europa.eu/!My47xQ**

DID YOU KNOW?

Almost 6 in 10 Europeans think discrimination based on ethnic origin or skin colour is widespread in their country.

Source: **Eurobarometer 2251**

EXERCISE 22
FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION

Can you think of times where you have seen – or maybe experienced – discrimination? What do you think can be done to fight it? Discuss this in small groups and present your thoughts to the class.

Upholding the rule of law

The rule of law has a direct impact on the life of every citizen. It is necessary for ensuring equal treatment before the law and the defence of individual rights. It is also necessary to prevent the abuse of power by public authorities and for ensuring that decision-makers are held accountable.

Find out what the EU is doing to promote, protect and enforce the rule of law in Europe:
europa.eu/!Hm38wc

DID YOU KNOW?

More than 8 in 10 citizens say that effective judicial protection by independent courts, equality before the law and the proper investigation and prosecution of corruption are important to them.

Source: **Eurobarometer 2235**

A new approach to managing migration and asylum in Europe

The European Union is an area of protection for people fleeing persecution or serious harm in their country of origin. Every year, thousands of people come to Europe seeking international protection or a better life. The EU is working together with EU countries on ways to better manage the flow of people arriving on its shores. In 2020, the Commission put forward proposals to improve the migration and asylum system in Europe. These **proposals** include looking at ways of improving cooperation with countries of origin and transit, successful integration of refugees and the return of those with no right to stay.

europa.eu/!wt69FQ

DID YOU KNOW?

Migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background play an important role in European society and in different sectors of our economy. The EU is working to ensure that they can participate fully in society through action in areas such as education, jobs, healthcare and housing.

Suaad Alshleh came to Europe as a refugee from Syria. She is now following her dream of becoming a doctor in Ireland.

WATCH THE VIDEO:
Interview with Suaad Alshleh
audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-195435

Protecting the health of Europeans

The EU is working to ensure that EU countries prepare and respond together to health crises and that medical supplies are available and affordable. It is also working to improve prevention, treatment and aftercare for diseases such as cancer. This work – which is behind the European health union – will equip the EU to better prevent and tackle future pandemics, make Europe's health systems stronger and better protect the health of citizens.

europa.eu/!VT48Dt

The EU will invest more than EUR 5 billion in actions with an EU added value to complement EU countries' health policies under its 2021–2027 **EU4Health funding programme**.

https://ec.europa.eu/health/funding/eu4health_en

Areas of actions:

Improve and foster health in the Union.

Protect people in the Union from serious cross-border threats to health.

Improve medical products, medical devices and crisis-relevant products.

Strengthen health systems.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2020, 2.7 million people in the European Union were diagnosed with cancer and another 1.3 million people lost their lives to it, including over 2 000 young people.

Find out how Europe's 'Beating cancer' plan aims to cut the number of deaths from the disease and improve cancer prevention, treatment and care: **europa.eu/!yV98ru**

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

Find out more about EU's work for **promoting our European way of life** *at:* europa.eu/!uj93JY

A new push for European democracy

Democracy is the foundation on which the European Union is built. In a healthy and thriving democratic system, citizens are able to freely express their views, choose their political leaders or become one themselves, and have a say about their future.

Recent years have shown a resurgence of popular political engagement and increased turnout in elections. But as in many places around the world, democracy in the EU and in the EU countries is facing challenges. These challenges range from rising extremism and election interference to threats against journalists and a perceived distance between people and their elected representatives.

The EU wants to strengthen democratic processes and encourages citizens to get involved in shaping their future in the EU. It also strives to make its own structures more transparent and democratic.

Find out more about how you can get involved and make your voice heard in section 'Your voice in the EU decision-making' *(p. 25)*

Making EU democracies stronger

Individual rights and freedoms, transparency and accountability are at the heart of the European Commission's plan to make EU democracies stronger. It focuses on actions to promote free and fair elections, support free and independent media and tackle disinformation. The European Union and the EU countries are **stepping up their actions** to counter efforts by those who try to exploit crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as those who spread propaganda or hatred. One of the ways in which they are doing this is by detecting and exposing disinformation and by working with online platforms to limit the spread of fake news.

europa.eu/!hq63Wv

DID YOU KNOW?

73 % of female journalists globally have experienced online violence in the course of their work (UNESCO/ ICEF survey, 2020).

Giving children a voice

Every child in Europe – and everywhere else – should enjoy the same rights and live free from discrimination and intimidation. The first-ever EU strategy on the rights of the child aims to ensure protection and support to all children (young people under the age of 18), regardless of their background, origin, social or residence status. It proposes action in several areas, including those relating to children's right to be free from violence and to be safe online. At the same time, the EU is working to break cycles of poverty and disadvantage across generations. The new European child guarantee aims to make sure that children who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion have access to healthy meals, education, healthcare and adequate housing.

europa.eu/!jmqwcJ

europa.eu/!hK88MU

1/5
**of EU Population
are children
or young people
under 18**

More than
10 000 children
and young people
contributed their ideas
and helped shape the
EU strategy on the
rights of the child.

WATCH THE VIDEO:
The EU's strategy on the rights of the child
europa.eu/!4n8TMU

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2019, 22.2 % of children in the EU were living in households at risk of poverty or social exclusion. That's nearly 18 million children in need.

DID YOU KNOW?

The European Commission will set up a children's participation platform to give children space to become a part of the decision-making processes at EU level. For example, children will be actively involved in the implementation of the European Climate Pact and the European Green Deal.

A changing Europe

From longer life expectancy to lower birth rates, Europe's societies are changing. Addressing demographic changes is key to building a more resilient, sustainable and fair European Union. For example, rural areas across the EU are often affected by population decline, and at the same time inhabitants are on average older than in urban areas. Rural areas provide us with our food, homes, jobs and essential ecosystem services. To ensure they can continue to play these essential roles, the European Commission has set out an action plan to help rural communities and businesses reach their full potential in the coming decades.

Take a look at what Europe will look like in the decades to come:
europa.eu/!jH37uX

EXERCISE 23
CITIZENS' DIALOGUES

Citizens' dialogues between Commissioners and the public take place regularly across the EU. If you are not able to take part in one of these events, why not organise one of your own in class? Three or four students taking the role of a Commissioner should choose one of the topics presented in this chapter as a starting point for the discussion. In individual study time, they can look into the details of the chosen policy in order to prepare a 5-minute statement. In the classroom, once the 'Commissioner' has delivered their short statement, hold a 15-minute question and answer session, moderated by the teacher.

Find out more about the **EU's new push for European democracy***:* europa.eu/!Ck78uh

Visit our online version of this chapter

europa.eu/!D4T7Cg

ANSWERS TO THE EXERCISES

CHAPTER 1 'WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN UNION?'

EXERCISE 1
WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE EU?

WHAT DO THE EU'S VALUES AND PRINCIPLES MEAN IN PRACTICE?

Part 1. Put a cross in the correct column for each of the nine questions below. In small groups, discuss what you think a country can or cannot do if it wants to be part of the EU.

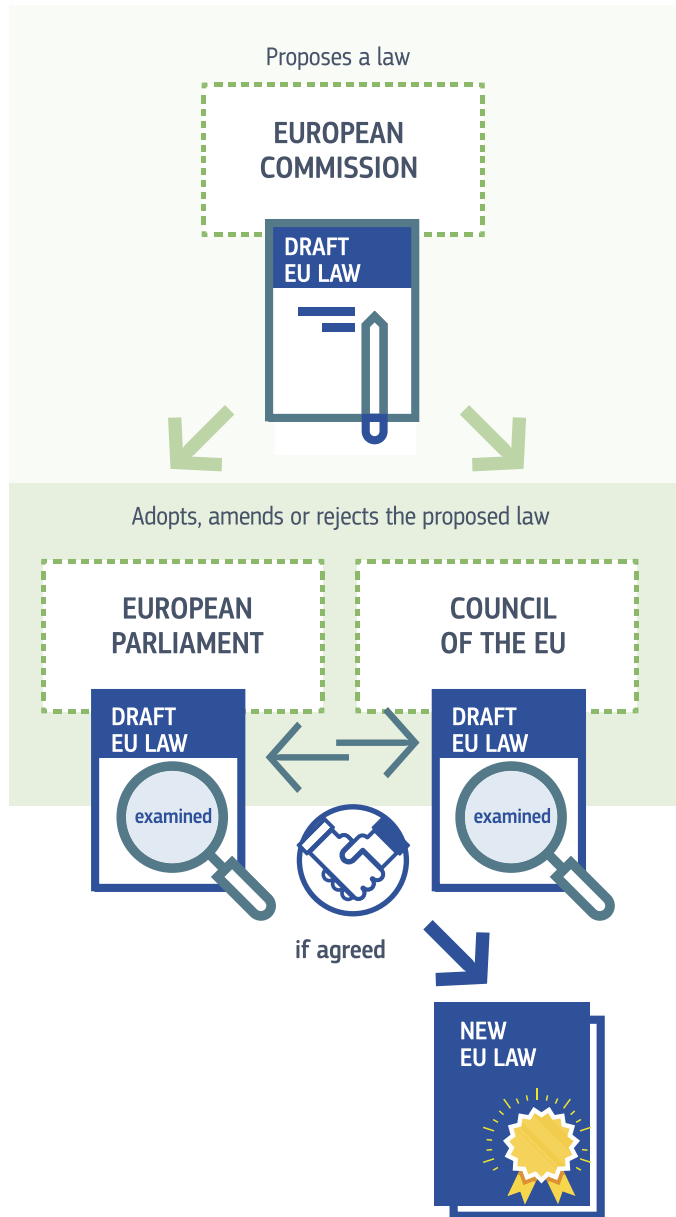| A country …	(A) can join the EU	(B) can't join the EU
1. that does not have freedom of the press	NO	**YES**
2. that applies the death penalty	NO	**YES**
3. that allows its citizens to protest against the government	**YES**	NO
4. in which the parliament is elected on a regular basis	**YES**	NO
5. in which the army determines policy and may even intervene in internal affairs with military power	NO	**YES**
6. in which people are considered innocent until their guilt has been established by a court	**YES**	NO
7. in which there is only one party which is always in government	NO	**YES**
8. which protects minorities, even when the majority is against them	**YES**	NO

CHAPTER 2 'HOW DOES THE EU WORK?'

EXERCISE 7
WHO DOES WHAT IN THE EU?

Who ...?	European Parliament	European Council	Council of the European Union	European Commission	European Court of Justice
1. makes proposals for EU laws	NO	NO	NO	**YES**	NO
2. approves EU laws	**YES**	NO	**YES**	NO	NO
3. consists of (only) one representative/member per EU country	NO	**YES**	**YES**	**YES**	**YES**
4. is directly elected	**YES**	NO	NO	NO	NO
5. manages the budget	NO	NO	NO	**YES**	NO
6. represents the interests of the people	**YES**	NO	NO	NO	NO
7. represents the interests of EU countries/their governments	NO	**YES**	**YES**	NO	NO
8. represents the interest of the EU as a whole	NO	NO	NO	**YES**	NO
9. decides on the interpretation of EU laws	NO	NO	NO	NO	**YES**
10. defines the general political direction of the EU	NO	**YES**	NO	NO	NO

LAW-MAKING IN THE EU

Proposes a law

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DRAFT
EU LAW

Adopts, amends or rejects the proposed law

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

COUNCIL OF THE EU

DRAFT
EU LAW

examined

DRAFT
EU LAW

examined

if agreed

NEW
EU LAW

WHO IS WHO?

You now know a lot about the European institutions, but do you know the names and faces of the people leading them? Do you know who is the current:

1. **President of the European Parliament** (https://europa.eu/!9dR4kW).
2. **President of the European Council** (https://europa.eu/!wW73CM).
3. **President of the European Commission** (https://europa.eu/!Xd39kv).
4. **High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission** (https://europa.eu/!g9kXjH).

CHAPTER 3 'HOW IS THE EU RELEVANT TO YOUR DAILY LIFE?'

EXERCISE 12
WHICH COUNTRIES ARE IN THE EURO AREA?

EURO	Austria	**EURO**	France	**EURO**	Malta
EURO	Belgium	**EURO**	Germany	**EURO**	Netherlands
NO	Bulgaria	**EURO**	Greece	NO	Poland
NO	Croatia	NO	Hungary	**EURO**	Portugal
EURO	Cyprus	**EURO**	Ireland	NO	Romania
NO	Czechia	**EURO**	Italy	**EURO**	Slovakia
NO	Denmark	**EURO**	Latvia	**EURO**	Slovenia
EURO	Estonia	**EURO**	Lithuania	**EURO**	Spain
EURO	Finland	**EURO**	Luxembourg	NO	Sweden

EXERCISE 14

WHAT DOES FREE MOVEMENT MEAN FOR YOU IN PRACTICE?

Examples	Free movement of people	Free movement of goods	Free movement of services	Free movement of capital
1. I can buy a second-hand car abroad and take it back home without paying customs duties.	NO	**YES**	NO	NO
2. I can travel anywhere I like within the EU.	**YES**	NO	NO	NO
3. I can study in another EU country.	**YES**	NO	NO	NO
4. My parents can have their bathroom renovated by a tiler from another EU country.	NO	NO	**YES**	NO
5. My parents can send money to me, without any extra charges, in the country where I am studying.	NO	NO	NO	**YES**
6. I can work in another EU country.	**YES**	NO	NO	NO
7. I can buy goods online from another EU country without paying customs duties.	NO	**YES**	NO	NO

EUROPEAN LABELS

EU laws have put strict rules in place for the labelling of food, drinks, cosmetic products and electronic appliances. Some labels help protect consumers, while others let them know about certain characteristics of the product. For example, there are labels to indicate which products are organic or energy efficient. Without proper labelling, a product will not be allowed onto the market.
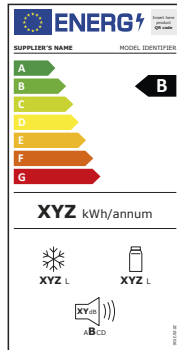
1

The **CE marking** is a safety label, showing that the product complies with EU health, safety and environmental standards.

2

The **EU ecolabel** is awarded to environmentally friendly products and services. It is a voluntary scheme that was introduced in 1980 by EU law.

3

The **EU energy label** tells you how energy efficient an appliance is on a scale from A to G. A (green) is the most energy efficient and G (red) is the least energy efficient. A brand new version of this label was introduced on 1 March 2021 for certain product categories (fridges, freezers, dishwashers, washing machines and television sets). Other products will follow in the coming years.

4

The **EU organic logo** tells you that the product meets EU rules for the organic farming sector. For processed products this means that at least 95 % of the agricultural ingredients are organic.

5

The **three EU quality logos** indicate characteristics of food products derived from the geographical location in which they are produced or from their traditional composition or production method.

FIND OUT
MORE ABOUT
EUROPE

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the European Union than most of
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highest score!

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