European Commission

The **European Union**

What it is and what it does

European Commission

Contents

The **European Union**

What it is and what it does

INTRODUCTION:
WHAT THIS PUBLICATION IS ABOUT

This publication is a guide to the European Union (EU) and what it does.

The first section explains in brief what the European Union is.

The second section, 'What the European Union does', describes what the EU is doing in 35 different areas to improve the lives of people in Europe and further afield.

The third section, 'How the European Union makes decisions and takes action', describes the institutions at the heart of the EU's decision-making process and how their decisions are translated into actions.

The texts printed in blue indicate hyperlinks to more detailed information in the HTML and PDF versions of this book. These versions can be found online at www.publications.europa.eu/webpub/com/eu-what-it-is/en/

1 The European Union in brief

At the core of the EU are the 28 Member States* that belong to the Union, and their citizens. The unique feature of the EU is that, although the Member States all remain sovereign and independent states, they have decided to pool some of their 'sovereignty' in areas where it makes sense to work together.

In practice, this means that the Member States delegate some of their decision-making powers to the shared institutions they have created, so that decisions on specific matters of common interest can be made democratically at EU level.

Several institutions are involved in making decisions at EU level, in particular:

- the European Parliament, which represents the EU's citizens and is directly elected by them;

- the European Council, which consists of the Heads of State or Government of the EU Member States;

- the Council, which represents the governments of the EU Member States; and

- the European Commission, which represents the interests of the EU as a whole.

* On 29 March 2017 the United Kingdom provided formal notification under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union of its intention to leave the European Union and Euratom.

0   500 km

Iceland

Norway

Finland

Sweden

Estonia

United Kingdom

Denmark

Latvia

Ireland

Lithuania

Netherlands

Germany

Poland

Belgium

Luxembourg

Czech
Republic

Slovakia

France

Austria

Hungary

Switzerland

Slovenia

Romania

Croatia

Portugal

Bosnia and
Herzegovina

Serbia

Spain

Italy

Montenegro

Bulgaria

Kosovo*

The former
Yugoslav Republic
of Macedonia

Albania

Greece

Turkey

Cyprus

Malta

Azores (PT)

Madeira (PT)

(FR)

Guadeloupe
(FR)

Canary Islands (ES)

Martinique
(FR)

Mayotte
(FR)

French
Guiana
(FR)

Réunion
(FR)

* 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.

Member States of the European Union (2017)

Candidate countries and potential candidates

Generally it is the European Commission that proposes new laws and the European Parliament and the Council (also called the Council of the European Union) that adopt them. The Member States and the EU institution or institutions concerned then implement them. The third section of this publication contains more information on how the EU makes decisions, and how it implements them.

The EU has achieved a lot. For example, it has built a single market based on 'four freedoms', with people, goods, services and capital moving freely between all Member States. The single market means that over 500 million EU citizens are free to move and settle where they wish in the Union. The EU has created a single currency, the euro, which is now a major world currency and which makes the single market more efficient. It has also created the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which protects certain political, social and economic rights for EU citizens and residents. The EU has also led the way in protecting the environment and tackling climate change. These are just a few of the achievements so far.

The EU treaties

Every action taken by the EU is founded on treaties that have been approved voluntarily and democratically by all EU countries. The treaties lay down the objectives of the European Union, and set out the rules for how the EU institutions operate, on how decisions are made and on the relationship between the EU and its Member States.

In certain specific cases, not all Member States participate in all areas of EU policy. For example, while the euro is the single currency of the EU as a whole, the euro area currently (in 2017) comprises only 19 Member States, while two have an opt-out and the remaining countries do not yet meet the criteria for joining. Twenty-two Member States are members of the Schengen area, which enables passport-free movement, with six maintaining their own border controls.

Looking ahead

To keep the European project on course, the State of the Union Address of 14 September 2016 by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, presented a positive agenda for a Europe that protects, empowers and defends. This message was welcomed by the European Parliament as well as by the EU-27 leaders at the Bratislava Summit on 16 September 2016.

The work on the positive agenda continued with the Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe in March 2017, offering five scenarios for what the EU could look like by 2025. Following the White Paper, the Commission contributed to the debate with a series of thematic reflection papers offering different options for the EU in certain policy areas: the social dimension of Europe; harnessing globalisation; the deepening of economic and monetary union; the future of European defence; and the future of EU finances.

On 25 March 2017 the leaders of the EU-27 came together to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, which created the European Economic Community, a forerunner of today's EU. In the Rome Declaration adopted at the end of the celebrations, 27 EU Heads of State or Government set out a joint vision for the years to come, agreeing to 'make the European Union stronger and more resilient, through even greater unity'.

There is now a window of opportunity to engage on a broader reform of the European Union. To steer this reform and to stimulate discussion, President Juncker proposed in his State of the Union address of 13 September 2017 a roadmap for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union. Discussions on the future of Europe will include debates in parliaments, cities and regions, leading to a meeting of the European Council in Sibiu, Romania, in spring 2019.

2 What the European Union does

The second part of this publication presents a summary of what the EU does in 35 different policy areas, including useful links to more information.

Migration and asylum

The EU's common migration and asylum policy helps Europe deal with migration challenges in an effective manner.

More than 3.2 million refugees have applied for international protection in the EU since 2015, many of whom were fleeing from war and terror in Syria and other troubled countries.

http://europa.eu/!rB37xd

What the EU does

The EU has developed a common migration and asylum policy to manage the many challenges generated by migration into the Union, including of people seeking international protection. This policy includes the following actions aimed at dealing with the crisis.

The EU has dedicated over €10 billion to dealing with the refugee crisis, financing projects to address the most urgent humanitarian needs of refugees arriving on European shores. The EU also provides humanitarian aid to refugees and migrants in countries outside the EU, and supports work to address the root causes of irregular migration.

Based on a European Commission proposal, Member States agreed to relocate asylum seekers from Greece and Italy to other EU countries. The EU also wants to create safe and legal ways for asylum seekers to enter the EU. A voluntary resettlement programme agreed by Member States envisages the transfer of 22 500 people from outside the EU to an EU Member State. The EU is working to increase the rate of returns to their home country of irregular migrants with no right to stay in the EU.

The EU and Turkey agreed in March 2016 that irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving on the Greek islands from Turkey may be returned to Turkey. For every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands after an irregular crossing, the EU will take in a Syrian from Turkey who has not sought to make this journey in an irregular way. This has led to a major decrease in irregular arrivals to the islands. The EU has made available €3 billion to address the needs of refugees hosted in Turkey.

Over 620 000 lives have been saved in the Aegean and the Mediterranean since 2015 thanks to Italian and Greek rescue operations and the work of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, established in 2016.

The Commission has proposed a deep reform of existing asylum laws in line with current and future needs. The basic principle will remain the same: people should apply for asylum in the first EU Member State they enter unless they have family elsewhere, but whenever a Member State is overwhelmed, there must be solidarity and a fair sharing of responsibility within the EU.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/migration-and-asylum_en

@EUHomeAffairs

Borders
and security

The European Union is working towards establishing a security union, making Europe more secure by fighting terrorism and serious crime and by strengthening Europe's external borders.

The EU offers its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal borders. The overall objective of a security union is to make this area a safer place. The EU and Member States cooperate to tackle terrorism and violent radicalisation, serious and organised crime and cybercrime.

http://bit.ly/2jkydtQ

What the EU does

The EU focuses its actions on supporting Member States through:

- information exchange between national law enforcement, customs agencies and border guards;
- operational cooperation, with the support of EU agencies;
- training, exchange of best practice, funding, research and innovation.

The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) brings Member States together to investigate cases of serious and organised crime. The Commission is also working to ensure the different EU information systems for security, border and migration management will be 'interoperable', i.e. able to speak to each other, by 2020.

The EU has updated and reinforced its laws, harmonising the definition of terrorist offences and criminalising terrorist travel, training and financing. With the support of the Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence, the EU is stepping up efforts to prevent radicalisation and to address the challenge of returning foreign terrorist fighters. Through the EU Internet Forum, the Commission is facilitating cooperation between key internet companies, law enforcement agencies and civil society to reduce access to illegal content online and provide effective alternative narratives to counter terrorist propaganda.

To counter the increasing threat of cybercrime and cyberattacks the Commission has proposed measures to strengthen the EU's cybersecurity structures and capabilities, including to strengthen the role of the EU cybersecurity agency (European Union Agency for Network and Information Security), with the full cooperation of the Member States.

Thanks to the Schengen Agreement, checks at many EU internal borders have been progressively abolished. The migration crisis and the changing security landscape in recent years have demonstrated that the Schengen area needs strong external borders. In 2017 the EU adopted new rules for the external Schengen borders to reinforce checks on all people against relevant databases, to make sure that they do not represent a threat to public policy or internal security. In addition, over 1 700 officers from the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency are now helping Member States' national border guards to patrol in places like Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/borders-and-security_en

@EUHomeAffairs

Economy, finance and the euro

Economic and monetary union and the euro provide the common foundations for greater stability, growth and prosperity across Europe.

Economic and monetary union unites and integrates EU economies through coordinated economic and fiscal policies, a common monetary policy and a common currency, the euro. It is a powerful tool to deliver jobs, growth, social fairness and financial stability, but is a work in progress that still needs to be completed.

http://bit.ly/2A46OX6

What the EU does

The EU's economic and financial policies in the euro area and the EU aim to:

- promote growth and employment;
- promote macroeconomic and fiscal stability;
- improve the efficient functioning of economic and monetary union;
- promote investment;
- prevent or correct macroeconomic imbalances;
- help to coordinate national structural policies; and
- promote prosperity beyond the EU.

In reaction to the economic and financial crisis of 2008, the EU's economic governance was strengthened through improvements to the Stability and Growth Pact, the fiscal rules Member States follow to facilitate and maintain the stability of economic and monetary union. Countries that were shut out of financial markets, such as Greece, received financial and policy support and the European Stability Mechanism was created as the euro area's permanent solution for such situations.

The Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure was also introduced to monitor and correct potentially problematic economic trends in individual Member States and prevent them from affecting others.

The euro, in circulation since 2002 and used by more than 339 million people in 19 Member States, is the world's second most important currency after the US dollar. A single currency is practical for citizens and good for business, and represents a major achievement of European integration.

The €315 billion Investment Plan for Europe, adopted in November 2014, aims to bring investment back in line with historical trends before the 2008 crisis. The European Fund for Strategic Investments had already triggered more than €236.1 billion in approved investments by September 2017. Around 454000 small, medium-sized and 'mid-cap' companies are expected to benefit from improved access to finance as a result of support from the fund.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/economy-finance-and-euro_en
European Commission reflection paper on the deepening of the economic and monetary union

 facebook.com/EUeconomy   @ecfin

Business and industry

The EU aims to make industry and business more competitive and to promote jobs and growth through a business-friendly environment.

The EU's business and industrial policy is designed to improve the business environment, promote a climate of entrepreneurship and job creation and give small businesses easier access to finance and markets. Small and medium-sized enterprises represent 99 % of all businesses in the EU, providing two thirds of total private-sector employment. EU policies encourage the creation of new businesses and support innovative enterprises in their efforts to scale up. Enhanced trade agreements open markets for EU businesses, and action can be taken to prevent unfair competition from outside the EU. By 2020 the EU aims to:

- strengthen its industrial base and promote the transition to a low-carbon economy;
- promote innovation as a means to generate new sources of growth;
- encourage small businesses and promote an entrepreneurial culture;
- guarantee an EU-wide market for goods; and
- maximise the benefits of the EU's investment in space.

http://bit.ly/2n2DlHY

What the EU does

The EU is committed to helping businesses and industry to be competitive and to generate growth and new jobs. The aim is to help European companies to become smarter, more innovative and more sustainable. Industrial policy contributes to competitiveness by establishing appropriate framework conditions (such as smart legislation and skills development). The European Commission has developed sector-specific action plans and legislation to support more than a dozen key industrial sectors, including the chemicals, automotive, food, healthcare, biotechnology and aeronautics industries. The Commission is also responsible for sectors with geostrategic implications and a high degree of public intervention, such as defence, security and space.

The European Commission, together with the European Investment Bank, launched the Investment Plan for Europe. As part of the plan, the European Fund for Strategic Investments was created to mobilise investment across Europe. By September 2017 the fund had already triggered more than € 236.1 billion in approved investments. The fund provides guarantees in support of projects financed by the European Investment Bank, focusing on infrastructure, innovation and smaller companies. Around 454 000 small, medium-sized and 'mid-cap' companies are expected to benefit from improved access to finance as a result of support from the fund. The Commission also manages several EU programmes to support innovation and entrepreneurship, including:

- COSME – the programme for the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Horizon 2020 for research and innovation;
- Galileo for satellite navigation and Copernicus for earth observation.

Find out more: https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/enterprise_en

@EU_Growth/@EEN_EU

Single market

The single market is one of the EU's greatest achievements. It fuels growth and jobs and makes everyday life easier for people and businesses.

Thanks to the single market (sometimes also called the internal market) people, goods, services and money can move around the EU almost as freely as within a single country. EU citizens can study, live, shop, work and retire in any EU country, and enjoy products from all over Europe.

Hundreds of technical, legal and bureaucratic barriers to free trade and free movement between EU Member States have been removed to make things flow more easily within the single market. As a result, companies have expanded their operations and competition has brought prices down and given consumers more choice. For example, phone calls in Europe are much cheaper, and airfares have fallen significantly and new routes have opened up. At the same time, the EU works to ensure that these greater freedoms do not undermine fairness, consumer protection or environmental sustainability.

http://bit.ly/2jlDcdD

What the EU does

The European Commission works with authorities and stakeholders in Member States to monitor and enforce the existing rules so that people and businesses can benefit from the opportunities offered by the single market. However, some barriers remain to a fully functioning single market. The EU is in particular working to:

- address current regulatory or administrative obstacles that prevent people from easily buying or selling goods and services from or in another Member State;
- make it easier for companies – big and small – to raise money through the Investment Plan for Europe and the capital markets union;
- encourage workers to take up jobs in other EU countries in order to fill vacancies and meet the need for special skills, including through the European Professional Card and the EURES job mobility portal;
- prevent social dumping, the practice of using cheaper labour and moving production to a low-wage country or area;
- boost cooperation between national tax authorities; and
- establish a common consolidated corporate tax base in the EU and a financial transaction tax.

In addition to the single market's rules guaranteeing free movement of people, EU citizens do not need a passport to travel within the Schengen area, which currently comprises the EU Member States (except Bulgaria, Ireland, Croatia, Cyprus, Romania and the United Kingdom), plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. To ensure safety in the Schengen area, these countries have stepped up checks on the EU's external borders and also increased police cooperation.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/single-market_en

facebook.com/EU.Growth/   @EU_Growth

Digital economy and society

The EU's digital single market aims to open up opportunities for people and businesses and enhance Europe's position as a world leader in the digital economy.

More and more products and services are either online or available digitally. However certain hurdles still prevent people from doing business, shopping or accessing digital content in another EU Member State. These barriers range from charges, to 'geo-blocking', to lack of internet access or digital skills. A lot of people are missing out on the widest range of online goods and services, while companies cannot do business as widely as they would like or profit from high-quality digital services.

What the EU does

The idea of the digital single market is to move from 28 national markets to a seamless area where people and businesses can trade, innovate and interact legally, safely, securely and affordably, making their lives easier. It means businesses are able to fully use new technologies; and small businesses in particular are able to cross the EU with 'just a click'. Achieving the digital single market could potentially contribute €415 billion per year to the EU economy and create hundreds of thousands of jobs.

360 MILLION EUROPEANS SELL

http://Europa.eu/!jd83xG

Since May 2015 the European Commission has delivered on 35 action pledges announced in its digital single market strategy. The focus is now on making the proposals a reality for EU citizens. Here are some of the steps that have already been taken:

- Roaming charges ended in June 2017, so people can use their mobile devices when travelling in the EU, paying the same prices as at home.
- Strong new EU rules on personal data protection have been agreed.
- The Commission has proposed measures to ensure everyone in the EU will have the best possible internet connection, while the WiFi4EU initiative supports installing free public Wi-Fi hotspots in local communities across the EU.
- One of the key objectives of the EU is to better protect Europeans in the digital age. The Commission has therefore proposed new tools to help defend people and businesses against cyberattacks.
- From 2018 new EU portability rules will mean that people will be able to fully use their online subscriptions to films and TV, e-books, video games and music services when travelling within the EU in the same way that they access them at home.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en

facebook.com/DigitalSingleMarket   @DSMeu

Employment and social affairs

The EU contributes to the creation of more and better jobs across Europe, and aims for decent social standards for all its citizens, including through the €86.4 billion European Social Fund.

Responsibility for employment policies and social affairs is shared between the EU and its Member States. The European Commission has made jobs, growth and investment its top priority, backed up by the Investment Plan for Europe.

http://europa.eu/!fJ97VH

What the EU does

The EU's employment and social affairs policies are designed to:

- create quality jobs throughout the EU;
- help workers to find jobs in their own or another EU country;
- promote skills and entrepreneurship;
- coordinate and modernise social security schemes;
- create better working conditions through common minimum standards;
- support social inclusion and combat poverty; and
- protect the rights of people with disabilities.

These policies contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 targets in employment, social inclusion and education. The EU provides and coordinates funding to help Member States invest in people (in areas like childcare, healthcare, training, accessible infrastructure and help with finding a job) and to reform their social security systems. The European Social Fund is investing €86.4 billion to help millions of Europeans acquire new skills and find better jobs. The youth guarantee (€8.8 billion) supports youth employment by ensuring that all young people under 25 receive a good-quality, concrete offer of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education within 4 months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The upskilling pathways initiative helps adults to master basic skills such as reading, writing or using a computer. Through this initiative, the EU helps Member States to give people a second chance to build their skills.

While social security remains the responsibility of each Member State, the EU creates bridges between national systems for citizens moving across borders. The EU rules on social security coordination do not replace national systems, but protect the social security rights of people when they move within the EU (and Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland). The EU also protects people through laws to limit working hours, tackle workplace discrimination, make working conditions safer and ensure that they receive compensation for work injuries. To deliver new and more effective rights for citizens, the European pillar of social rights enshrines principles and rights in the areas of equal opportunities on the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection. EURES, the European Job Mobility Portal, also helps connect jobseekers and companies offering a job.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/employment-and-social-affairs_en
European Commission reflection paper on the social dimension of Europe

facebook.com/socialeurope   @EU_Social

Education and training

The EU helps improve the quality of education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and by complementing national actions. Erasmus+ provides opportunities for people of all ages and enables young people in particular to study, train, gain work experience or volunteer abroad.

Investing in education and training is the key to people's future, particularly if they are young. According to a 2015 report, in the EU there are still more than 4.4 million early school leavers and one in four adults who have a low level of skills, which makes it difficult for them to access the labour market and to fully participate in society.

What the EU does

http://bit.ly/2znJ3pN
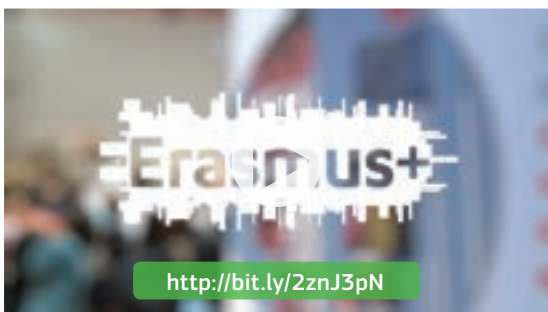
EU countries are responsible for their own education and training systems, but the EU helps them achieve quality education through the exchange of good practice, setting targets and benchmarks and providing funding and expertise. The EU strategy for education and training aims to meet the following objectives by 2020:

- make lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- improve the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; and
- enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Erasmus+, the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, helps tackle youth unemployment by boosting young people's personal development, skills and employability. With a total budget of €14.7 billion, it will help over 4 million (mostly young) people to study, train, gain work experience or volunteer in another country. Erasmus+ boosts the job prospects and the personal development of young people by giving them the skills they need in the labour market and society, both now and in the future.

The EU has set up a number of other initiatives to make it easier for people to study, train or work abroad. European countries, trade unions and employers cooperate to improve vocational and educational training through the Copenhagen process. One result is the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training and quality assurance network, which help people work and study abroad. The Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area make it easier for people to move between education systems within Europe by promoting mutual recognition of periods of study, comparable qualifications and uniform quality standards.

The Europass set of documents helps workers apply for jobs abroad by presenting their skills and qualifications in a standard Europe-wide format, more easily understood by employers.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/education-and-training_en

facebook.com/EUErasmusPlusProgramme   @EUErasmusPlus

Research and innovation

The €77 billion research and innovation programme Horizon 2020 is helping the EU to boost growth and jobs and tackle some of our biggest challenges.

Research and innovation are essential to the health of our economy and society. They are at the heart of EU policies to boost jobs, growth and investment and they also provide us with the knowledge and solutions to tackle both urgent problems such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak or the migration crisis and long-term societal challenges such as health, climate change and energy.

At the same time, research and innovation can help make people's lives better through improvements in areas such as healthcare, transport or energy, and are the launch pad for countless new products and services that can improve quality of life and improve our economic performance.

http://bit.ly/2i3XUm3

What the EU does

The EU is the world's biggest knowledge factory, accounting for almost a third of global science and technology production. However, in the face of increasing global competition, the EU needs to get better at turning excellent research and innovative ideas into successful products and technologies. All EU Member States have their own research policies and funding schemes, but many key issues can be best tackled by helping researchers and innovators in different countries to work together. This is why research and innovation is supported at the EU level, in particular through the Horizon 2020 programme.

Horizon 2020 is the biggest ever EU research and innovation programme, investing €77 billion of funding over 7 years (2014-2020), in addition to the other public and private investment that this money will attract. It promises more breakthroughs, discoveries and world firsts by taking great ideas from the lab to the market.

Horizon 2020 has three main aims, which are to:

- boost excellent science, including through the European Research Council, and training and career development for researchers under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions;
- promote industrial leadership in areas such as nanotechnologies and biotechnology and through support for companies and entrepreneurs; and
- tackle our biggest societal challenges, including health, transport, energy, climate action and protecting freedom and security.

The European Commission also aims to develop policies that will encourage excellent research and boost innovation. New policies and actions are grouped under three main themes: open innovation, open science and open to the world.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/research-and-innovation_en

facebook.com/EUScienceInnov   @EUScienceInnov

Regional policy

Regional policy targets all regions and cities in the European Union in order to support job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth and sustainable development and to improve citizens' quality of life.

Investing in research and innovation centres in San Ġwann, Galway and Cottbus; modernising the airports of Riga and Wrocław; improving urban mobility in Athens, Sofia and Cluj-Napaca; preserving Mont-Saint-Michel and safeguarding Pompeii; developing broadband infrastructure in Cornwall or across Lithuania; supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in Utrecht and Paredes; renovating the urban centres of Santa Coloma de Gramenet and Liège; renewing wastewater treatment in Trenčín and Slavonski Brod; and promoting the use of information technologies in universities in Nicosia and Ljubljana – these are just some examples of the thousands of projects co-funded by the EU's regional policy in regions across Europe.

What the EU does

Territorial Cooperation

http://bit.ly/1OPA6Yv
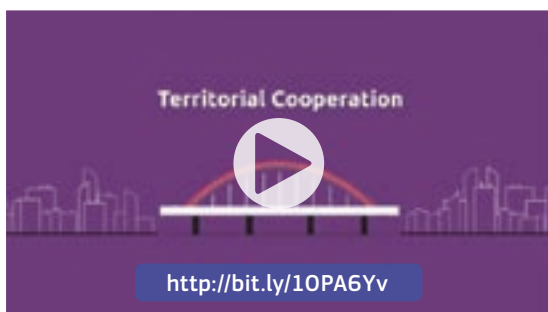
Regional policy underpins European solidarity, boosting economic growth and improving quality of life through strategic investment. It dedicates the bulk of its funding to help the EU's less-developed countries and regions to catch up and so reduce the economic, social and territorial disparities that still exist in the Union.

Regional policy is jointly managed by the European Commission and the Member States and their regions, which choose the projects that will be co-financed by the EU, under programmes agreed in advance with the European Commission. EU funds are always topped up with national (private and/or public) funds.

Each programme is drawn up through a collective process involving stakeholders at the European, national, regional and local levels, social partners and civil society. This partnership applies to all stages of programming, from design, through management and implementation, to monitoring and evaluation.

Through the Interreg programmes, regional policy pays particular attention to the needs and potential of border regions, which account for 37 % of the EU's population.

In order to reach these goals and address the diverse development needs of all EU regions, €259.7 billion, a quarter of the total EU budget, is available for regional policy in 2014-2020. These resources are used to finance strategic transport and communication infrastructures; to favour a transition to a more environmentally friendly economy; to help small and medium-sized enterprises to become more innovative and more competitive; to create new and lasting job opportunities; to reinforce and modernise education systems; and to build a more inclusive society. Further information on the European Structural and Investment Funds can be found here.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/regional-policy_en

f facebook.com/EUinmyregion   @EU_Regional

Transport

The EU's transport policy helps keep the European economy moving by developing a modern infrastructure network that makes journeys quicker and safer, all while promoting green and digital technologies.

Europe needs efficient transport connections to drive trade, growth, and employment. Transport is a major contributor to the economy, representing more than 9 % of the EU's gross added value (the contribution to the economy). Transport services alone accounted for around €651 billion in gross added value in 2015, and they employ around 11 million people.

The EU's transport policy is focused on overcoming obstacles between Member States and creating a single European transport area with fair competition conditions for and between the different modes of transport.

What the EU does

http://bit.ly/2nCDPkJ

Thanks to EU policy, the last 20 years have seen considerable progress in Europe's transport sector, leading to safer skies, seas and roads; decent working conditions for transport workers; more and cheaper mobility options for travellers and businesses; and fast progress towards cleaner transport and digital mobility solutions.

In addition:

- lorries can now operate in countries other than their country of registration, reducing the number of empty return journeys;
- the single European sky has helped flying become easier and cheaper;
- licensed rail companies can now offer their services anywhere in the EU;
- opening up the maritime market has allowed shipping companies to operate in more countries.

Safety is paramount. The number of deaths on Europe's roads halved between 1992 and 2010, and the EU has made further progress since 2010. Unsafe airlines are banned from flying in Europe and the EU has introduced tighter rules on maritime safety. EU transport policy also helps and protects people in other ways when they travel. Air, rail, ship or bus passengers travelling in the EU have rights when they experience delays or cancellations.

Funded through the Connecting Europe Facility, with a budget of over €24 billion, the EU's transport infrastructure policy aims to connect the continent from east to west and from north to south by closing the gaps between national transport networks; removing bottlenecks to the smooth functioning of the single market; and overcoming technical barriers such as incompatible standards for rail traffic. The EU supports research and innovation and the effective deployment of new green transport technologies, for example through new rules promoting clean vehicle technologies. The EU is also steering the transition towards connected and automated driving.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/transport_en

@Transport_EU

Agriculture and rural development

The common agricultural policy ensures a stable food supply, produced in a sustainable way at affordable prices for the EU's 500 million consumers. It also supports jobs and growth in rural areas.

http://bit.ly/2i4QezO

The common agricultural policy is applied in all EU Member States and funded under the EU budget. It supports the EU's food and farm sector, one of the major sectors of the economy, which provides some 44 million jobs. In 2016 around €61 billion (some 38 % of the EU budget) was invested in supporting farmers to produce food in a sustainable way, while also promoting growth in the rural economy and a living countryside. The common agricultural policy also supports environmentally and climate-friendly farming practices across the EU, and encourages healthy lifestyles.

What the EU does

The common agricultural policy provides support through the following means.

- Direct payments that support farm incomes. Farming can be a risky and costly business. The weather and agricultural market conditions are often unpredictable; and farm output and incomes can be badly affected. This is bad for farmers, and also for consumers as the food-supply chain may be affected. So the lion's share of the farm budget (72 %) is allocated to direct payments to farmers on condition that they follow strict food safety, environmental and animal health and welfare rules. Benefits for the environment and climate include protection of soils and biodiversity, and the maintenance of permanent pasture, which is a very effective means of locking carbon away, helping to reduce global warming. Direct payments help pay farmers for the provision of public goods that benefit society as a whole, which are not paid for by the market.

- Market measures to deal with difficult situations, such as a sudden drop in demand due to a health scare, a fall in prices due to temporary oversupply or the impact of unforeseen geopolitical developments.

- Rural development programmes (co-financed by Member States) that foster innovation and competitiveness to make rural areas attractive places in which to live and work. This includes the modernisation of farms and support for young farmers, as well as traditional and organic food production.

Restoring ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry and promoting resource efficiency and the shift towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy are also high priorities, accounting for 51.7 % (about €51 billion) of the total rural development budget for 2014-2020.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/agriculture_en

facebook.com/EUAgri   @EUAgri

Maritime affairs and fisheries

The EU protects our seas and oceans, while ensuring that they remain economically and environmentally sustainable as a driver for jobs, growth and innovation.

Seas and oceans are drivers for the European economy. The 'blue' economy represents roughly 5.4 million jobs and generates gross added value of almost €500 billion a year. Blue growth is the strategy to harvest the potential of sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors as a whole.

The EU's common fisheries policy aims to make sure that fishing and aquaculture (the farming of fish under controlled conditions) are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable so as to provide a source of healthy food for current and future generations of EU citizens. Its goals are to foster a dynamic yet sustainable fishing industry, including the conservation of resources and protection of the marine environment, while ensuring fair standards of living for fishing communities.

What the EU does

http://bit.ly/2BmceKw

The seas and oceans provide us not only with food, jobs, transport and recreation, but also – thanks to research and technological progress – pharmaceuticals, minerals and sources of renewable energy. While underpinning these new opportunities, the EU also plays an important role in promoting the responsible and sustainable exploitation of seas, both in Europe and globally.

The EU has introduced marine protected areas to safeguard marine ecosystems and biodiversity, along with the services these ecosystems provide. In these areas human activity is restricted for conservation purposes.

The common fisheries policy is financed through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, which, for the 2014-2020 period, is providing over €6.4 billion to help fishermen adapt to sustainable fishing, create jobs for the sector and diversify the economy in coastal communities. The fund provides co-funding to assist Member States in implementing operational programmes and projects, to deliver on the objectives of the common fisheries policy. In addition, the common fisheries policy contains a set of rules for managing European fishing fleets and for conserving fish stocks. Stocks may be renewable, but they are finite. To prevent overfishing, quotas for Member States set limits on how much of each species can be caught. To do away with the wasteful practice of fishing fleets dumping unwanted fish, a landing obligation is gradually being implemented.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/maritime-affairs-and-fisheries_en

facebook.com/EUmaritimefish   @EU_MARE

Climate action

The EU is working hard to cut greenhouse emissions, encourage other major polluters to take stronger action and address unavoidable consequences of climate change.

EU action on climate change seeks to address changes to the Earth's climate, in particular the rise in global temperatures due to an increase in greenhouse gases caused by human activity. Higher temperatures have many consequences, such as flooding or droughts in areas previously immune to such threats and extreme weather events that jeopardise food production, especially in poorer countries. Water and food shortages can trigger famine, regional conflicts and mass migration, while many plant and animal species are also at risk of extinction.

What the EU does

To keep climate change below dangerous levels, the international community has agreed that the average global temperature rise must be kept to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with the aim being to limit the increase to 1.5°C. Tackling climate change now can avoid human and economic costs in the future. The EU's strategy on adaptation to climate change includes building flood defences, developing drought-tolerant crops and changing building regulations.

For the EU, not addressing climate change could be very costly; however, the growing demand for clean technologies presents an opportunity to innovate and create green growth and jobs. Climate action is incorporated into all areas of the EU budget, and 20 % of the EU budget for 2014-2020 will be spent on climate-related initiatives.

new climate & energy targets

http://bit.ly/1b1Kgp2

The EU has set itself the following climate and energy targets for 2020:

- a 20 % cut in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels (at least 40 % by 2030);
- 20 % of all energy consumed to come from renewable sources (at least 27 % by 2030);
- a 20 % increase in energy efficiency compared to business-as-usual scenario (at least 27 % by 2030).

In the longer term the EU is committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95 % by 2050 compared to 1990 levels.

The EU emissions trading system is the cornerstone of the EU's climate strategy and is reducing emissions from industry, power plants and flights within the EU cost-effectively. The EU also has policies in place to tackle emissions in other sectors of the economy, such as transport and agriculture.

The EU is leading global efforts to fight climate change, in particular by galvanising the international community to maintain the momentum of the 2015 Paris Agreement and take the necessary steps to put it into practice on the ground.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/climate-action_en

facebook.com/EUClimateAction   @EUClimateAction

Environment

The EU has some of the world's highest environmental standards, which protect nature, green the economy and achieve careful and rational use of natural resources.

http://bit.ly/2mZsQFt

Environmental challenges know no boundaries. That is why we must tackle them through cooperation both within the EU and with the rest of the world.

Protecting the environment and promoting sustainable growth go hand in hand. Environment policy can play a key role in creating jobs and stimulating investment. Green innovations can be implemented and exported, making Europe more competitive and improving people's quality of life.

What the EU does

The 7th EU environment action programme guides the Union's environmental policy until 2020, and sets out a vision of where the EU should be by 2050. This includes living in an environment where nothing is wasted, natural resources are managed sustainably and biodiversity is protected, valued and restored.

The programme concentrates action in three key areas:

- protecting, conserving and enhancing the EU's natural capital;
- turning the EU into a resource-efficient, green and competitive low-carbon economy; and
- safeguarding EU citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing.

Nature is our life-support system, so we need to look after it. We share resources like water, air, natural habitats and the species they support, and we also share environmental standards to protect them. The EU is working to safeguard these natural resources and halt the decline of endangered species and habitats. Natura 2000 is a network of 26 000 protected natural areas, covering almost 20 % of the EU's land mass, where sustainable human activities can coexist with rare and vulnerable species and habitats. Water, air pollution and chemicals are among people's top environmental concerns. To safeguard people from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being, EU policy aims to guarantee safe drinking and bathing water, improve air quality, reduce noise and reduce or eliminate the effects of harmful chemicals.

The EU's circular economy action plan aims to transform our economy by enhancing the longevity and recyclability of products and by using materials and resources for as long as possible. Rethinking products' life cycles will help to manage precious resources more sustainably, minimise waste and make Europe more resilient as regards the supply of raw materials.

Environmental concerns do not stop at the EU's borders. As the world's population continues to grow the EU is playing a leading role in international efforts to promote sustainable development. More action is needed to ensure that air, oceans and other water resources are kept clean, that land and ecosystems are used sustainably and that climate change is kept to manageable levels.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/environment_en

f facebook.com/EUEnvironment

@EU_ENV

Energy

The EU's energy policies aim to ensure a secure, competitive and affordable supply of energy while meeting its climate targets.

Europe faces a number of major energy challenges. Our dependence on energy imports is particularly pressing, with the EU currently importing over half its energy at a cost of €400 billion per year. Other important challenges include potential energy-supply disruptions, high energy prices that affect households and businesses and environmental and health concerns caused by the emission of greenhouse and other harmful gases, particularly during the combustion of fossil fuels.

The EU's targets for 2030 include:

- a 40 % binding reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels;
- a binding target of at least 27 % renewable energy in the EU;
- an increase in energy efficiency of at least 27 % (the Commission has proposed to increase this to 30 %); and
- the completion of the internal energy market – meeting an electricity interconnection target of 15 % between EU countries and advancing important infrastructure projects.

http://bit.ly/2i2DMAw

What the EU does

To tackle these challenges and meet the EU targets the European Commission has launched a European energy union. This project aims to ensure secure, affordable and sustainable energy for people and businesses by allowing energy to flow freely across national borders within the EU. It will also promote new technologies and infrastructure projects to connect Europe's energy markets, cut household bills, create jobs and boost growth. It will enable Europe to lead the way in renewable energy production and the fight against climate change. Creating an energy union will also help Europe to speak with one voice on global energy matters.

Additional policies and actions that help ensure that the EU meets its goals include the following.

- The European energy security strategy, which presents measures to reinforce the security of the EU's energy supply.
- A resilient and integrated EU-wide energy market. New networks for gas and electricity are being built thanks to the €5.35 billion available under the Connecting Europe Facility. Financing is also available through the European Fund for Strategic Investments. At the same time, regulatory barriers are being broken down and common rules are being designed to increase supplier competition and promote consumer choice.
- Increased domestic production of energy in the EU, particularly from renewable energy sources.
- Increased safety across the EU's energy sectors, with strict rules on issues such as the disposal of nuclear waste and the operation of offshore oil and gas platforms.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/energy_en

@Energy4Europe

Foreign affairs and security policy

The EU's foreign and security policy enables it to speak and act as one in world affairs, allowing the Member States to tackle challenges they cannot solve alone and helping ensure security and prosperity for our citizens.

The policy is implemented by the EU's foreign affairs chief, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (who is also a Vice-President of the Commission), and the European External Action Service, the EU's diplomatic service. The EU's actions are guided by the principles that inspired its own creation and development, and which it seeks to promote in the wider world, including peace, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

http://bit.ly/2zn3YcF

What the EU does

In 2016 the High Representative/Vice-President launched the global strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy to enhance stability in the European neighbourhood and beyond, boost security and defence and deal with challenges such as energy security, migration, climate change and terrorism. The follow-up on security and defence has been particularly swift, with the adoption of a wide-ranging EU security and defence package in 2016 that will see Europe take more responsibility for these areas. The global strategy set the following five priorities for EU action:

- the security of our Union;
- state and societal resilience;
- an integrated approach to conflicts and crises;
- cooperative regional orders; and
- global governance for the 21st century.

The European Defence Fund launched in 2017 coordinates, supplements and amplifies national investment in defence so as to increase output and develop defence technology and equipment to meet current and future security needs.

The EU supports countries facing conflict and crisis. It is the leading donor in the international response to the Syria crisis, with over €9.4 billion provided to support the Syrian people, and it continues to support international efforts to bring peace to the Middle East by supporting a two-state solution with a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel. The agreement reached in 2015 on the Iranian nuclear programme demonstrated the EU's role in leading peace talks on behalf of the international community. Since 2003 the EU has carried out more than 30 civilian missions and military operations on three continents. Deployment decisions are made jointly by national ministers from EU countries. Success stories include EU peacekeeping missions in several of the world's trouble spots, the training of police, soldiers and coastguards, support for state-building in post-conflict situations and fighting piracy off the Horn of Africa. The EU has no standing army, but brings together forces contributed by its Member States under the EU flag.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/foreign-affairs-and-security-policy_en
European Commission reflection paper on the future of European defence

facebook.com/EuropeanExternalActionService   @eu_eeas

EU enlargement

The prospect of membership is a powerful stimulus for democratic and economic reforms in countries that want to become EU members.

The EU was created to foster peace, prosperity and European values across the continent. Enlargement is the process whereby countries join the EU. Since it was founded in 1957 the EU has grown from six countries to 28. In bringing other countries into the EU, one of the aims is to deepen the solidarity between the people of Europe, while respecting and preserving diversity.

What the EU does

http://bit.ly/1MZ6B9h
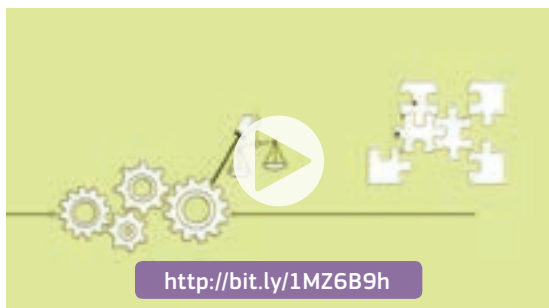
Any European country may apply for membership if it respects the democratic values of the EU and is committed to promoting them. Countries can only become a member of the EU if they fulfil the conditions for accession. Enlargement policy is therefore instrumental in encouraging and helping countries to achieve three key criteria:

- political stability, wherein the countries' political institutions guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU; and
- the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

During the enlargement process the Commission helps countries wishing to join the EU to meet the necessary criteria for membership, and supports them in implementing the related economic and democratic reforms. When the negotiations and accompanying reforms have been completed to the satisfaction of both sides the country can join the EU if all existing Member States agree. The current candidate countries are: Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Turkey. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo* are potential candidates.

A credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans will contribute to stability in the region. A new strategy will be launched in early 2018 for the successful EU accession of Serbia and Montenegro, as frontrunner candidates in the Western Balkans. While it is clear that no candidate is ready yet and there will be no further enlargement during the current mandates of the European Parliament and the European Commission, thereafter the Member States will be greater in number. Accession candidates must give the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights the utmost priority. President Juncker stated in the 2017 State of the Union address that this rules out EU membership for Turkey for the foreseeable future.

---

*   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.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/node/1705

facebook.com/EUnear   @eu_near

European neighbourhood policy

As a key element of the EU's foreign policy, the European neighbourhood policy focuses on stabilising the region in political, economic and security terms.

http://bit.ly/2nfECvt

The European neighbourhood policy governs the EU's relations with 16 of its closest eastern and southern partners. It translates the EU's wish to build on common interests with partner countries and a commitment to work jointly in priority areas, including in the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and social cohesion. Strengthening the state and the societal resilience of the EU's partners is a priority in the face of the threats and pressures they are experiencing, including the challenges associated with migration and mobility.

What the EU does

The European neighbourhood policy offers a framework for more effective and stronger partnerships based on common interests and action on both sides. The principal objectives of this policy are to:

- stabilise neighbouring countries by addressing economic development, employability and youth, transport and energy connectivity, migration, mobility and security;
- promote the key EU interests of good governance, democracy, the rule of law and human rights; and
- facilitate cooperation at regional level, for example through the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean.

The key initiatives that put the policy into practice are:

- the Eastern Partnership: a joint initiative to deepen and strengthen relations between the EU and six eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine; and
- the southern neighbourhood: a framework of cooperation between the EU and 10 partner countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine*, Syria and Tunisia.

Cooperation takes place at bilateral level (with individual partners), at regional level (with two or more partners from the east or the south) or across the neighbourhood, depending on the nature of the action. The European Neighbourhood Instrument supports the comprehensive approach by the EU towards its partners and is the key EU financial instrument for cooperation with the European neighbourhood policy countries in the years 2014-2020.

* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a state of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/european-neighbourhood-policy_en

facebook.com/EUnear   @eu_near

Trade

**The EU champions free trade.
With every €1 billion in exports
supporting 14 000 jobs in Europe,
the EU fights for open markets,
a level playing field and the highest
international standards.**

The EU is the largest trading power and one of the most open economies in the world. With 90 % of future global growth coming from outside Europe's borders, and a third of our national income dependent on trade, the EU fights for open markets, a level playing field and the highest international standards. The EU has the exclusive power to legislate and conclude international trade agreements under areas covered by its common commercial policy, based on World Trade Organisation rules, on behalf of its 28 Member States.

http://bit.ly/1FmvJMB

What the EU does

The EU's trade policy covers trade in goods and services, but also matters such as the commercial aspects of intellectual property and foreign direct investment.

Trade deals are not an end in themselves; they also project European values and principles around the world, which is why all new trade agreements negotiated by the EU include provisions on sustainable development, notably environmental protection and labour conditions. The recent agreement with Japan is the first ever trade agreement to include a commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement.

The EU stands for open and fair trade and fights against protectionism, and uses trade defence and market access measures to defend its companies and citizens against unfair competition and unfair trade practices.

The EU has trade agreements in force with 67 partners around the world, such as the EU–Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which has abolished customs duties on 98 % of Canadian products, saving EU businesses €590 million annually. The agreement with Japan could increase exports to Japan by more than a third and save €1 billion in customs duties. The launch of a joint action plan on trade with the United States was agreed in May 2017.

By 2017 the EU had finalised trade agreements with another 24 countries, and is negotiating a further 18 agreements covering 51 countries. In September 2017 the European Commission proposed to open trade negotiations with Australia and New Zealand.

The Commission handles trade negotiations transparently – systematically publishing negotiating texts, reports after negotiating rounds and explanatory documents – and provides regular reports to the European Parliament and the Member States.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/trade_en
European Commission reflection paper on harnessing globalisation

@Trade_EU

International cooperation and development

Development lies at the heart of the Union's foreign policy, with the EU providing over half the world's cooperation funding.

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 are no respecters of borders. These threats affect us all, and only by working with partner countries in the developing world can we tackle the extreme poverty that fuels and drives them.

What the EU does

The EU sees development cooperation not as 'charity' but as an investment in a viable, shared future. The EU is thus a leading advocate of the UN's 2030 agenda for sustainable development, and its own European consensus on development of May 2017 sets out how the EU will focus on 'people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership' in working towards the 2030 agenda's sustainable development goals.

http://bit.ly/2A4lNk3

The EU's aim is to take on the causes of poverty. This means not just helping to provide decent access to food, clean water, healthcare, education and land; not just developing vital transport and energy infrastructure and a clean environment. It also means building and strengthening democracy, human rights (including equality between women and men) and the rule of law. Without these things one cannot develop safe and stable societies in which people can prosper and local businesses can invest and grow, and generate lasting jobs.

The EU's 140 diplomatic missions ('delegations') work with partner countries around the world to design long-term programmes. Once approved by the European Parliament and the Member States, these programmes are managed on the ground using money from the general EU budget and a special European Development Fund. Altogether, from 2014 to 2020 the EU will deploy some €82 billion in external funding through grants, tenders and support for national budgets, and, increasingly, by using EU funding as 'seed money' to encourage local public and private investment.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/international-cooperation-and-development_en,

facebook.com/europeaid

@europeaid

Humanitarian aid and civil protection

The EU, together with its Member States, is the world's leading humanitarian aid donor, providing and coordinating relief assistance to people in areas hit by disasters in Europe and around the globe.

The EU provides relief assistance to the people affected by crises. In 2016 EU aid of €2.1 billion helped more than 120 million people in over 80 countries. The EU aims to:

http://bit.ly/2zANhP1

- save and preserve life, prevent and alleviate human suffering and safeguard the integrity and dignity of populations affected by natural disasters and man-made crises;
- provide rapid response to emergencies both inside and outside the EU;
- reduce disaster risks, for example by employing strategies aimed at mitigating the consequences of climate change;
- improve disaster preparedness, for instance by developing early warning systems;
- ensure a smooth transition when an emergency operation comes to an end, by linking up with development aid strategies;
- strengthen the overall resilience of populations, for example by investing in measures to help them prepare for future disasters; and
- protect and ensure the future of children caught up in man-made or natural disasters.

What the EU does

The EU responds to crisis situations through the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), which ensures rapid and effective delivery of EU relief assistance through its two main instruments: humanitarian aid and civil protection. The EU is a leading humanitarian donor in many crises, including the following.

- Emergency relief to displaced people inside Syria and refugees in neighbouring countries.
- Humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced people in Greece, Iraq, Turkey and Yemen.
- Life-saving humanitarian projects in the worst-affected communities in South Sudan and the Central African Republic.
- Helping communities in disaster-prone areas to better prepare and recover. Every euro spent on preparedness saves up to seven euros that would be spent in the aftermath of disasters.

The EU sends teams to help out in many crises within the EU and across the globe through its Civil Protection Mechanism, for example:

- coordinating and co-financing the transport costs of firefighting operations in Europe during a particularly intense summer fire season in 2017;
- following the Ebola crisis in 2014, setting up the European Medical Corps to provide a rapid response to emergencies with health consequences both inside and outside the EU; and
- helping people in Ecuador affected by the 2016 earthquake.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/humanitarian-aid-and-civil-protection_en

facebook.com/ec.humanitarian.aid   @eu_echo

THE **EUROPEAN UNION**: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT DOES

Justice and fundamental rights

The EU guarantees a range of fundamental rights for its citizens and protects them from discrimination, while the EU's common justice area helps solve cross-border legal problems for both citizens and businesses.

The EU is not simply a single market for goods and services. Europeans share values that are spelled out in the EU treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which guarantee rights to EU citizens (any person who holds the nationality of an EU country is automatically also an EU citizen). The EU also makes life easier for Europeans who study, work or get married in other EU countries by building bridges between the different national legal systems across the EU. A borderless and seamless common justice area will ensure that citizens can rely on a set of rights and can access justice throughout the continent.

What the EU does

This set of rights is secured by the EU and includes the following.

- Rules preventing discrimination on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.
- The right for everyone to have their personal data protected thanks to the new rules entering into force in May 2018.
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights, which brings together all the personal, civic, political, economic and social rights enjoyed by people in the EU. These are guaranteed by the European Union where EU law is at stake.
- The EU's justice and fundamental rights policies: the coordination of justice rules, minimum standards across the EU and access to justice on equal terms in all countries are key issues. For example, victims of crime have a common set of minimum rights wherever they are in the EU. This coordination also helps businesses to trade and operate throughout the EU's single market.

http://bit.ly/2jknVdl

The EU also strives to strengthen mutual trust between the courts and administrations of the EU Member States so they recognise each other's judicial decisions. This is especially important in civil cases such as divorce, child custody or maintenance claims. Eurojust facilitates cooperation between national justice authorities to help fight serious crimes such as corruption, terrorism, and drug trafficking and distribution, while the European Arrest Warrant has replaced lengthy extradition procedures to return suspected or convicted criminals back to the country where they will be or have been tried.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/justice-and-fundamental-rights_en

f facebook.com/EUJustice   @EU_Justice

Public health

Citizens' health is a major priority for the European Union. The EU's health policy complements Members States' policies to ensure that everyone living in the EU is protected from serious cross-border health threats and has access to quality healthcare.

While the organisation of healthcare is the responsibility of individual Member States, the EU complements national policies to achieve shared objectives. The EU's coordinating role in preparing for and responding to serious cross-border health threats is essential to protect Europeans from antimicrobial resistance, pandemics and other infectious diseases such as Ebola. The EU's health policy also generates economies of scale by pooling resources, and helps countries to tackle common challenges, including the risk factors of chronic diseases or the impact of increased life expectancy on healthcare systems.

http://europa.eu/!yh37hr
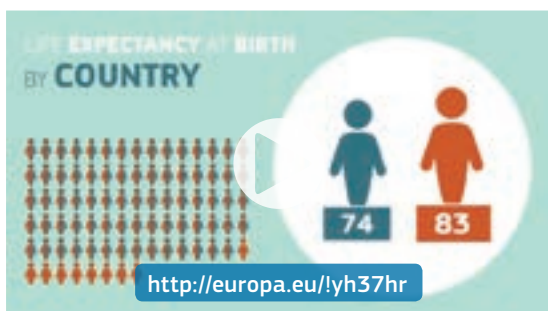
What the EU does

The EU's health policy focuses on tackling serious EU-wide health threats, preventing diseases and ensuring an equal chance of good health and quality healthcare for all. A population in good health is also good for the economy, and therefore the EU's ambition is to ensure the accessibility, effectiveness and resilience of health systems in the EU.

The EU is active in many different areas, such as pooling knowledge on cancer, promoting a healthy lifestyle and combating smoking through tobacco legislation. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control assesses emerging threats so the EU and national health authorities can respond rapidly. And to ensure patients get the best treatment all medicines in the EU must be approved at national or EU level (through the European Medicines Agency) before going on the market.

The main instrument to implement the EU health strategy is the third EU health programme. Its budget of €449 million funds cooperation projects at EU level and joint actions by national health authorities, and supports non-governmental bodies and cooperation with international organisations. In addition, the Horizon 2020 programme is investing €7.5 billion in health-related research and innovation, while the Connecting Europe Facility, the EU Structural Funds and the Investment Plan for Europe are investing in health infrastructure and the digitisation of healthcare.

The European Health Insurance Card helps travellers obtain treatment if they fall ill while visiting another EU country, while EU law on cross-border healthcare sets out citizens' rights when crossing borders for planned care. Through European reference networks patients with rare or complex diseases benefit from the best expertise from across Europe without even leaving their home country.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/public-health_en

@EU_Health

Food safety

EU action on food safety protects the health of people, animals and plants at every step from farm to fork, while helping Europe's food industry to thrive.

The EU's food-safety policy aims to guarantee safe and nutritious food produced from healthy plants and animals, while enabling the food industry, Europe's largest manufacturing and employment sector, to operate in the best possible conditions. Health is safeguarded at every stage of the food-production process by preventing food contamination and promoting food hygiene, plant health and animal health and welfare. EU food-labelling rules also provide consumers with information important to their health.

http://europa.eu/!Cj46Yw

What the EU does

The basic principles for the EU's food safety policy are defined in the EU's general food law, which ensures a high level of protection for people's health and consumers' interests while ensuring the single market works efficiently for food, drink and animal feed. The European Commission enforces EU food law by checking that Member States incorporate EU legislation into their national law and implement it correctly, while national agencies are responsible for ensuring that EU rules are respected.

Animals can be moved freely throughout the EU provided that welfare standards are met during transport. When there are outbreaks of animal diseases, the EU has mechanisms in place to act swiftly. The European Commission can also conduct on-the-spot inspections both within and outside the EU to ensure imported products meet stringent EU hygiene rules.

The general food law also set up the European Food Safety Authority and created procedures and tools to manage emergencies and crises. The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed protects consumers from food that does not comply with EU rules, including spotting banned substances such as the illegal use of fipronil in eggs in 2017. Whenever significant outbreaks of animal disease or food poisoning affect consumers, EU authorities can follow the movement of food products via the electronic Trade Control and Expert System.

It is estimated that around 88 million tonnes of food are wasted annually in the EU, costing €143 billion. Reducing food waste has enormous potential to save resources and money and reduce the environmental impact of food. The EU is tackling food waste while ensuring food safety by clarifying relevant EU rules to facilitate action by all players (public and private) and by promoting the sharing of innovation and best practices in this area.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/food-safety_en

@Food_EU

Consumers

EU consumer policy safeguards consumers' rights, ensures products are safe, helps people make informed choices when they buy goods and services, and offers tools to solve problems if something goes wrong.

The EU's single market offers consumers access to greater choice, flexibility, quality and value for money. But it can also pose challenges to consumers, especially in fast-developing areas like digital, energy and financial services. The EU's consumer policy ensures that people's rights will be upheld if they encounter any problems when buying goods or services from other EU countries, including online. This helps to build consumer trust across the EU, which is also good for businesses trading across borders in the EU's single market.

What the EU does

The EU offers consumers a set of practical rights to be used when something goes wrong.

- Minimum standards for passenger rights have been set across all modes of transport, including information, assistance and compensation if cancellation or long delays occur.
- When shopping online consumers have 14 days to reconsider their purchase and withdraw. They may always return a product within 2 weeks and get their money back.
- Since June 2017 roaming fees have been abolished. Europeans travelling within the EU pay domestic prices for roaming calls, SMS and data.
- If an item bought in the EU (whether online or in a shop) is different from how it is advertised or does not work properly, the consumer has the right to at least a free repair or replacement.
- Since 2016 new EU rules on mortgage credits have ensured clear information in advertisements and timely information to consumers before signing a contract.

http://bit.ly/1q2p8Sj
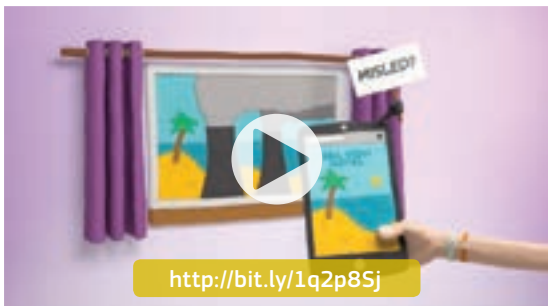
The EU also provides help to resolve disputes with traders quickly and efficiently. These low-cost, fast procedures can be used for both domestic and cross-border disputes. The online dispute resolution platform allows consumers and traders to resolve disputes over online purchases entirely online. The European Consumer Centre Network provides free help and advice to consumers on their cross-border purchases.

Stringent safety standards apply to toys, electrical appliances, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, and strict rules ensure that unsafe products are recalled from the market. Over 200 different unsafe products are notified via the EU's Rapid Alert System for dangerous non-food products each year.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/consumers_en

f facebook.com/EUJustice   @EU_Consumer

Banking and financial services

The EU is working to ensure the financial system remains strong and secure and that the single market offers consumers and businesses the financial products they need.

Financial institutions and markets play a vital role in the stability and growth of the EU economy. They provide funding to households and businesses, allow people to save and invest, provide insurance against risks and facilitate payments.

A failure of the financial system can have wide-ranging consequences. The 2008 financial crisis showed that no single EU country can manage the financial sector and supervise financial stability risks alone. In the wake of the crisis the EU carried out ambitious reforms to strengthen the financial system and the EU's ability to deal with future financial and economic shocks. This includes strengthening the rules to protect deposits in case of bank failure.

http://bit.ly/2i4u9Bw

What the EU does

The EU aims to build a strong, secure financial sector by strengthening the supervision of financial institutions and regulating complex financial products. The European Commission is monitoring the effectiveness of the reforms introduced over the last decade, which have helped make the financial system more stable and resilient. It will also continue to address the remaining risks and keep the regulatory framework up to speed with technological and economic developments.

The single rulebook created common rules for supervising bank capital requirements, improved protection of depositors and managing failing banks. The banking union transferred bank supervision and resolution from the national to the EU level in the 19 Member States of the euro area. The capital markets union creates the necessary framework to mobilise capital in Europe and channel it to all companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and infrastructure projects that need it to expand and create jobs.

There is not as yet a fully integrated EU single market for consumer financial services, which still operate largely on a national basis. This makes it difficult for consumers to access or transfer financial products like bank accounts, credit cards, mortgages and insurance across borders. The EU is working on making financial services work better for consumers and small investors. For example, it has taken measures to guarantee an EU-wide right of access to basic bank accounts. It also seeks to further harness the potential of digitalisation and technological developments to improve consumer access to financial services.

Sustainable finance is the provision of finance to investments taking into account environmental, social and governance considerations. The EU is examining how to integrate these considerations into its financial policy framework in order to mobilise finance for sustainable growth.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/banking-and-finance_en

@EU_Finance

Competition

EU competition rules aim to ensure that all companies compete fairly and equally in the single market to the benefit of consumers, businesses and the European economy as a whole.

Together with national competition authorities and national courts, the European Commission enforces EU competition policy and rules to make markets work better and to ensure that companies compete fairly with each other. This helps to reduce prices and improve quality, encourages innovation and efficiency and creates a wider choice for consumers.

What the EU does

The Commission takes action in regard to:

- cartels or other illegal arrangements between companies to avoid competing with each other or to set artificially high prices;
- abuse of a dominant position, whereby a major player tries to squeeze competitors out of the market;
- mergers and similar agreements between companies that may affect competition in the single market;
- financial support (state aid) from EU governments to companies, which may distort competition in the single market; and
- promoting competition culture internationally.

EU investigations into anti-competitive practices can cover not only goods but also professions and services. The Commission monitors the assistance Member State governments give to businesses (state aid) to ensure that it does not give certain companies an unfair advantage over their competitors. This helps make Europe fairer and promotes growth. State aid may be allowed if it helps or promotes disadvantaged regions, small and medium-sized businesses, research and development, environmental protection, training, employment or culture.

http://bit.ly/2bOwMln

As an example of illegal state aid, in 2016 the Commission concluded that Ireland had granted undue tax benefits of up to €13 billion to Apple. This is illegal under EU state aid rules, as it allowed Apple to pay substantially less tax than other businesses. Ireland must now recover the illegal aid. Big firms are barred from using their bargaining power to impose conditions that would make it difficult for their suppliers or customers to do business with their competitors. By way of example, in 2017 the European Commission fined Google €2.42 billion for abusing its market dominance as a search engine by promoting its own comparison shopping service in its search results and demoting those of competitors. Some more examples of cases brought by the European Commission are presented here.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/competition_en

@EU_Competition

Taxation

TAX

While national governments are responsible for setting tax rates and collecting taxes, the EU ensures that people or businesses from another Member State are not discriminated against and that taxes do not hinder the EU's single market.

Member State governments are broadly free to design their tax laws according to their national priorities. However, in doing so they must respect certain fundamental principles, such as non-discrimination and respect for free movement of goods and services in the single market. More and more companies and individuals are active in more than one country, making it easier for them to try and pay the least tax possible ('tax avoidance') or to not pay taxes due ('tax evasion') through legal means. A single country cannot tackle these issues on its own, so EU Member States work together to make sure that taxation is fair.

What the EU does

The EU does not have a direct role in raising taxes or setting tax rates. The EU's role is to oversee national tax rules to ensure they are consistent with certain EU policies such as:

- promoting economic growth and job creation;
- ensuring the free flow of goods, services and capital around the EU in the single market;
- making sure businesses in one country do not have an unfair advantage over competitors in another;
- ensuring taxes do not discriminate against consumers, workers or businesses from other EU countries.

http://bit.ly/2i2gsCX

The governments of all Member States must agree when it comes to making EU decisions on tax issues so that the interests of every EU country are taken into account. For some taxes, such as value added tax or excise duties on petrol, tobacco and alcohol, Member States have agreed to broadly align their rules and minimum rates to avoid unfair competition within the single market.

The tax laws of one Member State should not allow people or businesses to escape taxation in another. EU-wide action is essential to tackle the problem and important progress has been made in recent years, including the adoption of an EU action plan to fight tax fraud and tax evasion.

Close coordination between tax administrations also helps to prevent companies from exploiting loopholes between different countries' systems with the aim of reducing the amount of taxes they pay.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/taxation_en

@EU_Taxud

Customs

The EU's customs union means that all Member States are working together to ensure that goods imported into the EU circulate freely and that they are safe for people, for animals and for the environment.

A customs union means that the countries involved apply the same tariffs to goods imported into their territory from the rest of the world, and apply no tariffs internally. In the case of the EU this means that there are no customs duties to be paid when goods are transported from one Member State to another.

Customs policy is one of the few exclusive competences of the European Union. The European Commission proposes legislation on EU customs affairs and makes sure it is being implemented.

What the EU does

http://bit.ly/1Tn9RIH
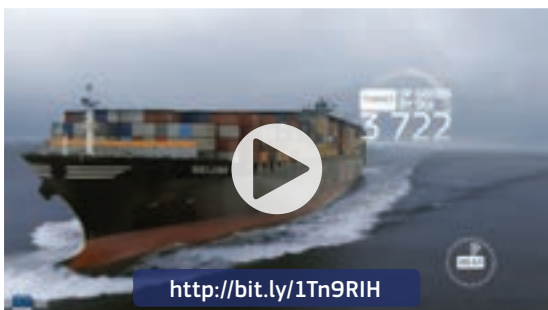
In practice, the EU's customs union is managed by 28 national customs services acting as if they were one. They protect consumers from goods that could be dangerous or bad for their health and protect animals and the environment against plant and animal diseases. They also contribute to the fight against organised crime and terrorism and make sure European treasures are not smuggled out.

The customs services also prevent illegal exports of waste, as protecting the environment is one of their key tasks. For businesses, the customs union means that regardless of where goods enter the EU the same rules apply, and once the goods have cleared customs they can circulate freely or be sold anywhere within the EU customs territory.

In 2015 almost 293 million customs declarations were handled by more than 2 000 EU customs offices working 365 days a year.

The EU's customs policy currently focuses on the following areas:

- making sure all Member States work together efficiently within the customs union;
- proposing legislation and procedures for better security and safety for citizens;
- helping EU countries to exchange information that could be useful for customs agencies; and
- making sure goods can move freely from one Member State to another in the EU's single market.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/customs_en

@EU_Taxud

THE **EUROPEAN UNION**: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT DOES

Culture and media

The EU works to preserve Europe's shared cultural heritage and make it accessible to all. It supports the arts and helps our creative and audiovisual industries to thrive, specifically through the creative Europe programme.

Culture and creativity are at the core of the European project and at the heart of the EU's cultural policy. The EU seeks to protect cultural heritage and diversity across countries and to harness the cultural and creative industries' contribution to jobs and growth in line with the principles of the European agenda for culture. In 2014 these sectors represented 4.5 % of the EU's GDP, and about 3.8 % of its workforce (8.5 million people). EU policy also looks to meet common challenges such as the shift to digital production and content, or how to encourage innovation in the cultural sector.

What the EU does

http://bit.ly/2jmBE3d

The creative Europe programme aims to strengthen Europe's cultural and creative sectors and provide funding for 250 000 artists and cultural professionals, 2 000 cinemas, 800 films and 4 500 book translations during its 7-year lifespan. It is investing € 1.46 billion to:

- promote European cultural and linguistic diversity;
- drive economic growth and competitiveness in the creative sectors;
- help the creative and cultural sectors make the most of digital technologies and develop new business models; and
- bring creative works to a wider audience in Europe and internationally.

The Commission also coordinates policymaking, research and reporting on a range of topics, from media literacy and digital distribution to cultural heritage preservation or culture in external relations. Furthermore, it fosters cooperation and peer learning between Member States within the framework of the open method of coordination. Creative Europe also promotes initiatives such as EU prizes for cultural heritage, architecture, literature and music and the European Capitals of Culture.

The EU's audiovisual and media policy aims to ensure that, like other goods and services, audiovisual media (film, TV and video) are subject to EU-wide rules to ensure they can circulate freely and fairly in the single market, regardless of how they are delivered. The main rules require EU countries to coordinate with each other on issues such as protecting children and consumers, safeguarding media pluralism, preserving cultural diversity and combating racial and religious hatred. The EU's rules also support the development and distribution of European films and other content, with the goal of promoting cultural diversity.

2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/culture-and-media_en

f facebook.com/CreativeEuropeEU   @europe_creative

Youth

Through its youth policies the EU aims to give young people more opportunities in education and the job market and to make sure they can participate fully in all areas of society.

http://bit.ly/2iP7RAy

The social inclusion of young people is vital for European society and democratic life. The EU's youth strategy promotes young people's health and well-being, participation in society, involvement in voluntary activities, and employment and entrepreneurship. The EU's youth policies also offer young people the chance to reduce gaps in their education and skills, thus allowing them to fully contribute to society. This is particularly relevant as youth unemployment is still significantly high.

What the EU does

The EU has set up several programmes and initiatives to help young people in Europe to play a more active role in society and benefit from experiencing another country. These include the following in particular.

- Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. Its budget of €14.7 billion will provide opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, gain experience and volunteer abroad.

- The Commission emphasises the need for structured dialogue as a means of mutual communication between young people and decision-makers in order to get first-hand input from young people on policy matters. Organised into 18-month cycles, each cycle of structured dialogue focuses on a specific theme and gives young people the chance to have their voices heard on this topic.

- The Erasmus for young entrepreneurs programme helps provide new or young European entrepreneurs with the skills necessary to start and run a small business.

- The European Solidarity Corps is a new EU initiative aiming to provide opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people around Europe.

- The youth guarantee, with funding of €8.8 billion, supports youth employment by ensuring that all young people under 25 receive a good-quality, concrete offer of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education within 4 months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

The European Youth Portal provides information on these and other EU initiatives for young people across Europe, while EURES, the European Job Mobility Portal, also helps connect jobseekers and companies offering a job across the EU and in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/youth_en

facebook.com/EuropeanYouthEU/   @EuropeanYouthEU

Sport

The EU promotes the health benefits and positive values associated with sport, supports cooperation between policymakers and dialogue with sports organisations and tackles problems such as doping, match-fixing and violence.

Sport and exercise are an integral part of life for millions of Europeans. Besides promoting better health and well-being, sport can help tackle issues such as racism, social exclusion and gender inequality. Sport also provides significant economic benefits and is an important tool in the EU's external relations. The EU's policy on sport is now mainly carried out through the Erasmus+ programme.

What the EU does

The EU focuses on sport as a means to keep people healthy, create communities, nurture social inclusion and promote equal opportunities.

- Erasmus+ co-funds initiatives to help develop, share and implement innovative ideas and practices to promote grassroots sport. 'Erasmus+ sport' helps develop sport's European dimension, boosting cooperation between sports organisations, public authorities and other parties.
- Sport can bridge social divides, empower people and provide opportunities to develop leadership skills. EU Member States applying for European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund grants are encouraged to include projects that promote social inclusion through sport. The #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards recognise organisations using the power of sport to increase social inclusion for disadvantaged groups.
- The European Week of Sport encourages Europeans to be active in their everyday lives.
- The European Commission encourages sport organisations to implement good governance.
- The European Commission is gradually integrating sport into bilateral agreements with countries outside the EU.

http://bit.ly/2BlTjAc

Cooperation between EU Member States on sport is agreed through a multiannual EU work plan for sport. The latest one (for the 2017-2020 period) defines three priorities: the integrity of sport, the economic dimension of sport, and sport and society. The European Commission works together with Member States and stakeholders to promote the role of sport and to find solutions to problems facing European sport.

The Eurobarometer survey on sport and physical activity shows that EU citizens are not exercising enough. The EU's health policy promotes exercise both through the sharing of good practices between EU countries and with interested parties, and through the EU platform for action on diet, physical activity and health, which provides a forum for tackling adverse trends. The EU physical activity guidelines (2008) and the Council recommendation on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors (2013) show how national policies can encourage activity.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/sport_en

facebook.com/EUErasmusPlusProgramme/   @EUSport

Budget

The EU budget helps to deliver on the things that matter to Europeans. By pooling resources at the EU level Member States can achieve more than they could by acting alone.

The EU budget supports a wide range of policies implemented within the European Union and has helped the EU to consolidate its strong role in the international arena, as a leader in the fight against climate change and as the largest donor of humanitarian and development aid in the world.

During the economic and financial crisis the EU budget proved to be a powerful instrument to support investment. With national budgets in many Member States under severe strain the EU budget, and the Structural Funds in particular, emerged from the 2008 crisis as a stabilisation factor investing in growth and jobs. Most recently the budget has also underpinned management of the EU's external borders and the European response to the refugee crisis and to the threat of organised crime and terrorism.

What the EU does

http://Europa.eu/!Xv33Tb

The EU agrees long-term spending plans (the multiannual financial framework), that provide a stable basis for implementing the budget over a period of at least 5 years. The current multiannual financial framework covers 2014-2020 and allows the EU to invest around €1 trillion over that period.

The annual budget is decided democratically. First the European Commission proposes a budget. Then the national governments (acting through the Council of the European Union) and the directly elected European Parliament approve the proposal. This becomes the next year's budget. Some 94 % of the budget is spent in the Member States and outside the EU on development and humanitarian assistance, while 6 % is spent on EU administration.

The annual EU budget in 2017 was around €158 billion – a large sum in absolute terms, but only about 1 % of the wealth generated by the economies of the Member States every year. About 80 % of the EU budget is financed from national contributions based on gross national income and value added tax.

Every year, following a recommendation by the Council, the European Parliament decides whether to give its final approval, or 'discharge', on the way the Commission has implemented the EU budget. This procedure ensures full accountability and transparency, and when granted the discharge leads to the formal closure of the accounts for a given year.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/budget_en
European Commission reflection paper on the future of EU finances

facebook.com/EUbudget   @EU_Budget

Fraud prevention

The European Anti-Fraud Office ensures taxpayers' money is put to the best possible use by investigating cases of fraud, corruption and illegal activities involving EU funds.

Corruption and fraud can seriously harm the economy and undermine the trust of citizens in democratic institutions and processes. Institutional corruption, however, is not the only threat. Cigarette smuggling, evasion of import duties on shoes and clothes, receiving subsidies for growing oranges on farms that do not exist – there are many examples of fraud, large and small, that can cost European taxpayers money. Corruption alone is estimated to cost the EU economy €120 billion per year, a little less than the annual budget of the EU.

To counter these threats, the European Anti-Fraud Office (also known as OLAF) investigates fraud, corruption and other illegal activities involving EU funds, along with serious misconduct by EU staff and members of the EU institutions, and helps the institutions formulate and implement policies to prevent and detect fraud. The office is part of the European Commission, but acts in full independence in its investigative mandate.

http://bit.ly/1lBCacz

What the EU does

When a case of suspected corruption or fraud of EU funds is assessed and proved to be substantiated by the European Anti-Fraud Office, an investigation is launched. These investigations can involve interviews and inspection of premises. The office will also coordinate inspections by Member State anti-fraud agencies involved in the case.

After an investigation is concluded, the office recommends action to the EU institutions and national governments concerned: this usually includes launching criminal investigations, financial recoveries or other disciplinary measures. It then monitors how these recommendations are implemented.

National customs authorities carry out regular joint customs operations with the office (and other EU agencies) to stop smuggling and fraud in certain high-risk areas and on identified routes. For example, in 2016, joint customs operations financed by the European Anti-Fraud Office led to the seizure of 11 million cigarettes, as well as hundreds of thousands of counterfeit semiconductors and thousands of litres of diesel.

The office also contributes to the development, monitoring and implementation of the EU's anti-fraud policies, working closely with the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

Find out more: https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/fraud-prevention_en

@OLAFPress

3 How the European Union **makes decisions** and takes action

1 WHO IS WHO

The European Union is based on the rule of law. This means that every action taken by the EU is founded on treaties that have been approved voluntarily and democratically by all EU countries. The treaties are negotiated and agreed by all the EU Member States and then ratified by their parliaments or by a referendum.

The treaties lay down the objectives of the European Union and set out the rules on how the EU institutions operate, how decisions are made and the relationship between the EU and its Member States. They have been amended each time new Member States have joined the EU. From time to time they have also been amended to reform the European Union's institutions and to give it new areas of responsibility.

The last amending treaty, the Lisbon Treaty, came into force on 1 December 2009. Earlier treaties are now incorporated into the current consolidated version, which comprises the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

More recently, the EU agreed upon the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, an intergovernmental treaty that obliges participating countries to have firm rules to guarantee balanced public budgets and strengthens the governance of the euro area.

Decision-making at EU level involves various European institutions, in particular:

- the European Parliament

- the European Council

- the Council, and

- the European Commission.

Generally it is the European Commission that proposes new laws and the European Parliament and the Council (also called the Council of the European Union) that adopt them. The Member States and the EU institution or institutions concerned then implement them.

The political groups in the European Parliament

European People's Party
(Christian Democrats)
215

Non-attached members
18

Europe of Nations
and Freedom
40

Europe of Freedom
and Direct Democracy
42

Progressive Alliance of
Socialists and Democrats
189

European Conservatives
and Reformists
73

Alliance of Liberals and
Democrats for Europe
68

European United Left —
Nordic Green Left
52

Greens/European
Free Alliance
51

Total 748 (3 seats vacant) – *Situation in August 2017*

The European Parliament

The European Parliament is elected by EU citizens in direct elections held every 5 years (most recently in 2014). Each Member State elects a number of Members (MEPs); seats are allocated on the basis of the population of each Member State. The Parliament meets in both Brussels and Strasbourg. The current European Parliament President is Antonio Tajani.

MEPs organise themselves into political groups, and also into committees that examine proposals for new legislation in different policy areas.

In terms of decision-making, the Parliament is responsible for the following:

- Approving, amending or rejecting EU laws, together with the Council of the European Union, based on European Commission proposals. The Parliament also shares with the Council equal responsibility for adopting the EU budget (proposed by the European Commission).

- Deciding on international agreements.

- Deciding on enlargements of the EU.

- Electing the President of the Commission, based on a proposal from the Member States, and then approving the full Commission.

- Reviewing the Commission's work programme and requesting that it propose legislation.

The Parliament's work comprises two main stages.

- Committees to prepare legislation: the Parliament has 20 committees and two subcommittees, each handling a particular policy area. The committees examine proposals for legislation, and MEPs and political groups can put forward amendments or propose to reject proposed legislation. These issues are also debated within the political groups before they decide how to vote on a particular subject.

- Plenary sessions approve, amend or reject legislation: this is when all the MEPs gather in the chamber to give a final vote on the proposed legislation and the proposed amendments. These plenary sessions are normally held in Strasbourg, with any additional sessions held in Brussels.

The European Council

The European Council, based in Brussels, is made up of the Heads of State or Government of all of the EU Member States, the President of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The current President of the European Council is Donald Tusk.

The European Council brings together EU leaders to set the EU's political agenda. It represents the highest level of political cooperation between the EU Member States. The European Council takes the form of (usually quarterly) summit meetings between EU leaders, chaired by the President of the European Council, who is elected by the European Council itself for a 2½-year term (which can be renewed once). The President can also convene additional meetings to address urgent issues.

The European Council generally decides issues by unanimity, or by qualified majority in some cases. Only the Heads of State or Government can vote.

The European Council:

- decides on the EU's overall direction and political priorities, but does not pass laws;

- deals with complex or sensitive issues that cannot be resolved at lower levels of intergovernmental cooperation;

- sets the EU's common foreign and security policy, taking into account EU strategic interests and defence implications;

- nominates and appoints candidates to certain high-profile EU-level roles, such as the President of the European Commission or the President of the European Central Bank.

On each issue, the European Council can:

- ask the European Commission to make a proposal to address it;

- pass it on to the Council of the European Union to deal with.

The Council

Together with the European Parliament, the Council is the main decision-making body of the EU. It is also known as the Council of the European Union. In the Council, government ministers from each Member State meet to discuss, amend and adopt laws and to coordinate policies. The ministers have the authority to commit their governments to the actions agreed on in the meetings. The presidency of the Council rotates among the EU Member States every 6 months, and is responsible for chairing all Council meetings and setting the agendas.

The Council:

- negotiates and adopts EU laws, together with the European Parliament, based on proposals from the European Commission;

- coordinates EU countries' policies;

- develops the EU's foreign and security policy, based on European Council guidelines;

- concludes agreements between the EU and other countries or international organisations;

- adopts the annual EU budget jointly with the European Parliament.

The ministers who attend are those that deal with the policy being discussed. For example, environment ministers meet in the Environment Council. The ministers meet several times a year to make decisions relating to the EU, though government officials have meetings all year round to discuss the policy details.

To be agreed, decisions usually require a qualified majority, which is defined as 55 % of the Member States (with 28 current members this means a total of 16) representing at least 65 % of the total EU population. To block a decision at least four countries are needed, representing at least 35 % of the EU's population. However, certain topics like foreign policy and taxation require a unanimous vote (all Member States in favour) and a simple majority is required for procedural and administrative issues.

The Council is not to be confused with the Council of Europe, which is not a European Union body but an international organisation that was set up to promote democracy and protect human rights and the rule of law in Europe. It comprises 47 European countries, including the 28 Member States of the EU.

The European Commission

The European Commission is the main institution that runs the day-to-day business of the EU. It is the only EU institution that can propose legislation (often after a request from the European Parliament or the Council), though it is the Parliament and the Council that vote on it. Most people working in the Commission are based in Brussels or Luxembourg, however there are 'representation' offices in all the capitals of the EU Member States.

The Commission is composed of the College of 28 Commissioners, one from each EU Member State, and including the President (since 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker) and Vice-Presidents.

President Juncker was nominated by the European Council, on the basis of the results of the European Parliament elections, and voted for by the European Parliament. This was the first time that the results of the European Parliament elections helped to decide who should lead the European Commission. Since the European People's Party won the most votes in the 2014 European elections, its leading candidate (known as the Spitzenkandidat), Jean-Claude Juncker, was elected Commission President.

Once the Commission President is nominated, the Council of the European Union nominates the other 27 Members of the Commission in agreement with the nominated President, and the 28 Members as a single body are then subject to a vote of approval by the European Parliament. The Commissioners are the Commission's political leadership during a 5-year term. Each Commissioner is assigned responsibility for specific policy areas by the President.

The staff of the Commission are the equivalent of the civil service in a Member State, and are organised into departments, known as directorates-general and services, similar to ministries at national level.

The decisions of the Commission are made based on the collective responsibility of the College of Commissioners. All Commissioners are equal in the decision-making process and equally accountable for these decisions. They do not have any individual decision-making powers, except when authorised in certain situations.

There are six Vice-Presidents (including the First Vice-President and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) among the 28 Commissioners, who occupy these roles in addition to the usual Commissioner's portfolio. The Vice-Presidents act on behalf of the President and coordinate work in their area of responsibility, together with several Commissioners. The Commission has set itself 10 priorities for the period up to 2019.

In general decisions are made by consensus, but votes can also take place. In this case, decisions are made by simple majority, with every Commissioner having one vote. The relevant directorate-general then takes up the subject. This is usually done in the form of draft legislative proposals.

European Union agencies

The work of the European Union is assisted by a number of EU agencies, which are separate legal entities set up to perform specific tasks under EU law. They work on issues and problems affecting the everyday lives of people living in the EU. They have a major impact, providing EU institutions and Member States with specialised knowledge in diverse areas, such as cybersecurity, safety of food and medicines, environmental protection, fundamental rights and border security.

2 MAKING DECISIONS

Various institutions take part in the EU's decision-making process, with the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission at the forefront.

Usually the European Commission proposes new legal acts that are then adopted by the Parliament and the Council. On some occasions, the Council may do this alone.

There are several types of legal acts, which are applied in different ways.

- A **regulation** is a law that is applicable and binding in all Member States directly. It does not need to be passed into national law by the Member States, although national laws may need to be changed to avoid conflicting with the regulation.

- A **directive** is a law that binds the Member States, or a group of Member States, to achieve a particular objective. Usually, directives must be transposed into national law to become effective. Significantly, a directive specifies the result to be achieved: it is up to the Member States individually to decide how this is done.

- A **decision** can be addressed to Member States, groups of people or even individuals. It is binding in its entirety. Decisions are used, for example, to rule on proposed mergers between companies.

- **Recommendations** and **opinions** enable the EU institutions to express a view to Member States, and in some cases to individual citizens, that is not binding and does not create any legal obligation on the person or entity addressed.

Every proposal for a new EU legal act is in accordance with a particular article of a treaty, which is called the legal basis of the proposal. This determines which legislative procedure must be followed.

The majority of laws are made following a process known as the ordinary legislative procedure.

Ordinary legislative procedure

The ordinary legislative procedure, also known as the co-decision procedure, is the most common procedure for adopting EU legislation. This places the European Parliament and the Council on an equal footing, and the laws passed using this procedure are joint acts of the Parliament and the Council. It applies to the great majority of EU legislation, covering a wide range of fields such as consumer rights, environmental protection and transport. Under the ordinary legislative procedure the Commission makes a proposal, which must be adopted by both the Parliament and the Council. On receipt of the proposal the process proceeds as follows.

The first reading

- The European Parliament debates the proposal in its committees. Any amendments to the proposal are tabled and voted on in these committees. The proposal then passes to the whole Parliament, which votes on it (and further amendments) in plenary session.

- The Council and the Member States examine the legislation in detail; most of this discussion happens in a working group of civil servants. Many issues can be resolved at this technical level, or the levels just above it, though some issues may remain to be finalised at the meetings of the relevant ministers. The Council will come to a political agreement on the legislation – this may happen before or after the Parliament votes. Once the Parliament has voted the political agreement will be converted into a formal common position. If the Council's common position is different from the Parliament's vote the legislation passes onto a second reading in order to resolve the differences.

- Representatives of the Parliament and the Council often meet informally to try to agree between themselves before formalising their positions. If they do agree the Council will adopt exactly the same text as the Parliament and the proposal will become law. This is called a first-reading agreement.

The second reading

- If no agreement was found at first reading, the second reading will then begin. It follows a similar pattern to the first reading, but this time with the Parliament examining, and voting on, the changes proposed by Council, and then the Council considering what the Parliament proposes. The second reading is a faster process than the first reading, as only differences between the Parliament's and the Council's positions can be discussed, and various elements are time limited.

- It is possible that the Parliament and the Council will agree at this stage (a second-reading agreement). If the two institutions cannot come to a common decision on the proposed legal act it is passed to a Conciliation Committee comprised of an equal number of representatives of the Parliament and the Council. This conciliation procedure has become rare. Most legal acts are adopted following the ordinary legislative procedure during the first or second reading.

- Once a final text is agreed, and all translations have been done, the legislation is passed to the Parliament and the Council again so that they can adopt it as a legal act. It will then be published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* in the EU's 24 official languages. The legislation will specify when it must be implemented in the Member States, or when it comes into force in the case of a regulation.

The Commission can take Member States to court and ask for them to be fined if EU legislation is not implemented. Almost all enforcement of EU legislation occurs within the Member States. This can sometimes lead to complaints about uneven implementation of the rules in different countries. Some decisions are enforced directly at EU level, notably competition law such as antitrust cases. See the section 'Ensuring EU laws are respected' below for more information.

Who else is consulted?

When making decisions in a number of policy areas, the Parliament, the Council and the Commission consult the European Economic and Social Committee (of which Georges Dassis has been the President since 2015). Its members represent the various economic and social interest groups that collectively make up organised civil society.

The European Committee of the Regions (of which Karl-Heinz Lambertz has been the President since 2017) consists of representatives of regional and local government. The Parliament, the Council and the Commission must consult the Committee on matters of relevance to the regions.

The advisory committees' opinions are not binding upon the EU institutions.

In addition, other institutions and bodies may be consulted when a proposal falls within their area of interest or expertise, for example the European Central Bank for proposals concerning economic or financial matters.

National oversight

National parliaments receive draft legislative acts at the same time as the European Parliament and the Council. They can give their opinion to ensure that decisions are made at the most appropriate level. EU actions are subject to the principle of subsidiarity, which means that, except in the areas where it has exclusive powers, the EU only acts where action will be more effective at EU level than at national level. National parliaments monitor the correct application of this principle in EU decision-making and can give 'reasoned opinions' when they consider that the principle is not being respected.

Getting involved as a citizen

Every EU citizen has the right to submit a petition to the European Parliament in one of the 24 official languages of the EU, in the form of a complaint or a request, on an issue that falls within the European Union's fields of activity. Petitions are examined by Parliament's Committee on Petitions, which makes a decision on their admissibility and is responsible for dealing with them.

Citizens can also participate directly in the development of EU policies by calling on the European Commission to make a proposal on matters on which the EU has the competence to legislate. A European citizens' initiative, as this is called, has to be backed by at least 1 million EU citizens, coming from at least seven of the 28 Member States. A minimum number of signatories is required in each of those seven Member States.

Coordinating the policies of Member States – the example of economic policy

Under economic and monetary union, the EU's economic policy is based on close coordination of national economic policies. This coordination is carried out by the economics and finance ministers, who collectively form the Economic and Financial Affairs Council.

Common foreign and security policy

The common foreign and security policy is the organised, agreed foreign policy of the EU, mainly for security and defence diplomacy and actions. Decisions require unanimity among Member States in the Council of the European Union, but once agreed, certain aspects can be further decided by qualified majority voting. The EU's foreign policy is represented by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, currently Federica Mogherini, who also chairs meetings of foreign ministers.

Concluding international agreements

Each year the Council concludes (i.e. officially signs) a number of agreements between the European Union and non-EU countries, and also with international organisations. These agreements may cover broad areas such as trade, cooperation and development, or they may deal with specific subjects such as textiles, fisheries, science and technology, or transport. The Parliament's consent is required for all international agreements in fields covered by the ordinary legislative procedure.

Approving the EU budget

The EU's annual budget is decided jointly by the European Parliament and the Council. If the two institutions do not agree then conciliation procedures are followed until a budget is approved. See the section 'Taking action: the EU's budget' below for more information.

3 ENSURING EU LAWS ARE RESPECTED

The Court of Justice of the European Union ensures that EU legislation is interpreted and applied in the same way in each Member State. The Court has the power to settle legal disputes between Member States, EU institutions, businesses and individuals. To cope with the many thousands of cases it receives it is divided into two main bodies: the Court of Justice and the General Court.

If a private individual or a company has suffered damage as a result of action or inaction by an EU institution or its staff they can take action against them in the Court, in one of two ways:

- indirectly through national courts, which may decide to refer the case to the Court of Justice;

- directly before the General Court, if a decision by an EU institution has affected them directly and individually.

If someone considers that the authorities in any country have infringed EU law they can follow the official complaints procedure.

How the Court works

Cases are processed in two stages.

- **Written stage.** The parties give written statements to the Court, and observations can also be submitted by national authorities, EU institutions and, sometimes, private individuals. All of this is summarised by the judge-rapporteur and then discussed at the Court's general meeting.

- **Oral stage.** This is a public hearing: lawyers from both sides can put their case to the judges and the advocate general, who can question them. If the Court decides an opinion of the advocate general is necessary this is given some weeks after the hearing. The judges then deliberate and give their verdict.

The General Court procedure is similar, except that most cases are heard by three judges and there are no advocates general.

Other EU judicial institutions

The Ombudsman receives and investigates complaints and helps to identify maladministration in the EU institutions and other bodies. Any citizen, resident, association or business of an EU Member State can make a complaint to the Ombudsman.

The European Data Protection Supervisor is charged with protecting the personal information and privacy of EU citizens and residents, stored by the EU institutions in electronic, written or visual form. It also promotes good practice in this field among the EU institutions and bodies.
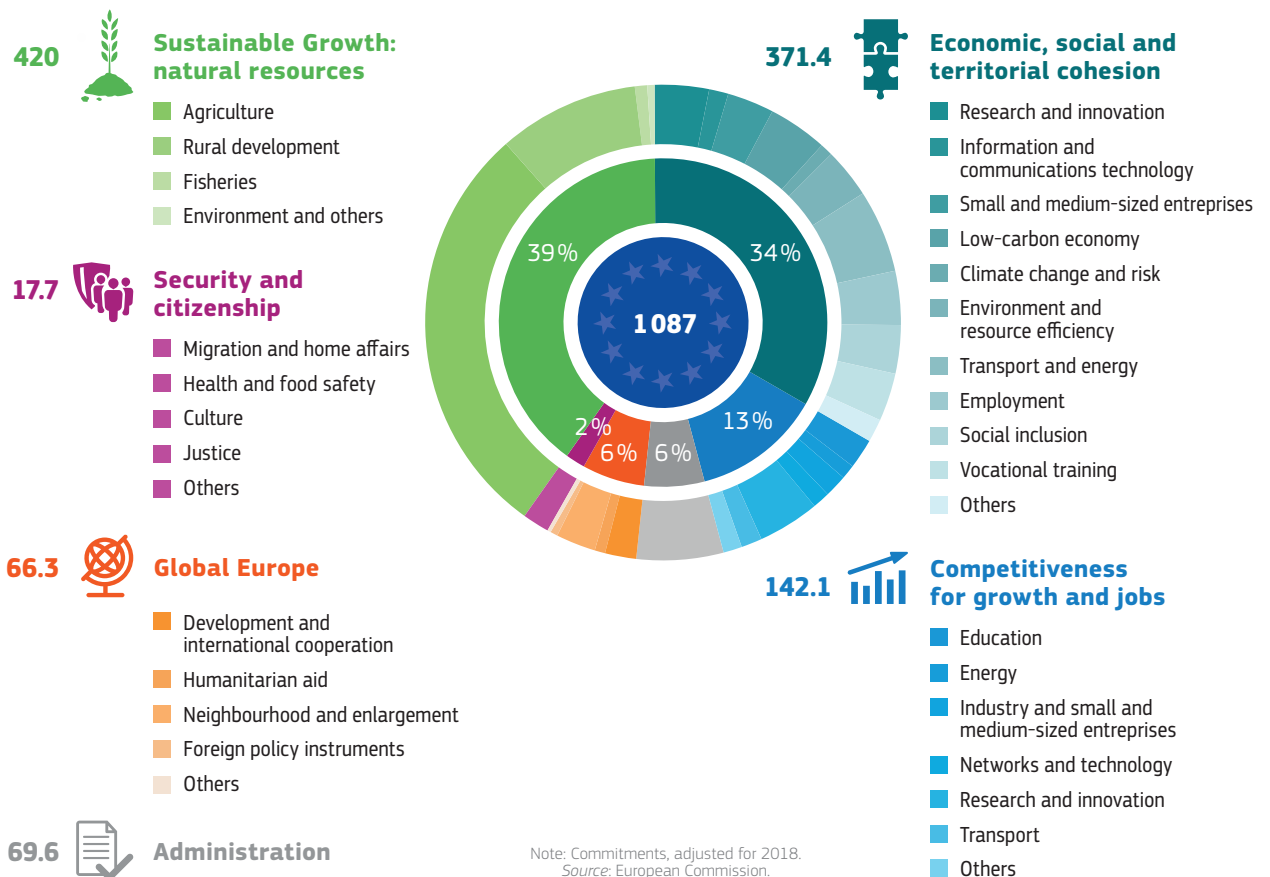
4 TAKING ACTION: THE EU'S BUDGET

The EU agrees long-term spending plans – the multiannual financial framework – which provide a stable basis for implementing the budget over a period of at least 5 years. The multiannual financial framework allows the EU to complement national budgets by funding policies with added EU value. The current multiannual financial framework covers the 2014-2020 period and allows the EU to invest around € 1 trillion over that period in the five areas of EU activities.

The multiannual financial framework lays down the maximum annual amounts (ceilings) that the EU may spend in different categories of expenditure (headings). The EU's annual budget is decided jointly by the Parliament and the Council of the European Union. The Parliament debates it in two successive readings, and it comes into force when it has been signed by the President of the Parliament. The Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control monitors how the budget is spent, and each year the Parliament decides whether to approve the Commission's handling of the budget for the previous financial year.
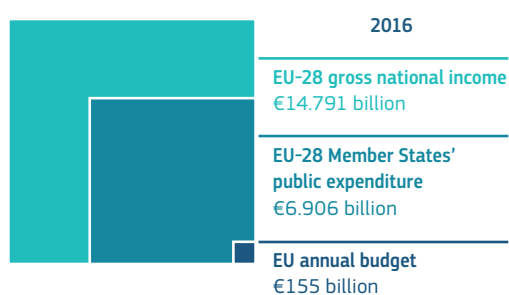
The annual EU budget in 2017 was around € 158 billion – a large sum in absolute terms, but only about 1 % of the wealth generated by the economies of the Member States every year.

Areas financed by the EU budget (2014–2020) in billion EUR

420 **Sustainable Growth: natural resources**
- Agriculture
- Rural development
- Fisheries
- Environment and others

17.7 **Security and citizenship**
- Migration and home affairs
- Health and food safety
- Culture
- Justice
- Others

66.3 **Global Europe**
- Development and international cooperation
- Humanitarian aid
- Neighbourhood and enlargement
- Foreign policy instruments
- Others

69.6 **Administration**

371.4 **Economic, social and territorial cohesion**
- Research and innovation
- Information and communications technology
- Small and medium-sized entreprises
- Low-carbon economy
- Climate change and risk
- Environment and resource efficiency
- Transport and energy
- Employment
- Social inclusion
- Vocational training
- Others

142.1 **Competitiveness for growth and jobs**
- Education
- Energy
- Industry and small and medium-sized entreprises
- Networks and technology
- Research and innovation
- Transport
- Others

1 087

39 % 34 % 13 % 6 % 6 % 2 %

Note: Commitments, adjusted for 2018.
Source: European Commission.

The EU budget compared to overall
EU income and public spending

2016

EU-28 gross national income
€14.791 billion

EU-28 Member States'
public expenditure
€6.906 billion

EU annual budget
€155 billion

The size of the EU budget as a percentage
of gross national income

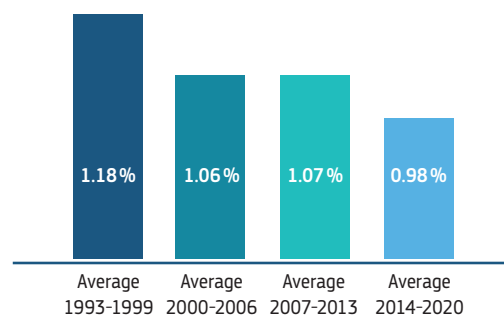| Average 1993-1999	Average 2000-2006	Average 2007-2013	Average 2014-2020
1.18%	1.06%	1.07%	0.98%

The Commission is responsible for managing and im-
plementing the EU budget and the policies and pro-
grammes adopted by the Parliament and the Council.
Most of the actual implementation and spending is
done by national and local authorities but the Com-
mission is responsible for supervising it. The Commis-
sion handles the budget under the watchful eye of
the European Court of Auditors. Both institutions aim
to ensure sound financial management.

Every year, following a recommendation by the Coun-
cil, the European Parliament decides whether to give
its final approval, or 'discharge', on the way the Com-
mission has implemented the EU budget. This proced-
ure ensures full accountability and transparency, and
when granted the discharge leads to the formal clos-
ure of the accounts for a given year.

The main financial institutions of the EU are as
follows.

The European Court of Auditors is the independent
external audit institution of the European Union. It
checks that the Union's income has been received cor-
rectly, that its expenditure has been incurred in a legal
and regular manner and that financial management
has been sound. It performs its tasks independently
from the other EU institutions and governments.

The European Central Bank is an independent insti-
tution of economic and monetary union to which all
EU Member States belong. It makes its decisions with-
out seeking or taking instructions from governments
or other EU institutions. Its main purpose is to main-
tain monetary stability in the euro area by ensuring
low and stable consumer price inflation.

The European Investment Bank is the bank of the
European Union. It is owned by the Member States
and its mission is to lend money for investments that
support the EU's objectives. Its focus is on increasing
the EU's jobs and growth potential and on supporting
climate action and the EU's policies beyond its
borders.

The Eurogroup consists of the ministers of economy
and finance of the euro-area members. It acts to pro-
mote economic growth and financial stability in the
euro area by coordinating economic policies.

See also the following pages in Section 2: 'Budget';
'Banking and financial services'; 'Economy, finance
and the euro'; 'Fraud prevention'; and 'Taxation'.

Getting in touch
with the EU

ONLINE

Information in all the official languages of the European Union is available on the Europa website:
http://europa.eu

IN PERSON

All over Europe there are hundreds of local EU information centres.

You can find the address of the centre nearest you at:
https://europa.eu/european-union/contact/meet-us_en

ON THE PHONE OR BY EMAIL

Europe Direct is a service which answers your questions about the European Union.

You can contact this service by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain mobile telephone operators do not allow access to 00 800 numbers or may charge for these calls), or by payphone from outside the EU: +32 22999696, or by email via http://europa.eu/contact

READ ABOUT EUROPE

Publications about the EU are only a click away on the EU Bookshop website: http://bookshop.europa.eu

EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPRESENTATIONS

The European Commission has offices (representations) in all the Member States of the European Union:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/contact/local-offices-eu-member-countries_en

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT INFORMATION OFFICES

The European Parliament has an information office in every Member State of the European Union:
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/information_offices.html

EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATIONS

The European Union also has delegations in other parts of the world:
https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/area/geo_en