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A YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO

THE IRISH EU PRESIDENCY

FOREWORD

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE AND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, HELEN MCENTEE TD

I am delighted to present this Young Person's Guide to the Irish EU Presidency.

Holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union is a significant responsibility for Ireland. Since we began our Presidency term on 1 July, we have been working to set the EU agenda, build consensus among EU Member States on our approach to important policy issues, and move a legislative programme of enormous breadth and consequence for Ireland and the wider Union forwards.

The far-reaching impact of policies made at the EU level on this country is clear. Since joining the EU in 1973, we have enjoyed an overwhelmingly positive economic and social transformation. Our EU membership means that Irish businesses and farmers can trade freely across the Single Market, and Irish people can live and work across Europe. The EU facilitates global exports through EU trade agreements, opening important markets for Irish products. Thousands of Irish students receive grants to work, volunteer, and study abroad through the Erasmus+ programme. Cooperation at EU level helps us to protect our environment and address climate change, tackle cross-border crime, strengthen research and innovation, secure our energy supplies, and protect consumers across our continent.

Ireland holds the Presidency in an increasingly complex world. Decisions being made today on issues such as climate action, technology, research, equality, and international cooperation will affect you in your everyday life for decades to come. These complex issues will be addressed throughout our Presidency, across the three interconnected Irish Presidency priorities of Competitiveness, Values, and Security.

The EU is not something remote from us; it is something all of us are part of, a shared project that people across Europe have built by working together. Ireland intends to use this Presidency, and our ongoing EU Membership, to help deliver a peaceful and prosperous future for our citizens.

The starting point for meaningful participation in the EU is understanding it. With a particular focus on the Presidency, and the Council of the European Union, this publication is intended to provide you with background information which will help you to engage with the work of Ireland's EU Presidency, and Ireland's broader role in the EU.

I encourage you to engage with the Presidency, ask questions, share your views, and take an active interest in the future of Europe.

FOREWORD

MINISTER OF STATE FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE, THOMAS BYRNE TD

As Ireland delivers our eighth EU Presidency, we will work in the spirit of the Irish seanfhocal *ní neart go cur le chéile*, or strength with unity. This is reflected in our commitment to building consensus and working constructively with other EU Member States throughout our Presidency term.

During the Presidency, we will take forward a policy agenda that will address issues directly relevant to citizens across Europe. Our policy objectives for the Presidency were not developed behind closed doors. Following structured meetings with businesses, organisations, and communities across Ireland, the Government opened an online public consultation. The consultation was open to everyone to share their ideas on the work Ireland should focus on during our Presidency, ensuring that our priorities are inclusive and reflect the needs and ambitions of Irish society.

Engaging with local communities and young people has been central to my work as Minister of State for European Affairs. In preparing for the Presidency, I have been meeting with communities, schools, universities and local organisations to hear their perspectives on the wide range of issues on the EU's agenda.

I am especially proud that the specific policies on which the Irish Presidency will focus reflect the issues that many young people raised directly with me in classrooms around Ireland. Our programme includes a strong focus on educational mobility through Erasmus+, the responsible development of artificial intelligence, climate action, equality and inclusion, youth participation, and making the online world safer for children and young people.

The Presidency is an important opportunity to strengthen the links that communities across Ireland have with our European partners. The county pairings initiative sees Irish counties linked with other EU Member States, creating opportunities to build direct European connections and relationships.

This publication is a demonstration of the commitment the Irish Presidency has to engaging with young people, and providing space for young people to develop their own perspectives on the EU. Children in primary school will also be given the opportunity to learn about the EU through a children's version of the Presidency Policy Programme.

A particularly exciting part of the 2026 Presidency is that it is the first Irish Presidency since Irish became a fully-operational working language of the EU in January 2022. We are proud to promote the use of Irish throughout our EU Presidency.

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EU INSTITUTIONS EXPLAINED

The EU has seven institutions. There are four main decision-making institutions which collectively provide the EU with policy direction and play different roles in the process of making European laws:

FOUR MAIN DECISION-MAKING INSTITUTIONS

- The European Parliament
- The European Commission
- The European Council
- The Council of the European Union

THERE ARE THREE OTHER INSTITUTIONS

- The Court of Justice of the European Union
- The European Central Bank
- The European Court of Auditors

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

WHAT IS IT?

The European Parliament represents the citizens of EU countries. The 720 Members of the European Parliament (known as MEPs) are directly elected by voters in all Member States. Elections take place every five years.

WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Parliament takes decisions on European laws jointly with the Council of the European Union. It also approves the EU budget. MEPs also vote on the appointment of the President of the European Commission, and the College of Commissioners.

HOW DOES IT DO IT?

MEPs debate and vote on EU legislation, and adopt legislation together with the Council of the European Union. The Parliament's work comprises two main stages:

1. Committees - to prepare legislation.

The Parliament has numerous committees, 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 a bill. These issues are also debated within the political groups.

2. Plenary sessions – to pass legislation.

This is when all the MEPs gather in the chamber to give a final vote on the proposed legislation and the proposed amendments.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

WHAT IS IT?

The European Commission is responsible for proposing and enforcing EU legislation as well as implementing European policies and the EU budget.

WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Commission:

- Proposes new laws for adoption by the Parliament and the Council of the European Union
- Manages EU policies and allocates EU funding
- Enforces EU law
- Represents the EU internationally in many areas of policy

HOW DOES IT DO IT?

Political leadership is provided by a team of 27 Commissioners (one from each EU country), including the Commission President, who decides who is responsible for which policy area.

Ursula von der Leyen is the Commission President

Michael McGrath is the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, Rule of Law, and Consumer Protection

Glenn Micallef is the Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport

The Commission takes its decisions based on collective responsibility. All Commissioners are equal in the decision-making process, and are equally accountable for these decisions.

THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

WHAT IS IT?

The European Council brings together EU Leaders to set the EU's political agenda. The European Council is made up of the Heads of State or Government of all EU countries, the European Council President, and the European Commission President.

European Council President António Costa

- Term started 1 December 2024
- Elected for a term of two and a half years, renewable once

As Ireland's Head of Government, the **Taoiseach** represents Ireland at the European Council

WHAT DOES IT DO?

The European Council:

- Sets the EU's overall strategic direction and political priorities (it does not pass laws)
- It deals with complex or sensitive issues that cannot be resolved at lower levels
- Nominates and appoints candidates to certain significant EU roles, such as the Presidents of the European Central Bank and the Commission

HOW DOES IT DO IT?

The European Council usually meets four times a year, chaired by the President of the European Council – but the President can arrange additional meetings to address urgent issues.

At the end of each meeting, European leaders adopt "European Council Conclusions".

These conclusions detail what was discussed by leaders, and set out the shared views of EU leaders on these topics.

The European Council does not pass laws, but European Council Conclusions guide the EU's policy agenda.

European Council Conclusions are used to identify specific issues of concern for the EU and outline particular actions to take or goals to reach.

European Council Conclusions can also set a deadline for reaching agreement on a particular item or for the presentation of a legislative proposal.

WHAT IS THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION?

WHAT IS IT?

The Council of the European Union is the body where Ministers from the 27 EU Member States meet to negotiate and adopt EU laws and coordinate policies. In practice, national Ministers meet in the Council in different thematic groups, known as 'Council Configurations'.

Each Member State takes a turn to chair the Council for six months. This is the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, commonly known as the "EU Presidency".

WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Council has five main tasks:

- Negotiating and adopting EU legislation
- Adopting the EU budget
- Coordinating Member States' policies
- Developing the EU's common foreign and security policy
- Concluding international agreements on behalf of the EU

HOW DOES IT DO IT?

Representatives from the EU Member States come together in the Council of the European Union at three different levels to shape policies and adopt laws. Decisions happen in a three-step process:

1. **Working Groups:** National experts examine the more technical aspects of draft legislation. More than 150 Working Groups do preparatory work for Coreper.

2. **Coreper:** Coreper Ambassadors work to reach agreement on proposals where Member States have different opinions or positions. They do preparatory work for the Council.

3. **Council:** Delivering on these tasks requires teamwork and compromise. In the Council, the 27 Ministers work together to find EU-level solutions that deliver benefits for the EU as a whole, and for their respective countries.

DID YOU KNOW?

'Coreper' stands for ***"Committee of the Permanent Representatives"*** in French. It is made up of Member State Ambassadors to the EU. There are two Corepers focusing on different Council Configurations, with an Ambassador from all 27 Member States participating in each.

Aingeal O'Donoghue
Ireland's Permanent Representative
Coreper II Ambassador

Cáit Moran
Ireland's Deputy Permanent Representative
Coreper I Ambassador

WHAT ARE THE COUNCIL CONFIGURATIONS?

Each Council meeting has a meeting agenda that lists items to be discussed or decided.

Some Council configurations meet every month, some three to four times a year, and some on an ad-hoc basis (now and again, as needed).

70 to 80 Council meetings are held every year. Most meetings last for a full day, although some are half-days and some are two-day sessions.

Council meetings take place in Brussels (in January, February, March, May, July, August, September, November, December) and Luxembourg (in April, June, and October).

Informal Council meetings usually happen in the EU country holding the EU Presidency. These informal meetings are an opportunity for Ministers to meet and discuss strategic issues in an open format.

THE COUNCIL CALENDAR IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2026

40

Council Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg

22

Informal Meetings in Ireland

Meetings of the Council are grouped according to specific policy areas or themes.

These Council meetings are attended by the relevant Minister from every EU Member State, and chaired by the Presidency. During the Irish Presidency, Irish Ministers will chair most of the meetings. They will be responsible for setting the agenda, inviting others to speak, and working to bring everyone to agreement on the topics covered by the Council.

WHAT IS THE EU PRESIDENCY

The Council works every day in the interests of the 450 million people living in the EU.

The Council doesn't have a single permanent leader. Instead, each EU Member State takes a turn to hold the Presidency for six months (January to June, or July to December).

With every EU country taking a turn, everyone becomes responsible for making sure the European agenda can move forwards.

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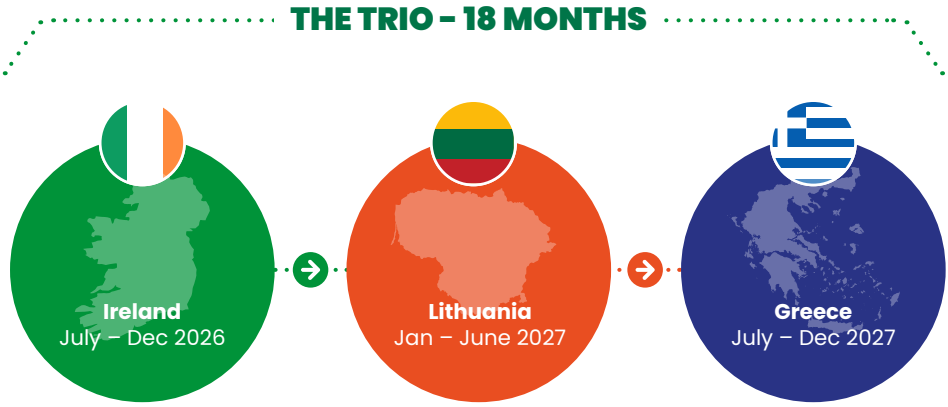
Reaching consensus across 27 countries isn't easy: the Presidency's role is to bring everyone together, and ensure that the Council can reach agreement on policies and legislation.

WHAT DOES THE PRESIDENCY DO?

- The Presidency plans, coordinates, and chairs meetings
- The Presidency acts as an **'honest broker'*** in discussions, suggesting compromises to reach an agreement
- The Presidency represents the Council in talks with other EU Institutions like the European Parliament and the European Commission
- The Presidency negotiates on behalf of the Council to reach agreement on potential new legislation
- The Presidency helps to inform the public about what the Council is doing

*An honest broker is someone who stays neutral and helps different sides reach a fair agreement

Team work is critical to the work of the EU generally, and when it comes to the Presidency, EU Member States also work in groups of threes, known as the 'Trio'. Ireland's trio is made up of:



The Trio works together over 18 months to ensure continuity, stability, and teamwork in the work of the EU.

WHY IS THE PRESIDENCY IMPORTANT?

Since 1973, Ireland's EU Membership has had a transformative and positive impact on many aspects of Irish society, and life in Ireland.

Change doesn't happen by itself - the EU is a democracy, which Member States work at every day. The EU is a collection of 27 diverse countries that work together to find agreements that address the needs of the Union as a whole – not just one, or a few, Member States.

The role of the Presidency is part of this EU commitment to teamwork and compromise among Member States. Taking on the Presidency is part and parcel of being in the EU – it is an opportunity for each EU Member State to take centre stage, to make sure all voices are heard, but it is also a major responsibility and undertaking.

The EU Presidency puts the Presidency Member State at the centre of Europe's political attention. Ireland is responsible for setting the EU agenda, bringing people together, and responding to the challenges that may arise during these six months.

Remember, the Presidency acts as an honest broker. The Irish Presidency Priorities set out what Ireland hopes to achieve for Europe as a whole during the Presidency. Irish Ministers will therefore be responsible for making sure everybody works together at the Council meetings, to deliver meaningful impact for the 450+ million people who live across the European Union.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The EU and Me Competition

This guide is a tool to help you learn more about the work of the Presidency and the Council of the European Union. One way to use this guide to better understand Ireland's Presidency is to put it into practice.

This guide was developed with the help of Seanad na nÓg's Youth Advisory Group, who were consulted on the language and design to make sure that young people could engage with the Presidency and the EU in general.

During the Presidency, the EU and Me competition is open to entries from students in first to third year or Transition Year in post-primary schools, as well as to students in primary schools and other educational settings in Ireland.

Working in groups of at least four, young people are invited to connect issues in their local area to the work of the Council, using this Guide as well as the Presidency Policy Programme as a starting point for their research.

In addition to prizes, winners will be invited to present their projects, and action plans to address the relevant issues, to key EU policy-makers at a special event in Dublin.

The competition will run during the first half of the school year, and be advertised on the social media channels and website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Winners will be notified in December, with a special awards ceremony and youth participation day to be organised in early 2027.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The Presidency Cultural Programme

Ireland's 8th EU Presidency is an important moment for Ireland to play its part in the European Union. While Irish Ministers and officials (civil servants) will chair negotiations across dozens of policy areas at meetings in Brussels, Luxembourg, and Ireland, the Presidency is also an opportunity for communities across Ireland to engage with the EU.

Ireland's Presidency Cultural Programme Cultúr 2026: Sharing Ireland's Culture has been designed around creativity, collaboration, and exchange between Ireland and the wider European family. Public events that are open to all will run all over Ireland, and the full calendar is available online: **Cultúr 2026 - Sharing Ireland's Culture**

The County Pairings Initiative

As part of the EU Presidency County Pairings initiative, Ambassadors of EU Member States in Ireland, together with Irish Ambassadors accredited to those countries, are visiting schools, libraries, and communities across Ireland. Local authorities and community groups are also putting on events in their own areas to celebrate Ireland's EU Presidency, as well as their specific pairings, fostering deeper understanding and friendship.

COUNTY/MEMBER STATE PAIRINGS

County	EU Member State
Carlow	Luxembourg
Cavan	Latvia
Clare	Croatia
Cork	France
Donegal	Poland
Dublin	Greece
Galway	Estonia
Kerry	Czech Republic
Kildare	Austria
Kilkenny	Romania
Laois	Malta
Leitrim	Cyprus
Limerick	Germany
Longford	Hungary
Louth	Portugal
Mayo	Netherlands
Meath	Italy
Monaghan	Finland
Offaly	Belgium
Roscommon	Slovenia
Sligo	Lithuania
Tipperary	Bulgaria
Waterford	Denmark
Westmeath	Sweden
Wexford	Slovakia
Wicklow	Spain

IRELAND'S PRESIDENCY PRIORITIES

To deliver a successful Presidency across the broad range of policies discussed at the Council, it is essential to have a plan or strategy. Ireland's Presidency priorities were published on 10 June 2026.

Three interconnecting, overarching priorities are guiding the work of the Presidency. Throughout the Presidency, each Council meeting will work with these ideas in mind to deliver policies and improvements for citizens across the EU.

COMPETITIVENESS

In order to deliver a secure economic future, which meets the needs and expectations of its people, Europe must act urgently to enhance its competitiveness and productivity. The One Europe, One Market Roadmap, agreed by the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament, provides a blueprint to achieve decisive progress in 2026. The Roadmap's objectives are core priorities for the Irish Presidency.

VALUES

Our Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Our shared values, including those contained in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are the bedrock which makes Europe a good place to live and work, and they underpin our competitiveness and our security.

SECURITY

Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, the conflicts in the Middle East and the Gulf, and the evolution of new threats and new forms of warfare present serious challenges. We must work together to address these challenges, which have highlighted the need for Europe to invest in all dimensions of our own security and develop our defence capabilities.

HOW WERE IRELAND'S PRESIDENCY PRIORITIES DEVELOPED?

The breadth and depth of the work of the Council means it requires very detailed planning. On 10 June 2026, Ireland published its official Presidency programme. This document explains how Ireland, as Presidency, will guide negotiations, broker agreement among Member States, and help develop EU legislation.

To prepare for the Presidency, the Government undertook a public consultation to listen to people's views on what Ireland's Presidency priorities and policy programme should cover.

This included an online public consultation opened in November 2025, asking people to respond to five guiding questions. Over 480 submissions were received, bringing diverse perspectives from across Irish society on the EU and policy areas that should be given particular attention during Ireland's Presidency.

Approximately 10% of respondents worked in education or academia, and education and youth were mentioned consistently in responses, with references to Erasmus, youth mobility, early schooling and third-level education and opportunities for young people appearing frequently.

480+

SUBMISSIONS
received through the public consultation

10%

of respondents
came from the academia/ research sector with education and youth mentioned frequently

The 2025 session of Seanad na nÓg (Ireland's youth senate) gathered 55 youth delegates to discuss Ireland's Presidency and potential priorities. Seven key priority topics emerged through online and in-person discussion:

1. **Peace and Security**
2. **Climate Action**
3. **Education and Youth**
4. **Cost of Living**
5. **Substance Misuse**
6. **Children in Care**
7. **Equality**

> *This experience proved that when young people are given a seat at the table, they can make a meaningful contribution to Ireland's future in Europe.*
>
> **Joshua, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown, Youth Advisory Group Delegate**

Youth delegates presented these topics in the Seanad chamber on 17 November and voted on them, with equality and cost of living being selected as the top two priorities.

Since June 2025, the Minister of State for European Affairs and Defence has visited communities around Ireland to discuss the Presidency. These visits have been an opportunity for young people and communities to ask questions and express their views.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (GAC)

The General Affairs Council works on cross-cutting EU policies like enlargement, the EU's long-term budget known as the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the rule of law and the simplification of EU rules, as well as relations with the UK and other non-EU countries in Europe. It coordinates and prepares meetings of EU leaders at the European Council.

GAC (General)

Areas of Responsibility: Cross-cutting policies like enlargement, the rule of law, the MFF, relations with the UK

Chaired by: Thomas Byrne TD, Minister of State for European Affairs and Defence

Lead Department: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Meeting in Ireland:
3 – 4 September, Dublin

Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg:
14 July, 22 September, 13 October, 19 November, 15 December

GAC (Cohesion)

Areas of Responsibility: Policies to reduce economic, territorial and social disparities across the EU and monitoring cohesion funding

Chaired by: Jack Chambers TD, Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation

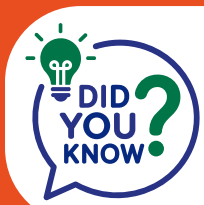
Lead Department: Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation

Meeting in Ireland:
14 – 15 September, Dublin

Meeting in Brussels:
23 November

WHAT DOES THE GAC WORK ON:

- **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) -** GAC Ministers are responsible for negotiating the EU's next long-term budget. The MFF will provide funding for EU policies and priorities from 2028 to 2034.
- **EU Enlargement -** Candidate countries for EU membership are required to align their laws and regulations with the EU in order to join. The GAC supervises this process.
- **Rule of Law -** The GAC works to ensure that the rule of law is upheld across Europe, making sure public authorities follow the law and that everyone is treated equally before the law.
- **Democracy and Political Participation -** The GAC is responsible for European democratic resilience, protecting democratic values, promoting free and fair elections, and countering antidemocratic influences.
- **The EU's relationship with the UK and others -** The GAC manages the EU's relationship with the UK since the UK left the EU in 2020 as well as other non-EU countries in Europe, like Switzerland, Norway and Iceland.
- **Cohesion -** This separate grouping (GAC Cohesion) works to reduce major economic, territorial and social differences between different parts of the EU, representing more than one third of the entire current EU budget.



In June 2026, European leaders called on the Irish Presidency to take forward work on the MFF in an effort to reach a timely agreement. The Irish Presidency will work to bring it closer to agreement.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL (FAC)

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) is responsible for the EU's foreign policy, decides on security and defence matters, concludes trade agreements and establishes international partnerships.

FAC (Foreign Policy)

Areas of Responsibility: The EU's overall relations with the rest of the world

Chaired by: EU HR/VP, Kaja Kallas. Ireland represented by Helen McEntee TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Lead Department: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Meeting in Ireland: 1-2 September, Wicklow

Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg: 13 July, 12 October, 16 November, 14 December

FAC (Defence)

Areas of Responsibility: Security and defence policies

Chaired by: EU HR/VP, Kaja Kallas. Ireland represented by Helen McEntee TD, Minister for Defence

Lead Department: Department of Defence

Meeting in Ireland: 31 August – 1 September, Wicklow

Meetings in Brussels: 28 September, 17 November

FAC (Trade)

Areas of Responsibility: The EU's trade policies and trade agreements

Chaired by: Helen McEntee TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Lead Department: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Meeting in Ireland: 22 – 23 October, Dublin

Meeting in Brussels: 30 November

FAC (Development)

Areas of Responsibility: Development and humanitarian aid, crisis response, and assistance

Chaired by: EU HR/VP, Kaja Kallas. Ireland represented by Neale Richmond TD, Minister for International Development and Diaspora

Lead Department: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Meeting in Ireland: 8 – 9 October, Dublin

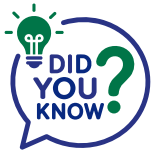
Meeting in Brussels: 1 December

WHO IS THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY POLICY (HR/VP)?

Kaja Kallas is the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) and chairs three of the FAC formations. She is also Vice-President of the European Commission and the head of the EU's diplomatic service, the European External Action Service (EEAS). When it is discussing trade issues, the FAC is chaired by the rotating Presidency.

WHAT DOES THE FAC WORK ON:

- **Foreign Policy -** The FAC works to ensure a consistent and coherent EU approach to our interactions with the rest of the world. This includes the EU's response to crises such as Russia's war against Ukraine and the crises in Gaza, the Gulf region and Sudan.
- **Security and Defence -** The FAC takes decisions aimed at bolstering the EU's ability to defend itself, both collectively and at national level. This includes investment in the EU's defence industry and its military capabilities, as well as building resilience against cyber and hybrid threats.
- **Trade -** The FAC shapes the EU's position on world trade and plays a crucial role in trade agreements with non-EU countries and regions.
- **Development -** The FAC frames the EU's development cooperation policy and international partnerships, including through the Global Gateway.
- **Sanctions -** The FAC works on the adoption of sanctions targeting individuals and entities responsible for certain actions such as terrorism or serious breaches of international law, such as undermining a country's territorial integrity.
- **Human Rights -** The FAC promotes human rights worldwide, sets the EU's strategic priorities at UN fora and adopts sanctions in view of human rights abuses.



The EU is the leading donor of humanitarian aid globally, providing food security, nutrition, emergency healthcare, water and sanitation, shelter, and protection services.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (ECOFIN)

The Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) works to create strong and resilient economies across the EU.

ECOFIN (General)

Areas of Responsibility: Coordinates national economic policies and regulates financial services like banking

Chaired by: Simon Harris TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Finance

Lead Department: Department of Finance

Meeting in Ireland: 18 - 19 September, Dublin

Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg: 10 July, 9 October, 9 November, 11 December

ECOFIN (Budget)

Areas of Responsibility: EU annual budget

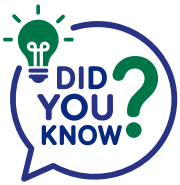
Chaired by: Simon Harris TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Finance

Lead Department: Department of Finance

Meeting in Brussels: 9 November

WHAT DOES ECOFIN WORK ON:

- **Coordinates economic policies -** ECOFIN coordinates national economic policies to promote sound and sustainable finances, strengthen resilience through reforms and investments, and prevent excessive government deficits.
- **Capital Markets -** ECOFIN drives progress on deepening capital markets to improve companies' access to financing and broaden investment opportunities for citizens.
- **Banking -** ECOFIN works to promote a competitive and resilient banking sector that protects financial stability and citizens' savings, while ensuring banks can finance the real economy.
- **Budget -** ECOFIN works on the adoption of the EU's annual budget alongside the European Parliament and works on the EU's own resources, ensuring funding for EU priorities.
- **Taxation -** ECOFIN agrees common rules where EU action is needed to support the good functioning of the internal market, including the free movement of goods and services and combatting tax fraud.
- **The Euro -** ECOFIN is responsible for the single currency's legal aspects, including decisions on introducing the euro in EU Member States. Before ECOFIN, Ministers from countries that use the euro also meet informally in the Eurogroup.



Today, the euro is the official currency of 21 countries and is the second most used currency in the world. The EU is investigating the possible launch of a digital euro to future proof the euro and make sure it can respond to changing payment preferences. The digital euro would complement cash, not replace it, providing a secure, easy-to-use and cheap way for people to make digital payments.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS COUNCIL (JHA)

The Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council works to keep the European Union safe and secure, to protect fundamental rights, and to improve access to Justice.

JHA

Areas of Responsibility: Civil and criminal law, migration, the fight against organised crime, internal security, protection of fundamental rights, civil protection.

Chaired by: Jim O'Callaghan TD, Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration

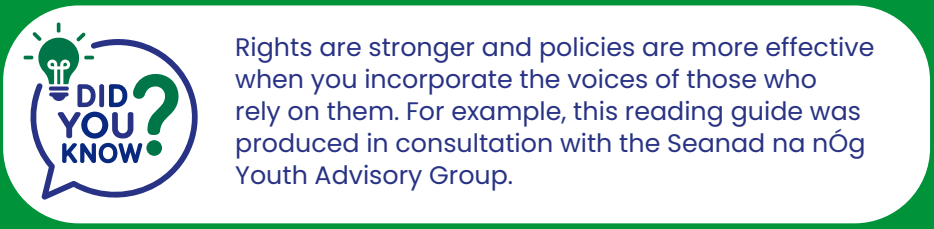
Lead Department: Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration

Meeting in Ireland: 16 – 17 July, Dublin

Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg: 1-2 October, 3-4 December

WHAT DOES JHA WORK ON:

- **Borders and Visas -** JHA works on strengthening the management of the EU's external borders and harmonising visa policies to help ensure security in the EU.
- **Migration and asylum -** JHA develops and adopts common rules on migration and asylum to ensure a clear, efficient and fair approach to managing migration.
- **Criminal and Civil Law -** JHA strengthens law enforcement and judicial cooperation to combat crime, and to ensure businesses and citizens can rely on fair and effective justice systems across the EU.
- **Fundamental Rights and Citizens' Rights -** JHA safeguards fundamental rights and citizens' rights by working on the adoption of laws that protect privacy and data protection, and by strengthening participation across the EU.
- **Civil Protection -** JHA strengthens civil protection, which includes preparing for, preventing and responding to natural and human-induced disasters.



Rights are stronger and policies are more effective when you incorporate the voices of those who rely on them. For example, this reading guide was produced in consultation with the Seanad na nÓg Youth Advisory Group.

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS COUNCIL (EPSCO)

The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) adopts legislation and guidelines that improve wellbeing, working conditions, social inclusion, gender equality, and public health.

EPSCO (Employment and Social Policy)

Areas of Responsibility: Focuses on improving wellbeing, working conditions, social inclusion, gender equality

Chaired by: Dara Calleary TD, Minister for Social Protection; Norma Foley TD, Minister for Children, Disability and Equality will chair discussions on equality issues

Lead Department: Department of Social Protection (the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment leads on employment issues)

Meetings in Ireland: 5 - 6 July, Ballina (Employment and Social Policy); 22 - 23 November, Tralee (Equality)

Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg: 19 October, 7 December

EPSCO (Health)

Areas of Responsibility: Focuses on public health, mental health, health security, setting standards for healthcare access, disease prevention, health promotion and medicine availability across the EU.

Chaired by: Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD, Minister for Health

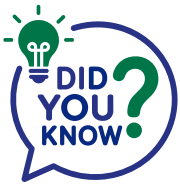
Lead Department: Department of Health

Meeting in Ireland: 30 September – 1 October, Dublin

Meeting in Brussels: 8 December

WHAT DOES EPSCO WORK ON:

- **Equality -** EPSCO promotes gender equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities across the EU, ensuring fair treatment for everyone in Europe.
- **Labour Rights -** EPSCO develops policies that protect workers' rights, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and protection from exploitation.
- **Social Policy -** EPSCO shapes policies that aim to reduce poverty, improve social inclusion and enhance social protection for vulnerable groups.
- **Health -** EPSCO improves public health by setting standards for healthcare access, by promoting mental health and disease prevention, and ensuring health protection, health security, and medicine availability across the EU.



The European Commission has set three EU targets to be achieved by 2030:

- **78%** of 20-64 year olds to be in employment
- **60%** of adults to be taking part in training every year
- **15 million** fewer people at risk of poverty or social exclusion

COMPETITIVENESS COUNCIL (COMPET)

The Competitiveness Council (COMPET) develops and adopts EU legislation that strengthens the Single Market and works to enhance industrial competitiveness and increase growth.

COMPET (Internal Market and Industry)

Areas of Responsibility: Focuses on the Single Market and policies to boost growth and competitiveness

Chaired by: Peter Burke TD, Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment

Lead Department: Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment

Meeting in Ireland: 9 – 10 July, Dublin

Meetings in Brussels: 24 September, 3 December

COMPET (Research)

Areas of Responsibility: Fostering scientific and technological research and innovation

Chaired by: James Lawless TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Lead Department: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Meeting in Ireland: 20 – 21 July, Dublin

Meeting in Brussels: 4 December

COMPET (Space)

Areas of Responsibility: Developing the EU's space sector

Chaired by: Alan Dillon TD, Minister of State for Employment, Small Business and Retail

Lead Department: Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment

Meetings in Brussels: 4 December

WHAT DOES COMPET WORK ON:

- **Single Market –** COMPET removes barriers that hinder the cross-border movement of products and workers and the provision of services, including through technical harmonisation.
- **Industry –** COMPET works to enhance the EU's strategic autonomy and its business environment, especially for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), by boosting businesses' access to funding, cutting red tape, fostering innovation and protecting intellectual property.
- **Consumer Protection –** COMPET protects and empowers European consumers when they buy goods and services in the EU.
- **Research –** COMPET strengthens fundamental, applied and collaborative research, promotes innovation as the engine for competitiveness, and further develops the European Research Area.
- **Space –** COMPET ensures safe and sustainable space operations and flagship programmes that support Europe's strategic autonomy, competitiveness, security, and digital and green transitions.
- **Digital Economy –** COMPET aims to create a digital single market that promotes fair competition between digital companies, drives innovation and delivers benefits for consumers.

Thanks to the Single Market, **17 million people** live or work in an EU country other than their own.

TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND ENERGY COUNCIL (TTE)

The Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (TTE) covers EU policies related to mobility, transport, digitalisation, telecommunication networks and energy.

TTE (Transport)

Areas of Responsibility: Discusses transport, logistics and mobility policies, including passenger rights

Chaired by: Seán Canney TD, Minister of State for International and Road Transport, Logistics, Rail and Ports

Lead Department: Department of Transport

Meeting in Ireland: 20 – 21 September, Dublin

Meeting in Brussels: 30 November

TTE (Telecommunications)

Areas of Responsibility: Focuses on improving telecommunication and digital networks and cybersecurity

Chaired by: Patrick O'Donovan TD, Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport

Lead Department: Department of Culture, Communications and Sport

Meeting in Ireland: 12-13 October, Limerick

Meeting in Brussels: 1 December

TTE (Energy)

Areas of Responsibility: Focuses on the EU's energy independence, clean energy transition and energy efficiency

Chaired by: Darragh O'Brien, Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment

Lead Department: Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment

Meeting in Ireland: 28 – 29 September, Dublin

Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg: 29 October, 10 December

WHAT DOES TTE WORK ON:

- **Transport -** TTE strives towards a better-connected, safe, competitive and more sustainable transport system for passengers and freight.
- **Digital Infrastructure -** TTE wants to improve the EU's digital infrastructure and resilience and ensure that Europe fully seizes the opportunities offered by the digital decade.
- **Energy -** TTE's primary focus is on maintaining and enhancing a secure supply of clean, affordable and indigenous energy to all EU citizens and businesses.
- **Artificial Intelligence -** TTE aims to address the potential risks of AI while promoting its use.
- **Cybersecurity -** To build a resilient digital landscape, TTE works to strengthen Europe's ability to prevent, combat and recover from cyberattacks.

The EU's Artificial Intelligence Act is the world's first law working to address the potential risks of Artificial Intelligence, while also making sure the EU can take advantage of its benefits. It aims to ensure Artificial Intelligence systems are safe, ethical and trustworthy.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL (AGRIFISH)

The Agriculture and Fisheries Council (AGRIFISH) shapes EU agriculture and fisheries policy.

AGRIFISH

Areas of Responsibility: Focuses on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), market regulation, food safety and health, animal and plant health, support to rural areas, fisheries legislation and allocation of fishing opportunities

Chaired by: Martin Heydon TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Lead Department: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Meetings in Ireland: 28 – 29 July, Cork (Fisheries), 6 – 8 September, Dublin (Agriculture)

Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg: 13 – 14 July, 28 – 29 September, 26 – 27 October, 23 – 24 November, 14 – 15 December

WHAT DOES AGRIFISH WORK ON:

- **Food and Farming -** AGRIFISH develops policies and legislation to ensure high-quality and safe food, supports farmers and rural development, and promotes sustainable farming, in line with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- **Fisheries -** AGRIFISH adopts legislation to manage fisheries resources sustainably. Under the common fisheries policy, it regulates fishing and aquaculture activities and sets fishing quotas to safeguard fish stock.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2024, 55,300 young women received support from the CAP to set up farming businesses and benefit from additional income support.

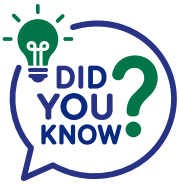
ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL (ENVI)

The Environment Council (ENVI) covers environmental protection, climate action, and sustainability.

ENVI
Chaired by: Darragh O'Brien, Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment
Lead Department: Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment
Meeting in Ireland: 23 – 24 July, Dublin
Meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg: 12 October, 11 December

WHAT DOES ENVI WORK ON:

- **Climate –** ENVI helps shape and implement the EU's climate policies, driving efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote clean energy, and achieve climate neutrality by 2050.
- **Circular Economy –** ENVI fosters a circular economy by advancing policies that reduce waste, encourage recycling and reuse, and make sustainable production the norm across Europe.
- **Pollution –** ENVI Ministers take measures to reduce pollution and protect human health and the environment.
- **Nature and Biodiversity –** ENVI advances policies to protect nature and biodiversity, ensuring the conservation and restoration of ecosystems and species across the EU.



The Irish Presidency will lead the EU's work at UN climate, environment, and water negotiations. This includes the world's largest environmental meeting COP31 on climate in Turkey, and COP17 on biodiversity in Armenia.

EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT COUNCIL (EYCS)

The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS) Council develops EU initiatives to enhance education and training cooperation, engage youth, support culture and creativity, and encourage sport.

While the policy areas covered by EYCS are the responsibility of Member States, who can make individual decisions, EYCS aligns EU priorities and creates Strategies, Conclusions, and Recommendations that guide the actions of all.

EYCS (Education)

Areas of Responsibility: Education and training

Chaired by: Hildegarde Naughton TD, Minister for Education and Youth; James Lawless TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (on further and higher education)

Lead Department: Department of Education and Youth and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Meeting in Ireland: 15 -16 October, Dublin

Meeting in Brussels: 19 November

EYCS (Youth)

Areas of Responsibility: Addresses youth-related issues and promotes youth participation and dialogue

Chaired by: Hildegarde Naughton TD, Minister for Education and Youth

Lead Department: Department of Education and Youth

Meeting in Brussels: 19 November

EYCS (Culture, Audio-visual and Media)

Areas of Responsibility: Focuses on policies promoting cultural diversity, media freedom and online safety for children

Chaired by: Patrick O'Donovan TD, Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport

Lead Department: Department of Culture, Communications and Sport

Meeting in Brussels: 20 November

EYCS (Sport)

Areas of Responsibility: Works on sports policies and initiatives promoting physical activity

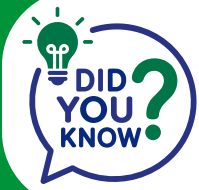
Chaired by: Patrick O'Donovan TD, Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport

Lead Department: Department of Culture, Communications and Sport

Meeting in Brussels: 20 November

WHAT DOES EYCS WORK ON:

- **Education -** EYCS works to enhance cooperation in education policies and education and training systems across the EU based on jointly agreed priorities such as making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all.
- **Youth -** EYCS fosters youth empowerment by promoting youth participation in democratic processes, advancing social inclusion, and supporting the mobility of young people.
- **Culture and media -** EYCS supports a vibrant cultural sector, including public libraries, and works to guarantee media freedom as well as to preserve cultural diversity.
- **Sport -** EYCS supports policies that promote sport and physical activity, emphasising inclusion and good governance in organised sport.



As well as the EYCS meeting, Ireland will also host an EU Youth Conference in September which will gather youth representatives from every EU country to discuss the EU Youth Strategy's Youth Goal #4 - Information and Constructive Dialogue.

FURTHER RESOURCES

If you are interested, there are lots of different ways to get involved and have your voice heard in the EU. The below offers a snapshot of what is available to you.

IN IRELAND

There are eight **Europe Direct centres** across Ireland where you can ask questions about working or studying abroad, pick up brochures about the EU to learn more, attend locally led events about the EU, and share your thoughts and concerns.

The centres are in Ballinasloe, Blanchardstown, Clones, Letterkenny, Limerick City, Portlaoise, Sligo, and Waterford.

Léargas is the national Agency which supports Erasmus+, education and training and European Solidarity Corps. For example, you can find out more information on youth policies both in Ireland and Europe on **Youth Wiki,** run by Léargas.

The National Participation Office offers young people a route to provide their opinions on policies that affect them. Through **Comhairle na nÓg**, you can have a say in what your local council is doing for young people. You can also have a say on a national level through **Dáil na nÓg** or **Seanad na nÓg**. The National Participation Office also oversees the National Youth Assembly of Ireland, which Government Departments can consult when developing new policies and legislation.

The **National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)** runs **Young Voices**, which gathers young people from across Ireland to discuss EU Youth Goals, and contributes to the EU Youth Dialogue. The NYCI also coordinates Ireland's EU Youth Delegates, who attend the EU Youth Conference twice a year, and helps young people access the **European Youth Forum** online community. The NYCI also oversees other youth delegates such as the **UN Youth Delegates** and Climate Youth Delegates.

IN EUROPE

The **European Solidarity Corps** offers youth exchanges, solidarity projects in Ireland, and volunteering opportunities across Ireland for young people over 18. All expenses are covered by the project and you can go anywhere in the EU. **Young people with disabilities** and **young people with fewer opportunities** are able to access specific supports.

Erasmus+ offers the opportunity to study for 2-12 months as part of your higher education (university) in another EU country. You can also do a work placement as part of your PLC/College of Further Education through **Erasmus+** or go on a **youth exchange** with a youth organisation to learn and develop skills.

Discover EU offers 18 year olds the opportunity to discover Europe using free travel passes. Selected applicants who are resident in Ireland can travel by plane to begin their journey in a European country of your choice.

EURES Ireland has a network of advisers who can give you information to help find work in another EU country and help you contact European employers, giving you access to a database of jobs all over Europe. The **EURES Targeted Mobility Scheme** offers financial assistance to EU citizens aged 18+ who are relocating for work or travelling to an interview in another EU country.

Europass can also help you with further information on learning and working opportunities in Europe.

University graduates can work in an EU Institution during a traineeship for 3-5 months. You can work for the European Commission (**Blue Book Traineeship**), the European Parliament (**Schuman Traineeship**), the **Council of the European Union**, or the **EEAS** (the EU's diplomatic service).

Eurodesk is an EU information service for young people and has developed a **guide** to opportunities for people in Ireland.

Every year, young journalists across Europe are chosen to write stories about what's going on across Europe through the **Young Journalists in Europe** programme.

European Youth Parliament also have opportunities for young people to have their say in EU legislation and policies.

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ÉIRE2026.**EU**
IRELAND2026.**EU**

Uachtaránacht na hÉireann ar Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh 2026
Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026