

How the European Union (EU) works

The European Union (EU) is a unique economic and political partnership between 28 European countries that together cover much of the continent. The EU was created after the Second World War. The first steps were to foster economic cooperation: the idea being that countries who trade with one another become economically interdependent and are more likely to avoid conflict and war. The result was the European Economic Community (EEC), created in 1958, and initially increasing economic cooperation between six countries: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Since then, a huge single market has been created and continues to develop towards its full potential.

From economic to political union

What began as a purely economic union has evolved into a political organization that focuses on lots of ideas ranging from giving money to needy countries to helping protect the environment. A name change from the EEC to the European Union (EU) in 1993 reflected this change. The EU is based on the rule of law: everything that it does is founded on treaties which are agreed to by all member countries. These agreements set out the EU's goals in its many areas of activity.

Mobility, growth, stability and a single currency

The EU created 50 years of peace, stability and prosperity, helped raise living standards, and launched a single European currency called the euro. Thanks to the ending of border controls between EU countries, people can travel freely throughout most of the continent. And it's become much easier to live and work in Europe. The single market is the EU's main economic engine, allowing most goods, services, money and people to move freely.

Human rights and equality

One of the EU's main goals is to promote human rights both within Europe and around the world. Human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights are the core values of the EU. Since the 2009 signing of the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights brings all these rights together in a single document. The EU member countries are legally bound to uphold the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU governments must protect human rights whenever they apply EU law.

The European Union (EU) Membership criteria – Who can join?

The Treaty on the European Union states that any European country may apply for membership if it respects the democratic values of the EU and is committed to promoting democracy. The first step to joining is for the country to meet key criteria, or requirements, for being included in the European Union (EU). These requirements were defined at the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 and are now referred to as the 'Copenhagen criteria'. Countries wishing to join need to have:

- stable institutions (in other words, **a national government**) **guaranteeing 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;
- the ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union. In other words, **the country must follow the EU's laws**.

The EU also needs to be able to accept new member countries.

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/conditions-membership/index_en.htm

- Member states of the EU
(year of entry)

- [Austria](#) (1995)
- [Belgium](#) (1952)
- [Bulgaria](#) (2007)
- [Croatia](#) (2013)
- [Cyprus](#) (2004)
- [Czech Republic](#) (2004)
- [Denmark](#) (1973)
- [Estonia](#) (2004)
- [Finland](#) (1995)
- [France](#) (1952)
- [Germany](#) (1952)
- [Greece](#) (1981)
- [Hungary](#) (2004)
- [Ireland](#) (1973)
- [Italy](#) (1952)
- [Latvia](#) (2004)
- [Lithuania](#) (2004)
- [Luxembourg](#) (1952)
- [Malta](#) (2004)
- [Netherlands](#) (1952)
- [Poland](#) (2004)
- [Portugal](#) (1986)
- [Romania](#) (2007)
- [Slovakia](#) (2004)
- [Slovenia](#) (2004)
- [Spain](#) (1986)
- [Sweden](#) (1995)
- [United Kingdom](#) (1973)

- On the road to EU membership

- Candidate countries
- [Albania](#)
- [Iceland](#)
- [Montenegro](#)
- [Serbia](#)
- [The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)
- [Turkey](#)

- Potential candidates
- [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)
- [Kosovo*](#)

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

