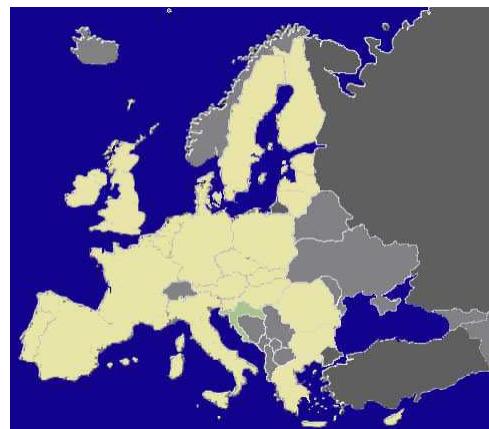


A short guide to the EU

- What it does
- Which countries are in it
- How you join
- How it works
- What it costs
- What it does for me



Fact sheet

What is the EU?

It's a group of European countries working together.

What does it do?

It makes it easier for companies in one country to do business in another.
It gives cash to less well off regions so they can boost their economies.
It gives cash to farmers to help them produce enough food for people.
It sets limits on how much fish and of what type boats can catch so that stocks don't run out.
It helps protect the environment with rules about getting rid of waste and saving wild life

How many countries are in it?

27 so far and there are others who want to join. Croatia will join in 2013.

How many people are in it?

About 500 million

Does it cover all of Europe?

No. Some European countries are not members. These include Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and a number of Balkan countries.

How does a country get to join?

A country has to be part of Europe.
It has to have a government elected by the people.
It has to have a market economy, that is business has to be mostly in private hands and people must be able to own property
It must behave well towards minority groups
It must have laws that people are required to obey and a justice system that ensures laws are obeyed.

Who runs the EU and who makes the rules?

It's run a bit like a country. It has a government, with a parliament, a civil service, a court of justice and a central bank. The civil service, called the Commission, prepares the laws; the parliament and a council of ministers from each of the countries debate the laws and agree them. The court of justice sees the laws are obeyed and the bank looks after the euro that is the currency of 17 of the member countries.

It is now possible for individual people if they can get a million signatures from more than one member state to get the Commission to prepare a new law.

What languages do they speak in the EU?

English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Slovenian, Italian, Greek, Maltese, Bulgarian, Romanian.

What does it cost to join?

Each member country pays in about one per cent, one hundredth, of the value of all the things the country produces whether they are products like cars or services like insurance. Its total annual budget is about £120 billion.

What does the EU do with all that money?

Most of it goes back to the countries in the form of payments to farmers or payments to local governments so they can build bridges or payments to help local companies expand.

What does it do for me?

It does lots of things that make daily life safer and more pleasant.

It does lots of things for the environment to ensure you get clean drinking water, waste is recycled, and wildlife is protected.

When you go on holiday it reduces the cost of using mobile telephones across country borders.

It ensures toys are safe for small children.

It ensures food is correctly labelled so you know where it comes from and when it is best to eat it.

It ensures you get compensation if trains are late.

At a national level:

It provides support for democratic government.

It helps to ensure disagreements among member states are resolved by negotiation instead of by force as they used to be.

It has a system for reducing emissions to counter the effect of climate change.

Why don't some British people like the EU?

They don't like the fact that so many of their laws are made in Brussels.

They think there is a lot of fraud in the way the budget is spent.

People still remember that Britain was once a very powerful country that ruled an empire.

People still remember that Britain fought in two wars in Europe to protect other countries from fascists like Hitler.

People think that because of its size Germany dominates what happens in the EU.

People don't like the fact that there are so many people coming to the UK from other EU countries.