



Why vote in the European Parliament elections

The European Union (EU) takes decisions that impact your life, every day. It is responsible for many important and practical issues – whether it's helping businesses face the financial crisis or cutting unemployment, a cleaner environment or safer food, easier travel or cheaper phone calls.

How can **you** have your say in the EU's decisions?

Through **the European Parliament** - elected to represent you and all the other people living in the European Union.

The European Parliament plays a crucial part in EU decision-making.

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BUDGET & FINANCES

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament played a key part in the creation of the Euro?

The Euro, introduced in 1999, is now used by 329 million people in 16 EU countries. It has become an important world currency. Having a single European currency makes it easier to do business across borders. It also allows you the consumer to shop around by comparing prices in different countries, and to travel without exchanging currency. The Euro area accounts for over 16.5% of world GDP and over 30% of world trade (including intra-EU trade).

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament plays a key part in deciding how the EU budget of some €133bn per year will be spent?

45% of it, or some €60 billion, currently goes on promoting competitiveness, growth and jobs as well as on reducing the differences between the richest and poorest regions. This gap has been reduced by about a sixth between 2000 and 2006.

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament has a decisive say on how the EU spends some €7.5 billion a year on Research & Development?

Right now, for example, EU researchers are working on better ways to protect low-lying land (and therefore people's homes and livelihoods) against flooding. The EU's R&D budget is also being spent in other areas that have an impact on the everyday lives of ordinary people, such as health, food safety, transport, technology, energy and the environment.

FINANCIAL CRISIS & RECOVERY PLAN

- **Did you know** that the EU is helping protect livelihoods with an economic rescue package?

In the current financial crisis, European Heads of State and Government made a concerted decision to support the European economy. The EU's response, approved by the European Parliament, has been an overall economic package of €200 billion. Within this, €14.4 billion will come directly from the EU budget. Small & medium-sized businesses will be specifically targeted as the cornerstone of the EU's economy.

- **Did you know** that the EU helps people in difficult economic conditions?

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, approved by the European Parliament, has up to €500 million available each year to help people made redundant find new jobs.

- **Did you know** that the EU helps Member States in financial crisis?

The EU has decided to provide assistance of up to €6.5 billion to Hungary and of up to €3.1 billion to Latvia. This "Community assistance" is part of an international assistance effort involving the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. An additional €50 billion of EU money has been earmarked for providing further help if needed.

- **Did you know** that during the period 2007 to 2013 the EU will spend approximately €350 billion to stimulate economic growth and create more jobs, especially in the poorer regions of Europe?

Hundreds of thousands of projects are being funded, with the approval of the European Parliament, to help reduce the gap between poorest and richest areas of the EU, boosting employment and competitiveness all over Europe and, enhancing cross border cooperation between different parts of the EU.

- **Did you know** that your savings are protected thanks to action by the EU?

The European Parliament has backed legislation raising the guarantee level on people's savings up to €100 000 in the event of a European bank failing. The existing minimum guarantee (€20 000) will rise to €50 000 by end of June 2009, then to €100 000 by the end of 2010. Customers will also have faster access to their deposits in emergencies.

CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT

- **Did you know** that the European Union has given a big push to promote the use of renewable energy?

Together with the European Parliament, legislation has been adopted setting national targets for the use of renewable energy in generating electricity, heating and cooling buildings and fuelling vehicles. The aim is to ensure that by 2020 renewable energy makes up at least 20% of the EU's total energy consumption.

- **Did you know** that the cars you drive are now safer and greener thanks to EU action?

The European Parliament has approved a number of measures to help make driving safer and less polluting.

- **Did you know** that the EU is helping power plants to cut their CO2 emissions?

Thanks to legislation adopted together with the European Parliament, industrial installations and power plants will be able to use new technology to store carbon dioxide (CO2) permanently and safely underground. This will help them cut their greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Did you know** that the EU has strengthened the rules on using potentially risky chemical substances in Europe?

New legislation on chemicals, adopted together with the European Parliament, came into force in 2007 and will assure the safe use of some 30 000 potentially dangerous substances. It puts the onus on industry to collect data and guarantee the safety of chemicals. The legislation is known as "REACH", which stands for the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and restriction of Chemical substances.

The EU is also encouraging industry to introduce more biodegradable types of plastic for bags, cups, food wrapping, plant pots etc.

- **Did you know** that thanks to EU action marine wildlife is now better protected against the threats of pollution from tankers?

With the support of the European Parliament single-hulled tankers have been banned from EU coastal waters and a pollution prevention project is being implemented to help tanker owners prevent and manage oil and chemical spills.

- **Did you know** that the EU is taking measures under the Common Fisheries Policy to prevent the marketing of illegal fisheries products?

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a worldwide phenomenon and has become a priority international issue because it depletes fish stocks worldwide. With the support of the European Parliament, a proposal to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing was adopted in 2008.

- **Did you know** that there are now strict rules to monitor the quality of bathing water at resorts all around Europe, making it safer to swim?

Thanks to EU rules, developed in collaboration with the European Parliament, scientific tests are regularly carried out on bacteria levels. If the water at a particular beach falls below the acceptable quality standard you can find out about it quickly and easily on the spot.

- **Did you know** that since 2002, the EU has spent €1.5 billion to help EU Member States which have been struck by natural disasters?

The European Union Solidarity Fund was set up in agreement with the European Parliament to respond to natural disasters and support disaster-stricken regions. So far, it has been used for 26 disasters covering a range of different catastrophic events including floods, forest fires, an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, storms and drought.

INTERNAL MARKET

- **Did you know** that, since its creation in 1992, the Single Market, created with the support of the European Parliament, has put more money in your pocket?

Recently, it has increased EU prosperity at the rate of around €240 billion per year - meaning an average of €518 extra per year for you and every other EU citizen compared to a situation without the Single Market. This is a result of less red tape and fewer trade barriers through harmonised rules and product standards, leading in turn to more competition and innovation and more foreign investment.

- **Did you know** that 2.75 million extra jobs have been created over the period 1992-2006 as a result of the Single Market?

The European Parliament has played an important role in shaping the Single Market as we know it today, so that goods, services, capital and persons can circulate freely around the EU.

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament played a key part in bringing an end to roaming charge rip-offs across Europe?

Charges have been reduced by up to 60% when you use your mobile phone abroad.

- **Did you know** that the EU offers a single set of consumer rights, giving you peace of mind wherever you shop in the European Union?

With the help of the European Parliament, EU rules now provide a two-year Europe-wide guarantee on any product you buy.

- **Did you know** that the EU has made it possible for you to choose your utility provider and save money?

The European Parliament has helped put an end to gas & electricity monopolies and has increased pressure on energy providers to become greener and more efficient.

- **Did you know** that the EU is making it easier for you to set up and grow a business as well as helping create more jobs in the service sector?

With the help of the European Parliament, many financial, legal and administrative barriers to free movement, free trade and competition in Europe have been removed.

- **Did you know** that, together with the European Parliament, special regulations have been adopted for toys, electrical equipment, gas boilers, etc. to make sure you and your family are kept safe and can shop confidently – at a market stall, in a shop or online?

EU rules oblige producers and distributors to ensure the products they place on the market are safe, and criteria for toys are especially strict. National authorities check to ensure these requirements are met. If a faulty item is found in one country, a rapid alert system ensures that it is immediately withdrawn from shops across the EU.

- **Did you know** that the cosmetic products you use (including things like lipstick, deodorants, soap, toothpaste and shampoo) have not been tested on animals within the EU since 2004? Or, that cosmetic products containing ingredients tested on animals outside the EU cannot be sold on the EU market?

With the support of the European Parliament, the EU has banned animal testing of cosmetic products and their ingredients on its territory as well as the marketing of products whose ingredients could have been tested on animals elsewhere. You will therefore be able to rest assured that, thanks to EU rules and the European Parliament, no animal in an EU country has suffered in order for you to look or smell good.

- **Did you know** that the EU protects your children from excessive advertising?

Recent legislation adopted together with the European Parliament introduces strict new rules for audiovisual commercials aimed at children, also in on-demand audiovisual media services and for product placement. Product placement against payment is prohibited in all children's programmes. Children's programmes longer than half an hour can only be interrupted once every 30 minutes for television advertising.

These common rules also make it possible to view channels across borders without a country block because of infringement of its advertising laws.

- **Did you know** that thanks to the EU, there is now a single emergency number for the whole of Europe?

The European Parliament together with the Commission has ensured that since January 2009 you can reach the emergency services by dialing 112 anywhere in the EU.

TRANSPORT

- **Did you know** that there can be no more 'hidden' charges on your plane ticket, so you know exactly how much you have to pay?

Thanks to a regulation adopted together with the European Parliament, you can now see at a glance the total price of your ticket. Fares have to include all taxes, fees and charges added to the basic ticket price.

- **Did you know** that airlines can no longer refuse you transportation because of disability?

Together with the European Parliament, legislation has been passed improving the rights of disabled people when travelling by air. In addition, assistance at airports now has to be given without additional charge.

- **Did you know** that you fly more safely thanks to an EU blacklist?

Thanks to a regulation adopted with the cooperation of the European Parliament, airlines failing to meet safety requirements appear on an EU blacklist and are subject to an EU-wide ban.

SOCIAL, EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION POLICIES

- **Did you know** that the EU invests over €10 billion each year in people to help improve their job opportunities?

Through the European Social Fund (ESF), established in agreement with the European Parliament, the EU co-finances projects with the Member States to better equip Europe's workforce and companies for the challenges of the day. This is a key element of the EU's strategy for Growth and Jobs to improve people's lives and give them better skills and better job prospects.

- **Did you know** that as a result of legislation endorsed by the European Parliament, temporary workers in the EU have the same rights as permanent employees as well as improved working conditions?

Temporary workers in the EU make up as much as 10 % of the workforce — or more than 6 million jobs. Thanks to EU legislation, they can now enjoy the same basic working and employment conditions as their permanent colleagues. The agreement maintains the flexibility that industry needs and allows workers to achieve a better work-life balance.

- **Did you know** that the EU gives equal rights for both the mother and father of newborn babies?

Under EU legislation adopted together with the European Parliament, both parents are now entitled to three months leave, and either parent can take it. At the end of parental leave, parents have the right to return to the same job, or to an equivalent or similar position. Employers must comply with the minimum requirements agreed by all European countries.

- **Did you know** that the European Commission, with the support of the European Parliament, has created EURES, a web portal designed to help you look for a job in 31 European countries, and to give you all the information you need about making a move abroad?

EURES (European Employment Services) is a network that helps you find a job across Europe – the opportunity to work in different countries all over the EU as well as Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

Not only is EURES a massive job-search database, but it also provides advice and information about living and working conditions across Europe such as social security issues, cost of living, local health and education systems, recognition of qualifications, and much, much more. EURES is also useful for employers looking to hire staff from abroad. EURES has a human face too, thanks to its network of 700 advisers, who are available to counsel job seekers and employers on the ins-and-outs of international recruitment.

- **Did you know** that the EU supports lifelong learning and cultural exchanges for all European citizens?

During the period 2007-2013 the EU will spend over €8 billion, approved by the European Parliament, to give European citizens the opportunity of an international experience through Lifelong Learning. The EU programmes involved include Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci and Gruntvig), the Youth in Action and Europe for Citizens Programmes and the Culture Programme.

- **Did you know** that the ERASMUS scheme, set up with the agreement of the European Parliament, has given some 1.2 million students the opportunity to study in another EU country?

The ERASMUS programme provides students with a financial grant and the year studied abroad counts toward the student's final degree. Similar schemes (called Leonardo da Vinci and Marie Curie) help with vocational training and research.

- **Did you know** that EU supports internet connexions between schools all over Europe?

Since 2005 over 35 000 schools across Europe have joined the eTwinning action as part of the Comenius programme. It allows schools to find, free of charge, partners for joint internet-based school projects. Pupils and teachers are enthusiastic about this initiative which is supported by the European Parliament.

- **Did you know** that EU programmes enable tens of thousands of young people to work and travel all over Europe every year?

1.5 million young people have so far benefitted from the EU's youth mobility programmes; in 2007 alone more than 40 000 young people took part in a youth exchange scheme and almost 5 000 in the European Voluntary Service. The European Parliament strongly supports these exchanges.

- **Did you know** that the EU supports exchanges between towns and villages across Europe?

In 2008 alone, the Europe for Citizens programme, endorsed by the European Parliament, mobilised some 1 million people in cultural exchanges all over Europe, involving more than 1200 town-twinning initiatives from 4000 towns.

FOOD SAFETY & AGRICULTURE

- **Did you know** that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) now focuses not only on the quantity but also on the quality of food that farmers produce, as well as on promoting jobs and sustainable development in the countryside?

The European Parliament is deeply involved in reforming the CAP. Thanks to previous reforms the EU no longer produces food mountains but has a long term policy for the sustainable development of the countryside.

- **Did you know** that the CAP is about much more than EU subsidies to farmers? And that the EU has recently taken a number of steps to benefit consumers directly?

The European Parliament has helped set up a School Fruit Scheme that funds the distribution of fruit and vegetables in schools all over Europe. The European Parliament has also backed the new School Milk Scheme, which supports the distribution of milk, cheese, yoghurt and other nutritious dairy products to all school kids.

- **Did you know** that your food is now safer than ever?

The European Parliament has contributed to the adoption of a wide range of measures to ensure that food across Europe is safe to eat, and to encourage a healthy diet. These measures cover the whole food supply chain, "from farm to fork", setting standards and monitoring animal health and welfare, plants and crops as well as food imports. The European Food Safety Authority is there to give independent scientific advice.

The EU sets stringent rules for organic produce, and stops the manufacturers of 'health foods' or slimming products making inaccurate or unsubstantiated claims. EU legislation on food labelling aims to give consumers all the background they need in order to make informed purchasing choices.

- **Did you know** that EU funds are being used to support research into getting clean energy from waste?

In order to achieve the European Parliament-backed goal of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020, researchers are looking at new ways of using farm waste (such as straw, stubble and manure) as an environmentally-friendly source of renewable energy.

JUSTICE, FREEDOM AND SECURITY

- **Did you know** that it is now even easier to travel around Europe without borders?

The European Parliament gave its support to the enlargement of the Schengen area. The area without internal border controls has now expanded to 22 EU Member States, (i.e. all of them except Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria, Ireland and the UK – the last two having opted out) and three associated States (Norway, Iceland and Switzerland).

- **Did you know** that the European parliament supports the EU's fight against criminal activity, such as catching the gangs who smuggle drugs or illegal immigrants into Europe?

EU funds are available to finance actions by and cooperation between EU Member States, as well as for tracking systems (on ships, aircraft and satellites) to fight these criminal activities.

The European Parliament is an important player in establishing the rules of entry into the EU, ensuring a smooth crossing of borders while maintaining security.

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament played an important role in establishing key principles for an effective policy to return illegal immigrants, while safeguarding their rights? Or that the European Parliament also called for the development of legal channels for immigrants to enter the EU?

The European Parliament has agreed on rules for cooperation between EU Member States to fight illegal immigration. In 2006, for example, an estimated 500 000 illegal immigrants were caught in the EU, and 40% of them were subsequently returned to their country of origin.

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament supports measures to fight terrorism and improve security?

Initiatives supported by the European Parliament have enabled police and magistrates from all EU Member States to join forces to ensure more efficient cooperation at European level through EUROPOL and EUROJUST, respectively. This has delivered concrete results in a variety of cross border crime cases. For example, during operation 'Koala', Europol and Eurojust worked together to dismantle a paedophile network involving 2500 criminals worldwide.

In 2006, almost 600 terrorist attacks in 11 EU Member States failed, thanks to effective EU mechanisms against terrorism. The EU Member States have significantly improved their coordination in the fight against terrorism, partly through the "cooperation platforms" provided by Europol and Eurojust.

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament was co-legislator in establishing measures to detect and prevent terrorist and criminal activities?

The European Parliament has passed a directive requiring telecom companies to retain certain call data (source, destination and location of phone and internet communications) for up to 24 months. This is part of a strategy to help fight terrorism and organized crime. The law also sets data protection standards.

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament played an important role in boosting consumer confidence in cross-border trade by ensuring that consumers have access to justice in their home Member State and are also protected by the laws of that Member State?

The European Parliament acted as co-legislator in ensuring the consumer's protection in disputes relating to contracts concluded by consumers, both in terms of access to the courts and protection by the law.

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament has helped resolve cross-border family disputes such as child custody or divorce cases?

The European Parliament helped to pass EU legislation that ensures mutual recognition of family law decisions between Member States and encourages the parties to use family mediation.

ENLARGEMENT

- **Did you know** that the European Parliament has a say in who can join the European Union?

The EU Member States can decide on whether new members should join the Union, only with the agreement of the European Parliament. Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey are the current candidate countries whilst Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Kosovo are potential candidates. The European Parliament is assessing their progress and will have a final say on whether these countries become Member States of the EU or not.

- **Did you know** that EU enlargement has helped make Europe a safer place to live?

In the case of the latest enlargements, for example, EU support and guidance helped the former Communist regimes to develop into politically stable, democratic neighbours with strongly growing economies.

- **Did you know** that the 12 new Member States which joined the Union in 2004 and 2007 are attractive new markets for the companies in your country, offering unique opportunities for them to invest abroad?

The two successive enlargements added over 100 million new consumers to the internal market. In 2007, 7.5% of total exports from companies in the old Member States went to the new Member States, compared to 4.7% in 1999. Trade between the old and new Member States grew almost threefold in less than 10 years (from €175 billion in 1999 to approximately €500 billion in 2007).

- **Did you know** that workers from the new Member States have actually boosted labour markets in the old Member States rather than, as often assumed, threatened them by taking away jobs?

Workers from new Member States have helped to meet extra demand for labour in the old Member States and have thus made a significant contribution to sustained economic growth.

For example, since 2004 in the UK, half a million job vacancies have been filled by workers from the new Member States. This has encouraged other countries to open their labour markets too.

- **Did you know** that new trade possibilities, increased investments from abroad and new incentives for modernisation have helped improve the overall performance of new Member States' economies since the 2004 enlargement?

During the five years since they joined the EU, average GDP growth in the new Member States has gone from 3.4% to 5.6% and trade in the new Member States has expanded by 16.2%. Average salaries have increased in all new Member States and people are increasingly employed in the services sector as well as in high-tech manufacturing.

THE EU IN THE WORLD

- **Did you know** that the EU is the most important development aid donor in the world?

As it aims to meet the Millennium Development Goals under the next European Parliament, the EU (European Commission plus the contributions of individual Member States) accounts for some 60% of all global aid - or a combined total of €49 billion in 2008. The EU is also playing a leading role in making aid more effective and ensuring that other EU policies such as trade, environment, agriculture etc are coherent with development goals. The European Parliament continues to be closely involved through the "European Development Consensus" established in 2005 between the EU Institutions and the Member States.

- **Did you know** that in addition to helping its own Member States deal with the financial crisis, the EU was first to act, after the G20 Summit in April, to support developing countries in coping with the economic downturn?

A package of measures has been agreed to provide more money for development, to refocus on the most vulnerable as a priority and to make existing aid more effective. The Commission is giving €3 billion toward social spending. An additional €500 million will be available as a 'safety net'. Working together, the 27 Member States and the Commission are much more efficient, making every aid Euro count and serving as a model for others across the world.

Earlier this year, the European Commission finalised a deal which will provide €1 billion of food aid for over 20 of the world's most vulnerable countries. The European Parliament agreed this package in its role as budget authority. And a €2.7 billion agreement was signed with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries (ACP) group covering health, education and climate change. This is part of the strong partnership the EU has maintained with these countries for over five decades.

- **Did you know** that with the support of the European Parliament, the EU is helping promote democracy and good governance across the world?

Every year, members of the European Parliament lead teams around the world monitoring elections in countries where democracy is not yet well established, or is under threat. Thanks to the European Parliament, the EU has a special budget to help promote democracy and human rights worldwide, used for instance to support local NGOs in their work. There are also a range of Joint Parliamentary groups and bodies including a Joint Parliamentary Assembly with Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific.

- **Did you know** that the European Union is the world's largest provider of humanitarian aid?

The European Commission provides rapid relief to the most vulnerable victims of natural and man-made disasters outside the EU. Working with aid agencies in crises zones, it funds assistance that goes directly to people in distress, whatever their nationality, religion, gender or ethnic origin. The sole objectives are to save lives and relieve suffering in accordance with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.

The European Parliament has an important role in allocating funds for EU humanitarian action and in monitoring how the money is spent.

- **Did you know** that the EU is at the forefront of the push to help women fight poverty?

EU action focuses on improving literacy among adult women, addressing gender inequalities and empowering women in conflict zones. The European Parliament has been continuously pushing for an increased role for women in development work, most recently in its report on "Gender mainstreaming in EU external relations and peace-building".

- **Did you know** that the EU is helping people in developing countries get clean drinking water?

The EU has launched the Water Initiative (EUWI) to help give people in developing countries better access to drinking water and sanitation and to improve water resources management. In March 2009, the European Parliament voted a resolution which declares that water is a public good and should be under public control. It also seeks to promote access to drinking water as a fundamental and universal right.

- **Did you know** that with the support of the European Parliament, the EU is helping the Palestinian Authority to improve the lives of Palestinian people and to work towards a peace agreement with Israel?

The EU has committed €300 million to finance reform in the areas of governance, social development, business development, and infrastructure as well as supporting Palestinian refugees. The European Parliament actively contributes to these policies, and holds regular meetings with representatives of the Palestinian and Israeli parliaments.

- **Did you know** that the EU is helping rebuild Iraq?

The Commission has supported reconstruction since 2003. This is helping alleviate the problems of Iraqi people in rebuilding their lives since the war. In 2008, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for an increased EU role in Iraq, and for measures to help Iraqi refugees.

- **Did you know** that the EU is involved in restoring stability in Georgia?

The Commission has agreed a €500 million aid package, of which €61million is to help the people displaced in the conflict with Russia. The European Parliament, which shares power with the Council over the budget, approved this package and oversees its use.

- **Did you know** that the EU protects its businesses against unfair trade?

The European Union defends free trade through its Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard rules. These allow the EU to defend its producers against unfairly traded or subsidised imports and against dramatic shifts in trade flows when these are harmful to the EU economy. Through its Committee on International Trade, the European Parliament is closely involved in EU trade policies.