

Europe and you

A snapshot
of EU achievements



European Union

2011 edition
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A snapshot of EU achievements

Have you ever wondered exactly what it is that the European Union does for you? If so, this booklet provides the answer with a brief glimpse at a few of the tangible steps the EU has taken in 2010 to make life better and easier. Sometimes it is in finding simple everyday solutions, such as persuading mobile phone makers to switch to a standard form of charger. Sometimes it is European laws that give citizens new rights. Sometimes it is battling against continental and global forces to maintain the EU's economic equilibrium and generate jobs. And sometimes it is in helping to restore hope to people suffering natural or man-made disasters, in Europe and beyond. But in every case, the EU is acting to create a Europe in line with the responsibility taken on by its founders to work in the interests of 'the peoples of Europe'.

Everything we do is for the citizens of Europe.

The EU will continue to place people's concerns on the political agenda.

Securing a sound economy and stronger financial markets



As financial and economic challenges peaked, the EU created mechanisms to safeguard its citizens' future



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European Union leaders demonstrated just how effectively they can act together when they came up with a series of solutions to tackle the turbulence in public finances during the year.

Rapid EU action preserved the stability and credibility of the euro. It generated confidence in the markets. It helped member states in difficulty to restore their finances. And it put in place new mechanisms to protect against future shocks. It created an innovative mechanism of more than €500 billion to assure financial stability for the euro area.

In parallel, the EU established strict new rules for member states, for banks and bankers. They are to make financial markets more transparent and to curtail excessive risk-taking, for example via new rules for hedge funds and for bonus systems for bankers. There are also new European-wide supervision bodies to keep a watchful eye on the financial players.



And crucially, alongside the defensive action, it launched an economic strategy — Europe 2020 — which will not only boost growth and jobs, but will also ensure that everyone shares in its benefits.

Boosting small businesses and creating new jobs



The EU promotes the many small firms that are driving growth in the economy and in employment



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Between 2002 and 2008, smaller firms created 9.4 million jobs in the EU. This is more than all the big companies combined. They have the potential to fuel the EU's rapid recovery, both in terms of economic growth and employment.

But that potential needs to be nurtured if they are to deliver. The economic downturn showed that even the best small firms and brightest entrepreneurs can be vulnerable to everything from late payments to lack of access to loans or training. So the EU has taken decisive action to help them develop.

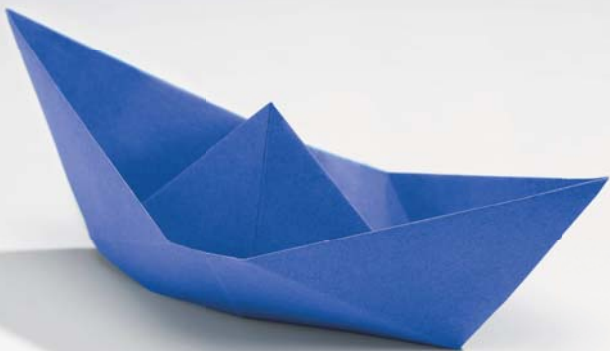
A new EU rule requires public authorities to pay up within 30 days when they buy goods and services. This makes a real improvement in the cash flow that keeps small businesses alive.

A new European-level exchange scheme, modelled on the Erasmus programme that has been so successful for students, now gives young entrepreneurs the chance to acquire management skills from working with experienced entrepreneurs.



And the EU has set aside €100 million in start-up loans for redundant workers who want to start their own business, helping to regenerate employment in areas where job losses have been heavy.

New rights for passengers



Travellers on EU trains and ferries get guarantees of information, assistance and compensation for delays, as is already the case for air passengers



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Ever been inconvenienced by train cancellations? Had difficulty getting an elderly relative up a gangplank? Or were you on one of the many flights that were held up because of the volcanic ash cloud in the spring?

The EU strengthened passenger rights during the year, by introducing new rules about travelling on trains and ships — largely modelled on the air passenger rights introduced so successfully a few years ago. Legislation covering bus and coach travel is coming too.

Now when passengers are delayed, they no longer have to puzzle out for themselves what's gone wrong. They have a right to information, and they can demand it from the transport company they are due to travel with. And passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility have the right to special attention.



The new rights include compensation when the trip is delayed or cancelled — unless it is caused by extraordinary circumstances beyond the company's control.

The volcanic ash cloud in the spring of 2010 showed clearly how important these rights are. Air passengers were able to assert their rights for compensation and assistance, including expenses for hotels and meals while they awaited their flights.

A common charger for mobile phones



Mobile phone makers have responded to EU pressure and are switching to a universal standard for chargers



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Mobile phones are fine — until the battery goes flat and you don't have your charger with you. No calls. No access to your data or your contacts. Cue a frantic search for a compatible charger.

But that will soon be a problem of the past. The European Commission has persuaded mobile phone manufacturers to abandon the wasteful and inefficient system of different chargers for different phones.

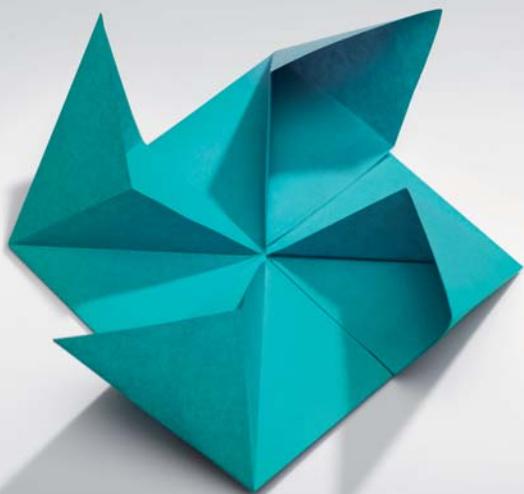
Thanks to pressure from the Commission, 13 of the leading phone makers agreed on a harmonised system for data-enabled phones sold in the EU. The result on paper is a new technical standard. The result in the shops — and in the pockets and handbags of EU citizens — is that all these phones can be charged with a simple micro-USB plug. The result for the environment is less electrical waste.



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The EU action has crystallised industry thinking — and accelerated a process that companies themselves might have taken years to get round to. In addition, the EU has achieved this without having to resort to complicated new legislation. It is a neat demonstration of one of the ways the EU can help its citizens — not just through laws, but by spearheading at European level a common-sense approach that benefits everyone.

Fairer trials



Europeans win the right to full translation services if they are involved in a court case anywhere in the EU



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It is always disconcerting to find yourself on the wrong side of the law — even for minor offences. But it is even more disconcerting when you are in a place where you don't understand the language used by the police and judicial authorities.

This is why the EU has acted to guarantee access to translation and interpretation in criminal proceedings.

The new legislation will help people exercise their right to a fair trial anywhere in the EU when they cannot understand the language of the case. Member states are required to provide the service — and to provide it free of charge too.

This type of protection is increasingly useful because more and more Europeans travel, study and work outside their home country. And even the most innocent mistake can sometimes lead to a brush with the authorities.



The new rule doesn't mean you can ignore the local law when you go on holiday. But it does mean you will understand what you are accused of if you do get into trouble. And you are always presumed to be innocent until final conviction.

Making energy supplies more secure



EU action is keeping the gas flowing into people's homes



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Because Europe has to import much of its gas, it has been vulnerable to breaks in supply, particularly at times of peak demand. So in 2010 the EU took decisive action to make energy supplies more secure.

Partnerships with supplier and transit countries have been strengthened. The EU has built on the experience of the 2008 and 2009 gas crises, when supplies of Russian gas through Ukraine were disrupted for two weeks by disputes between Moscow and Kiev, and some EU citizens were left shivering in their homes.

A new EU–Russia early warning mechanism proved its value when it was successfully used during a gas transit dispute with Belarus in 2010.



And within the EU, a new regulation strengthened coordination between EU countries. Gas companies are required to guarantee gas supply to households and other protected customers for 30 days even in harsh weather conditions. Higher standards for the infrastructure will make sure that the countries may receive gas from other routes if, for instance, one big pipeline breaks down.

Meanwhile, the EU continues to promote energy efficiency, so that it gets the most out of its energy supplies.

Putting electronic waste to new use



The EU makes sure that nature doesn't suffer from
the televisions you no longer need



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Electronic and electrical equipment often contains materials that are harmful for health or the environment.

To help cope with the growing problems presented by this type of waste, the EU strengthened its legislation to restrict the use of hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment and to ban outright the use of the most dangerous ones like lead or mercury. The new rules reinforce requirements for sorting some of the most harmful substances into different waste streams.

And parallel legislation in the final stages of negotiation will oblige companies making electronic or electrical goods to design and manufacture their products to make it easier to recycle their components and materials.

Out-of-date televisions, video players or old computers don't just block up your garage or take up useful warehouse space.



They also have adverse consequences on the environment and health. Until now, only about a third of waste equipment has been officially reported, collected and treated in line with EU norms. The new rules will make sure the other two thirds are taken care of too.

Cutting out illegal timber



The EU counters climate change even in the furniture shop

It might be a nice-looking set of garden furniture, and a very good price — but is it legal? The EU has brought in tough new rules to make sure that only timber that has been felled legally can be sold in EU countries.

Much of the wood used in the EU is imported. It might be from tropical rain forests, and often from parts of the world where controls on the timber trade are not fully enforced. The risk is that the furniture and construction industries in Europe use wood that has been illegally cut so that it destroys forests. The new rules prevent this, through a system of compulsory certification.

This is good for the legal timber trade — particularly in exporting countries where communities that are economically dependent on the forests face unfair competition from illegal operators.

And it is good for the forests, many of which play a vital role in maintaining climate stability around the world. Their disappearance through illegal felling risks intensifying climate change.



In the end it is good for Europeans too. Countering climate change may give them a chance to use those legal garden chairs in a predictable summer!

Protecting children



New EU rules shelter children from harm,
both on the Internet and in the physical world



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Some 10 to 20% of children in Europe fall victim to some form of sexual abuse during their childhood. At the same time, the number of websites devoted to child pornography is growing, with an estimated 200 new images put into circulation every day. The Commission proposed more severe punishment for child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and child pornography.

The new rules also target 'grooming' (befriending children via web chats with the intention of sexually abusing them) and so-called 'sex tourism', even when this crime has taken place outside the EU. The Commission also wants more to be done to protect the victims and prevent these offences from happening at all, for instance by giving offenders tailor-made rehabilitation so that they do not abuse again.



Better protection is also needed for children coming to the EU without being accompanied by an adult. More than 10000 unaccompanied minors lodged applications for asylum in the EU in 2009. The EU countries have adopted a European approach based on the best interest of every child with the aim of shielding them from danger and abuse. The European approach sets common standards for how immigration authorities must treat unaccompanied minors, for example: guardianship, legal representation and access to accommodation and care.

Lending a hand when disaster strikes



From earthquakes in Haiti to chemical spills in Hungary,
the EU moves fast to respond to catastrophes



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Some disasters can be prevented and some cannot — but when disaster strikes, the EU moves into action rapidly to help the victims.

The EU played a prominent role in the international response to the earthquake in Haiti, supplying shelter, food, medical teams, helicopters to fly out the injured, ships that could land without needing a dockside because the docks had collapsed, and machinery that could move around an island whose roads had subsided. It provided satellite images that helped coordinate assistance on the ground, and backed up recovery with work on a long-term development strategy.

Beyond Haiti, EU humanitarian aid has also been provided to millions of victims of natural and man-made disasters throughout the world.



And when red alkaline mud spilled out of a mine in Hungary in October, the EU mechanism for cooperation on civil protection was activated instantly. An EU civil protection team was rapidly on the spot to support the local authorities in their bid to combat the pollution, a team which included experts on protecting flora and fauna and decontaminating agricultural land.

From its involvement in incidents like this, the EU is also developing a new degree of preparedness — not just to help limit damage, but also to prevent and protect in advance.

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The European Union



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