How the EU Works

EU Institutions | Black, Irish and the EU

What is the European Union?

The European Union is a political and economic partnership between 27 European countries, including Ireland. It was founded to promote peace, stability and prosperity after World War II. Today the EU sets laws and policies that affect everything from workers' rights and food safety to anti-discrimination law and climate action.

The European Parliament

The European Parliament is directly elected by EU citizens every five years. It debates and passes EU laws alongside the Council of the EU and holds the European Commission to account. Ireland has 14 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who represent Irish citizens in Brussels and Strasbourg.

The European Commission

The European Commission is the executive body of the EU. It proposes new laws, manages EU policies and spending, and ensures that EU rules are applied properly across all member states. Each EU country nominates one Commissioner.

The Council of the EU

The Council of the EU represents the governments of EU member states. Ministers from each country meet to discuss and adopt EU laws and coordinate policy. Ireland holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU on a rotating basis, most recently in 2026.

Court of Justice of the EU

The Court of Justice ensures that EU law is interpreted and applied consistently across all member states. It can rule that a member state has failed to meet its EU obligations and is an important mechanism for

enforcing anti-discrimination rights.

Ireland's role in the EU

Ireland has been a member of the EU since 1973. EU membership has shaped Ireland's economy, legal system and society significantly. Ireland benefits from the single market, EU research funding, Erasmus+, and EU anti-discrimination and equality law. During Ireland's EU Council Presidency, the country has a particular opportunity to shape EU priorities including around equality and human rights.

How to engage with the EU

• Contact your MEP directly: europarl.europa.eu

• Participate in EU public consultations: ec.europa.eu/info/consultations

• Use the European Citizens' Initiative to propose new EU laws

• Attend events run by European Movement Ireland: europeanmovement.ie