

Let's explore the European Union!

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Are you interested in finding out more about the European Union (EU) — then this unit is for you! It will tell you what the EU is, what its values are, who has which tasks in the EU and how all of this is relevant to your daily life, if you live or will live in a European country someday!

The European Union is a partnership between European countries, known as Member States. Together they cover much of the European continent. The EU is home to over 446 million people, which corresponds to around 6% of the world's population.

Read the following information.

Official languages in the EU

The European Union has 24 official languages. Why are there so many? The EU would not exist without its Member States and citizens. As a democratic organisation, it has to communicate with the governments of the Member States, its citizens, its companies and its public bodies in their own language. People have the right to know what is being done in their name. They must also be able to get actively involved in EU affairs without first having to learn a new language.

Did you know that you can write to the EU institutions in any of the 24 official languages and receive a reply in the same language?

European values

Have you ever heard the phrase '**United in diversity**'? It is the EU's motto and it represents what the EU's values are all about. While each EU country has its own culture, language and traditions, they all share the same common values and must respect them if they want to be part of the European Union.

One fundamental value that unites all the Member States is **democracy**. This means that only democratic countries can be members of the EU.

The other values of the EU that are common to all Member States are **human dignity**, **freedom**, **equality**, the rule of **law** and respect for **human rights**, including the rights of people belonging to minority groups.

These values are set out in an important legal text, called a treaty, which all Member States have approved and must therefore respect. **The Lisbon Treaty** is the most recent treaty. It was signed in the Portuguese capital in 2007.

From six to 27 EU countries

As we have seen, the EU is made up of very different countries. The largest, Germany, has around 82 million inhabitants, while the smallest, Malta, has 400 000. Europeans speak different languages and use three different alphabets (Latin, Greek and Cyrillic). There are different traditions, cultures, foods and festivals.

Did you know?

The flag of Europe is made up of 12 golden stars on a blue background. It was adopted in 1984 by the European Union (which was called the European Economic Community at the time) and now flies above parliaments, municipal buildings, parks and monuments all over Europe.

The design symbolises the peoples of Europe, with the circle representing their union. The number of stars never changes — it is always 12: representing perfection and entirety.

How did it all begin?

After the Second World War, which lasted from 1939 to 1945 and occurred just 20 years after the end of the First World War, people were determined that nothing like this should ever be allowed to happen again.

Between 1945 and 1950, a few European politicians, including Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and Winston Churchill, began the process of creating the European Union we live in today. New structures were created in western Europe to unite European countries economically and politically in order to secure lasting peace and prosperity.

On 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman (the French foreign minister at the time) proposed that the production of coal and steel — the raw materials that were used to prepare for war — should be managed jointly in order to ensure that no one country could secretly arm itself against the others. At that time, coal played the role that oil and natural gas do today, in being the most important energy source available.

The European Coal and Steel Community, from which today's EU emerged, came into being in 1952. It was founded by six neighbouring countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Extended cooperation

A few years later, the six founding countries decided to extend their cooperation to other economic sectors.

The Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, establishing the European Economic Community. Mutual hostility was replaced by cooperation — and this cooperation was extremely successful. The European Economic Community made great strides economically. No wonder more and more countries have asked to join over the years.

New members

In 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom* joined the EU. A few years later, three European countries, previously ruled by dictatorships, had become democratic and were also able to apply for membership. They were Greece, which joined in 1981, followed by Portugal and Spain in 1986. Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, bringing its membership to 15. Soon after the Second World War, Europe was split into east and west by the Iron Curtain as the 40-year-long Cold War began. The Berlin Wall was a symbol of this division. After its fall in 1989, the path was clear for the central and eastern European countries that had previously been controlled by the former Soviet Union to reform their systems and apply to join the EU. In 2004, eight countries from central and eastern Europe joined the EU: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In the same year the Mediterranean islands of Cyprus and Malta also became members. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined, and Croatia became the 28th member of the EU in 2013.

The addition of new members to the EU has helped to maintain peace and stability in Europe and to extend the area of democracy and the single market. Any new member must be prepared to sign up to the treaties and take on board the full body of EU law. It must respect the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

What the EU's values and principles mean in practice.

Discuss with your buddy what you think a country must do and should never do if it wants to be part of the EU:

Who does what in the EU? Discuss together and tick the right boxes!

(Be aware: sometimes more than one answer is right!)

That was a lot of institutional background to take in! However, it is important to understand what so-called Brussels actually is and who is responsible for what in the EU. Take the test below to see how much you remember. Put a cross in the box against the

institution(s) that match(es) the description.

A common currency in 19 EU countries: the Euro.

Euro banknotes and coins were introduced in 12 EU countries in 2002, and 19 have now replaced their national currencies with the euro. More than 340 million EU citizens, i.e. 75 % of all EU citizens, use the euro on a daily basis. There are a number of advantages in using a common currency in a single market where people from different countries trade together. Consumers can compare prices more easily at home, abroad and online. Companies can calculate and charge customers in one currency and are not at risk of exchange rate fluctuations, and getting rid of transaction costs keeps prices stable.

DID YOU KNOW?

Euro coins have a common side that portrays a map of Europe, but on the other side each country has its own design. Do you recognise the symbol on this €2 coin? Can you guess where it comes from?

WATCH THE VIDEO FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE EURO

WHICH COUNTRIES ARE IN THE EURO AREA?

The table below lists all 27 EU countries. Tick the 19 that are in the 'euro area' and use the euro as their currency.

Free movement of goods, services and capital in the EU

Thanks to the EU's single market, it is not only people who can move around freely in the EU, but also goods, services and capital. 'Capital' does not only mean 'money'. It also includes investments, loans and credit, and other operations with financial institutions such as legacies and endowments. This makes it easier for EU businesses to operate in more than one country, and to compete globally. Whatever their size, companies have access to the national markets of all EU countries and to around 446 million potential customers. Why does this benefit you as well? Because greater competition leads to lower prices as well as a wider choice of products and services.

WHAT DOES FREE MOVEMENT MEAN FOR YOU IN PRACTICE?

Match the examples to the four aspects of the single market (free movement of people, goods, services and capital) and tick the appropriate box.

Did you know?

Seeking asylum is a fundamental right within the EU. EU countries have an international obligation to grant asylum under the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

A **refugee** is a person who is fleeing their home country and who cannot return due to a well-founded fear of persecution.

An **asylum seeker** is someone who says they are a refugee and who has made an application for international protection, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.

Discuss with your buddy why the EU can help refugees and asylum seekers and how that can be done. Grab a piece of paper and draw/write your ideas on it.

Done?

Share with the other buddy-teams!

If you want your content to be in the KIDS4ALLL gallery, please ask your educator to upload it in the work.it area.

You already read about the values of the EU:

- respect for human dignity
- freedom
- democracy
- equality
- the rule of law
- human rights
- ...

Discuss with your buddy:

- What does each of these values mean to you? What does 'respect for human dignity' mean in real life? Give examples.
- Which value is most important to each of you?
- Are these values respected in your countries? How?

If you do not know the answer to the last question, do some research, make a survey and ask your teachers/parents/friends.

Have your results uploaded in the work.it area!

What was the thing you found the most important in this unit? Does the EU appear in your daily life? How?

Create a postcard showing this point.

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