



Pivot+

Module 1

European Union its role and institutions



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Pivot

Module 1

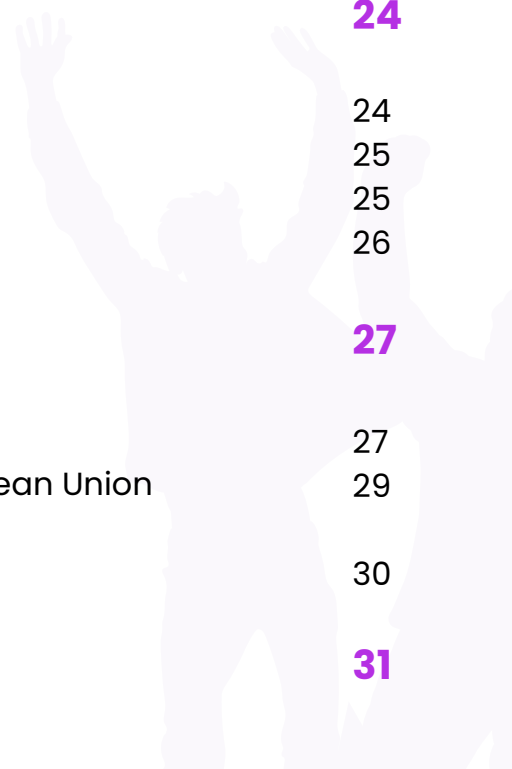
European Union its role and institutions



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Introduction

The general objective of Pivot Youth Promoting Informed VOTE is to foster an inclusive and active citizenship of youths, preparing them at the next 2024 elections. Although the 2019 European elections had the highest political participation ever (increasing from 42.6% in 2014 to 50.6% in 2019), the general trend since 1979 has been steadily decreasing and in some countries, participation was very low with a mere third of citizens submitting their vote. For this reason, the next EU parliamentary elections in 2024 will be an important juncture to evaluate the active participation of European citizens in the European Union. In recent years, the European Union has experienced a wave of populist movements advocating greater national autonomies. Even though the majority of the member states' citizens are in favor of the EU, this development has caused rising extremism, political polarization, and manifestations of an anti-European sentiment. The Pivot's general objective is to increase participation of EU citizens in EU Parliament Elections and general interest of citizens in EU policies through the implementation of a series of workshops, webinar and thematic publications. Through its activities, the Pivot will bring citizens closer to the EU institutions, enhancing their knowledge about the EU opportunities and policies, and making citizens responsible for their active participation in European democratic political life.

Initial self-assessment questionnaire.

Let's evaluate your knowledge about the **European Union**

At the beginnings of the module, you can evaluate your knowledge about the topic by evaluating yourself. Please, complete the following questionnaire. At the end you will receive a e-mail with a score.

Try to compare this score with the second questionnaire at the end of the module:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeshA5TgG_0i8S_eeikjNAVv0_1q613cbPLRz9W3FIJlvz5Sw/viewform



Chapter 1

The European Union: Its foundation, institutions and values

1.1 Historical outline

1950

May 9, 1950 - A Europe of Peace - the beginnings of cooperation

May 9, 1950, marks a significant moment in history when Robert Schuman, then the Foreign Minister of France, declared in his speech: "World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it." These words were not ignored. On April 18, 1951, Schuman's ambition turned into reality, and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was officially established with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Six European countries - France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg - signed the founding treaty of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The ECSC came into effect in 1952, marking a significant step towards European cooperation.

1957-1958

March 25, 1957 - Treaties of Rome

Given the success of the Coal and Steel Treaty, the six founding countries decided to extend their cooperation to other economic sectors. This commitment was formalized with the signing of two treaties, giving rise to the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). Both organizations came into operation on January 1, 1958, marking another step forward in the construction of European unity.

March 19, 1958 - Birth of the European Parliament

The first meeting of the European Parliamentary Assembly, the precursor to today's European Parliament, took place in Strasbourg, France, with Robert Schuman as the elected President. It replaced the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community and, on March 30, 1962, became known as the European Parliament.

1973-1979

January 1, 1973 - From 6 to 9 Member States

With the formal accession of Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, the member states of the European Communities increased to nine.

June 1979 - First direct elections to the European Parliament

For the first time, European citizens had the opportunity to directly elect Members of the European Parliament. Previously, MEPs were appointed through nominations from national parliaments. With this new system, MEPs organized into pan-European political groups rather than national delegations, representing a significant step towards a more direct and integrated representation of the European Union.

1986–1987

Erasmus Program

Despite the abolition of customs duties in 1968, trade between member countries continued to be hindered by differences in national regulations. To address this issue, the Single European Act proposed a comprehensive six-year program aimed at overcoming these obstacles and creating a single market. It came into effect on July 1, 1987. June 13, 1987, marks the launch of the Erasmus program, designed to provide funding to university students interested in studying in another European country. From that point forward, the program had a significant impact, offering over 10 million people the opportunity to study, train, volunteer, or gain work experience abroad.

1989–1992

Maastricht Treaty

In the early '90s, the Cold War could be considered definitively over: the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Germany was reunified in 1990, and the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. After radical changes in the European political landscape, the countries of the European Economic Community felt the need to redefine the structure of the continent. With the Maastricht Treaty, signed by representatives of the member countries (then 12) in February 1992, the European Union (EU) was formally established.

1999–2022

The Euro

The Euro was introduced on January 1, 1999, and became the currency for over 300 million European citizens. The first countries to adopt the euro were Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain.

Subsequently, euro banknotes and coins became the legal tender of 12 EU countries (Greece joined the euro area in 2001, and other countries followed after 2002).

2007–2023

Lisbon Treaty

In 2007, the EU had 27 member countries, which signed the Lisbon Treaty, making changes to previous treaties. The main goal of the treaty was to make the EU more democratic, efficient, and transparent to address global challenges such as climate change, security, and sustainable development. Before its entry into force on December 1, 2009, all EU countries ratified the treaty.

Today, the EU is an economic and political union, unique in its kind, consisting of 27 member countries covering a large part of the European continent.

1.2 Member states

In 1957, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany signed the Treaty of Rome, which created the European Economic Community (EEC) and established a customs union. They also signed another pact creating the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) for cooperation in developing nuclear power.

- 1973** Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom join the European Union, raising the number of member states to nine.
- 1981** Greece joins the EU It has been eligible to join since its military regime was overthrown and democracy restored in 1974.
- 1986** Spain and Portugal become members
- 1995** Austria, Finland and Sweden join the EU. The 15 members now cover almost the whole of western Europe.
- 2004** Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia join EU.
- 2007** Romania and Bulgaria join EU, bringing the number of member states to 27 countries.
- 2013** Croatia joins the EU.

1.3 European Union Institutions

The institutional framework of the European Union is unique, and its decision-making system is constantly evolving. The 7 European institutions, 7 EU bodies, and over 30 decentralized agencies are spread across the EU. They all work together to safeguard the common interests of the EU and European citizens.

There are four main decision-making institutions that guide the administration of the EU and collectively provide political guidance, playing various roles in the legislative process:



The European Parliament

(Brussels / Strasbourg / Luxembourg) (EP) is composed of 751 Members of the European Parliament elected in the 28 Member States of the extended European Union. Since 1979, MEPs have been elected through direct universal suffrage for a five-year term. With the Lisbon Treaty, its powers have been strengthened.



The European Council

(Brussels) brings together the heads of state or government of each EU country and decides on the political direction of the EU. The Council of the European Union (Brussels/Luxembourg) is composed of one minister from each Member State and is part of the legislative process in the EU.



The European Commission

(Brussels/Luxembourg/Representations throughout the EU) is the executive branch of the European Union. This document illustrates the meaning, role, and functions of the European Commission and its functioning within the EU.

Their work is complemented by other institutions and bodies, including:



The Court of Justice of the European Union

(Luxembourg) ensures that European law is interpreted and applied in each Member State. Discover the other important functions of this court.



The European Central Bank

(Frankfurt) defines and implements the EU's monetary policy with the aim of maintaining price stability and supporting the overall economic policies of the Union.



The Court of Auditors

Whose task is to audit and control the accounts and budgets of the institutions of the European Union.

1.4 Principles and values of the European Union

Treaty on European Union – TITLE I COMMON PROVISIONS – Article 2:

“The European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as laid down in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). These values are common to the member states in a society characterized by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men.” [1]

[1] Article 2 Treaty on European Union:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/146/the-protection-of-article-2-teu-values-in-the-eu> and https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2012/art_2/oj.

The European Union is founded on the following values: [2]

Human dignity

Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected, protected, and constitutes the real basis of fundamental rights.

Freedom

Freedom of movement gives citizens the right to move and reside freely within the Union. Individual freedoms such as respect for private life, freedom of thought, religion, assembly, expression, and information are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Democracy

The functioning of the EU is founded on representative democracy. A European citizen automatically enjoys political rights. Every adult EU citizen has the right to stand as a candidate and to vote in elections to the European Parliament. EU citizens have the right to stand as a candidate and to vote in their country of residence, or in their country of origin.

Equality

Equality is about equal rights for all citizens before the law. The principle of equality between women and men underpins all European policies and is the basis for European integration. It applies in all areas. The principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

[2] EU Charter of Fundamental Rights https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

Rule of law

The EU is based on the rule of law. Everything the EU does is founded on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by its EU countries. Law and justice are upheld by an independent judiciary. The EU countries gave final jurisdiction to the European Court of Justice – its judgments must be respected by all.

Human rights

Human rights are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. These cover the right to be free from discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, the right to the protection of your personal data, and the right to get access to justice.

1.5 European Union priorities

The European Council has outlined four priority areas in its strategic program for 2019–2024, which will guide the action of EU institutions over the next 5 years. These areas are designed to address challenges and seize opportunities highlighted by the current global situation. The current priorities of the EU include protecting citizens and freedoms, developing a strong and vibrant economic base, building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe, and promoting European interests and values on the global stage.

1.6 Action plan and the strategic agenda for the EU

The priorities of the European Union (EU) [3] are structured and organized through specific mechanisms, and the general framework includes:

Strategic Agenda

The European Council defines priorities for the next 5 years. EU institutions and countries work together to implement these priorities. The European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council issue joint conclusions and together, these priorities constitute the strategic agenda.

European Commission Priorities

Political guidelines of the Commission for the next 5 years, decided by the candidate for the Commission Presidency and presented to the European Parliament. These guidelines are then transformed into mission statements for each commissioner candidate and presented to the relevant Parliamentary Committee.

Presidency of the Council of the EU Priorities

These priorities, decided by the country holding the Presidency, aim to strengthen the EU and promote its fundamental values, considering urgent issues for the EU.

[3] *European Union priorities 2019-2024:*

https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities/how-eu-priorities-are-set/infographic-eu-priorities_en

European Parliament Priorities

Each political group selects priorities reflecting issues that their voters consider crucial for the next 5 years. There are 7 political groups organized by political affinity, not nationality, playing a significant role in this process.



How it works in practice:

State of the Union and Letter of Intent

Every September, the Commission President initiates the preparation of the annual work program with the State of the Union address and the Letter of Intent, drawing from the Commission's Strategic Foresight Report.

Discussions

The Commission engages in discussions with the European Parliament and the EU Council on priorities for the following year.

Annual Work Program of the EC

The Commission gathers opinions from the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee to integrate them into its annual work program.

Joint Annual Statement

The Commission, Parliament, and Council issue a joint statement on EU priorities to ensure swift action and political momentum to achieve these priorities. [4]

[4] European Union priorities 2019-2024:
https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities/how-eu-priorities-are-set/infographic-eu-priorities_e



1.7 European Union actions and rights concerning: gender equality, climate change, discrimination

The European Union places significant emphasis on safeguarding and promoting fundamental rights and freedoms. There are several mechanisms and institutions in existence to ensure the respect and implementation of human rights within the countries that are members of the European community. Nevertheless, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the conclusions of the European Social Charter Committee affirm the undeniable interconnections between environmental protection and human rights. In this chapter, we will face the policies activated by the European Union for the protection and prevention of rights related to gender equality, climate change, and discrimination.

Gender equality

Gender equality constitutes an essential and a central value within the European Union (EU). The EU is committed to promoting and ensuring gender equality in all its member states. Over the years, various initiatives, policies, and strategies have been introduced to address gender disparities and promote equal opportunities between women and men. Recently, the EU has developed a strategic plan aimed at safeguarding gender equality. This strategy sets specific goals and actions to make significant progress towards achieving gender equality. Key areas of focus include the elimination of gender-based violence, challenging stereotypes, reducing gender gaps in the labor market, achieving fair participation in various sectors, addressing wage and pension gaps, reducing disparities in caregiving responsibilities, and promoting gender balance in decision-making and policy [5].

[5] Gender equality strategy.

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

Climate change

The European Union (EU) is committed to implementing a comprehensive climate change policy aimed at mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, promoting sustainable practices, and achieving climate neutrality. The Europe Green Deal is the crucial initiative that outlines the EU's roadmap to a sustainable, climate-neutral economy. The deal covers various sectors and aims to transform the EU into the first continent in the world to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 [6].

Discrimination

In the context of the application of the Treaty establishing the European Community and the Treaty on European Union, any discrimination based on nationality is prohibited [7]. Every form of discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, skin color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or beliefs, political opinion, or any other status, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age, or sexual orientation, is prohibited. This right is enshrined in Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights [8].

[6] Climate change: what the EU is doing:
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/climate-change>

[7] Non-discrimination
https://commission.europa.eu/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/know-your-right/equality/non-discrimination_enon-discrimination

[8] EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
<https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/21-non-discrimination#:~:text=1,sexual%20orientation%20shall%20be%20prohibited.>

Chapter 2

Living in the European Union



2.1 Living in the EU

European citizenship is complementary to national citizenship. This means that every citizen of a Member State of the European Union is automatically also a European citizen. European citizenship includes both rights and responsibilities. [Articles 18 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union \(TFEU\) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) guarantee the rights of European citizens. These rights are ensured by the European Commission, which is responsible for implementing and respecting EU law, specifically concerning key aspects of daily life such as the right to healthcare, the right of residence, and rights related to family or relationships. Importantly, European citizens have the right to live and move within the European Union without discrimination based on their nationality.

2.2 Traveling in the EU

European citizens have the freedom of free movement within the Schengen area established in 1985, and that includes 27 countries. The Schengen area is a free movement zone without internal border controls. If you belong to one of the Schengen countries, you also have the option to move freely to other Schengen countries without being subject to border checks. As a European citizen, you also have access to passenger rights at the European level for your travels by flying, through internal communication routes (with cars or trains) and using maritime communications. These rights include specific regulations to ensure your protection, although a passport is not required for crossing borders within the European space. It is essential to have a valid travel document, such as a passport or national ID card when traveling within the European Union. This may be required for identification or security reasons during your travels within, to, and from the EU. For non-European citizens, a short-stay residence document, and they must possess two documents to travel in Europe: a passport and a visa. Follow the links below for more information on your rights during travels in the EU.

https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/travel/entry-exit/index_en.htm

2.3 Working in the European Union

As a European citizen, you have the right to work in any country of the European Union without needing a work permit. Additionally, you have the right to reside in the host country, subject to certain conditions. If you decide to live and work in an EU country other than your own, it is crucial to be informed about your working rights and tax obligations, which are guaranteed and regulated by the national law.

Furthermore, the EU provides additional opportunities and support for employment and professional training. To facilitate job searches for European citizens in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, the EU has created EURES (European Employment Services), a network that provides free information and advisory services to facilitate European professional mobility.

2.4 Immigration in EU

The European Union and its member states share competencies in the field of immigration, but the final decision on immigration requests it's up to the individual countries. In areas where there are no European regulations, member states have the authority to establish conditions for obtaining residence and work permits in their own countries. The European Council plays a significant role in this regard by setting strategic priorities.

To apply for a visa or residence permit, you should always contact the authorities of the member state where you want to move. There is no EU institution that manages or issues visas and residence permit on behalf of individual countries.

For migration policies, particularly for more vulnerable individuals such as political refugees and asylum seekers, the EU has established a Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which sets minimum standards for the treatment of all asylum seekers and asylum applications in the EU.

2.5 Studying, training, and volunteering in the European Union

The European Union supports the efforts made by member states to afford a high standard of education and training for their citizens. It actively promotes multilingualism in Europe, supporting language teaching and learning. This translates into encouraging the mobility of students, trainees, volunteers, teachers, and young people, as well as fostering the exchange of information and experiences through specific EU-funded programs. Erasmus+ for Mobility for Study or Internship provides funding, tools, and resources for students who wish to study abroad. For internships, the EU offers young people the opportunity to gain new professional skills through work placements, providing valuable experience for those entering the workforce. Regarding volunteering, a European portal has been created, allowing young people to engage in European volunteer experiences.

Chapter 3

European Union citizenship

3.1 European elections and right of vote



European Union citizens have the right to vote and be eligible for the European Parliament elections in the member state where they reside, under the same conditions as the citizens of that country. Members of the European Parliament are elected through direct universal suffrage, using a process of free and secret balloting.

Through the European elections, citizens of the European Union elect their representatives as Members of the European Parliament. The European Parliament is the only directly elected transnational assembly in the world. Members of the European Parliament serve as advocates for the interests of EU citizens at the European level. In collaboration with representatives of the governments of EU countries, they are responsible for developing and approving new provisions that regulate the lives of EU citizens in various sectors.

These include support for the economy, combating poverty, environmental protection, and promoting the fundamental values of the European Union, such as respect for human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law.

3.2 European Citizens' Initiative

Initiatives advanced by European citizens provide a means of participating in the public life of the EU by urging the European Commission to propose new laws. However, these initiatives must gather 1 million signatures to be accepted by the EU executive body. Citizens' initiatives represent a significant tool for participatory democracy available to European citizens, offering them greater involvement in shaping EU policies that affect their lives. This provides an opportunity for citizens across the EU to mobilize on issues of common interest, promote debate, and initiate reforms by proposing concrete legislative changes.

3.3 Petition the European Parliament

Every citizen of the European Union or resident in a Member State has the right to petition the European Parliament, individually or in collaboration with other citizens, on a matter of direct concern to the European Union. This right to petition is guaranteed by the Treaty of Maastricht. A petition can be formulated as a complaint or request and may address issues of public or private interest. It can include a personal request, a complaint, or an observation regarding the application of EU legislation, or it can invite the European Parliament to take a position on a specific issue.

These petitions provide the European Parliament with the opportunity to draw attention to any violations of the rights of European citizens by a member state, local authorities, or an institution.

3.4 Local Councilors

Local Councilors have the knowledge, experience, and contacts that make them excellent mediators for issues related to the EU in their municipalities, filling the gap between European and local government structures. This is designed to facilitate collaboration among local councilors, promoting debates to provide greater accessibility to a range of services, webinars, and updated materials to delve into EU-related topics. The ultimate goal is to support the formation of a consolidated European public opinion. Local representatives play a strategic role in this unprecedented initiative, involving communities in EU-related issues. They are the institutional representatives closest to the territory, sharing the same language and background as the people living in the area, sometimes feeling marginalized. Councilors participating in the BELC network are essential elements of a European governance that involves institutions, local communities, and citizens, who express their votes in the 2024 European elections.

Activities

Activity 1

European Parliament Simulation



Topic	EU citizenship; participatory democracy; rights and values;
Title	EU Parliament simulation
Goals	Awareness regarding to the EU founding values and principles; EU actions to guarantee and support rights; to increase the participants' sense of European citizenship by comparing their lives and needs
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Step 1: 25 minutes;• Step 2: 25 minutes;• Step 3: 10 minutes;• Step 4: 15 minutes;• Total 90 minutes
Resources	Tables, chairs, pencils, paper, flipcharts
Participants	At least 10 participants, divided in different groups

Description

Step 1

The trainer divides the participants into several groups. Each group is associated with a European country, or they can choose a creative name, drawing it from a list of country or names previously defined by the trainer. The groups separately begin the first session, identifying a topic between gender equality, discrimination, climate change. In the first phase, starting from their local context, each group identify its needs on these issues. They then develop a series of political actions to find a solution.

Step 2

The groups will return to work in plenary, presenting work carried out, through the following steps: 1) what is the problem they have identified; 2) what proposals they designed to resolve it.

Step 3

After the groups present their proposals, each person votes on the other groups' proposals. The group with the highest number of votes wins the election. To create greater suspense, the training that collects the votes will only announce the winner at the end.

Step 4

After the vote, it is important that the trainer leads a general debrief on the work carried out by the groups, focused on the themes, strengths, and weaknesses of the groups' proposals.

Activity 2

European Parliament Simulation



Topic	EU history, institutions, roles, its principles, and values
Title	EU Quiz
Goals	To present the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and enable participants to express their thoughts and experiences related to matters covered by the Charter.
Duration	90 to 120 minutes
Resources	Computer, projector
Participants	individual

Description

Participants should read the Charter before the session and think about examples of breaching personal, civic, political, economic and social rights enshrined therein.

Step 1

Trainers make an introduction on the Charter, explaining its significance and application.

Step 2

Trainers go through the Charter's articles and participants comment by sharing their experience on the protection and breaches of fundamental rights on local, national, or European level. After that, the trainers will lead a debrief.

Participants are asked to reflect on their learning through questions:

- Which fundamental rights were you unaware of before reading the Charter? How did others' experiences complement your learning about fundamental rights?
- Final self-assessment questionnaire. Let evaluate your knowledge about the European Union.
- Please, fill this self-evaluation questionnaire. Try to compare the score with the first questionnaire at the beginning of the module:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeshA5TgG_Oi8S_eeikjNAVv0_1q613cbPLRz9W3FIJlvz5Sw/viewform

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<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/146/the-protection-of-article-2-teu-values-in-the-eu>

and

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2012/art_2/oj

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

European Union priorities 2019–2024:

https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities/how-eu-priorities-are-set/infographic-eu-priorities_en

EU on Gender equality strategy:

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

EU on Climate change: what the EU is doing:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/climate-change/>

EU on Non-discrimination

https://commission.europa.eu/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/know-your-right/equality/non-discrimination_en

Partners



Coordinator
FEMMES ENTRAIDE ET AUTONOMIE / France
www.feaasso.org



CESIE / Italy
cesie.org



People in Focus / Albania
peopleinfocus.org



SAVE A GIRL SAVE A GENERATION / Spain
www.saveagirlsaveageneration.org

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