

Freedom, security and justice for all

Justice and home affairs in the European Union



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Introduction

Among the benefits the European Union has brought to its citizens is the right to move around freely in the EU and to live and work in any EU country they choose. However, to take full advantage of this, they need to know that they can lead their daily lives and go about their business in safety, protected from crime and with equal access to justice wherever they are in the European Union.

This challenge was already recognised in the Maastricht Treaty (1992), but it was in October 1999, at a special summit meeting in Tampere (Finland), that EU leaders really got to grips with the issue. They agreed on a series of spe-

cific steps to make the Union a single 'area of freedom, security and justice'. This means guaranteeing the fundamental rights of Europe's citizens and ensuring fair treatment of non-EU citizens legally resident in Europe. It also means a coordinated policy on asylum and immigration, issuing visas and managing the EU's external frontiers. In practical terms it involves close co-operation between national police forces, customs and immigration officers and the courts.

Slovenia (here, the capital Ljubljana) and the other new member states are part of the area of freedom, justice and security from the day they join the EU.



© EPA Photo / Antonio Barz

Fundamental rights guaranteed

Freedom and justice are highly valued by Europeans, and they are foundation stones of the European Union. The EU countries are firmly committed to democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. But freedom and justice can be fully enjoyed only in an environment of security. This is why EU governments are now determined to guarantee freedom, security and justice for all within the Union's borders.

Freedom is not just about personal mobility; it is also about having certain fundamental rights. For example, the right to liberty and security; equality before the law; freedom of thought, expression and information; the right to good governance and the obligation on EU institutions to make good any damage they may have caused to an individual. These rights belong to everyone living legally in the European Union – whether or not they are EU citizens.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights, adopted in 2000, sets out clearly and in a single document the personal, civil, political, economic and social rights the peoples of the European Union enjoy. The charter is to be incorporated into the new EU Constitution and will serve as the legal yardstick by which individuals' rights are judged and guaranteed.



As an EU citizen he can live and work in any EU country.

Countries seeking to join the European Union must also be committed to protecting human and fundamental rights to these same high standards. Indeed, this is one of the criteria they must meet before they can even begin entry negotiations. In addition, if any EU country violates these rights in a grave

and constant manner, or is likely to do so, it can face sanctions. For example, its voting rights at EU meetings could be suspended, thus denying that country any say in proposed European policies and legislation and cutting off its access to EU funding. The Union has never so far taken such action.

New member states

The European Union's newest members, from May 2004, are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

In recent history, many of these countries have fought hard for freedom, security and justice, and they all cherish these important principles.

As EU member states they apply EU legislation in the area of 'justice and home affairs'. This is based on the fundamental principles of respect for human rights, transparency and good governance. The new members also subscribe to shared goals such as the mutual recognition of judicial decisions, common immigration and asylum policies and improving judicial and police cooperation.

By doing so, the new member states confirm confidence in their judiciary, police and border guards, both among their own citizens and those of the other EU countries.

Being an EU citizen

Citizenship of the European Union does not replace national citizenship: it complements it. In other words, being an EU citizen gives you additional rights and responsibilities. You can, for instance, vote or stand as a candidate in elections for the European Parliament in your EU country of residence, whether it is your home country or not.

EU citizenship also gives you the right to travel freely within the Union (provided you carry a passport or identity card) and to settle anywhere within the Union's territory. To date, around five million people have used this right by going to live in another EU country, not to mention the millions who work daily in a neighbouring country or who move abroad for part of their studies.

Citizenship brings responsibilities too: if EU citizens want to live in another EU country, they must have health insurance and show that they either have a job or enough resources not to become a burden on their new country's social security system.

Hiccups still occur and people can sometimes face lengthy administrative procedures in obtaining residence documents or securing the rights of family members, especially when the latter are not EU citizens. To overcome these difficulties, the European Commission has put forward plans to simplify and update existing legislation, to make it easier for EU citizens and their family members to move to another EU country.

Freedom to travel

Free movement is enshrined in the EU's treaties, but it became a practical reality only once the 'Schengen area' was created. This frontier-free zone is named after the town in Luxembourg where the original agreement was signed. It does not presently include the United Kingdom, Ireland or the new member states, although two non-EU countries – Norway and Iceland – do participate. The Schengen Convention is now an integral part of the EU's treaties.

Within the Schengen area, EU residents and visitors from outside are free to travel as they wish without systematic passport checks. However, individuals can still be asked to prove their identity and member states retain the right to reintroduce border controls for a limited period in exceptional circumstances.

The abolition of internal border controls makes it easier for law-abiding citizens to move around freely in Europe. Unfortunately, the same applies to criminals and terrorists. That is why the Schengen Convention introduced other measures such as cooperation between national police forces and judicial authorities in the fight against crime.

It is also why member states have an extra responsibility to look after their external frontiers. These are the only places where systematic checks are carried out on who enters or leaves the EU. External frontiers are not only land crossings but also international airports, seaports and some railway stations, which are now entry points to the whole European Union.

Ireland and the United Kingdom do not apply the Schengen provisions on border controls: they continue to check the identity of everyone entering their territory, except from one another's territory. However, the right of EU citizens to enter and live in these member states is unaffected.

A Latvian border guard surveys the EU's external frontier.



Rights for everyone

Everyone living in the European Union should be able to move freely from one country to another and to choose where to live – regardless of whether they are nationals of a member state or legal immigrants from elsewhere.

Visitors from non-EU countries may enter the Schengen area and travel freely within it for up to three months provided they satisfy certain conditions. In particular, they must possess a valid travel document, be able to explain the reasons for their visit and

have sufficient money to cover their living costs. Some must have a visa to enter the EU. Visa rules have been harmonised and there is a single list of countries whose citizens need visas.

In addition, a non-EU national with a passport and a valid residence permit issued by a Schengen country does not need a visa when travelling for short periods to other Schengen countries. This considerably reduces bureaucratic obstacles for non-EU family members.

Skilled immigrants are a vital part of the EU's workforce.



Rights for residents

Some five million non-EU citizens currently work in the European Union. They all have rights which should apply throughout the Union, but differences between national administrative rules and procedures sometimes make it hard to apply them. The European Commission wants to establish common criteria and safeguards to protect these people's rights.

The Commission has proposed introducing 'civic citizenship'. This would give legal immigrants certain core rights and obligations, including the right to live and work in another EU member state. They will acquire these over a period of years and eventually will have almost the same rights as EU citizens.

The Union is also agreeing procedures on family reunification. These are designed both to bring families together and to ease their integration into the EU. For example, if a non-EU national has a residence permit issued by an EU country and valid for at least a year, family members will be able to join him or her in that country.

The EU is already coordinating rules and procedures on the admission of non-EU nationals and their conditions of stay. But it wants to go further. It recognises that immigrants can fill job vacancies, meet skill shortages and rejuvenate Europe's population. So the EU wants to help these people become fully integrated in all aspects of economic, social, cultural and civic life. This requires action in policy areas such as employment, non-discrimination and social inclusion. It also means giving attention to education, language training and access to social and other services.

Everyday concerns

To enjoy their freedom fully, EU citizens must be able to approach courts and authorities in any other member state just as easily as in their own. At the same time, criminals should be prevented from exploiting differences between national judicial systems, and court judgements should be respected and enforced throughout the European Union.

All this requires 'cross-border judicial cooperation'. For example, legal decisions taken in any one EU country, whether in civil or criminal proceedings, must be recognised by the authorities throughout the Union. This principle – called 'mutual recognition' – can greatly affect an individual's personal life when it comes to things like maintenance claims, divorce and access to children, financial issues like bankruptcy and unpaid bills, and even criminal offences.

Simplifying cross-border cases

Imagine the following situation. Paola Mennea meets Hans Schmidt while he is studying in Rome – her home town. The couple get married and have a son before moving to Hans's home country, Germany. Sadly, the marriage breaks down. Paola returns to Rome, where she sues for divorce and for parental responsibility for the child.

How would this cross-border case be handled?

Under existing EU rules, an Italian court would handle the divorce proceedings, provided Paola had lived in Italy for at least six months prior to the application. It would also be able to decide on parental responsibility for the couple's child as long as the request was submitted during the divorce proceedings. The EU rules also allow Paola to request, via a simplified procedure, that this court decision be recognised and enforceable in Germany – so Paola would not need to take her case before the German courts as well.

The current rules apply to divorce proceedings (including legal separation and marriage annulment). They also cover parental responsibility decisions, but only if these are issued in the context of divorce proceedings and concern children common to both spouses.

This situation will change as of 1 March 2005, when current rules will be replaced by a new regulation applying to all questions of parental responsibility and ensuring equal treatment for all children.

Civil cooperation

Personal legal problems can be stressful and complex enough within a single jurisdiction. They can become even more difficult to solve, especially when families break up, if they involve two or more legal systems.

Cross-border judicial cooperation is designed to overcome many of these obstacles. As a basic principle, the complexity or incompatibility of national judicial and administrative systems should not be allowed to prevent or discourage citizens and businesses from exercising their rights.

The EU has now adopted legislation on the mutual recognition of court judgments in civil proceedings relating to divorce, legal separation or marriage annulment. This does not yet cater for all potential situations, so the Commission is aiming to extend the rules in 2005 (see box). The EU is also establishing common procedures to simplify and speed up the settlement of cross-border disputes involving small and non-contested civil claims, and it has drawn up minimum common rules on legal aid for cross-border civil cases.



The EU tries to ease cross-border disputes over child custody.

Judicial cooperation in criminal matters

Freedom of movement in the EU is a great thing for law-abiding citizens. Unfortunately criminals also exploit it. Terrorism, cybercrime, drug smuggling and trafficking in human beings are among the most obvious examples of cross-border crime, and to deal with them effectively the Union needs a common policy on criminal matters. EU citizens need to know that criminals can be prosecuted no matter where they are in the EU or where the offence was committed.

Judicial cooperation can help by establishing common definitions of certain serious crimes, bringing different national laws into line with one another and setting proportionate and dissuasive minimum penalties. The EU's aim is to plug the legal loopholes that are exploited by organised criminal gangs: there should be no safe havens for those who commit serious crimes.

When it comes to enforcing sentences and other court decisions, moves are afoot to ensure that orders by courts in one member state (imposing fines, confiscating assets or depriving offenders of certain rights) are implemented throughout the Union. Again, the principle is mutual recognition of national court judgements so that differences in national legal practices cannot stop offenders being brought to justice.

The European arrest warrant and Eurojust

The European arrest warrant, valid throughout the EU from January 2004, is designed to replace lengthy extradition procedures. Suspected or convicted criminals who have fled abroad to escape justice can thus be swiftly returned to the country where they were (or will be) tried. The warrant can be issued for anyone accused of an offence for which the minimum penalty is over a year in prison or if the person has already been sentenced for at least four months.

One of the most significant recent advances in EU judicial cooperation was the creation of Eurojust, in April 2003. Based in The Hague, Eurojust is a high-level team of magistrates and prosecutors from all EU countries, working together in the same building. They have direct access to their own authorities back home and share advice and information with their colleagues.

Eurojust's job is to help coordinate the investigation and prosecution of serious cross-border crime. It works closely with Europol (the European Union's police coordination office), OLAF (the EU's anti-fraud office) and the European Judicial Network – a network of national legal authorities.

Protecting your legal rights

Catching criminals and bringing them to trial is one thing: but a European area of justice must also ensure that the rights of the accused are fully protected. They must have access to legal advice and to the services of an interpreter if necessary. There must be proper procedures for taking evidence, agreed rules on provisional detention and on hearing a case in the absence of the accused. In short, the EU has to agree certain minimum common standards of justice.

The Union is also concerned about the victims of crime. Legislation adopted in March 2001 provides certain minimum guarantees. These include the right to be heard, access to relevant information, the opportunity to participate in the legal proceedings, to have legal costs refunded, to be given a suitable level of protection and to receive compensation.



The EU's national courts must recognise each other's decisions.

Europe has a long tradition of giving refuge to asylum seekers.



Funding practical cooperation

The EU has launched a series of funding programmes to help national authorities, professionals, and academic and non-governmental organisations cooperate in fighting crime at European level. A framework programme on police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (AGIS) runs from 2003 to 2007. It aims to set up Europe-wide networks, exchange information and disseminate best practices in criminal matters.

A funding programme on administrative cooperation covering external borders, visas, asylum and immigration (ARGO) runs until 2006, as does another on judicial cooperation in civil matters. A new project for promoting the integration of non-EU citizens into the Union (INTI) was launched in 2003. Yet another programme, Daphne, fights against all forms of violence towards children, young people and women (from sexual abuse to domestic violence and bullying in schools).

Towards a common asylum policy

Europe has a long tradition of welcoming people from other countries who are forced to flee their homes because of war or persecution. Such people have the right to seek asylum, and the European Union attaches great importance to respecting the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the increased flow of people seeking protection in the EU has led the member states to develop a common asylum policy. This is being achieved in two stages. The first relates to minimum standards and measures. The second will lead to a single common asylum procedure and a uniform status for those granted asylum throughout the EU.

The number of asylum applications in the Union varies from year to year, and can depend on whether there are political upheavals on its frontiers (as in former Yugoslavia). Thus, in 1992, there were 672 000 applications, while in 2000 there were only 374 000.

Indeed, in exceptional circumstances, such as during the Kosovo war, special provisions can come into play. Immediate and temporary protection is provided to whole groups seeking refuge for up to two and, if necessary, three

years. The refugees are given residence permits, accommodation, access to social welfare and medical treatment, schooling for their children and the right to look for work. They may also formally apply for asylum.

The Union is looking at ways to ensure that the responsibility of caring for asylum-seekers is equally shared among the member states. It is also considering how to reduce waiting times by processing applications more efficiently while ensuring fair treatment of applicants.

Rules have been established to determine which EU country is responsible for examining an asylum application – usually the one the asylum-seeker entered in the first place. It is responsible for examining the application according to established EU criteria and for taking back any applicants who subsequently travel illegally to other destinations in the Union.

The system's efficiency has increased with the introduction of a new database called Eurodac at the start of 2003. It will contain the fingerprints of all registered asylum-seekers in the EU. By comparing prints, authorities will know whether an individual has already applied for asylum in another member state.

Strengthening the EU's frontiers

A common asylum system must be accompanied by a clear policy on legal immigration so that economic migrants striving to enter the EU legally are not tempted to try the asylum route. Ensuring fair legal means by which people can enter the European Union will help put an end to illegal immigration pressures and trafficking in human beings.

Clamping down on illegal immigration also involves strengthening the EU's external frontiers. These frontiers are managed by a number of different national authorities – including border guards, police and customs officers – and several pilot projects have been launched to improve cooperation between them. Countries with particularly long coastlines or external land borders may receive special EU help.

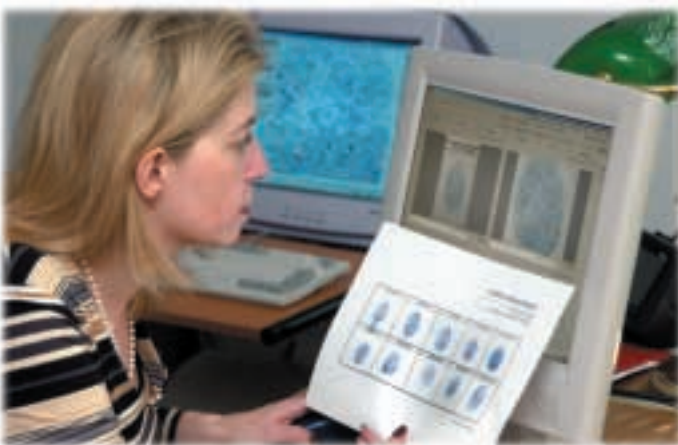
With EU enlargement, the new member states become responsible for controlling large tracts of the European Union's external frontiers. Several new members already receive EU funding to bring their expertise, equipment and procedures up to EU levels. Once this has been achieved, border controls between them and the rest of the EU will be removed, and the Schengen free movement area will be extended.

Developing a common visa information system will make it possible to check visa applications more thoroughly and reinforce the fight against fraud. Identification data (such as fingerprints, facial recognition and iris scanning) will be required. These data can also help make documents for EU citizens more secure and more easily acceptable to non-EU countries.

At the moment, sending illegal immigrants back home is largely a national responsibility. The European Commission, however, wants more cooperation and common rules and standards, not just among EU members, but also between the Union and countries that are the sources of illegal immigration.

Many issues must be addressed, such as setting minimum standards for return procedures, the mutual recognition of return decisions and providing proper travel documents for illegal immigrants who have no papers of their own.

Fingerprints can add security to travel documents.



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Tackling terrorism and organised crime

People rightly expect the Union to tackle threats to their security, and to protect them from terrorism and serious, organised, cross-border crime. This requires close police and judicial co-operation to eliminate hiding places for criminals and their ill-gotten gains.

Criminal organisations always exploit the weaknesses of the legal and economic systems in which they operate, and the European Union gives them a

wide open space in which to move around. Terrorists, drug barons, people traffickers, money launderers or fraudsters operate as if national frontiers do not exist: they can plan a crime in one country, execute it in another and live in a third.

Attacking the drug culture

No one knows for sure how many drug users there are in the EU. For heroin alone, the total number of addicts is thought to be about one million. Between 7 000 and 8 000 people die every year from illegal drugs. Different strategies are now in place to deal with the numerous problems drugs cause, and a specific EU agency – the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction – provides a continuous flow of information.

Drug trafficking respects no borders and trends in drug use spread rapidly. National police forces can tackle drug-related crime only by working together. Policymakers, health practitioners and educators are more effective when they share information and target funding on a Union-wide basis. This is why the EU has launched an action plan on drugs and has a coordinated strategy of supporting national and local campaigns.

Law enforcement agencies cooperate to act against traffickers and to prevent drugs reaching the streets. The EU works with countries around the world to encourage them not to grow crops that can be turned into narcotics. Increasingly, synthetic drugs are produced in the Union and the police devote a great deal of energy to locating and shutting down the factories that make them.

On the public health side, there are programmes to prevent people trying drugs in the first place, or to wean them off if they do. In addition, projects such as providing clean needles for heroin users aim to reduce the risks associated with drug use.

Afghanistan is still a major source of hard drugs.



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Human trafficking

Trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation or as cheap labour is a serious offence that violates fundamental rights and human dignity. It is a major source of income for organised criminal gangs, who sometimes act under the cover of companies with legitimate activities. Profits can be laundered and used to fund other criminal operations or to bribe law enforcement officers.

The EU, which has been devising a comprehensive strategy since 1996, made a major advance in 2002, agreeing a common definition of the crime in question. This is now being implemented in all members of the enlarged EU and – under specific circumstances – the crime carries a minimum penalty of eight years imprisonment. The EU's work is largely guided by the Brussels Declaration (September 2002) recommending concrete measures, standards and best practices to stamp out this trade in human misery.

Money laundering

Money laundering is part of almost every criminal activity, as the proceeds of crime are 'cleaned' to disguise their illegal origins. The scale of the problem is enormous: according to the International Monetary Fund, it amounts to between 2% and 5% of the world's gross domestic product.

The Union has taken several measures to clamp down on money laundering. At the end of 2000, it opened the way for cooperation between national financial intelligence units. This was soon followed by legislation on identifying, tracing, freezing and confiscating criminal assets and the proceeds of crime.

Another piece of anti-money laundering legislation, agreed in December 2001, widened the definition to cover all serious crimes, including offences related to terrorism. It applies not just to banks and financial institutions, as the first measures did, but also to accountants, lawyers, notaries, real estate agents, casinos and dealers in high-value goods. They, too, must now report any suspicious transactions to the authorities.

Police and customs cooperation

Police and customs cooperation is a key part of the fight against international crime. A task force of European police chiefs has been established to develop contacts between the heads of the various EU law enforcement agencies, while the recently-created European

Police College (CEPOL) offers training on European policing for senior and middle-ranking officers.

Cooperation between national police forces is not limited to tackling criminals. It also extends to major sporting events, in particular to hooligan-prone international football matches.

Law enforcement agencies can often find themselves in politically sensitive situations, especially if they need to pursue a suspect onto another country's territory. Cooperation agreements can involve the right of hot pursuit, cross-border surveillance, covert investigations, data-exchange provisions, and joint special investigation teams. The Convention on Mutual Assistance and Cooperation between Customs Administrations is designed to ensure that customs officers can tackle cross-border offences.

Europol

Based in The Hague, Europol is essentially a police coordination centre for collecting, analysing and sharing information to help investigations being carried out in two or more EU countries.

Among its resources is a vast computer database that helps to track down suspected criminals and stolen objects by giving law enforcement officers instant access to millions of shared files. Coupled with the electronic data held on the Schengen Information System, police and customs authorities now have a huge amount of information at their disposal.

Europol's initial task (in 1994) was to coordinate national operations against illegal drug trafficking. This remit has been expanded to include recovering stolen vehicles and kidnapped human beings as well as dealing with illegal immigration networks, the sexual exploitation of women and children, pornography, forgery, the smuggling of radioactive and nuclear materials, terrorism, money laundering and counterfeiting of the euro.

Crime prevention

Preventing day-to-day crime is largely a matter for national, regional and local authorities. General crime prevention at EU level focuses on supporting these authorities in their action against juvenile, urban and drug-related offences. These account for a large percentage of crimes and affect people's quality of life. A European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) has been set up to identify EU priorities, develop and exchange best practice, and support various European, national and local initiatives.

Tackling terrorism

We all remember the dreadful terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 in the United States. Europe and Europeans too have been the target of terrorist outrages, and there is a common will to defeat terrorism.

Previously, some countries had specific legislation on terrorism, while others treated terrorist acts as common criminal offences. Having a common framework now makes police and judicial cooperation easier. To ensure that terrorist acts are punished in the same way throughout the Union, national penalties are being brought into line – according to the principle that sentences must be both proportionate and dissuasive.

EU legislation now lists a number of serious offences – such as attacks upon life and limb, kidnapping, hostage-taking or hijacking an aircraft – that will be considered as acts of terrorism when intentionally committed with a specific terrorist aim.

EU countries will prosecute terrorist acts that take place on their own soil or have been committed by one of their nationals or residents or against their own people. At the same time, respect for fundamental rights, such as freedom of assembly, association and expression, is explicitly guaranteed and provision is made to protect the victims of terrorism.

Bank safes must not become money laundries.

© Kim Steele/Getty Images



The wider international dimension

EU enlargement is creating a wider area of stability and prosperity in Europe – an area in which democracy and the rule of law are secured and human rights are respected. Naturally, people from neighbouring regions, and from farther afield too, are drawn to the EU and seek to make their home there – legally or otherwise.

European leaders do not believe that the right response is to build barriers on the EU's borders and turn it into a fortress. That would deny the European Union and its neighbours many valuable opportunities for cross-border trade and cooperation. Instead, the EU wants to form close partnerships with all its neighbours – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Caucasus, the Balkan countries, North Africa and the Middle East.

Partnership means close cooperation in the fight against terrorism and organised crime, helping the EU's neighbours to reform their police and judiciary and to improve their border management. For instance, the second Northern Dimension Action Plan (2004–06) involves specific action to tackle trafficking in human beings and drugs and to increase cooperation in the Baltic region between EU frontier guards and their colleagues to the east.

But partnership also means giving the European Union's near neighbours easy access to the enlarged single market, with its 450 million consumers. It means helping these neighbours improve their citizens' standard of living. And it means promoting democratic institutions and political plural-



Police officers from different EU countries are helping local police keep order in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

ism in these regions. Respect for human rights is now a key part of all the international treaties the European Union signs. All this helps tackle the problem of refugees and asylum seekers at source. As the situation in troubled countries improves, their citizens will feel less need to flee and try to make a better life elsewhere.

At the same time, the European Union seeks to play an active role in managing any crises that do occur in the regions beyond its borders. For example, officers from the EU's national

police forces are working together in the new European Union Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They are training local police officers, helping maintain public order and establishing a dialogue with local authorities.

In short, the EU believes that one important way to secure freedom, justice and security within its borders is to export those things to countries beyond its borders. To spread those benefits over an ever wider area. To help make a safer, freer and fairer world.

Further reading



For more detailed information on the subjects dealt with in this booklet, visit the website of the European Commission at europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/index_en.htm

Information about drugs-related problems is also provided by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) at www.emcdda.eu.int/

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Freedom, security and justice for all

Justice and home affairs in the European Union

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One of the European Union's remarkable achievements over the past half century has been to create a large frontier-free area within which people can move around unhindered by border checks. EU citizens are also free to choose which EU country they wish to live and work in.

But if these freedoms are to be fully enjoyed, the EU must manage its external borders effectively. Its national judicial authorities and police forces must also work closely together to ensure that people everywhere in the EU are equally protected from crime, have equal access to justice and can fully exercise their rights.

The European Union is developing a more coordinated asylum and immigration policy so that asylum applicants are treated fairly in the same way and the legal immigrants the EU needs are integrated into European societies. Action is also being taken to prevent abuses of the system and to tackle illegal immigration.

Moreover, in a globalised world, it is only by working together that EU countries can effectively combat international crime and terrorism.

All of this will guarantee that the Union is indeed a single area of freedom, security and justice for all.

Other information on the European Union



Information in all the official languages of the European Union is available on the Internet. You can access it through the Europa server: europa.eu.int



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The European Union



-  Member states of the European Union
-  Candidate countries

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One of the European Union's remarkable achievements over the past half century has been to create a large frontier-free area within which people can move around unhindered by border checks. EU citizens are also free to choose which EU country they wish to live and work in.

But if these freedoms are to be fully enjoyed, the EU must manage its external borders effectively. Its national judicial authorities and police forces must also work closely together to ensure that people everywhere in the EU are equally protected from crime, have equal access to justice and can fully exercise their rights.

The European Union is developing a more coordinated asylum and immigration policy so that asylum applicants are treated fairly in the same way and the legal immigrants the EU needs are integrated into European societies. Action is also being taken to prevent abuses of the system and to tackle illegal immigration.

Moreover, in a globalised world, it is only by working together that EU countries can effectively combat international crime and terrorism.

All of this will guarantee that the Union is indeed a single area of freedom, security and justice for all.