

# DiscoverEU: Questions and Answers

What is DiscoverEU?

DiscoverEU is an EU initiative which offers 18-year-olds a travel experience that will enable them to take advantage of the freedom of movement in the European Union, discover the diversity of European regions, enjoy its cultural richness, and connect with people from all over the continent. At the same time, they will have the chance to learn more about themselves, gain self-confidence and improve key competencies such as problem-solving and foreign language skills.

Why don't you offer this opportunity to all 18-year-olds?

The aim is to give as many young people as possible the chance to benefit from DiscoverEU. However, with a current budget of €12 million, it is not possible to offer travel passes to all 18-year-olds in Europe.

Following the huge interest so far and the overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, the Commission wants to develop DiscoverEU, further strengthening the initiative's outreach to disadvantaged groups and learning dimension in line with the general objectives of the future Erasmus programme. Therefore, the European Commission has proposed to allocate €700 million to the initiative under the future [Erasmus](#) programme (2021-2027). If the European Parliament and the Council agree to the proposal, an additional 1.5 million 18-year-olds will be able to travel between 2021 and 2027.

Is there a quota per country?

A quota of travel passes is set for each Member State based on the share of its population compared to the overall population of the European Union. In case there are fewer applicants in certain countries than their fixed quotas, the remaining travel passes will be distributed among the countries where there are more applicants than their quotas.

Why is the initiative only accessible to young people aged 18?

DiscoverEU is an initiative originally requested by the European Parliament with the objective of providing travel and mobility opportunities for young people turning 18. The programme specifically targets 18-year-olds, as this age marks a major step to adulthood which should go hand in hand with an increased understanding for Europe in all its diversity.

For how many days are participants allowed to travel?

Young people can travel for a minimum of 1 day and up to 1 month. They should visit at least one Member State in the European Union other than their country of residence. For the second round, trips must start between 15 April 2019 (first departure date) and 31 October 2019 (last return date).

What modes of transport can be used?

As a basic rule, participants will travel by rail. Nevertheless, in order to ensure the widest possible access – for instance among young people with special needs, or those living in remote areas – alternative transport modes can be offered, such as buses or ferries, when necessary and taking into account environmental, travel and distance consideration. Travel will be in second class.

Can a participant travel alone or in a group of friends?

The project foresees that participants can travel either individually or in a group of maximum 5 people. In the case of a group, a group leader must be appointed on the group's behalf. The group leader will fill in the application form and respond to the quiz and subsidiary question. S/he will receive a code in the confirmation email when submitting the application and should communicate this code to the group members in order to allow their registration. Based on the code provided by the group leader, the remaining group members will be able to register online and fill in their personal data.

If a group application is successful, will all group members be able to participate?

Yes, a group application will be assessed as one single application.

How are the young people selected?

The selection of applicants took place via an online application tool available on the [European Youth Portal](#). Applicants first had to pass the eligibility criteria check. Then, all applicants needed to complete a quiz. They had to answer 5 multiple choice quiz questions linked to the [2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage](#), other European Union initiatives targeting young people and the upcoming European Parliament elections. Finally, they had to answer an additional question related to the second application round. The correct replies to the quiz and this final question enabled the European Commission to make the selection and to rank the applicants.

What about young people with reduced mobility and/or special needs?

Young people with special needs (such as reduced mobility, visual impairments) may be entitled to receive appropriate additional support. Those costs will be assessed on a case-by-case basis according to their needs and based on appropriate documents, as required under the national law of the Member State of residence. In this respect, costs of special assistance (for example an accompanying person, a dog for visually impaired participants) might be covered. The Commission generally strongly encourages young people with special needs to apply.

Should the selected participants book the travel passes themselves?

No. Selected participants should not book their travel passes themselves, as tickets purchased separately shall not be reimbursed. Travel passes for the selected participants will exclusively be booked, purchased and delivered by

the external contractor designated by the European Commission.

What is the value of the travel passes?

The basic rule is that each participant will be entitled to financing of his or her travel pass of €260. Travel will only be in second or economy class. However, this amount can be higher in specific cases, for instance for people living in remote regions.

Can a relative or friend older than 18 travel with the participant?

Yes, at their own expense. They themselves would have to book and pay for their travel arrangements.

Is the travel pass transferable to another person?

No. Each travel pass will be nominative and cannot be transferred to another person under any circumstance. The name on the travel pass cannot be changed.

What if the participants have to cancel their trip or need to modify it?

Any potential cancellation or modification fees will need to be covered by the participants. There is no extra budget to cover expenditure of this kind, whatever the reason.

Are any of the following expenses included: travel insurance, accommodation, subsistence or any other expenses related to the trip?

No. The initiative does not include any travel insurance. Insurance coverage is the sole responsibility of the participant. Moreover, accommodation, subsistence, travel supplements to be paid during the trip or any other expenses related to the trip shall be covered by the participant.

The participant should acquire appropriate health and travel insurance for the whole duration of the trip. Basic health insurance coverage is usually provided by the participant's national health insurance during his/her stay in another European Union country through the European Health Insurance Card. However, the coverage of the European Health Insurance Card or private health insurance may not include all possible cases, especially if repatriation or specific medical intervention is needed. In that case, complementary private insurance is advisable.

Will the European Commission help participants with booking accommodation?

No. Booking accommodation is the sole responsibility of the participant.

Will the European Commission give preference to specific transport operators?

No. The contractor who will book the trips can select any public transport mode and any operators or lines.

How can participants prepare their trips?

The [European Youth Portal](#) has a website section with practical information

about [travelling in Europe](#), where the participants can find useful tips. Participants must possess their valid travel document/pass during their journey. Anything related to such a document (for instance its validity) is the participant's responsibility. Young people should also have a valid passport or ID card when travelling in the European Union. Anything related to such a document (validity, etc.) is the participant's responsibility.

What is expected from the selected participants?

The European Commission would like to hear back from the young travellers and will encourage them to share their experiences. That is why, once selected, participants become ambassadors for the initiative. They will be encouraged to report back on their travel experiences, for example through social media like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, or by providing a presentation at their school or local community. Participants are welcome to join the Facebook Group set up for this initiative.

What has the feedback from the participants in the first round been like?

Feedback from participants has been very positive. For many, it was the first time they had travelled without parents or other adults, and the majority indicated that they had become more independent. They also stated that the DiscoverEU experience had given them a better understanding of other cultures and of European history. And they feel it has improved their foreign language skills. Two thirds said that they would not have been able to finance their travel pass without DiscoverEU.

**Where can people find more information on the rules of the contest?**

The rules of the contest are published on the European Youth Portal.

**For more information**

[Press release](#)

[European Youth Portal](#)

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## **[Joint letter of President Tusk and President Juncker to Theresa May, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom](#)**

**Press contacts**

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Thank you for your letter of 14 January 2019.

As you are well aware, we regret but respect the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. We also consider that Brexit is a source of uncertainty and disruption. In these challenging times, we therefore share with you the determination to create as much certainty and clarity as possible for citizens and companies in a situation where a Member State leaves the European Union after more than four decades of closest economic and political integration. That is why the Withdrawal Agreement that you and the Leaders of the 27 EU Member States agreed after long negotiations is so important. It represents a fair compromise and aims to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, thereby limiting the negative consequences of Brexit. That is also why we wish to establish as close as possible a relationship with the United Kingdom in the future, building on the Political Declaration, which the Leaders of the 27 EU Member States agreed with you. It is also why we want negotiations to this effect to start as soon as possible after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

As you know, we are not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement, but against this background, and in order to facilitate the next steps of the process, we are happy to confirm, on behalf of the two EU Institutions we represent, our understanding of the following points within our respective fields of responsibility.

A. As regards the President of the European Council:

On the 13 December, the European Council (Article 50) decided on a number of additional assurances, in particular as regards its firm commitment to work speedily on a subsequent agreement that establishes by 31 December 2020 alternative arrangements, so that the backstop will not need to be triggered.

The European Council also said that, if the backstop were nevertheless to be triggered, it would only apply temporarily, unless and until it is superseded by a subsequent agreement that ensures that a hard border is avoided, and that the European Union, in such a case, would use its best endeavours to negotiate and conclude expeditiously a subsequent agreement that would replace the backstop, and would expect the same of the United Kingdom, so that the backstop would only be in place for as long as strictly necessary.

In this context, it can be stated that European Council conclusions have a legal value in the Union commensurate to the authority of the European Council under the Treaties to define directions and priorities for the European Union at the highest level and, in the specific context of withdrawal, to establish, in the form of guidelines, its framework. They may commit the European Union in the most solemn manner. European Council conclusions therefore constitute part of the context in which an international agreement, such as the Withdrawal Agreement, will be

interpreted.

As for the link between the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration, to which you make reference in your letter, it can be made clear that these two documents, while being of a different nature, are part of the same negotiated package. In order to underline the close relationship between the two texts, they can be published side by side in the Official Journal in a manner reflecting the link between the two as provided for in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

B. As regards the President of the European Commission:

The Political Declaration agreed at the November Special European Council (Article 50) describes a future relationship of unprecedented depth and breadth, reflecting the continuing strength of our shared values and interests. The Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration represent a fair balance of European Union and United Kingdom interests. They will ensure a smooth withdrawal and a strong future relationship in the interests of all our citizens.

As the European Council has already stated, it will embark on preparations for a future partnership with the United Kingdom immediately after signature of the Withdrawal Agreement. As regards the European Commission, we will set up the negotiating structure for these negotiations directly after signature to ensure that formal negotiations can start as soon as possible after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom, having in mind the shared ambition of the European Union and the United Kingdom to have the future relationship in place by the end of the transition. Should national ratifications be pending at that moment, the Commission is ready to propose provisional application of relevant parts of the future relationship, in line with the legal frameworks that apply and existing practice. The Commission is also ready to engage with you on a work programme as soon as the United Kingdom Parliament has signalled its agreement in principle to the Withdrawal Agreement and the European Parliament has approved it.

There is an important link between the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration, reflecting Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. As stated in Article 184 of the Withdrawal Agreement and reflected also in Paragraph 138 of the Political Declaration, the European Union and the United Kingdom have committed to use best endeavours, in good faith and in full respect of their respective legal orders, to take necessary steps to negotiate expeditiously the agreements governing their future relationship referred to in the Political Declaration.

In light of your letter, the European Commission would like to make the following clarifications with regard to the backstop:

The Withdrawal Agreement including the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland embodies the shared commitment by the European Union and the United Kingdom to address the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland as part of ensuring the orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. The Commission can confirm that, just like the United Kingdom, the

European Union does not wish to see the backstop enter into force. Were it to do so, it would represent a suboptimal trading arrangement for both sides. The Commission can also confirm the European Union's determination to replace the backstop solution on Northern Ireland by a subsequent agreement that would ensure the absence of a hard border on the island of Ireland on a permanent footing.

The European Commission can also confirm our shared understanding that the Withdrawal Agreement and the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland:

- Do not affect or supersede the provisions of the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement of 10 April 1998 in any way whatsoever; they do not alter in any way the arrangements under Strand II of the 1998 Agreement in particular, whereby areas of North-South cooperation in areas within their respective competences are matters for the Northern Ireland Executive and Government of Ireland to determine;
- Do not extend regulatory alignment with European Union law in Northern Ireland beyond what is strictly necessary to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland and protect the 1998 Agreement; the Withdrawal Agreement is also clear that any new act that the European Union proposes should be added to the Protocol will require the agreement of the United Kingdom in the Joint Committee;
- Do not prevent the United Kingdom from facilitating, as part of its delegation, the participation of Northern Ireland Executive representatives in the Joint Committee, the Committee on issues related to the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, or the joint consultative working group, in matters pertaining directly to Northern Ireland.

The European Commission also shares your intentions for the future relationship to be in place as quickly as possible. Given our joint commitment to using best endeavours to conclude before the end of 2020 a subsequent agreement, which supersedes the Protocol in whole or in part, the Commission is determined to give priority in our work programme to the discussion of proposals that might replace the backstop with alternative arrangements. In this context, facilitative arrangements and technologies will be considered. Any arrangements which supersede the Protocol are not required to replicate its provisions in any respect, provided that the underlying objectives continue to be met.

Should the parties need more time to negotiate the subsequent agreement, they could decide to extend the transition period, as foreseen in the Withdrawal Agreement. In that case, the Commission is committed to redouble its efforts and expects the same redoubled efforts from your negotiators, with the aim of concluding a subsequent agreement very rapidly. Were the backstop to enter into force in whole or in part, it is intended to apply only temporarily, unless and until it is superseded by a subsequent agreement. The Commission is committed to providing the necessary political impetus and resources to help achieving the objective of making this period as short as possible. To this end, following the withdrawal of the United Kingdom, and until a subsequent agreement is concluded, the Commission will support making best use of the high level conference foreseen in the Political Declaration to

meet at least every six months to take stock of progress and agree the appropriate actions to move forward.

Finally, in response to your concern about the timetable, we would like to make it clear that both of us will be prepared to sign the Withdrawal Agreement as soon as the meaningful vote has passed in the United Kingdom Parliament. This will allow preparations for the future partnership with the United Kingdom immediately thereafter to ensure that negotiations can start as soon as possible after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

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## **Third quarter of 2018 – EU28 current account surplus €38.7 bn – €49.3 bn surplus for trade in services**

The **EU28** seasonally adjusted current account of the balance of payments recorded a surplus of €38.7 billion (1.0% of GDP) in the third quarter of 2018, down from a surplus of €59.9 billion (1.5% of GDP) in the second quarter of 2018 and from a surplus of €60.4 billion (1.6% of GDP) in the third quarter of 2017, according to estimates released by **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)

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## **November 2018 compared with October 2018 – Industrial production down by 1.7% in euro area – Down by 1.3% in EU28**

In November 2018 compared with October 2018, seasonally adjusted industrial production fell by 1.7% in the **euro area** (EA19) and by 1.3% in the **EU28**, according to estimates from **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**. In October 2018, industrial production increased by 0.1% in both the **euro area** and in the **EU28**.



## **Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the unilateral decision by the Government of Guatemala to withdraw from the CICIG Agreement with the United Nations**

The government of Guatemala's unilateral announcement terminating the 2006 Agreement with the UN establishing the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) runs against its legal obligations towards the UN and several rulings of the Constitutional Court.

The EU fully concurs with the Secretary General of the United Nations that the government should allow CICIG to complete its work until its current mandate ends in September 2019, respecting the integrity of CICIG national and international personnel and affording them all necessary protection.

Since its establishment, CICIG has been working very successfully hand in hand with the Guatemalan judicial authorities to fight corruption, impunity and strengthen the rule of law. Its achievements were recognized through the renewal of its mandate on several occasions. CICIG has been benefiting from EU and EU Member States financial support since its creation. The EU reiterates its willingness to continue working on the strengthening of Guatemala's judicial system in cooperation with the country's authorities.

The EU also strongly supports the statement made by the local donor coordination group G13 on January 8 calling on the government of Guatemala to fully respect the country's constitutional order, in particular the independence of the Constitutional Court. The EU considers that Guatemala must further strengthen its rule of law to guarantee stability. The EU will continue to closely monitor the situation and react in the light of events.

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