

Europe and you

A snapshot
of EU achievements



2010 edition

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European Union

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Europe and you

A snapshot of EU achievements

Have you ever wondered what exactly it is that the European Union does for you? If so, this booklet provides the answer with a brief glimpse at 10 actions that have been put in place over the past year and that will make a real difference in the lives of each and every one of us. From helping us save money when making mobile phone calls from abroad to pooling resources for research into diseases such as Alzheimer's, the European Union is working on policies and practices that have a direct impact on the lives of people and their environment, both within and outside its borders. As wide-ranging as they are diverse, these activities nonetheless share one common purpose: to make Europe, and the world it is a part of, a better place.

Paving the way towards economic recovery



The EU and its member states have mobilised
huge resources to put the economy back on
its feet and to protect citizens



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EU governments, coordinated by the European Commission, stabilised the banks after US investment bank Lehman Brothers failed in 2008. Not to bail out bankers but to protect people, their savings and their jobs.

Under the EU's economic recovery plan, about 5.5% of GDP is being pumped into the economy from national and European budgets. The focus is on jobs, infrastructure and energy efficiency. The EU has also speeded up advance funding under the EU's regional aid schemes, providing an extra €6.25 billion to kick-start local growth.

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund is providing new opportunities to workers who have lost their jobs. In 2009, some 16 000 workers, in sectors such as the car industry, textiles and construction, have benefited from it and the Commission has approved applications worth €60 million.

Interest rates were cut to record levels in the euro area. The Commission has tabled radical reforms to financial markets, to cut out reckless behaviour, ensure financial institutions are properly supervised and get lending flowing to families and small businesses. The EU has persuaded international partners in the G20 to adopt similar measures.

When EU countries outside the euro area — namely Hungary, Latvia and Romania — requested assistance, the EU stepped in with loans of €15 billion.



Staying in touch for less

Europeans can stay in touch via mobile phone more easily and more cheaply, thanks to the EU's efforts to ensure cheaper communication charges



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Since July 2009 Europeans using their phone while travelling in another EU country have been paying less for texting. These changes are the result of new rules which are expected to cut roaming holidaymakers' and business travellers' bills by 60%. Sending a text message from abroad in the EU now costs a maximum of €0.11 — almost three times cheaper than the previous EU average.

Calls are even cheaper than before and per-second billing saves money as subscribers now only pay for the actual length of each call. Making a roamed call in another EU country must not cost more than €0.43 per minute, and no more than €0.19 to receive a call.



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Surfing the web, downloading movies or sending photos with mobile phones can be done without fear of 'bill shocks' while roaming, thanks to cut-off limits available to consumers from 1 March 2010.

And soon, mobile phone users will have fewer worries about batteries going flat. EU pressure has convinced manufacturers to standardise chargers, doing away with the inconvenience — and waste — of different systems for different phones.

Pooling resources to fight dementia



Everyone gets sick sometimes.
The EU is backing medical research
in many priority areas



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There are still more illnesses than successful treatments — as the growing problem of conditions like Alzheimer’s disease cruelly demonstrates. Researchers are still striving to identify many of the processes that generate disease, so that new treatments can be developed.



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To sharpen the focus of research in Europe, the EU has created a novel programme to increase the chances of finding new treatments. This €2 billion 'innovative medicines initiative' brings together industry and academia in specific projects to remove the bottlenecks that often slow down the transition from new science to new medicines.

The EU is also coordinating work on prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care. It has been supporting research into viral diseases. Project proposals on influenza will generate more insight into transmission and surveillance and help develop novel therapeutics, including for influenza H1N1.

In July 2009, the European Commission took new steps to tackle Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia — which currently claim more than seven million victims in Europe — and which are likely to affect twice that number over the next 20 years. It is also promoting the pooling of national resources through joint programming of research investments. Since 2002, the EU has put almost €175 million into research on the brain and ageing.

Throwing a new light on climate change



Everyone can help save the planet —
and save money at the same time



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The EU has made it possible to prevent 32 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions at the flick of a light switch. As from September 2009, the old energy-hungry light bulbs have been replaced by better alternatives that last longer and use less power.

New rules introduced during 2009 are now improving the energy efficiency of household lamps and lighting used in offices, streets and industry. By 2020 this will save roughly the annual electricity consumption of Belgium, or the equivalent of 23 million European households enjoying power without using any energy at all.


By the end of 2012, the old incandescent light bulbs will be a thing of the past, while new eco-design rules will improve the energy efficiency of everyday devices including televisions, refrigerators and freezers. The measures adopted so far will



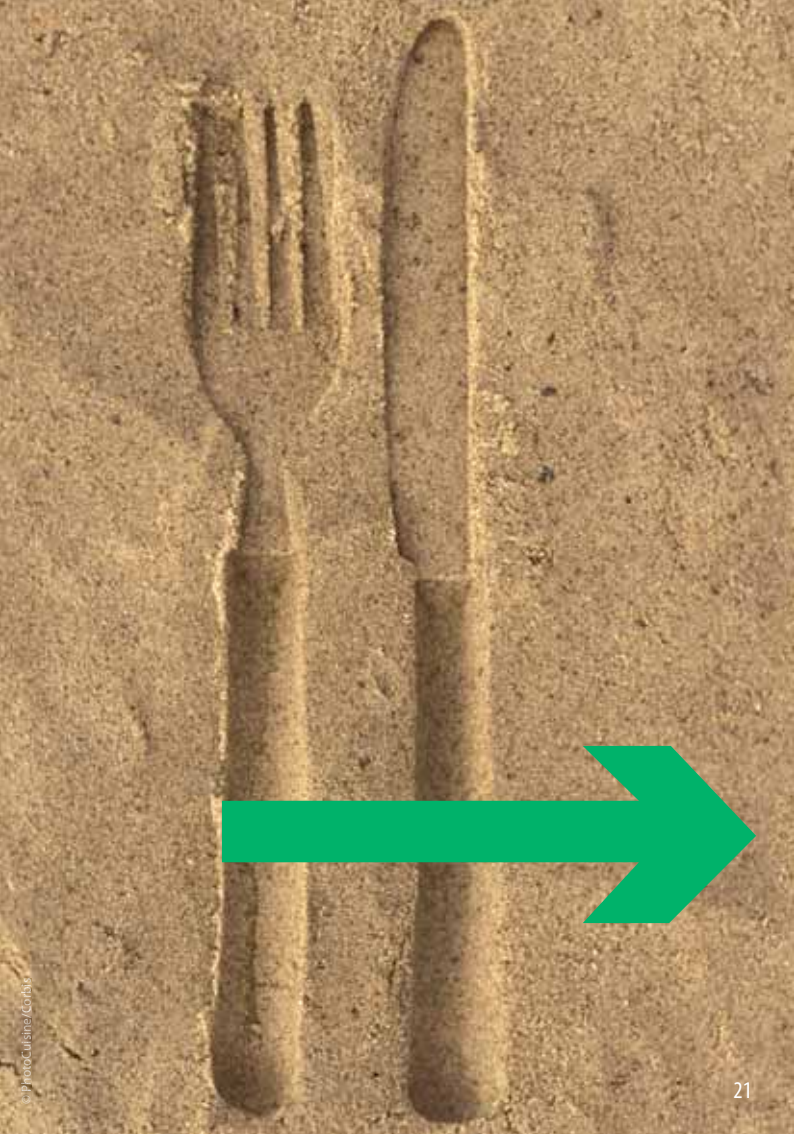
save more than 12 % of total electricity used in the EU every year by 2020 — more than the combined annual electricity consumption of households in France and Germany.

These regulations are a practical example of how the European Union is leading the way in fighting climate change. It means the emissions that harm the planet will be cut, while every year Europe will save about €50 billion that can be re-injected into its economy.

Fighting hunger in the world's poorest countries



As its €1 billion Food Facility clearly showed in 2009, the EU looks outwards as well as inwards in its concern for bettering people's lives, by tackling poverty and hunger across the globe



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The EU prevents more than a billion people in Africa, Asia and Latin America from going hungry. In 2009, the €1 billion EU Food Facility provided rapid and massive support to small-scale farmers to boost agricultural production in 50 countries where the population is struggling with worsening food insecurity caused by high food prices and the economic crisis.



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The EU helps purchase fertilisers and seeds, provide safety nets for the most vulnerable and microcredit to local farmers, improve rural transport, and provide training. It provides nearly 60 % of global development aid, making it the world's biggest donor.

In Zimbabwe, 176 000 farmers received seeds and fertilisers, which can help double traditional food production in the country. In Bangladesh, a project is generating employment opportunities for 78 000 vulnerable agricultural households — just two examples of how the EU helped food supply in developing countries.

The European Commission has also put food security at the heart of its development assistance. It will contribute around €3 billion within the initiative on global food security agreed at the G8 summit of world leaders in 2009.

Protecting animals on land and in the oceans



The EU acts in countless ways to help its citizens, but animal welfare remains an important concern as well



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Commercial seal-hunting has few friends in Europe, and during 2009 legislation was passed to limit the sale of seal products. The EU cannot ban seal-hunting, but it has now decided to make it illegal to put seal products on the market.

The same concern for animals in the wild led the European Commission to propose an action plan to protect sharks. Overfishing of many shark species is pushing them to the verge of extinction. The current catch by EU vessels of sharks and related species now runs at around 100 000 tonnes each year. So the EU is aiming to reduce catches of deep-sea sharks to zero by 2010, and to promote sustainable policies that will ensure the survival of all species of sharks — and of the fishing communities that depend on them.

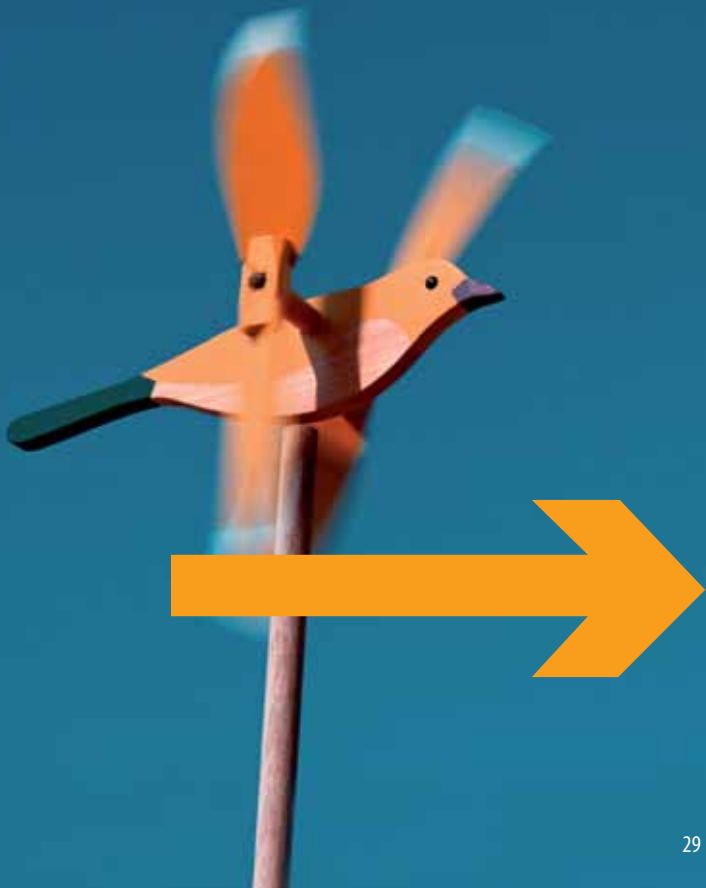
Even in the more domestic sphere of food production, the EU has acted in 2009 to improve welfare, with new rules on improving conditions for animals at the time of slaughter and ensuring that this is carried out humanely.



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Caring for the environment: from pesticides to petrol

To keep the environment as clean as possible, the EU has brought in new rules to cut down on harmful pollutants from petrol or pesticides



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harmful pollutants from petrol or pesticides**

Every time you fill your car with petrol, some escapes into the atmosphere. The benzene in the vaporised fuel can cause cancer, and it also contributes to ground-level ozone — better known as smog — which is one of the air pollutants most damaging to people and the environment. In 2009 the EU adopted legislation obliging petrol stations to introduce systems that will capture and recycle these harmful emissions.



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With the same objective of keeping Europe's environment clean, the EU also brought in new rules to make sure that, when farmers use pesticides to boost crop yields, they are careful that they do not harm human health, wildlife and the environment. Europeans share resources like water, air and soil, so protection needs to be Europe-wide.

The new pesticide rules require sustainable use, to limit accidental exposure — from, for instance, unsafe handling, faulty equipment, or unnecessary aerial crop-spraying. The legislation also shifts the focus away from chemicals and towards integrated systems of pest management, in which plant protection strategies are designed to promote natural control mechanisms.

Keeping online shopping hassle-free

The internet has helped many retailers widen their reach — a good thing, provided the citizen gets a fair deal too



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An EU investigation into websites selling electronic goods like digital cameras and mobile phones found that more than half of them were not giving consumers the rights they are entitled to under EU laws. The survey also revealed the existence of misleading information on websites about the total cost of the product or incomplete contact details for the trader.

The investigation included 200 of the biggest websites in the EU selling personal music players, DVD players, computer equipment, game consoles and other electronic goods. As a result, national authorities are now enforcing improvements.

The move followed a similar crackdown on nearly 400 websites selling airline tickets; 137 sites were found to be providing misleading information on prices or conditions,

or using unfair trading practices — but by May, 115 of them had corrected their conduct. A follow-up study of 67 sites led to 52 being given the all-clear, because they no longer showed problems or because they had immediately responded to EU concerns.

The Commission is now working to put in place an industry-wide agreement to ensure that airlines stick to their commitments.



Rebuilding Europe when natural disaster strikes

Solidarity is one of the core values of the European Union and, during 2009, EU countries have acted rapidly to support one another, by sending aid to areas affected by natural disasters



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The Abruzzo earthquake in April sent physical shockwaves across Italy and emotional shockwaves across Europe. The plight of the victims and the clear need for emergency relief provoked an immediate response. In addition to the dead and injured, thousands of people were made homeless. The disaster has also virtually brought the regional economy to a standstill.

The task of reconstruction is now under way, and the EU is planning to grant nearly half a billion euros to Italy to help cope with the aftermath. Financial support has come from the EU Solidarity Fund. The Abruzzo earthquake is the greatest disaster for which the fund's help has been sought since it was set up. The money is helping to provide temporary housing, to repair power stations, water networks and roads, and to clear rubble and devastated villages.



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Other financial assistance is revitalising the economy by helping smaller companies, renovating public buildings and promoting tourism. It is also funding the resumption of activities by sporting and cultural associations, with the aim of encouraging the 27 000 students in the area to stay. Their presence is an important economic factor for the region.

Giving bank customers value for money



The EU created the single market for the benefit of citizens as well as companies. Now it is making sure that banks give their customers a fair deal



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Where banks appear to be overcharging for their retail services, the EU has moved in to investigate — and, where necessary, to demand better treatment for customers. And where services are of poor quality, the EU has insisted on improvements.



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A European Commission study of retail financial services revealed problems with the way banks inform and advise their customers. Even the experts compiling the report found bank fees so unclear that they needed additional contacts with the bank to find the real costs of an account.

And EU legislation that came into force during 2009 will entitle credit card customers to seek full refunds when they have been overcharged. Banks will have to reply within 10 days of receiving a complaint.

The EU is working towards allowing consumers, companies, merchants and public administrations to make payments under the same conditions throughout Europe as easily as within their own country.

Getting in touch with the EU



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The European Union



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