



An Roinn Gnóthaí  
Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of  
Foreign Affairs and Trade

# Public Consultation on the Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

*An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála*  
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## 1. How to make a submission

This form contains important guidance and background information on the consultation, followed by optional guiding questions to which respondents are invited to provide responses. We ask that the response to each question is limited to a maximum of 500 words.

Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside the Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This summary should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.

We ask that, where possible, respondents frame feedback with reference to the EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, the legislative programme of the Council, the planned legislative proposals included in the European Commission's 2026 work programme, or the work of a relevant Council configuration.

Please submit the form via email to [EUPresidency2026Consultations@dfa.ie](mailto:EUPresidency2026Consultations@dfa.ie). The deadline for receipt of submissions is Friday 12 December 2025. If you have any questions, please send your query to this same email address.

Feedback received from submissions will be considered as part of the development of Ireland's Presidency priorities and policy programme. A summary thematic report, along with all submissions received, will be published on the consultation webpage.

## 2. Background information

Ireland will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) for the eighth time from July to December 2026. This will be an opportunity for Ireland to play an important role in shaping the EU's policy and legislative agenda in a way which responds to the overall interests and needs of the Union and its Member States.

Ensuring the delivery of a successful EU Presidency will be essential for Ireland's position and influence in the EU. During the six-month EU Presidency period, Ireland will steer the agenda of the Council and its legislative and policy-making processes. Irish Ministers and officials will chair meetings of the Council and its preparatory bodies, and Ireland will represent the Council in its interactions with other EU institutions.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to resource and deliver a successful EU Presidency in 2026. Planning for the Presidency is being led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in close cooperation with the Department of the Taoiseach, and with active engagement from all Government Departments.

The Council of the EU is one of the three main institutions involved in the EU decision-making process. For further background information on the Council of the EU and how the EU's legislative and policy processes operate, see the following:

- [The Council of the European Union - Consilium](#)
- [Policy, law – decision-making process | European Union](#)

### THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Council of the EU is composed of representatives at Ministerial level from the governments of all EU Member States. It meets to negotiate and adopt EU laws; conclude international agreements on behalf of the EU; adopt the Union's budget; develop the EU's foreign and security policy; and coordinate Member States' policies in specific fields.

The Council meets in ten different configurations to discuss policy and legislation:

- Agriculture and Fisheries (AGRIFISH)
- Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN)
- Competitiveness (COMPET)
- Environment (ENVI)

- Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO)
- Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS)
- Foreign Affairs (FAC)
- General Affairs (GAC)
- Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)
- Transport, Telecommunications and Energy (TTE)

## THE COUNCIL PRESIDENCY

The Presidency of the Council rotates among EU Member States every six months. It is responsible for driving forward the Council's work on EU legislation, ensuring the continuity of the EU agenda, orderly legislative processes and cooperation among Member States. To do this, the Presidency must act as an honest and neutral broker.

The Presidency chairs meetings of the Council in each of its configurations (with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Council, unless trade matters are being discussed) and meetings of the Council's preparatory bodies, working parties and other committees dealing with specific policy issues. The Presidency also organises various formal and informal meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg, and in the country of the Presidency.

The Presidency represents the Council in its relations with the other EU institutions, notably the European Commission and the European Parliament. The rotating Presidency works in close coordination with the President of the European Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, groups of three successive Council Presidencies – known as “Trios” – work together to ensure the coherence of the Council’s agenda over an 18-month period.

## 3. The Presidency Policy Programme

Shortly before the start of each Presidency term, the incoming Presidency sets out its priorities and objectives for the work of the Council during its term in the form of a Presidency policy programme. This identifies the areas of focus for the work of the Council during the Presidency, and highlights the specific legislative and policy initiatives on the Council’s agenda that the Presidency will seek to progress during its term.

The Presidency programme generally has two parts. One part highlights a range of high-level priorities for the Presidency term, setting out the overall areas of thematic focus for the Presidency. A second part details the specific legislative and policy proposals that the Presidency will seek to take forward during its term across each of the ten different policy configurations in which the Council meets.

The policy programmes of recent EU Presidencies can be found at the following links:

- [Denmark \(July to December 2025\)](#)
- [Poland \(January to June 2025\)](#)
- [Hungary \(July to December 2024\)](#)
- [Belgium \(January to June 2024\)](#)
- [Spain \(July to December 2023\)](#)

While the Presidency does offer the opportunity for Ireland to shape and influence the EU agenda, as Presidency, Ireland will be expected, in effect, to act as an impartial chair and be tasked with guiding the work of the Council in a way that reflects the interests of all Member States and of the Union as a whole. In effect, this means that the Presidency policy programme does not typically prioritise the specific national interests of the Member State holding the Presidency. Instead, the policy programme sets out the perspective of the Presidency on the policy areas and initiatives that are likely to be of most value and relevance for the Union – and all of its 27 Member States – during the Presidency term. The policy programme identifies areas of ongoing Council work on which the Presidency will seek to reach agreement or make substantial progress in discussions among Member States during its term.

The Presidency programme generally indicates how each Presidency plans to build on the work done by its predecessor in progressing the Council's legislative and policy agenda. It also reflects the programme of legislation planned by the European Commission, which is the sole institution that can propose new EU laws for consideration by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament.

## **4. Preparing the Irish Presidency Programme**

Ireland will publish its priorities and policy programme for its 2026 EU Presidency in June 2026, shortly before the start of the Presidency term. The development of the programme is now underway and the stakeholder consultations form part of this process.

A number of EU documents set out the background and context for the policy and legislative work of the Council, and will inform the development of Ireland's EU Presidency priorities and policy programme:

- The EU's overall priorities and strategic orientations for the period ahead have been set out by the European Council in the [Strategic Agenda for the Union for 2024-29](#).
- The legislative work of the Council in 2026 will reflect the [Work Programme of the European Commission for 2026](#), which was published on 21 October 2025.
- Each year, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission set out a **Joint Declaration on Legislative Priorities** for the year ahead. The Joint Declaration on Legislative Priorities for 2026 is expected to be agreed and published in the coming months.

The evolution of the Council's legislative agenda through the Danish and Cypriot Presidencies over the coming months will also have a significant bearing on the definition of the policy and legislative objectives to be reflected in Ireland's Presidency policy programme.

Ireland will also work with its Trio Presidency partners, Lithuania (January to June 2027) and Greece (July to December 2027) to prepare a Trio programme setting out an overall orientation for the work of the Council during the 18-month Trio period (July 2026 to December 2027). It is expected that the Trio programme will also be finalised and published in June 2026.

This process of consultation with domestic stakeholders will play an important part in ensuring that the policy priorities for the Irish Presidency take account of views across different sectors of Irish society on important areas of focus for the work of the European Union during the Presidency term.

## 5. Freedom of Information Act 2014 and Publication of Submissions

The Department will make public all submissions received as part of this consultation on the consultation webpage on gov.ie. Additionally, information provided to the Department via this consultation may be disclosed in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. Therefore, if you consider any information you provide as part of this consultation to be commercially sensitive, please clearly identify it as such and specify the reason for its sensitivity. The Department

will contact you regarding any information identified as sensitive before publishing or otherwise disclosing it.

## 6. General Data Protection Regulation

Respondents should note that the General Data Protection Regulation ('GDPR') entered into force in Ireland on 25 May 2018 and is intended to give individuals more control over their personal data. The key principles under the Regulation are as follows:

- Lawfulness, fairness and transparency
- Purpose limitation
- Data minimisation
- Accuracy
- Storage limitation
- Integrity and confidentiality
- Accountability.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is subject to the provisions of the Regulation in relation to personal data collected by it from 25 May 2018 onwards. Any personal information which you volunteer to this Department, will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018.

We would like to draw your attention to our [Data Privacy Notice](#), which explains how and when we collect personal data, why we do so, and how we treat this information. It also explains your rights in relation to the collection of personal information and how you can exercise those rights. Anonymised excerpts from individual submissions may be included in internal and published reports. While the Department will carefully consider all comments and suggestions received, it does not intend to respond to individual submissions.

Please note that all responses received as part of this consultation are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 (FOI), the European Communities (Access to Information on the Environment) Regulations 2007-2014, and the Data Protection Act 2018.



## 7. Submission Form

### Public Consultation on the Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

Mandatory questions	
Name	Lily Power
Organisation (if any)	The Wheel
Date of submission	12 December 2025
Do you agree to all of the terms set out in this consultation process, including those set out under section 5 and 6?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Optional questions	
<i>The following questions are asked only to help us understand the range of perspectives received as part of this consultation process.</i>	
Respondent type (i.e. individual, NGO, business, academic, local authority, etc.)	NGO
What is your sector/area of work?	Representative body for community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises
What is your connection to the issues you are providing feedback on? For example, are you an expert practitioner, person affected by a policy issue, member of the public with a general interest in the topics, etc.?	The Wheel runs a series of European programmes and engages with European policymaking in our advocacy work. Many of our members are also funded through European programmes and undertake advocacy work at European level.
Describe your geographical focus in the context of your submission? For example, rural, urban, national or EU wide.	National and EU wide.



## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

Through these consultations the Government is seeking to gather observations, suggestions, and reflections on how Ireland can best fulfil its Presidency role; ensure the Presidency policy programme is informed by diverse perspectives from across Irish society; and identify EU-wide issues, themes, and policy areas that should be given particular attention during Ireland's Presidency.

It is proposed that Ireland's overall policy approach for the 2026 Presidency will be expressed at a high level in the form of a single overarching phrase or slogan setting out a people-centred and future-oriented vision for the EU, accompanied by three priority themes.

Respondents are asked to consider the following guiding questions and to limit their responses to each question to a maximum of 500 words. Please note that you do not have to respond to all questions.

Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This response should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.

### **Question 1 – What should Ireland choose as the high-level thematic priorities for its Presidency of the Council in 2026?**

*Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.*

#### **1. Protecting democratic values and partnership with civil society**

Presidency of the EU provides an opportunity for Ireland to assert vital democratic values that are being eroded across several member States and globally. This includes human rights protections, the rule of law, free and fair elections, as well as protection of civic space for dialogue and defense of NGOs.

When the rule of law and democracy are under attack from internal and external threats, civil society organisations act as watchdogs, promoting transparency and good governance, while also enabling people, including from disadvantaged groups, to participate in decision-making at local, national, and EU level. These organisations are indispensable to a healthy democratic ecosystem and must be recognised as such by public authorities.

The general need for a high level of partnership and dialogue between Government and civil society organisations in a healthy democracy should be highlighted during the Presidency. Strengthening the connection of Irish citizens to the EU could be achieved through the organisation of events during the Presidency taking place all across Ireland.

#### **2. Renewed vision of a social Europe**

Ireland has a long and positive history of progressing a social agenda in the EU, and the Presidency provides an opportunity to shape and drive an agenda focused on a renewal of social cohesion and societal wellbeing.

There are significant risks for the EU and its Member States in overly focusing on economic growth over social development, including reduced trust among individuals, institutions and the state, greater fragmentation, and erosion of the social contract. We recommend an increased focus on wellbeing measurement at EU level, as well as social dialogue and civic participation.

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

Ireland should seek to play a key role in the finalisation of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to preserve the financial sustainability of a social and democratic Europe, as well as a renewed focus on the implementation of the Social Economy Action Plan.

### 3. Renewed emphasis on a just transition

Ireland's Presidency offers a unique opportunity to press for the protection and expansion of EU budget lines dedicated to the Just Transition, climate action and biodiversity, to champion the SDGs as an overarching framework for European policymaking. It is also vital that Ireland seek to counter the European Commission's current 'omnibus simplification' process and deregulatory agenda, which poses risks to flagship Green Deal instruments, including the LIFE programme and environmental and social elements of the CAP.

## Question 2 – Which particular policy areas and legislative proposals should be a focus of work for the Irish Presidency of the Council in 2026? What should the Irish Presidency aim to achieve in these areas?

*Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.*

### Create a safe and enabling environment for civil society

- Promote Council Conclusions on protecting civil society and safeguarding democratic participation in EU policymaking.
- Promote initiatives that protect civil society such as the EU Civil Society Strategy, Democracy Shield and Civil Society Platform
- Support joint work by civil society and parliamentarians to counter disinformation campaigns targeting the social justice agenda, climate action, and biodiversity renewal. Particular attention should be paid to promoting the Democracy Shield which is under development by Commissioner McGrath.
- Model good practice through inclusive stakeholder engagement, drawing on domestic models of dialogue and collaborative governance with the community and voluntary sector (Civic Forum, Health Dialogue Forum etc.)
- Call for inclusion of a chapter on civic space in the annual Rule of Law report to track democratic dialogue.

### Counter the European Commission's current 'omnibus simplification' process and deregulatory agenda

- Press for the protection and expansion of EU budget lines dedicated to the Just Transition, climate action and biodiversity, protecting flagship Green Deal instruments, including the LIFE programme and environmental and social elements of the CAP.
- Build alliances with like-minded member states to prevent cuts that would disproportionately harm rural communities, civil society and future generations.

### Ensure greater coherence of European economic, environmental and social policy in support of a social Europe

- Make the European Pillar of Social Rights enforceable through legislative initiatives, including the Multiannual Financial Framework, turning it into a strategic tool to influence EU macroeconomic governance.

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

- Take greater account of social impacts when making Country-Specific Recommendations, especially those requiring fiscal consolidation measures, and ensure no return of austerity policy.

### Strengthen implementation of the new Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

- Prioritise a Council Recommendation on ending homelessness, behind which there is significant momentum.
- Advance proposals for an EU framework directive on adequate minimum income to build on the Directive of Adequate Minimum Wages and the 2023 recommendation.
- Include access to child care, education (including lifelong) and healthcare across member states.

### Progress implementation of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy

- Monitor and address poverty amongst sub-groups such as children, young people, minority ethnic groups including Travellers and Roma, lone-parents, disabled people, vulnerable migrants, older people, communities facing socio-economic disadvantage and the working poor.

### Support developments in the social economy

- Reintroduce the EU Equality Directive 2008 which proposed to establish a minimum level of protection against discrimination.
- Implement the Social Economy Action Plan, working in partnership with social economy stakeholders.

### EU funding

- The Irish Presidency will come at a critical time in the negotiations on the MFF. The Irish Government should promote an approach to the MMF which ensures that critical cohesion funding for social initiatives and investment is retained or increased in the next round of EU funding.
- Streamline EU funding to make it accessible to civil society and social economy organisations who play a vital role in the delivery of EU policy priorities.

## Question 3 – How can the work of the Council during the term of the Irish Presidency make the most substantial positive impact for people, businesses and communities across the EU?

*Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.*

### Europe for all

Trust in EU institutions is in serious crisis, with misinformation dominating the narrative. The presidency provides an opportunity for Ireland to communicate the democratic values of the European project to its citizens as well as promoting Irish examples of these values across Europe.

However, trust goes both ways and the high-level priorities chosen by the Irish government should reflect the needs and priorities of citizens and demonstrate the relevance of EU policy in people's lives. The actions of the EU

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

on the international stage and in major global conflicts also has a significant impact on trust and perception in its institutions.

The Presidency provides an opportunity to set the tone in Europe and to speak out on issues that really matter, as well as working to influence policy and legislation that will have a tangible effect at national level across Europe.

At an event gathering together more than 100 of The Wheel's members, we heard from a broad range of organisations about their priorities and hopes. These included issues such as housing, progressing rights for people seeking international protection, the European Council's recommendation on homelessness, promotion of social enterprise, reversing the deregulation of climate protections and improving interactions between civil society organisations and the EU more generally.

### Active citizenship

Ireland ranks low in citizen engagement with EU policy and institutions, and civil society uptake of European funding is also low. We recommend that government develop a programme of active citizenship and engagement around the Presidency. This should include meaningful opportunities for a broad cross-section of society, especially young people and communities with the least access to power. Moreover, it will be crucial for events to be organisation all across Ireland, in both rural and urban areas, to engage all citizens and ensure that the Presidency can benefit everyone.

## Question 4 – How can we best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership to its citizens and create a sense of ownership, amongst citizens, over Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU?

*Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.*

### Civil society and EU values

Government has already acknowledged the central role that civil society can play in communicating EU values to citizens across Ireland. These organisations are embedded in every community in Ireland, and represent those who are furthest from political institutions. EU policy, in particular, can seem remote and irrelevant to many.

In order to improve engagement around the presidency, Government should promote an accessible Europe that can be experienced at local level in both rural and urban areas. It is vital that Government engage with key stakeholders to ensure that groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and unemployed people, can influence policy direction and implementation, and that their experiences become part of the dialogue with European institutions to try and repair social cohesion and political legitimacy.

It is essential, therefore, that the high-level priorities chosen by Government are meaningful to people across society and do not relate solely to economic growth.

### Funding for civil society

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

In order to achieve this, civil society needs support and funding. We recommend that:

- CERV, under the new AgoraEU programme, should be protected and expanded in the next MFF to respond to rising threats to our sector, including the rise of populism, hate, attacks on civic freedoms and the unprecedented rise of misinformation, which disproportionately affects our sector.
- The Presidency provides an opportunity for Ireland to recommend the establishment of a match funding facility at member-state level to support civil society participation in EU funding programmes with low co-financing rates such as the Interregs. This would support the Quadruple Helix model of the academic, private, public and civil society sectors all working together to solve problems. Without meaningful support for civil society groups to participate, this model cannot work.
- Stronger controls are needed for EU funding managed at national level to ensure that a reasonable portion of funding is ringfenced for civil society.
- Consultation and co-design processes of nationally-managed EU funding programmes should be meaningful and not just tokenistic or an afterthought.
- Applications and reporting requirements should be streamlined, so that smaller social economy and civil society organisations have a fair chance to access funding.
- Funding should be adjusted to acknowledge rising costs across the EU in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). In countries with higher costs of living, EU funding is becoming increasingly unsustainable.

## Question 5 – Any other comments

*Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This summary should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.*