BRUSSELS REPORT

July - September 2026

The Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels

BrusselsNI

Northern Ireland Executive

Brussels Office

Welcome

This edition of the Brussels Report for July to September 2026 covers a particularly active period in Brussels, with significant developments across the EU legislative and policy agenda, alongside continued evolution in UK-EU relations. The reporting period coincided with the first half of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, President Ursula von der Leyen's annual State of the European Union (SOTEU) address, continued implementation of the Windsor Framework, and preparations for the next UK-EU Summit, scheduled for 20 November.

The wider political context was shaped by an EU focus on strengthening competitiveness, resilience and strategic autonomy while responding to geopolitical, economic and security pressures. In her SOTEU address, President Ursula von der Leyen highlighted priorities including technological competitiveness, security, enlargement, social protection and climate objectives. The address also included specific references to the UK as a like-minded partner on AI and security. Meanwhile, the Irish Presidency reached its halfway point at the end of September, having placed the next Multiannual Financial Framework, European competitiveness and the rule of law among its priorities.

UK-EU relations also remained an important feature of the quarter. The Specialised Committee on the Implementation of the Windsor Framework met on 15 September and preparations continued for the next UK-EU Summit, with the UK and EU expected to agree on areas outlined in the May 2025 Common Understanding, including sanitary and phytosanitary measures, the Emissions Trading Scheme and a Youth Experience Scheme.

Against this backdrop, the report provides an overview of a substantial range of EU policy and legislative developments with potential relevance or interest to Northern Ireland. Developments during the quarter included new initiatives on agricultural research and innovation, energy and decarbonisation, cybersecurity and AI, labour mobility, online safety, public procurement and European innovation, as well as continued negotiations on the EU's next long-term budget for 2028-2034.

The Office also continued its wider programme of networking, policy and cultural engagement. Activities during the quarter included the jointly organised TRIBE trade networking event, the "Words and Wealth" event examining minority-language regeneration and its links with the economy and tourism, and the thirteenth annual Culture Night, showcasing Northern Ireland's arts, culture, food and drink to an audience in Brussels.

In September we also welcomed a new Events and Policy Assistant, Chandler Lütteken, and you can find out more about Chandler in section 5.6.

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1. Ministerial and Senior Official Engagement

1.1 Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee

No meetings of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee took place within the reporting period.

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1.2 Specialised Committee on the Implementation of the Windsor Framework

The Specialised Committee on the Implementation of the Windsor Framework (SCIWF) took place on 15 September. The UK and EU published a joint statement following the meeting. It confirmed that the co-chairs discussed the implementation of the Windsor Framework since the last SCIWF meeting on 7 May and reaffirmed their commitment to the full, timely and faithful implementation of the Windsor Framework. On SPS issues the co-chairs noted that progress is needed on pending issues, including full compliance of certificates, box-level labelling and ensuring that only compliant goods are authorised for movement. The co-chairs also noted a number of trade and customs issues, including that no customs duties are to be paid for business to consumer parcels under Windsor Framework facilitations, the improvements to the Duty Reimbursement Scheme, and that Steel TRQs will remain at the same level for steel moving from GB to NI.

The co-chairs also took stock of the work of the Joint Consultative Working Group and structured sub-groups, as well as engagement with business and civic stakeholders. They noted that the second meeting of the Enhanced Coordination Mechanism on VAT and Excise has taken place to discuss ongoing work on VAT under the Windsor Framework.

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1.3 Visit from Katrina Godfrey, Permanent Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs



Katrina Godfrey, Permanent Secretary for the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) visited Brussels on 17 and 18 September. Katrina discussed a number of common challenges such as SPS, Animal health, Plant Propagating Material and Windsor Framework Implementation while meeting a range of key European stakeholders including Gintaras Stonys (Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the EU), Deputy Permanent Representative of Ireland to the European Union Ambassador Cáit Moran, and Damien O'Reilly, European Affairs & Communications Manager of The Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS).

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2. Overarching Developments

2.1 Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The thirteenth meeting of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries took place on 23 September.

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2.2 UK-EU Relations

The UK-EU Summit, scheduled for 22 July, was postponed, following the resignation of former-Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, met with European Council President Antonio Costa on the train enroute to mark Ukrainian Independence Day in Kyiv on 23 August. The UK press release for the meeting noted that a UK-EU Summit is set to be held before the end of the year. The summit has subsequently been scheduled for 20 November 2026.

The Prime Minister also met with European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, in the margins of the UN General Assembly on 22 September. According to the Prime Minister's press release, they discussed the importance of working towards a successful EU-UK summit later this year. They also discussed hybrid warfare and disinformation threats from Russia and the importance of working together to address common security threats, illegal migration and respond to unfair competition and global overcapacity. AI was also on the agenda, particularly in the context of the UK Presidency of the G20 in 2027, where the UK will host a leader's summit in Manchester.

Minister Falconer, Minister for Intergovernmental Relations and European Relations met with European Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič in Brussels on 7 September for their first official meeting.

At the Summit on 20 November the UK and EU will aim to agree a legal text setting out cooperation on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS), Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) and Youth Experience Scheme (YES) as set out in the Common Understanding agreed at the Summit in May 2025. The UK and EU may also agree to start the process to open negotiations in other areas.

2.3 State of the European Union

European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, gave the State of the European Union (SOTEU) address to the European Parliament Plenary on 16 September 2026. The annual speech sets out the European Commission's priorities for the coming year and trails the 2027 Commission Work Programme, expected to be published on 20 October. In general, a lot of the content reflected a continuation of existing EU priorities including the need for the EU to be more strategically autonomous, more secure, more technologically competitive and more geopolitically influential, while continuing to pursue enlargement, social protections and climate objectives.

During SOTEU, President von der Leyen referred to the UK as a like-minded partner in respect of both AI and security. The importance of the UK as a security partner was also referenced by Ireland's EU Minister, Thomas Byrne, representing the position of the Council of the EU. Minister Byrne also mentioned the Northern Ireland peace process and the role of former MEP John Hume.

Among the initiatives raised in the SOTEU on climate and environment were a new European Critical Raw Materials Corporation, a European Firefighting Fleet, a European Water Initiative and a Climate Insurance Alliance, aimed at improving early warning systems, health preparedness,

urban cooling measures, and support for vulnerable citizens. On social rights the European Commission is planning to bring forward a European Care Deal. Canada was singled out as a particularly important partner, with plans to enhance the existing relationship, while support to Ukraine remains a priority for the EU. The European Commission is also planning action in relation to disinformation and digital safety, including the EU Kids Act, which aims to establish EU-wide rules on online safety.

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2.4 Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU

On 30 September the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU reached its halfway point. The Presidency began on 1 July with an opening ceremony in Dublin Castle and an opening concert in Brussels on 7 July. The College of Commissioners also visited Cork on 2-3 July.

By the halfway point Ireland had hosted 25 informal Ministerial meetings. These meetings are opportunities for Ministers to discuss important issues within their portfolio in an informal setting and without making binding decisions.

The Irish Presidency has published a special version of the Presidency programme for children, which aims to explain what the Irish Presidency is working to achieve from July-December 2026, as well as to explore some of the ways in which the EU impacts the daily lives of people living in Ireland and across the EU.

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3. Policy Developments

3.1 Agriculture

Livestock Strategy

On 7 July 2026 the European Commission published the EU's first ever Livestock Strategy. The strategy aims to ensure Europe's valuable livestock sector remains strong and resilient in the long term. It sets out actions to help livestock farmers address economic, environmental and market challenges, and also explores how the sector can respond to increasing societal expectations on animal welfare. This long-term vision recognises the essential role of sustainable livestock farming in Europe's future to protect Europe's food security and support rural communities in all their diversity.

Fertilisers

On 13 July 2026, the Council of the European Union formally adopted Regulation (EU) 2026/1768 introducing targeted measures to support farmers affected by sharp increases in fertiliser and other input costs resulting from disruptions to global supply chains and the crisis in the Middle East. The regulation amends the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 and the CAP Horizontal Regulation (EU) 2021/2116 to provide Member States with additional flexibility to deliver rapid financial assistance to farmers facing cost pressures and liquidity challenges.

The adopted measures included:

- A new crisis liquidity scheme under rural development programmes to provide targeted support to farmers most affected by rising input costs.
- The ability for Member States to make CAP direct payments earlier, helping farmers manage short-term cash-flow pressures.
- Greater flexibility for Member States to adjust direct payment allocations for 2027 to reflect national priorities and needs.
- The use of unused rural development funding that might otherwise be lost, with EU co-financing of up to 65% from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the possibility of additional national funding of up to 200%
- Stronger incentives for more efficient fertiliser use, nutrient management practices and the uptake of bio-based fertilisers, with the aim of improving both economic resilience and environmental sustainability.

The regulation will enter into force on the day following its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.

Strengthening the position of farmers in the food supply chain

On 29 July 2026, Regulation (EU) 2026/1739 on strengthening the position of farmers in the food supply chain, was published in the Official Journal of the EU. It aims to strengthen farmers' bargaining power, improve contractual fairness, reinforce producer organisations and cooperatives, and provide greater transparency throughout the agri-food supply chain. Member states are required to establish and publish online benchmarks for use in contractual arrangements. The regulation also strengthens the role of producer organisations (POs) in market

organisation and collective bargaining. Key provisions include allowing POs to negotiate directly with buyers and introducing rules that prevent buyers from bypassing POs to contact individual producers. The new rules also clarify the use of the terms “fair” and “equitable” for agricultural products and list the criteria for allowing such labelling for instance in cases when a product contributes to rural community development or the promotion of farmers’ organisations. This legislation also brings in new measures, such as mandatory written contracts, to support dairy producers’ incomes given the challenging conditions the sector is facing.

The proposal also introduces the much publicised “Meaty Terms” definition of meat as “edible parts of animals” and includes a list of terms to be reserved for meat products only, and that cannot be used for products that do not contain meat such as lab-grown or cell-based products. These terms include beef, veal, pork, poultry, drumstick, tenderloin, sirloin, flank, brisket and bacon.

Welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability

On 10 August 2026, Regulation (EU) 2026/1818 on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability was published in the Official Journal of the European Union. The Regulation establishes the first harmonised EU-wide framework for the welfare, identification and traceability of dogs and cats, introducing common standards for breeding establishments, pet shops, shelters and other professional operators. The new rules aim to improve animal welfare, strengthen consumer confidence, and tackle the illegal trade of companion animals, particularly through online sales platforms.

The legislation introduces minimum standards covering housing, feeding, veterinary care, breeding practices and handling conditions for dogs and cats kept by professional operators. It also requires training and education measures for animal handlers and promotes responsible pet ownership.

New Strategic Approach to Research and Innovation for competitive, resilient and sustainable agriculture, forestry, rural areas and food systems

On 8 September 2026, the European Commission adopted a new Communication setting out a Strategic Approach to Research and Innovation for competitive, resilient and sustainable agriculture, forestry, rural areas and food systems. The initiative establishes two interconnected frameworks, AgRI 2040 and Food 2040, which will guide future research, innovation and uptake activities across the agri-food sector and inform programming under Horizon Europe 2028-2034 and relevant elements of the European Competitiveness Fund.

AgRI 2040 focuses on agriculture, forestry and rural areas, while Food 2040 addresses wider food systems, including fisheries and aquaculture. Together, the frameworks seek to enhance productivity, competitiveness and resilience in the face of climate change, resource pressures, technological developments and geopolitical uncertainties. The Communication also supports the objectives of the Vision for Agriculture and Food, the Strategy for European Life Sciences and the EU Bioeconomy Strategy.

Informal Meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers



On Monday 7 September 2026 Minister Andrew Muir, and DAERA Permanent Secretary Katrina Godfrey, attended the Gala Dinner of the Informal Meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers held in Dublin as part of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU. Martin Heydon TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) extended the invitation to Minister Muir who represented Northern Ireland at the event, meeting notable dignitaries such as European Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, Christophe Hansen (pictured).

EU AgRI 2040 Conference



On 24 & 25 September, the European Commission's DG AGRI hosted the EU AgRI 2040 Conference, bringing together policymakers, researchers, farmers, industry representatives and civil society to shape future EU agricultural research and innovation priorities. The conference launched discussion on the Commission's new AgRI 2040 and Food 2040 strategic frameworks, which will guide investment under the next EU Research & Innovation Programme (2028-34) and the future European Competitiveness Fund. Key themes included strengthening the competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of EU agriculture and food systems, accelerating the uptake of digital technologies, AI and robotics in farming, improving climate resilience, biodiversity protection, soil health and water management, supporting innovation in livestock, cropping systems, forestry, bioeconomy and rural development, and, enhancing knowledge transfer so that research delivers practical benefits for farmers and rural communities. The AgRI 2040 Conference was attended by officials from DAERA EU Policy based in ONIEB.

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3.2 Environment

Evaluation of the Nitrates Directive

On Wednesday, 15 July 2026, the European Commission published the first comprehensive Evaluation of the Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC) since its adoption in 1991, alongside the latest Member State implementation reports covering the period 2020-2023.

The Nitrates Directive aims to improve water quality by protecting water against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources. This new evaluation concludes that the Directive remains effective, relevant and necessary in addressing agricultural nitrate pollution and protecting water quality across the EU. The Commission noted that significant improvements in nutrient management and reductions in nitrate pollution had been achieved over the past 30 years, while recognising that nutrient pollution remains a major environmental challenge in several regions. The

European Commission does not propose any amendments to the Directive at this stage but will work with Member States to explore practical improvements to implementation and reporting arrangements. The evaluation was published alongside country reports covering the period 2020-2023, which include recommendations to support further progress towards the Directive's objectives.

EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) - Implementation Measures

On 13 July, the European Commission adopted a Delegated Act and an Implementing Act to support implementation of the EU Deforestation Regulation (EU) 2023/1115. The Delegated Act updates the list of products covered by the Regulation, adding certain products while removing others following a simplification review, while the Implementing Act establishes the operation of the EU information system for due diligence declarations. The measures are intended to provide legal certainty ahead of the Regulation's application at the end of 2026.

Circularity Requirements for Vehicle Design and End-of-Life Vehicles

On 24 July 2026, Regulation (EU) 2026/1738 on circularity requirements for vehicle design and the management of end-of-life vehicles was published in the Official Journal of the European Union following its adoption under the ordinary legislative procedure. The Regulation replaces the End-of-Life Vehicles Directive (2000/53/EC) and Directive 2005/64/EC on vehicle reusability, recyclability and recoverability, establishing a comprehensive lifecycle framework for vehicles placed on the EU market. The new rules require vehicles to be designed for easier dismantling, reuse, repair and recycling, introduce recycled-content requirements for vehicle materials, strengthen producer responsibility obligations and improve the collection and treatment of end-of-life vehicles. The legislation also aims to enhance the recovery of critical raw materials, improve vehicle traceability and support the transition to a more circular and resource-efficient automotive sector in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal and Circular Economy Action Plan.

Nature Restoration

On 1 September EU Member States submitted their draft National Restoration Plans (NRPs) to the European Commission marking the first major implementation milestone under the Nature Restoration Regulation (EU) 2024/1991. The Regulation is a cornerstone of the European Green Deal and EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and establishes legally binding restoration obligations covering terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems.

The draft plans outline how each Member State intends to contribute towards achieving restoration targets by 2030, while also providing a strategic outlook towards 2040 and 2050. Each NRP must also set financing arrangements and implementation mechanisms, monitoring and reporting approaches, and synergies with other EU policies, including the Water Framework Directive, Common Agricultural Policy, Forestry strategies and Fisheries and marine policies.

Final National Restoration Plans must be completed within one year of the submission deadline. During this period, the Commission and EEA will continue to provide technical guidance, reporting tools and implementation support to assist Member States in refining their plans. Ireland's draft National Restoration Plan could have cross-border relevance, particularly in relation to peatlands, agricultural habitats, water quality measures and pollinator restoration initiatives.

Revision of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS)

On 17 July, the European Commission adopted COM(2026)616, a proposal to revise the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) and the Market Stability Reserve as part of the legislative framework for achieving the EU's 2040 climate target. The proposal seeks to balance decarbonisation objectives with industrial competitiveness and includes measures relating to emissions caps, carbon removals, carbon leakage protection, aviation and maritime emissions, ETS-funded industrial support mechanisms and the future operation of the Market Stability Reserve. The proposal is currently under consideration by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union under the ordinary legislative procedure.

Emissions Trading System (ETS)

On Tuesday 15 September, the European Parliament voted to approve two separate proposals aimed at strengthening market stability within the EU's current Emissions Trading System (ETS1 and ETS2). Under the first proposal, which relates to the existing EU ETS1 covering power generation, industry and aviation, MEPs voted to maintain the current Market Stability Reserve (MSR) allowance invalidation mechanism while increasing the threshold at which allowances are cancelled from 1 February 2027, from 400 million to 650 million allowances. The EU Commission had proposed ending the invalidation mechanism and retaining surplus allowances within the reserve as a buffer against market shocks. However, the European Parliament argued that maintaining allowance cancellations while expanding the reserve threshold would provide greater long-term predictability, support the orderly functioning of the carbon market and remain aligned with the EU's 2040 and 2050 climate targets. Parliament is now ready to enter negotiations with the Council of the European Union on the final legislative text.

In the second ETS related vote MEPs approved a provisional agreement with the Council of the European Union to amend the Market Stability Reserve for ETS2, the new emissions trading system covering buildings, road transport and additional sectors. The revised rules place greater emphasis on using ETS2 auction revenues to address social impacts, particularly for vulnerable households, and require a future assessment of whether existing price-control mechanisms remain appropriate. Once formally adopted by the Council of the European Union, the measure will enter into force 20 days after publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.

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3.3 Marine and Fisheries

The Multiannual Financial Framework and support for fisheries, the marine and aquaculture

On 29 September 2026, the Council of the European Union reached a partial negotiating position on a regulation setting out the conditions for the EU's support for the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the EU's maritime and aquaculture policies, and the European ocean pact for the 2028-2034 period. The agreement sets out the Council's position on the future framework for EU financial support to those policies and complements the provisions of the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP) Regulation.

Financial and horizontal issues will be taken up in the context of overarching legislative proposals when finalising the negotiating position. These are currently being discussed as part of the negotiations on the overall Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) covering the period 2028 to 2034. The new architecture would replace a number of existing funds, programmes and

regulations, including the current European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), with a single funding toolbox. The aim is to simplify and streamline EU funding, provide greater flexibility to member states and strengthen synergies between different policy areas. The Council's position aims to provide a balance between supporting the competitiveness, modernisation and resilience of the EU fisheries sector, while ensuring the sustainability of fish stocks and compliance with the EU's international obligations. It also allows for EU support for fleet modernisation, including investments in existing and new vessels. This will help the sector's energy transition, improve working conditions aboard vessels, and facilitate generational renewal.

At the same time, the Council of the European Union included safeguards to ensure that funding does not increase pressure on fish stocks. In the case of certain investments in fishing vessels and vessel purchases, the provisions ensure that no additional fishing capacity is introduced without first withdrawing existing fishing capacity, with special rules for small-scale coastal fishing. The Council's amendments also intend that the future EU framework reflects the WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies, binding on the EU since September 2025. This is relevant given the EU's role in combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing globally. An article on control and data collection was added, to reinforce the importance of both these aspects for the sustainable management of fisheries.

This negotiating mandate is the basis for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union to start negotiations with the European Parliament. The overall budget for the programmes for the 2028-2034 period will depend on the final agreement on the next MFF as a whole.

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3.4 Energy

Electrification Action Plan

On 17 July, the European Commission presented the Electrification Action Plan COM(2026)595, a roadmap comprising of 15 actions to accelerate the electrification of the economy. These are the main measures that will affect the building sector and energy renovation. A significant share of these measures is aimed at the building sector, promoting electrification, energy renovation and the deployment of clean technologies. The Action Plan builds on earlier initiatives: the Clean Industrial Deal, the Affordable Energy Action Plan and AccelerateEU.

TEN-E

On 10 September 2026, MEPs on the European Parliament's Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee adopted their position for a Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) Regulation which governs cross-border energy infrastructure across the EU. The proposed changes aim to strengthen energy security, improve cross-border electricity and hydrogen connections, reduce network bottlenecks and support greater integration of EU energy markets. MEPs argue that deeper market integration could help improve price stability and contribute to lower energy costs for households and businesses.

The revised rules would give the European Commission a stronger role in developing common energy planning scenarios, while introducing new mechanisms to identify gaps in electricity and hydrogen networks and target investment where it is most needed. The proposal would also streamline permitting and approval processes for strategic energy infrastructure projects, while requiring authorities to consider whether existing networks, digital solutions or demand-side

measures could address needs before approving new physical infrastructure. The ITRE Committee position includes expanded infrastructure priorities to include projects that strengthen the resilience and protection of critical energy assets, support digitalisation and monitoring and improve the climate resilience of energy infrastructure.

The ITRE Committee also approved the decision to enter into informal interinstitutional (trilogue) negotiations; the draft report will need to go to plenary for endorsement. The Council of the EU has already adopted a mandate for negotiations so, subject to the European Parliament plenary approval, multiple trilogue meetings were scheduled for 29 September, 13 October, 10 November and 1 December 2026. There is no evidence yet to suggest they have commenced.

The Regulation, once adopted, could have implications for future cross-border electricity infrastructure, offshore energy projects and energy market integration, with the stated aim of improving security of supply and reducing regional disparities in energy prices across the EU.

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

On Tuesday 15 September, the European Parliament adopted its position on proposals to strengthen the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) signalling support for a broader scope, tougher enforcement measures and additional support for European industry as it transitions to a low-carbon economy.

MEPs voted to extend CBAM beyond basic materials to include a wider range of downstream products, particularly finished steel and aluminium goods such as fasteners, wire, springs and household articles. This expansion is intended to reduce the risk of carbon leakage by ensuring that more imported products face a carbon cost equivalent to that paid by EU producers. Parliament also backed stricter anti-circumvention measures designed to prevent companies from avoiding CBAM obligations through minor product modifications or supply chain adjustments. MEPs are seeking stronger powers for the European Commission to address cases where imports are deliberately routed through third countries to evade the mechanism.

The CBAM is a key element of the EU's Climate Policy Framework designed to prevent emissions-intensive production relocating outside the EU and to encourage higher climate standards among trading partners. The European Parliament's position reflects a strong commitment to both industrial competitiveness and the achievement of the EU's decarbonisation objective.

Temporary Decarbonisation Fund

Alongside the CBAM reform, the European Parliament endorsed the creation of a Temporary Decarbonisation Fund to help EU businesses remain competitive while investing in cleaner production methods. MEPs proposed that support should be available from 2027 to 2029 and broadened eligibility to include fertiliser products and downstream industries facing increased carbon-related costs. The proposals also include measures to assist least-developed countries through simplified reporting requirements and technical support, while maintaining the environmental integrity of the system.

Negotiations with Member States will now begin to determine the final shape of legislation. For businesses with links to carbon-intensive supply chains, the outcome of these discussions will be closely watched, particularly given the potential implications for trade, manufacturing and the wider transition to net-zero emissions.

State of the European Union Address

On Wednesday 16 September, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gave the State of the European Union (SOTEU) address to the European Parliament Plenary. Key energy themes of the SOTEU included:

- The EU must reduce strategic dependencies and strengthen competitiveness by ensuring a level playing field for energy companies, addressing its €1 billion per day trade deficit with China, and securing critical raw materials through a new European Critical Raw Materials Corporation.
- Energy policy featured prominently, with the President arguing that Europe must "make its future electric" while ensuring EU companies can compete on a level playing field. She linked stronger domestic energy production and industrial competitiveness to the wider objective of maintaining affordable energy prices and reducing strategic dependencies.

Informal Meeting of EU Energy Ministers

On 29 September, as part of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, there was an informal meeting of the EU Energy ministers where they discussed energy affordability, innovation and market disruption, as well as European energy security and cooperation. Commenting at the close of the informal meeting, Irish Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment Darragh O'Brien said 'This meeting has come at a critical moment for Europe. For the second time in four years, our citizens and businesses are facing the consequences of a major fossil fuel shock, with rising energy prices placing real pressure on households and economies across the Union. We must accelerate the transition to clean energy produced here in Europe. Doing so will strengthen our competitiveness, enhance our security and help protect consumers from future price shocks.'

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3.5 Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS)

EDUCATION

Erasmus+ Programme

On 28 September 2026, the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) adopted its position on the proposal for the 2028-2034 Erasmus+ programme. The Committee called for a significant increase in funding, proposing a budget of €47.39 billion, compared with the European Commission's proposed €40.8 billion, to ensure the programme can deliver on its stated objectives. MEPs also supported ring-fenced funding for key areas, including education and training, youth and volunteering, and sport. In addition, they argued that financial support for participants in educational and youth exchanges should better reflect variations in living costs, housing prices, inflation and purchasing power across host countries, regions and cities. The CULT Committee's position places a strong emphasis on inclusion, with MEPs proposing that at least 20% of Erasmus+ participants should come from groups facing barriers to educational or employment opportunities. The committee also believes that the future Erasmus+ programme should contribute to implementing the forthcoming EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda and support policy measures aimed at improving teacher recruitment and retention. MEPs also proposed extending mobility opportunities to athletes involved in grassroots sport, rather than limiting support to staff of sports clubs and organisations. CULT's position was approved by 24 votes to one and with one abstention. It will be put to a vote for the whole Parliament, provisionally scheduled for 19

October. Once approved, negotiations with the Council of the EU can start as the Council had already agreed its position in May 2026.

CULTURE AND AUDIOVISUAL (AV)

Digital and Online Safety

On Tuesday 7 July, the European Parliament's CULT Committee adopted a resolution, stating that media literacy and digital learning are basic skills for all citizens and should therefore be promoted throughout the entire education path and beyond, in the workplace, within lifelong learning and through a whole-of-society approach.

Media literacy and digital learning are crucial to empower citizens for safer navigation through the digital environment, enabling them to identify disinformation, foreign information manipulation and interference, cyberbullying and other forms of online harm. MEPs encourage cooperation between public and private organisations for the promotion of media literacy across the EU, ensuring that the use of digital learning tools in education is free from undue commercial influence and that cooperation with the private sector is guided by the public interest.

In the framework of the evaluation of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), MEPs call for further measures to protect minors who use video-sharing platforms.

Online Safety for Children and Young People

On Tuesday 14 July, the CULT Committee stated in an own-initiative report that companies should guarantee that the use of social media and the digital environment is safe, particularly for children and young people. To protect minors from the impact of social media, MEPs want EU legislation better enforced and implemented. In the adopted report, they say that the online environment must be governed by the principles of privacy-by-design and safety-by-default, age-appropriate design, and algorithmic transparency.

Pointing to the impact of addictive and persuasive design features on wellbeing of children and young people, MEPs want a ban on the most harmful addictive practices and urge platforms to include risk-based safeguards for their recommender systems.

The text also highlights the need for increased transparency around social media algorithmic systems, as opaque algorithms and content moderation hampers the ability of young users to understand why certain content is recommended, suppressed or removed, intentionally undermining their capacity to navigate online content.

MEPs also support the introduction of a "youth mode" disabling targeted advertising and limiting addictive design features for minors.

MEPs maintain that the European Commission must ensure consistency among all key EU legal instruments, including the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Digital Services Act (DSA), the AI Act, and Digital Fairness Act.

On Tuesday 17 September, Parliament in plenary adopted the Committee's report and its proposals to oblige platforms, EU countries and the Commission to guarantee a safe online environment for young people in the EU.

The EU KIDS Act

On Thursday 17 September, the European Commission adopted the EU KIDS Act to enhance the online safety of children throughout the EU. The proposal prohibits social media platforms from accessing children under the age of 13 and sets an EU-wide minimum age for minors to open an

account of their own at the age of 15, thereby ensuring a gradual approach. The KIDS Act also reverses the burden of proof. Now, service providers will have to show that their services are age-appropriate and safe by design.

Key elements of the Act include:

- Children between 3 and 13 not being able to access social media. However, they can access specially designed child-friendly video-sharing services through accounts managed by their guardian.
- Between 13 and 15, the proposal calls for parental control, enabling guardians to set up mini accounts that children can access through the guardian's account.
- From age 15 onwards, children can create autonomous accounts on social media.

The EU KIDS Act imposes a number of obligations for all online services offering social media services, video sharing, online video games, AI companions and chatbots to users below the age of 18, requiring 'safety-by-design'. These include a ban on addictive features and profiling-based recommender feeds dragging minors into 'rabbit holes' of harmful content. It also includes prohibiting infinite scroll without stopping points, reward tricks, and push notifications during sleeping hours, as well as unsolicited contact from strangers. In addition, AI companions and chatbots must be turned off by default and cannot simulate interpersonal relationships in ways that create emotional dependency.

The proposal has been transmitted to the European Parliament and Council, with a view to launching the legislative process for their examination and adoption. The European Commission considers that in light of the clear demand for urgent and comprehensive action at EU level the proposal requires swift adoption.

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3.6 Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO)

EMPLOYMENT

Work Related Psychosocial Risks

On Wednesday 2 September, the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) agreed on a series of recommendations for a new EU bill to ensure minimum requirements to prevent, eliminate or reduce work-related psychosocial risks which could lead to work-related stress, burnout, and mental and physical disorders. This proposal should be preceded by an impact assessment including an assessment of existing legislation.

MEPs have called for strong binding obligations for employers to protect mental and physical health and to ensure safe and dignified working conditions. They also want the European Commission and EU Member States to explicitly recognise that work-related psychosocial risks give rise to occupational diseases.

MEPs want employers to adopt and implement policies defining and prohibiting violence, harassment, bullying and discriminatory behaviour undermining workers' dignity, physical or mental health, as well as early detection mechanisms and risk-based prevention protocols for third-party violence.

MEPs recommend employers carry out regular psychosocial risk assessments to evaluate factors such as excessive workload and high work intensity and adopt action plans with concrete

measures. Workers who have been absent from work due to work-related psychosocial risks should have the right to a supported and sustainable return to work.

EU Member States should ensure that, where a worker establishes that they have suffered injury or damage to health due to exposure to work-related psychosocial risk factors, it is presumed that the injury or damage is work-related, unless the employer demonstrates that it is not linked to the worker's working conditions.

Limiting Exposure to Toxic Substances in the Workplace

On Wednesday 2 September, the EMPL Committee approved a provisional agreement to new rules to improve EU standards protecting workers from exposure to certain dangerous substances.

The sixth revision of the carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances directive (CMRD) includes new exposure limit values for certain dangerous chemicals, based on the most up-to-date scientific data.

The agreement still needs to be approved by Parliament in plenary and the Council of the EU. It is anticipated that both bodies will consider the provisional agreement in October 2026.

The Fair Labour Mobility Package

On Tuesday 15 September, the European Commission published the Fair Labour Mobility Package. The package will enable workers to prove and claim their social security and health insurance rights, and have their qualifications understood everywhere in the EU and formally recognised where the profession is regulated. New rules and tools will better protect mobile workers from abuse and remove slow and complex administrative procedures that hinder companies from recruiting talent or providing services across the EU. National administrations will benefit from more efficient cooperation to enforce workers' rights and to fight fraud.

The package includes a Communication on fair labour mobility and five legislative proposals:

- A Regulation establishing a European Social Security Pass (ESSPASS)
  - The European Social Security Pass (ESSPASS) will enable people to request and receive social security documents fully online, including the European Health Insurance Card and portable document A1 for posted workers.
  - Through the EU Digital Identity Wallet, people moving to another EU country will be able to store and present these documents digitally, while administrations will be able to verify them quickly and securely. This digital space will be available to people and companies across the EU by the end of the year.
- A "Skills Portability Act", a Regulation on digital and comparable qualifications
  - Qualifications will be issued in a standardised digital format and be available in the EU Digital Identity Wallet. This will make it easier to verify the authenticity of qualifications. The Commission also proposes to provide a new EU qualifications comparison tool, drawing on information from national qualifications databases. This will give employers and workers a simple, free way to understand and compare qualifications across Member States.
- A Regulation to strengthen the European Labour Authority
  - Once adopted, the Commission's proposed regulation will equip the European Labour Authority (ELA) with stronger tools to support Member States in enforcing EU law. It will allow the ELA to improve its capacity to provide risk assessment for inspections to help national inspectorates better target controls. It also proposes to reinforce cross-border cooperation and expertise with dedicated national inspection liaison officers.
- A Directive revising the Professional Qualifications Directive

    - This proposal aims to reduce the time and cost required to have a professional qualification recognised in another Member State, making recognition more transparent and digital.
    - The Commission will extend automatic recognition to more regulated professions. The Commission has adopted the first such framework for physiotherapists.
- A Directive on qualifications of third-country nationals.
    - New rules will also set common standards for recognising qualifications obtained outside the EU for EU citizens and for third-country professionals working in the Single Market or applying from abroad.

The European Commission has produced factsheets for ESSPASS, Skills Portability Initiative (comprising the Skills Portability Act; amendments to the Professional Qualifications Directive and Directive on qualifications of third-country nationals) and Strengthening the ELA

SOCIAL POLICY

Revision of EU Social Security Coordination Rules

On Tuesday 7 July, the European Parliament in plenary approved a revision of EU social security coordination rules to ensure fair and clear access to social security for EU workers who live or work in another EU country.

The update of the regulation on social security coordination, provisionally agreed between Parliament and the Council, introduces clearer criteria for determining which country's social security legislation applies for EU workers who live or work in another EU member state. It also encourages member states to share necessary information promptly in order to identify errors or fraud, including abusive practices, such as letterbox companies.

The law clarifies how periods of work, self-employment, or insurance cover undertaken in different member states are counted when assessing entitlements to unemployment benefits. People who go to another EU country to look for work will be entitled to receive unemployment benefits for six months from the country they left. This period may be extended until the end of their entitlement.

For cross-border workers, it is clarified which member state is responsible for paying benefits. If a cross-border worker has been employed, self-employed, and/or insured for an uninterrupted period of 22 weeks in a member state other than their country of residence, benefits will be paid by the country in which they work.

The updated rules increase legal certainty for people who need care and those who care for them. It adds a new definition and a list of long-term care benefits covered by these rules. Workers or self-employed persons sent abroad for up to 24 months (not replacing a previously sent employee) remain insured in the EU country where their employer is established or where they normally pursue their self-employed activity.

For workers carrying out activities in two or more member states, the updated law helps determine the "registered office or place of business" of the employer or business to help establish which member state's social security legislation applies. In line with decisions by EU Court of Justice, EU citizens who neither work nor actively search for a job should not be prevented from contributing to a sickness coverage scheme.

On 28 September, The Council of the EU approved the rules. The regulation will enter into force on the first day of the month following the date of its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.

European Pillar of Social Rights

On 22 July, the European Commission adopted a Communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights, launching a strategic process towards a renewed commitment to Social Europe ahead of the Pillar's 10th anniversary in 2027. The Communication reviews the impact of this Pillar and highlights three areas which require urgent additional attention:

- Addressing affordability and the cost of living by continuing to support measures that reduce poverty, improve access to essential services, and help people with significant barriers to return to work.
- Harnessing AI for the future of work and shared prosperity by establishing a new high-level group on the impact of AI on the labour market.
- Reducing inequalities and promote equal opportunities by improving support for small businesses and developing better ways to measure job quality across the EU.

Making progress in these areas is complementary to ongoing Commission initiatives on jobs, skills, mobility and poverty reduction.

The European Pillar of Social Rights, which was adopted in 2017, sets out 20 rights and principles. It has guided EU policies such as the European Child Guarantee, the EU's main tool to combat child disadvantages, and the EU Minimum Wage Directive, the EU's legal framework that ensures workers earn an adequate living wage. Alongside the release of the Communication, the Commission has published a factsheet on its renewed commitment to 'A Future-Ready Social Europe'.

On 10 September, Mr Mario Nava, Director General at the European Commission DG Employment and Social Affairs and Inclusion, presented the Communication to the Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL).

HEALTH

The European Health Data Space (EHDS)

The EU's Working Party on the United Kingdom is currently considering two draft proposals for a Council Decision that would give the European Commission authority to agree to adopt a Joint Committee Decision to add new EU laws to the Windsor Framework (WF) under the process contained within article 13(4) WF. While the existence of these draft Decisions does not constitute a formal EU Commission request to consider these pieces of legislation for addition to the annexes to the Windsor Framework, it is generally regarded as a possible indication that a formal application to add the legislation might be forthcoming.

One of the items of EU legislation that is subject to these processes is Chapter III of the European Health Data Space, with the exception of article 29, which relates to procurement, reimbursement and financing.

Chapter III of EHDS deals with electronic health record systems (EHR systems). According to a recital in the legislation, although a number of Member States have created centralised EHR systems, not all countries have undertaken this work, and those Member States that have implemented them have done so in a fragmented manner. In order to facilitate the free movement

of personal electronic health data across the Union and avoid negative consequences for patients when receiving healthcare in a cross-border context, Union action is needed to improve natural persons' access to their own personal electronic health data and to empower them to share those data.

The EHDS seeks to reduce fragmentation, heterogeneity and division, and to create a system that is user-friendly and intuitive in all Member States. The recitals also state that any digital transformation in the healthcare sector should aim to be inclusive and also benefit natural persons with limited ability to access and use digital services, including people with disabilities.

As currently drafted, the proposed Council decision would seek to add Chapter III EHDS to section 47 of Annex 2 of the Windsor Framework, which is entitled *'Other'*.

Strategy to Combat Cardiovascular Diseases (CVD)

On Wednesday 16 September, the European Parliament in plenary adopted its response to the EU's first-ever strategy on cardiovascular diseases, the leading cause of mortality in the EU.

The report calls for a shift towards effective prevention of cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), including a horizontal EU health prevention plan to address risk factors for major non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, cancer, obesity and many others.

The European Parliament calls on the European Commission to present as soon as possible a revamp of the legislative framework on tobacco control. Stricter measures (such as bans on flavours, limits on nicotine content, regulating social media advertising) should reduce the affordability, access, consumption, and appeal of tobacco and nicotine products and smoking devices, and specifically include novel and emerging nicotine and tobacco products.

MEPs want better nutritional and health information on labels of all alcoholic beverages and awareness campaigns on the cardiovascular and other health risks associated with harmful alcohol consumption, particularly at levels exceeding scientifically established health recommendations.

The report calls for legislative measures to improve front-of-pack nutrition labelling. MEPs also want a clear EU definition of "ultra-processed foods" and better promotion of balanced diets and physical activity.

Staffing Shortages in the Healthcare Sector

On Thursday 17 September, the European Parliament in plenary adopted a report raising the need for the EU to address healthcare sector staff shortages and inadequate working conditions.

The European Parliament is asking the European Commission for an ambitious strategy to increase the healthcare workforce by at least one million during the next multiannual budgeting period (2028-2034). To increase the number of healthcare professionals, MEPs propose action to attract more young people to the healthcare professions, funds for scholarships, cross-border cooperation, and targeted measures to guarantee fair pay and job stability.

Healthcare workers should receive fair remuneration, mental health support, and job security. Safeguarding the well-being of frontline staff is a major priority, according to MEPs, as one in three doctors and nurses experience mental health challenges. They call for an obligatory framework to recognise unsafe staffing levels as an occupational hazard, compromising of workload controls and doctor-to-patient/nurse-to-patient ratios.

Parliament stresses the need for adequate financing to sustain healthcare systems, including increased public funding and the strategic use of EU funds, as well as an increase in the allocation and efficient use of dedicated EU funding. The report also calls for workers to be equipped with essential digital skills and training when it comes to AI.

Call for Action on Rare Diseases

On Monday 28 September, in a legislative initiative resolution, the SANT Committee called for a dedicated EU law addressing rare diseases (those affecting fewer than five in 10,000 people). This new law, they say, should improve diagnostics, ensure equal access to treatments and therapies, increase investment into research and innovation, and provide for patient-centred care pathways. MEPs also want to see common rare diseases benchmarks and time-bound targets to monitor progress.

To reduce delays in diagnosing rare diseases, MEPs are proposing a binding coordination mechanism, the European Newborn Screening and Early Diagnosis Steering Committee, to coordinate between EU countries, provide targeted support to those countries with limited capacities, and create EU-level guidelines on relevant rare diseases.

To ensure equal access to treatment, regardless of where they live, the Committee is seeking stronger cooperation between Member States, including in areas such as joint procurement, joint pricing and reimbursing projects.

To support patients living with rare diseases, as well as their caregivers and families, MEPs want to see holistic, patient-centred and multidisciplinary care pathways including inclusive education, employment and progression to adulthood for patients with rare diseases.

To accelerate the development of diagnostics and treatment, the Commission (with the systematic involvement of patient organisations) should establish a rare disease research agenda to ensure that EU funding programmes are aligned.

Assessing the EU's Beating Cancer Plan

On Monday 28 September, the SANT Committee adopted a resolution assessing the EU action plan on beating cancer. The Committee called for dedicated funding, ambitious prevention policies, and equal access to screening, diagnosis and treatment to improve the EU's fight against cancer. The Committee wants the next long-term EU budget to earmark at least €10.05bn for health, with €2.5bn dedicated to cancer-related action.

MEPs want to see EU tobacco legislation urgently updated to cover products such as electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco products and nicotine pouches. At the same, they say an increase in minimum excise duties for all tobacco and nicotine products is needed.

MEPs also call for measures against harmful alcohol consumption, including mandatory clearly visible health information on all alcoholic beverages. SANT MEPs call for equal access to cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment across the EU. Breast, cervical and prostate cancer should remain priorities for screening. With AI-supported screening showing promising results, clinically validated systems should be integrated to national cancer screening programmes.

EU cancer action should also boost the quality of life of cancer survivors and patients. MEPs want to see measures boosting labour market integration, rehabilitation and psychosocial support, and a full implementation of "Right to Be Forgotten" rules.

The Pharma Package

On Monday 28 September, the Council of the EU approved the Regulation and the Directive that are collectively known as the 'Pharma Package'. The package contains a new set of rules that will increase patients' access to medicine and make the EU's pharmaceutical sector fairer and more competitive.

The package represents a far-reaching reform of the EU's pharmaceutical legislation and will help ensure fair access to safe, effective and affordable medicines across the EU. It also seeks to boost the competitiveness of the pharmaceutical industry by cutting regulatory burdens and strengthening security of supply to prevent and manage shortages.

The regulation and directive that make up the pharma package now need to be adopted by the European Parliament. An indicative plenary date has been set for 23 November 2026. They will then enter into force following publication in the EU's Official Journal.

Biotech Act I

Work is continuing on this file. Amendments to a draft report are being considered by the Joint Parliamentary Committee responsible for this proposal. In the Council of the EU, technical meetings continue to take place. Negotiations between the Parliament and the Council are not likely to take place before 2027.

Simplification of the Rules on Medical Device and In-Vitro Diagnostics

Both the European Parliament and Council are continuing the work necessary to establish their respective negotiating positions. Both parties are aiming to have their positions finalised by the end of the year, to enable trilogue discussions to begin during the Lithuanian Presidency.

Parliament has set an indicative plenary date of 14 December 2026.

Monitoring and Controlling Drugs Precursors

Both Parliament and Council are working to establish their positions and aim to be ready for trilogue discussions by mid-to-late November 2026.

The aim is to secure a provisional agreement on this proposal by the end of 2026.

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3.7 Digital

AI and Cybersecurity

On 7 July 2026, the European Commission presented an EU Action Plan on Cybersecurity and AI, which sets out a structured approach to addressing the risks and capitalising on the opportunities associated with advanced artificial intelligence (AI) models in cybersecurity. The Action Plan brings together Member States, industry stakeholders, and EU-level organisations to enhance the resilience and security of the EU's digital landscape against emerging AI-related cyber threats. It is built around three complementary objectives:

1. Promoting the safe and responsible use of advanced AI
2. Reinforcing the EU's cybersecurity and resilience
3. Scaling up Europe's AI capabilities for cybersecurity

The Action Plan will consist of the following:

- **Evaluating AI Models** – To strengthen expertise and capability across the EU, the Commission will launch a dedicated call to establish an EU-wide AI evaluation capacity, including a focus on cybersecurity. This capability is expected to become operational in 2027.
- **Access to Advanced AI Models** – The Commission will collaborate with the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) to develop a European framework for structured access to advanced AI capabilities for cybersecurity purposes.
- **Testing AI for Cybersecurity** – ENISA, together with the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), will establish a secure testing platform for AI-based cybersecurity solutions, including the use of simulated environments.
- **Strengthening EU Cybersecurity Resilience** – ENISA will support partnerships between public authorities, businesses, and open-source communities across the cybersecurity ecosystem. This will include the development of guidance, recommendations, and best practices, alongside a campaign to improve the security of critical open-source software.
- **Scaling EU AI Capabilities for Cybersecurity** – The Commission will launch the *EU Grand Challenge on AI for Cybersecurity*, a competition designed to bring together companies, researchers, and other organisations to develop innovative AI-driven cybersecurity solutions.

ENISA also released a publication on the same day detailing its view on Cybersecurity in the Frontier AI Era. The publication sets out an initial series of recommendations for Member State authorities, EU policymakers, cybersecurity practitioners, and service providers to help build the operational capabilities needed to respond to increasingly automated and machine-speed cyber threats. While not intended as a comprehensive framework, the recommendations provide a foundation for strengthening preparedness and resilience. ENISA will further develop and expand the guidance in collaboration with Member States and EU institutions, ensuring alignment with the Action Plan on AI and cybersecurity.

Cloud and AI Development

The European Parliament published a briefing 'Strengthening the European cloud and AI ecosystem' on 25 September 2026 analysing the European Commission's impact assessment accompanying its proposal on the Cloud and AI Development Act (CADA). CADA establishes a regulatory framework for a Single Market in cloud computing services, seeking to incentivise investment in cloud infrastructure and artificial intelligence research and development in order to cover existing gaps and reduce dependence on non-European providers of cloud and AI computing services. The impact assessment provides a solid assessment of the problems, identifies relevant policy options, and evaluates most of the potential impacts of the policy options

Digital Markets Act

On 16 July the European Commission issued Google two sets of binding specification measures under the Digital Markets Act. The measures are designed to create fairer competition in digital markets by:

- *Opening Android AI features to competitors*
  Google must allow rival AI services access to key Android device features on terms

comparable to Google's own AI services. This is intended to give competing AI providers a fair opportunity to compete with Google on Android devices.

- *Sharing search data with rival search engines*
  Google must provide eligible third-party search engines with access to search data that Google Search has been able to collect at scale. This aims to reduce Google's competitive advantage and help rival search engines improve their services.

The decisions are legally binding, but the company retains its rights of defence and can challenge them through independent judicial review. Search Data must begin to be shared with eligible search engine providers by January 2027. Android users will begin seeing the changes that give competing AI services greater access to Android features by July 2027.

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3.8 Innovation

European Innovation Act

On 9 September 2026, the European Commission proposed a new European Innovation Act to help innovative ideas grow into successful businesses in Europe by improving access to funding and support for scaling up. A key initiative under the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy and the Competitiveness Compass for the EU, the proposal will strengthen the EU's long-term competitiveness, prosperity and technological sovereignty. First, it will help innovative companies access financing. Many startups and scaleups have innovative ideas, patents and other intellectual property, but these assets are often difficult to value, which makes it harder to attract investment. The European Innovation Act will promote a common EU framework to value intellectual property. It will also create a digital marketplace connecting buyers and sellers of intellectual property and offer expert support to help companies bring their ideas to the market. Second, it will establish a common procedure for research and development (R&D) procurement, providing greater legal certainty and helping new technologies reach the market faster, including technologies that can help address shared societal challenges, such as health, education and clean mobility. It will also make it easier for public buyers from different Member States to jointly carry out R&D procurements.

Informal Meeting of EU Research and Innovation Ministers

An informal meeting of the EU Research and Innovation Ministers took place on 20-21 July 2026 in Dublin. The meeting provided the first opportunity for the Ministers to discuss how research and innovation can best contribute to the objectives of the 'One Europe, One market' roadmap. The roadmap, which is a joint initiative from the Council of the EU, the European Commission, and the European Parliament in response to the Letta and Draghi reports and recognises the need for urgent action to improve Europe's competitiveness and sets out a clear path forward. Advancing the roadmap is one of the main priorities for the Irish presidency.

Regulatory Sandboxes

Alongside the European Innovation Act, the European Commission has proposed measures to help innovators bring new ideas to market more quickly through the use of regulatory sandboxes. Regulatory sandboxes allow companies, researchers and public authorities to test new products, services or technologies in a controlled environment for a limited period under the supervision of regulators. This enables innovators to better understand how regulations apply in practice, while

giving policymakers valuable insights into whether existing rules are fit for purpose or need to be updated. By reducing regulatory uncertainty and encouraging experimentation, regulatory sandboxes can help speed up the development and deployment of innovative solutions across a range of sectors.

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3.9 Equality and Human Rights

Democracy and Rule of Law

On Tuesday 15 September, the European Parliament in plenary adopted a report on the findings of the special committee on the European Democracy Shield, including practical recommendations on how the EU can do more to defend its democratic institutions and strengthen its existing toolbox.

Parliament's special committee was set up in December 2024 and tasked with assessing the intensification and impact of hostile activities targeting the EU, such as foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), hybrid attacks, and coordinated disinformation campaigns. In their findings, MEPs argue that the EU's approach currently suffers from fragmentation, as individual member states cannot effectively counter these threats on their own.

MEPs support the creation of the EU centre for democratic resilience (as announced by the Commission in its Democracy Shield strategy, in line with proposals tabled by Parliament during the previous term). The new structure should not duplicate existing tools but instead consolidate ongoing EU-level actions into a single entity with a clear vision, mandate, budget, and capacity to act. Participation should be mandatory for all member states and parliamentary oversight ensured.

Gender Inequalities in Health

On Wednesday 16 September, the European Parliament in plenary adopted a report on gender inequalities in health, calling for stronger EU action to tackle bias in medical research, diagnosis, and treatment.

The text highlights that gender inequalities in health are multifaceted and a violation of fundamental rights, rooted in decades of medical research designed around the male anatomy, affecting the whole cycle of care for women, from clinical trials to diagnosis, treatment, and access to healthcare.

Sex sensitive research design throughout the full research cycle is needed, according to MEPs, including greater efforts to include pregnant and breastfeeding women in clinical trials, as well as to collect sex and gender disaggregated data in EU funded projects. They also call for the European Health Data Space (EHDS) to include a strong gender perspective and warn that artificial intelligence in healthcare can reinforce existing gender and racial biases.

MEPs say the Commission should include clear, public and measurable targets to address gender inequalities in health, including as part of a comprehensive EU women's health strategy. The report draws attention to under-researched and under-diagnosed conditions such as endometriosis, menopause symptoms, cardiovascular disease, migraines, infertility, osteoporosis, diabetes and mental health conditions.

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3.10 Chemicals

Common Data Platform on Chemicals

The EU's Working Party on the United Kingdom is currently examining draft Council Decisions that would authorise the European Commission to agree, within the framework of the EU-UK Joint Committee, to the addition of further EU acts to Annex 2 of the Windsor Framework. While the existence of these draft Decisions does not constitute a formal EU Commission request for incorporation, it is generally regarded as an indication that consideration of incorporation is advancing. Of particular relevance is Regulation (EU) 2025/2455 establishing a common data platform on chemicals, which forms part of the EU's "One Substance, One Assessment" (OSOA) chemicals package.

The Regulation establishes a centralised EU-wide chemicals data platform, managed by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), bringing together data from the Commission and key EU agencies, including ECHA, the European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). The objective is to ensure chemicals data are findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable (FAIR), improve the scientific basis for chemicals regulation, increase transparency, facilitate regulatory cooperation and reduce duplication of testing, including animal testing. The platform will also support a chemicals monitoring and outlook framework, including an early warning mechanism for emerging chemical risks.

Under the draft Council Decision, the Regulation would be added to point 23 ('Chemicals and related') of Annex 2 of the Windsor Framework, although a number of provisions and annex entries are specifically excluded from the proposed scope of application in Northern Ireland. The proposal is potentially significant as it would extend elements of the EU's emerging chemicals data-governance framework to Northern Ireland. While the Regulation is primarily directed at EU institutions and agencies rather than economic operators, its incorporation could require Northern Ireland authorities to engage with elements of the EU chemicals data architecture and may have indirect implications for regulatory transparency and information-sharing arrangements.

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3.11 Housing

Affordable Housing Act

On 9 September 2026, the European Commission published a proposal for a regulation establishing a framework for measures in Member States to safeguard housing affordability and availability under the Housing Affordability Act (previously known as the European Affordability Housing Plan (EAHP). The proposal is accompanied by an impact assessment and a Commission recommendation on housing supply in areas under housing stress. The proposal, based on EU competence in internal market matters (services and capital), focuses on short-term rentals and vacant homes. It establishes the common framework applicable to housing-related measures and introduces a legal concept of "housing stress areas". It lays down the methodology for demonstrating housing stress (based on the ratio between costs and income and on price trends), rules on territorial scope and the conditions governing non-discrimination, necessity and proportionality. It also establishes requirements concerning duration, periodic review, transparency and judicial review.

Member States and local authorities may, but are not obliged to, designate housing stress areas in order to gain a legal basis for adopting proportionate restrictions on short-term rentals and on vacant housing. Primary residences let out occasionally are excluded from the scope.

The regulation would apply to the following measures taken by competent authorities (only when justified by the necessity to safeguard housing affordability and availability):

- Restricting access to, or the provision of, short-term accommodation rental services in residential property;
- Restricting the acquisition or use of land and residential property that is not acquired or used for the purpose of a primary residence, whether occupied by the owner or by another person.

It would not apply to measures taken solely for overriding reasons relating to the public interest other than the need to safeguard housing affordability and availability.

The file will be dealt with by Parliament and Council as co-legislators.

State of the European Union Address

On 16 September, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gave the State of the European Union (SOTEU) address to the European Parliament Plenary.

Housing featured as a key social priority in the SOTEU. Highlighting rising concerns about affordability and access to housing across Europe, President von der Leyen announced a proposal for the EU's first dedicated Housing Act aimed at tackling issues such as short-term rentals and housing speculation. Framing housing as a social right rather than a privilege, the President argued that action is needed to ensure that people can continue to live in regions they call home. The announcement signals a significant expansion of EU engagement in housing policy, an area that has traditionally been led by Member States.

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3.12 Justice and Home Affairs

In July, as part of the Irish Presidency, the COSI and SCIFA working groups visited Ireland and an informal JHA Council was held in Dublin. Minister O'Callaghan welcomed Home Affairs Ministers on the first day where measures to support internal security, respond to emerging threats, and ensure the safety of EU citizens were discussed. With a focus on securing borders and fighting serious and organised crime, topics included improving cooperation with partners, restricting visa free travel to the EU, and the possibility of increasing information exchange with trusted third countries. The importance of advancing the EU Visa Strategy to guard against security threats from hostile third countries was agreed as a priority.

On the second day discussions for Justice Ministers focussed on data retention, children's involvement in family law proceedings, online safety and the need for effective measures to address the harmful impact of violent or extreme pornography. A key priority of the Irish Presidency is to maintain a spotlight on tackling domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). Two young people with lived experience of navigating the family justice system in Ireland spoke to Ministers about their experience, supported by Barnardos.

In the margins of the informal, Europol and Frontex signed a new Working Arrangement, reinforcing cooperation between the two agencies and reflecting the expanded mandates that both agencies have received in recent years. The third ministerial meeting of the European Ports Alliance also took place on the afternoon of the second day in Dublin. The issue of drug trafficking through ports was the focus and attendees visited Dublin Port for a live demonstration of the tools and tactics

jointly deployed by An Garda Síochána and the Revenue Commissioners to tackle drug trafficking in Ireland.

In relation to online safety, in July the European Parliament's CULT Committee adopted a report that calls for companies to guarantee that the use of social media and the digital environment is safe, particularly for children and young people. Throughout this reporting period technical discussions and a further trilogue have taken place on the CSAM Regulation proposal, where scanning remains the most contentious issue.

The LIBE Committee adopted a draft resolution on the upcoming EU anti-corruption strategy, with MEPs calling for an EU approach combining prevention, enforcement and international cooperation to complement the EU's new anti-corruption directive.

August was a relatively quiet period with the Parliament in recess; however the Irish Presidency hosted an extraordinary meeting of the JHA Council to address illegal migration developments in Ceuta. Member states and the Schengen associated countries were united in expressing strong solidarity with Spain. The EU e-evidence package entered into force in August which introduced European Production Orders (EPOs) and European Preservation Orders (EPOC-PR), that aim to make it easier for judicial and law enforcement authorities in different Member States to obtain electronic evidence in criminal investigations. The European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) published its Opinion on the Commission's proposal to streamline data protection rules for Europol and other justice agencies.

In September the Commission launched a new series of webinars on the use of AI in justice. The first session was dedicated to AI tools that can support case and document management, workflow automation, case allocation and information services for citizens.

The Commission adopted the EU KIDS Act, including a Factsheet and Q&A which aims to enhance the online safety of children. The proposal prohibits social media platforms from accessing children under the age of 13 and sets minimum age for minors to open an account at the age of 15. The proposal will be considered and negotiated by the Council and Parliament.

The LIBE Committee held a debate on 'Preventing the recruitment of children and young people by organised crime: strengthening prevention, protection and cross-border cooperation'. The exchange of views focussed on the EU Action Plan on the Protection of Children Against Crime and included interventions by the Commission, Europol, EU FRA and Save the Children. The growing issue of the recruitment of youths via social media for Violence-as-a-Service (VaaS) was discussed and Europol provided information on OTF GRIMM which targets the problem.

MEPs adopted a resolution calling for urgent action against drug trafficking networks, pushing for increased cooperation, including with third countries, and information-sharing alongside improved port security in response to quickly evolving criminal networks. A legislative proposal on controlling and monitoring drug precursors accompanying the strategy is currently being discussed by Parliament and updated rules on organised crime are expected to be presented later this year.

The EU Anti-Trafficking Hub published a paper NRMs in the EU: Mapping, Analysis and Further Guidance examining how all 27 Member States identify, refer, assist, and protect victims of human trafficking through their National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs).

Germany's Jürgen Ebner was appointed as the new Executive Director of Europol and Helen Graves was appointed as Eurojust's new Liaison Prosecutor for the UK.

For further details please contact Lynda.More@justice-ni.gov.uk

3.13 Economy

AGILE

On 15 July 2026, MEPs and the Council reached a provisional political agreement on the creation of a programme for agile and rapid defence innovation (AGILE), a new €115 million instrument designed to provide rapid, agile and targeted financial support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – including start-ups and scale-ups – developing emerging and disruptive defence technologies. This agreement ensures EU support for SMEs across the EU to be at the centre of defence innovation and is designed to stimulate innovation with fast-track grants and access to testing and certification. The provisional agreement must now be formally endorsed by Parliament and Council. Once adopted, the regulation will enter into force 20 days after its publication in the EU Official Journal. The new programme is on track to become operational from early 2027.

The Irish presidency of the EU Council hosted a meeting on 1 September 2026 of EU Defence Ministers in Wicklow for discussions on key security and defence issues facing Europe. Ministers exchanged views on the implementation of the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence and the role of space capabilities in strengthening European security and resilience. A key focus of discussions was maritime security and the protection of critical maritime infrastructure. Ministers considered the evolving threat environment in the maritime domain, and the importance of strengthening resilience, enhancing maritime domain awareness and improving cooperation to safeguard the infrastructure that underpins Europe's connectivity.

COMPET Council

The first meeting of the EU Competitiveness Council (Internal Market) under the Irish Presidency was held on 24 September 2026. Speaking at a press conference afterwards , Peter Burke, the Irish Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, highlighted the importance of maintaining momentum behind the "One Europe, One Roadmap" agenda and welcomed progress on several flagship initiatives. Discussions during the meeting included the European Chips Act which was described as vital for strengthening Europe's technological leadership and for ensuring the EU remains competitive in emerging industries. Particular attention was given to the proposed Industrial Accelerator Act, which aims to strengthen Europe's industrial base and increase manufacturing's contribution to EU GDP. The initiative was presented as central to boosting competitiveness, investment and long-term economic resilience. EU Inc., a proposal intended to simplify business establishment across Europe through a digital-first system that would allow companies to set up and operate more easily across the Single Market, was also highlighted. The measure was described as an important signal to investors and a way to improve Europe's attractiveness as a destination for investment. Minister Burke emphasised Ireland's role as an honest broker during its Presidency, working closely with Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament to build consensus across a range of policy files.

Defence

The European Parliament approved changes to accelerate defence investment and improve the EU's responsiveness to security challenges on 16 September 2026. These include the acceleration of permit-granting for defence readiness projects, intra-EU transfers of defence-related products and simplified procurement and Facilitating defence investments and conditions for defence industry. Votes on all three elements were voted on separately and were approved with a majority of votes. The new rules will enter into force on the twentieth day following their publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.

ECOFIN Council

Ministers from the Economic and Financial Affairs Council exchanged views on the market integration and supervision package – a key element of the savings and investments union on 10 July 2026. Agreement on this package is among the objectives of the "One Europe, One Market" roadmap. The draft market integration and supervision legislation aims to deepen integration of EU capital markets by removing barriers to cross-border provision of investment activities and strengthening supervisory efficiency. This should help in turn to boost EU competitiveness through the mobilisation of private savings.

ECOFIN Informal Council

An informal meeting of EU ministers responsible for competitiveness for the internal market and industry took place on 9 -10 July in Dublin. Discussions included private finance for scaling SME's and powering industrial decarbonisation.

European Business Wallets

MEPs from the Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) committee adopted a position on draft legislation to create European Business Wallets on 10 September 2026. This is a secure digital tool enabling companies and public authorities to interact online, across all EU Member States, in a simple and legally valid way. The Wallet will become a digital briefcase for businesses, where they can store, manage, and share official documents and credentials securely. According to the European Commission, if widely adopted, the European Business Wallets could unlock up to €150 billion in savings for businesses each year by reducing administrative processes and costs. In their amendments (parts 1, 2) to the European Commission's proposal, MEPs call for the design and deployment of European Business Wallets to consider the needs of smaller businesses, to deliver affordable and user-friendly solutions, under transparent, fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory conditions.

General Affairs Council

On 22 September 2026, Ministers responsible for European affairs held a policy debate at the General Affairs Council (GAC) on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034 and started preparations for the October European Council by discussing its agenda. Thomas Byrne, Minister of State for European affairs and defence of Ireland stated that progress had been made on the three priorities of the Irish presidency - advancing the next Multiannual Financial Framework, boosting European competitiveness, and promoting and protecting the rule of law. The presidency also presented the current status of the omnibus simplification packages.

Industrial Accelerator Act

The European Parliament Committees on International Trade (INTA), Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), and Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) held a joint public hearing on 2 September 2026 to support their legislative work on the Industrial Accelerator Act (IAA). The hearing brought together leading experts and industry stakeholders to discuss two key aspects of the proposal. The first panel examined the "Made in EU" framework, including origin requirements and conditions for foreign investment, and how these can reduce strategic dependencies while keeping Europe attractive to investment. The second focused on lead markets and EU competitiveness, including measures to stimulate demand for European low-carbon products, investment and job creation.

On 11 September 2026, the European Parliament Joint Committees - Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO), Committee on International Trade (INTA) and the

Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) published their amendments to the Industrial Accelerator Act.

Public Procurement Act

The European Commission adopted a proposal on 9 September 2026 for a new Regulation to modernise and simplify the EU's public procurement framework to support effective investments in public services and infrastructure in line with the Union's policy objectives. The proposal reflects the importance of public procurement as a strategic tool for strengthening Europe's industrial base, supporting innovation, advancing the green and digital transitions, and enhancing economic security and resilience. It also seeks to address weaknesses in the current procurement framework. The proposed Public Procurement Regulation is expected to generate annual administrative savings of around €650 million through four key measures:

- **Simpler rules**: One new Regulation will replace three existing procurement rules.
- **One EU procurement platform**: A new Digital Marketplace will bring all EU public procurement opportunities together in one place.
- **More focus on quality**: Contracts will be awarded based on the best balance of price and quality, including environmental, social and innovation factors.
- **Stronger security and resilience**: Public buyers will be able, and sometimes required, to consider security, cybersecurity, supply chain risks and foreign influence when awarding contracts.

The proposed Regulation will be negotiated by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union before its adoption and entry into force. It also introduces a European preference framework for public procurement.

28th Regime

On 9 July at the European Parliament's Committee on Economic & Monetary Affairs (ECON), MEPs adopted the proposal on the tax aspects of the 28th regime. The proposal focuses on the tax dimension of the broader 28th Regime initiative, which aims to provide companies, particularly innovative businesses, with a single, harmonised set of rules to strengthen the Single Market and encourage cross-border investment. The report also proposes schemes aimed at improving attractiveness for innovative companies and allowing companies to scale-up easily in Europe. The outcome of the vote was 366 in favour, 192 opposed, and 39 abstentions.

For further details please contact Johanna.Lagan@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk.

3.14 Trade

EU-US Tariffs

As of 1 July 2026, a revised EU tariff regime for imports originating in the United States entered into force following the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2026/1455. Published on 30 June 2026, the measure updates customs duty rates for designated US products and introduces tariff quotas for selected imports from the US. This is the basis of the current EU-US tariff arrangement. Rather than imposing additional tariffs on US imports, the regulation reduces or removes EU customs duties on a wide range of US-origin goods as part of a broader EU-US trade understanding reached in 2025.

Under the agreement most industrial goods imported from the US now receive a 0% EU customs duty under Annex I. This covers many categories including machinery, vehicles, chemicals,

pharmaceuticals, metals and manufactured products. Agrifood products benefit through a combination of duty reductions and tariff-rate quotas (TRQs). Products include pork, dairy, nuts, fishery products, soybean oil and some processed foods. For certain fruit, vegetable and food products, the ad valorem (percentage-based) duty has been removed, although specific duties may still apply.

The European Commission retains the power to suspend or withdraw these preferences if US imports cause serious injury to EU industry or the US fails to respect commitments made in the 2025 EU-US Joint Statement.

EU-US Tax Reform

Four MEPs from the European Parliament's Tax Matters subcommittee were in the United States on 21-22 September 2026 to discuss EU-US relations in the field of taxation and progress at global level on various tax issues. EU-US relations in the field of taxation where a key topic, in particular the implementation of the side-by-side approach of the OECD's Pillar Two tax reform and the US' GILTI/NCTI minimum corporate tax system. Other topics include the ongoing talks on a new global approach on digital taxation, improving tax competitiveness, and fighting tax evasion and avoidance. The delegation welcomed progress in tax reform discussions but expressed concerns about US transparency measures, particularly around beneficial ownership reporting and the use of anonymous companies. MEPs also discussed fiscal sustainability, warning that rising US debt levels could have wider implications for the global economy.

For further details please contact Johanna.Lagan@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

3.15 EU Programmes

Cohesion Funds

An informal meeting of the General Affairs Council was held on 15 September 2026 in Dublin Castle and was chaired by Ireland's Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation Jack Chambers TD. EU ministers discussed the future of EU cohesion policy and how it can support both competitiveness and regional development. Items on the agenda included:

- Ensuring cohesion policy continues to drive long-term economic competitiveness
- Using cohesion funding to strengthen employment, skills, education, reskilling and workforce development.
- Highlighting the benefits of cohesion funding in Ireland, particularly PEACE PLUS, which supports peacebuilding, reconciliation and cross-border economic development on the island of Ireland.

Horizon Europe

On 29 September 2026, the European Commission allocated an additional €500 million to Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship research and innovation programme, for 2026 and 2027. With this additional amount, the total budget now reaches around €14.8 billion for the two years. In addition, the Commission will also extend the scope of Horizon Europe by including two new cross-cutting calls to tackle major research and innovation challenges, such as next-generation AI-driven digital platforms for a more affordable, secure and sustainable European energy system; skills for innovative SMEs; addressing the biodiversity benefits and impacts of the clean and digital industries and accelerate transformative change for biodiversity.

PEACE PLUS

The European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development (REGI) debated the draft report on 'Establishing the European Fund for Regional Development including for European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) and the Cohesion Fund as part of the Fund set out in Regulation (EU) […] [NRP] and establishing conditions for the implementation of the Union support to regional development from 2028 to 2034' on 15 July.

The rapporteurs presented the report before the summer recess to allow MEPs to conduct an initial review, with further work continuing in September. The 122 proposed amendments aim to provide greater legal certainty, recognise the role and strengths of regions, establish clear but flexible criteria, and ensure that funding can be directed to areas affected by disasters. The report is maintaining the funds set out by the European Commission and includes a dedicated percentage for housing and sustainable urban development. There are several cohesion funding amendments for dual use and industrial development.

PEACE PLUS funding was raised several times by Irish MEPs. Kathleen Function (the Left) said that PEACE PLUS is the main regional fund for Ireland, and that the reference is welcome but there needs to be a figure in the draft proposal because there is the fear is that without specific allocation it will be underfunded, even if there is goodwill. Ciaran Mullooly (RENEW) said that PEACE PLUS funding is significant to Ireland, but the amount must be resolved because there cannot be staff uncertainty about what will be in the future. Maria Walsh (EPP) said a continued dedicated PEACE PLUS funding programme is important, and it is possible to see the difference that it is making especially in local business support, improving shared public services and environmental projects, however its essence is bringing communities closer together. She added that PEACE PLUS has played a vital role in the reconciliation role on the island of Ireland, and it is important this commitment should not be weakened after 2027.

At the time of the debate the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) draft included a commitment to an EU contribution to a successor programme for PEACE PLUS but not a specific allocation. The co-rapporteur Pascal Arimont (EPP) highlighted the significant added value of PEACEPLUS and supported the need to include an amount.

On 11 September 2026, an opinion by the European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs was published on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for Regional Development including for European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) and the Cohesion Fund as part of the Fund set out in Regulation (EU) […] [NRP] and establishing conditions for the implementation of the Union support to regional development from 2028 to 2034. Amendments included changes to wording on PEACE PLUS

For further details please contact Johanna.Lagan@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

3.16 Transport

Weights and Dimensions Directive

The European Commission listed the revision of the EU rules on weights and dimensions of heavy-duty road vehicles among its planned measures in 2023. Trilogue meetings started in December 2025 but it would appear that no final agreement has yet been reached.

Revision of Directive 1999/0037 on the Registration Documents for Vehicles

Directive 2014/46/EU on the vehicle registration documents (VRD Directive) is part of the Roadworthiness Package. The VRD Directive regulates the electronic recording of data on all vehicles registered on Member States' territory and harmonised procedures concerning the suspension of a vehicle's registration. Interinstitutional negotiations began on 2 July 2026. Discussions are continuing at technical level.

Revision on Periodic Roadworthiness Tests for Motor Vehicles and their Trailers and on the Technical Roadside Inspection of the Roadworthiness of Commercial Vehicles Circulating in the Union

Directive 2014/45/EU on periodic technical inspection and Directive 2014/47/EU on roadside inspection are also part of the Roadworthiness Package. Their joint review is registered under the same procedure 2025/0097(COD). Directive 2014/45/EU on Periodic Technical Inspection ensures that most vehicles and trailers are inspected at regular intervals and defines the conditions and procedures for certification. Directive 2014/47/EU on roadside inspections regulates roadside inspections of motor vehicles and their trailers used for professional transport. Interinstitutional negotiations began on 2 July 2026. Discussions are continuing at technical level.

Protection of Passengers with Single Tickets

Following the European Commission' publication of the proposal on 13 May 2026 as part of the Passenger Package, its referral to the TRAN Committee was announced in plenary on 9 July 2026. The proposal intends to update passenger protection rules to reflect how rail travel is actually booked today, with more multi-leg, multi-operator journeys purchased in a single transaction. The proposal complements the related Rail Ticketing and multimodal booking proposals. It aims to strengthen passenger protection, support sustainable mobility and advance an integrated European rail system.

On 2 September 2026, DG MOVE Director-General addressed the TRAN Committee on the Passenger Package, including the Rail Ticketing Regulation. The proposed regulation on Rail Ticketing aims to enable single-ticket bookings across multiple operators. It was included as actions 37 and 65 of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. Part of the Passenger Package, this initiative supports climate neutrality goals by making energy-efficient rail travel more accessible and competitive.

Driving Licence Directive

The Driving Licence Directive was published in the Official Journal on 5 November 2025. It entered into force on the twentieth day following that of its publication. By 26 November 2028, Member States shall adopt and publish the measures necessary to comply with the Directive and by 26 November 2029 they shall apply them. Measures related to Article 9 (2), points (i) and (k) on the validity of driving licences shall be adopted and applied by 26 November 2027. Measures related to article 17 (Accompanied driving scheme) shall be adopted and applied by 26 November 2028.

Air Passenger Rights

Regulation 261/2004 on air passenger rights and Regulation 2027/97 on air carrier liability revealed shortcomings during implementation that prevented their full potential from being realised. Following years of negotiation, in 2025, there was agreement on key issues including rerouting at the earliest opportunity, assistance, compensation for delays and cancellations according to flight

distance, clear cancellation rules and stricter information and claims-handling obligations. On 15 June 2026, joint text was approved restoring a general three-hour compensation threshold for delays, strengthening rerouting and missed-connection rights, banning “no-show” clauses, improving information requirements and rights during tarmac delays, and tightening rules on vouchers, which require passenger consent and reimbursement if unused. Parliament’s proposals on free hand luggage and compensation fees were only partly retained. Parliament approved the joint text on 7 July 2026. The final act was signed on 16 September 2026.

Informal Meeting of EU Transport Ministers

On 21 September 2026, as part of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, there was an informal meeting of the EU Transport Ministers. Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Seán Canney, hosted the meeting at Dublin Castle. The meeting focused on two critical issues facing Europe: road safety and the role of technology and the need to shift from fossil fuel dependence in road transport. This meeting will be followed by a formal meeting of Transport Ministers on 30 November 2026.

For further details please contact Deirdre.McDaid@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

4. European Parliament

4.1 Canadian Prime Minister at the European Parliament

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney addressed the European Parliament Plenary on 17 September. Following speculation that Carney would announce plans for Canada to become an "associate member of the EU" his speech, instead focused on the importance of the existing EU-Canada relationship and opportunities for building on it. Carney reiterated the comments from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in her State of the EU speech, about the importance of Canada as a partner within the current geopolitical context. Carney cited the erosion of democratic norms, trade being weaponised, the disruption of climate, and multilateral organisations being "weakened" as challenges to sovereignty and openness. He also said that tech has transformed the nature of warfare, economy, stability and governance, and highlighted challenges in economic integration, tariffs, supply chains and financial mechanisms.

The existing agreement between Canada and the EU, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is already a wide-ranging agreement, and Canada has an association agreement to the EU's defence loan mechanism; SAFE, however Carney gave further examples of where the relationship could be enhanced, including seamless trade and transport and a youth work/study agreement. Carney also followed up on President von der Leyen's announcement of the establishment of the European Corporation on Critical Raw Minerals with reference to a mutually beneficial alliance, marrying Canada's extensive energy and mineral reserves with the EU's clean energy technology.

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5. Office Events and Visits

5.1 Overview of Office Events and Communication



5.2 TRIBE



In collaboration with the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government in Brussels, the Office hosted a Trade Representatives in Brussels (TRIBE) networking event on 9 September. The event took place in Wales House and guests included trade attachés from EU and non-EU countries. This event was a great opportunity for attendees to meet new people from the world of trade and catch up with more established colleagues after the summer break. The TRIBE event allowed participants to discuss issues of common interest and develop their networks in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

5.3 “Words and Wealth” Minority Language Regeneration Event

On 22 September, the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels participated in an event that brought together representatives from across Europe to explore the economic and societal benefits of minority language regeneration. The event was titled *Words and Wealth: The Dynamic Link Between Language and Regional Economic Growth* and was organised in the lead up to the European Day of Languages, which is celebrated every 25 September.

The event provided a valuable platform to showcase Northern Ireland's experience and to exchange perspectives with partners from Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Gibraltar, Jersey, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.



A key contribution came from Brian Dougherty MBE, Chief Executive of the North West Cultural Partnership, who spoke about the societal value of minority language and its impact on identity, inclusion and cultural resilience. Drawing on his own and the Partnership's considerable experience, he demonstrated how minority language and related cultural activity supports the community through theatre, music, dance and cultural events.

The discussion also explored the wider societal benefits of minority language and cultural initiatives. Speakers reflected on how celebrating and respecting diverse cultural traditions can challenge misconceptions, strengthen community cohesion and contribute to peacebuilding.

In addition, the event provided an opportunity to discuss the economic benefits language regeneration can offer, including how such work can contribute to the employment and tourism

sectors. The importance of creating opportunities for both participation and employment, particularly within working-class communities, was highlighted during the event.

The event was followed by a networking session, allowing attendees and speakers to continue discussions and to explore specific areas of interest in more detail.

5.4 Culture Night







On Wednesday 30 September, ONIEB hosted the thirteenth annual Culture Night – an evening dedicated to celebrating the vibrant culture of Northern Ireland through food, art and performance. Held in collaboration with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the event brought together colleagues, friends and partners for a night of connection, creativity and community. This year's headline performance came from Dani Larkin, a Belfast-based singer-songwriter, producer and multi-instrumentalist whose critically acclaimed albums have established her as one of Ireland's most exciting contemporary folk artists.

We were proud to host the "British? Irish? Either? Neither?" (BIEN) Exhibition, showcasing sixteen artists exploring identity, cultural heritage and belonging in Northern Ireland through photography. Presented by Belfast Exposed, the exhibition examines themes of culture, language, landscape and lived experience. The exhibition championed Northern Irish artists, providing a platform to present their work to audiences in Europe.

The event also welcomed Paula McIntyre MBE, one of Northern Ireland's most recognised chefs, broadcasters and food writers, who created a menu for the night showcasing the finest Northern Irish food and drink. The menu highlighted locally sourced produce, including burgers sourced from Hannan meats from their farm in Moira, cheese from Dart Mountain, and buttermilk loaves from Krumb Bakery in Belfast. To end the evening, guests were treated to cider-glazed apple and blackberry compote with oatmeal crumble and Morelli's Irish Black Butter ice cream from Coleraine, as well as buttermilk cream with McConnell's whiskey and raspberry compote.

5.5 Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Topic	Contact
SEUPB Bridging Barriers and Building Futures event	13 Oct 2026	Regional Cohesion/Peace plus	Johanna Lagan
East Border Regions Event	13 Oct 2026	Regional Cohesion/Peace Plus	Johanna Lagan
European Week of Regions & Cities	12-14 Oct 2026	Regional Cohesion	Deirdre McDaid
Manufactuing Partnership Days – Factories of the Future	17-18 Oct 2026	Manufacturing	Johanna Lagan
Erasmus + Partnership Building Workshop for Youth Sector	19-21 Oct 2026	Erasmus+	Johanna Lagan
European Hydrogen Week	26 – 30 Oct 2026	Decarbonisation/ Energy Autonomy	Deirdre McDaid
EAIC Summit – Future of Funding in Europe	3 Nov 2026	Funding	Johanna Lagan
Breakfast roundtable discussion - Industrial Accelerator Act and its implications for UK-EU supply chains, investment and industrial cooperation.	3 Nov 2026	Manufacturing	Johanna Lagan
Euro Heat and Power Summit	3 – 4 Nov 2026	Sustainable District Heating/ Cooling Solutions	Deirdre McDaid
13th Annual European Cybersecurity Conference	4 Nov 2026	Cybersecurity	Johanna Lagan

European Commission Research and Innovation Day	10 Nov 2026	Research and Innovation	Johanna Lagan
Google Sovereign IT Summit	16 Nov 2026	IT	Johanna Lagan

5.6 Welcome Chandler Lütteken

What did you do before joining the Brussels NI Office?

After completing an International Relations MA in The Hague and living in the Netherlands for a few years, I moved to Brussels a year ago for a traineeship at the UK Mission to the EU working on strategy and policy, and communications and engagement.

What are you most looking forward to in your new position?
I'm excited to work on a wide range of policy files and learn as much as I can from the policy officers, as well as take part in organising our events and meet new people from all over the Brussels bubble.

If you could live anywhere, where would it be?
It's my dream to move to my grandparents' house deep in the mountains of Cogne, in the Aosta Valley. A close second is Robin Hood's Bay in North Yorkshire, right by the beach.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?
Take the first step in being kind to strangers.

If you could do any other job for one day, what would it be?
An astronaut or a book author (very different career paths).

What is on your bucket list?
I would love to hike the West Highland Way!

6. Contact Details

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