

Vancouver Youth Model United Nations 2019



European Union Background Guide

Director: Tina Qu

Chair: Jordan Rosenfeld

Assistant Director: Katrina Sun



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My name is Tina Qu, and it is my honour to be serving as your director of the European Union for VYMUN 2019. I hope that this experience will be both entertaining and fun as well as intellectually engaging for all delegates. This year, we will be examining two important topics: the European Migrant Crisis and the Digital Single Market.

Our first topic is the European Migrant Crisis, a significant problem that has thrown the whole of Europe into an identity crisis that has led to several political upheavals. Beginning in 2015, there has been a sudden influx of immigrants arriving in Europe, mainly in Austria, Germany, and Sweden, from war-torn Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Today, people are fleeing from not only war and persecution, but also from economic hardship, despair, and the consequences of climate change. The rise of far-right parties in Europe, the spread of rumours and falsehoods about refugees over social media, and the overall consensus that European countries are homogenous nations have led many countries to reject the idea of refugees despite the many economic and social benefits that they bring. In fact, it can very well be argued that Europe needs immigrants to find a position of strength and unity in a world that is dominated by America and China.

Our second topic is the European Digital Single Market. In a world that is rapidly being taken over by technology, it is essential that countries are taking advantage of the opportunities the arrival of the Digital Age brings. The Digital Single Market is a goal for the European Union to combine 26 national digital markets into a single European digital market to solve problems such as barriers using online tools and services and to provide citizens and businesses the best possible access to the online world that contains thousands of resources, many means of communication, and vast amounts of data. In order to achieve the European Digital Single Market, European countries have to manage funding, improve connectivity, spread knowledge and awareness, provide digital public services, and support the overall integration of digital technology.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at eu@vymun.com. I look forward to seeing everyone in October.

Sincerely,
Tina Qu
Director of EU | VYMUN 2019

Table of Contents:

European Migrant Crisis

Questions to Consider	4
Overview	
Timeline	5
Historical Analysis	8
Past UN Action	10
Current Situation	12
Possible Solutions	13
Bloc Positions	14
Sources Cited	16

Digital Single Market

Questions to Consider	17
Overview	
Timeline	18
Historical Analysis	21
Past UN Action	23
Current Situation	24
Possible Solutions	26
Bloc Positions	27
Sources Cited	29

Topic 1: European Migrant Crisis

Questions to Consider

1. What are the moral implications of denying asylum to refugees?
2. How can the EU balance the needs of migrants and the needs of all the different countries?
3. What are the social and economic concerns to accepting immigrants? How can the EU help settle such concerns with the public?
4. Should the EU enforce “first country responsibility” or a quota scheme to solve the problem of distribution? Is there a way to combine the two solutions?

Overview

According to the International Organization for Migration, more than 464 000 migrants have crossed into Europe by sea within the first nine months of 2015, following the Syrian Civil War that began in 2011.¹ The number of refugees arriving in Germany alone was 475 000, and 55 000 of them decided to register in Berlin.² In contrast, 77 000 refugees arrived in 2012, 126 000 arrived in 2013, and 202 000 arrived in 2014.³ This number continues to grow as 745 000 refugees arrived in 2016, and 222 000 refugees arrived in 2017 after a controversial deal with Turkey that prevented most of them from continuing their journey north.⁴ The immigrant body was mostly comprised of Syrians fleeing the Syrian Civil War, Afghans fleeing the ongoing war with Taliban rebels, and Eritreans fleeing forced labour. The deteriorating security and increasing poverty in countries such as Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Sudan have also pushed people into Europe. These immigrants first fled to neighboring states like Lebanon, then to the richer countries of Europe, namely Austria, Germany, and Sweden.

Present-day Europe is seemingly not prepared for the mass amount of migrants that will continue to flood the continent. Many European nations are accustomed to their own particular forms of immigration and nationhood. France and Britain both have imperial histories and immigrants from their former colonies: France is closely linked to North America, and the UK has ties with India and the Caribbean. Contrarily, various other European countries regard themselves as strictly homogenous nations. For example, boundaries are narrow for newcomers in Germany. Immigrants are considered guests:

¹www.prospect.org/article/migration-crisis-and-future-europe.

²ibid

³ibid

⁴ibid

“gastarbeiter”⁵ means “guest worker,” and is a term used to address Italians and Turks who came to work in German factories in the 1960s.⁶ Immigrants primarily shaped and drove the German economic success after World War II, but the Germans refused to acknowledge the benefits that immigration brought for a long time. Germans today are becoming more politically aware and active; however, like in many other countries, the rise of right-wing political parties and social media fueled anti-immigrant movements. For instance, the AfD, an anti-European Union party founded in 2013,⁷ is a right-wing, xenophobic, and Islamophobic party that is prominent on social media. They use emotional language that has become a moral contagion and helped shape the public discourse.

The biggest issue is, arguably, the fact that many European nations are still unaware of both the advantages migration brings and the consequences of turning away refugees. There are already many economic and technological consequences, as well as political and societal regression. In a world dominated by the United States and China, Europe needs immigration in order to find a position of strength and unity that comes from diversity and acceptance. In Germany, immigrants play an important role in sustaining its system of retirement and providing the necessary workforce. While some European countries are becoming more open toward refugees and the questions of how to deal with them, how to integrate them, and how to behave in the face of fundamental humanitarian challenges, others, such as Italy and Poland, are still governed by government bodies with clear anti-immigrant agendas.

Timeline

July 1951: The term “refugee” is defined as “someone seeking asylum owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”⁸ at the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

June 1985: The Schengen Agreement is a treaty for the abolition of internal border checks. 26 European countries sign the treaty: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

March 2011: The beginning of the Syrian Civil War marks the beginning of the European Migrant Crisis. With hundreds of casualties everyday, Syrian citizens begin to flock toward Europe in search of safety.⁹

⁵ibid

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⁸www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html.

⁹www.prospect.org/article/migration-crisis-and-future-europe.

October 2014: The Italian government decide to end the operation “Mare Nostrum.” With this program, Italian naval ships patrolled the Mediterranean sea, a popular route for refugees to get from Northern Africa to Europe, and saved any capsizing boats. “Mare Nostrum” is now replaced by “Triton,” a simple patrolling operation, amid concerns about the rising numbers of migrants.¹⁰

April 2015: The European Council holds an emergency meeting to discuss the migrant crisis. It decides to triple funding for rescue operations and several EU member states, such as Italy, agree to provide more ships and resources. It also looks at ways to capture and destroy smugglers’ boats, as well as ways to deploy immigration officers to non-EU countries.

May 2015: The European Commission proposes for EU member states to take in refugees under a quota scheme, a system to control the number of immigrants arriving at a country. Countries that receive a lot of migrants, such as Italy, Malta, and Germany, support the proposal while other countries such as Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Estonia oppose the proposal.

June 2015: The United Kingdom begins construction on a high-security fence at the Channel Tunnel port in Calais to prevent migrants from breaking into lorries headed for Britain.

July 2015: Hungary and Serbia begin building a barrier along their borders to stem the flow of immigrants coming into the countries.

August 2015: Bulgaria and Turkey begin building a razor wire fence along their borders to stop migrants from entering illegally. Macedonia, with more than 3000 migrants entering every day¹¹, seals its southern border with Greece and declares a state of emergency. Those who try to force their way into the country face tear gas and stun grenades.

September 2015: Migrants who hope to continue travelling through Europe and the Hungarian police who aim to enforce the Dublin Regulation have a stand-off for 5 days outside the Keleti railway station in Budapest.¹² Eventually, the Hungarian government relents and allows the protestors to cross the border.

September 2015: Despite growing public concerns over the surge of migrants, German Chancellor Angela Merkel chooses not to close Germany’s borders and is portrayed as a traitor to both the German public and other EU states through the media.

¹⁰ibid

¹¹ibid

¹²ibid

Late 2015: Lasego, an agency for health and social affairs, becomes a symbol of what went wrong in the beginnings of the refugee crisis. Unorganized bureaucracies, confusing procedures, and unsafe living conditions for families are highlighted as critical past mistakes.

October 2015: Hungary completes a fence along its border with Croatia. Migrants try to enter Slovenia, but the country is only able to take in 2500 migrants each day.¹³

November 2015: Austria builds a barrier along its border with Slovenia. Six days later, Slovenia builds a barrier along its border with Croatia.

November 2015: The Valletta Summit on Migration is held between European and African leaders to discuss the migrant crisis. Leaders sign an agreement to set up an Emergency Trust Fund to help development in African countries and to provide support for African states to reclaim some migrants. Just a few days later, a series of terrorist attacks in Paris led by Islamic State militants prompt European officials to re-evaluate the security needed for migrants and border controls.

November 2015: Days later, Sweden introduces temporary border checks and decides to grant only temporary residence permits to most refugees. Macedonia builds a barrier along its border with Greece.

January 2016: A number of New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Germany are linked to immigrants and hardens attitudes against mass immigration. Moreover, Sweden introduces higher security measures on its border with Denmark. Denmark also tightens border controls with Germany.

February 2016: Bulgaria closes all external EU borders. Two days later, Austria introduces higher security measures on its border with Hungary, Slovenia, and Italy and sets a daily maximum on the number of refugees entering the country, breaking EU and international laws.

March 2016: Balkan countries, such as Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania, tighten restrictions on migrant entry to close the "Balkan route."

April 2016: Austria builds a fence and registration center at the Brenner Pass on the Italian border and threatens to shut the Brenner Pass unless Italy stops migrants from continuing north.

¹³ibid

May 2016: The European Commission proposes fining EU member states €250 000 for each asylum seeker refused.¹⁴ The money would go to “frontline” states such as Italy and Greece.

January 2019: The EU records the lowest number of migrant arrivals in five years.¹⁵

Historical Analysis

The idea of immigration first arose around the time of the First World War. Seven million people were on the move at the time trying to escape the Russian Revolution, the war between Greece and Turkey, and several other conflicts.¹⁶ By the end of the Second World War, there were over thirty million people seeking asylum in foreign countries. Historian Gerard Daniel Gohén called the Cold War era the “golden age” for refugees because it marked the beginning of the development of a framework for granting immigrants asylum and rights.¹⁷ In 1951, 145 State parties from different nations gathered and ratified the Refugee Convention that defines who a refugee is, the rights guaranteed to them, and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum. The core principle is non-refoulement, which states that refugees shouldn’t be forced to return to a country where their lives would be endangered.

On September 8th, 2015 hundreds of migrants break out of a registration camp at Roszke and fight with the police on Hungary’s border with Serbia. Those who successfully entered the country walked towards the capital, Budapest. Four days later, tens of thousands of people took part in protests supporting refugees in cities all across Europe.¹⁸ In London, people marched through the streets toward the prime minister’s residence with placards. In Copenhagen, about 30 000 protest outside the Danish parliament.¹⁹ There were also rallies in Sweden, France, Austria, and the Netherlands. In contrast, there were various anti-refugee protests in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. On the 13th, Germany closes its border with Austria temporarily due to being “at the limit of its capabilities”.²⁰ The following day, Austria introduced controls on its border with Hungary to limit the number of immigrants arriving in the country. Hungary then officially shuts down its border with Serbia and declares a state of emergency on the 15th. Creating a domino effect, Croatia experiences a huge influx of immigrants after the Hungary-Serbia border closes. Consequently, Croatia closes seven of its eight road border crossings with Serbia.²¹ Slovenia introduces temporary controls on its border with Hungary.

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However, as time passed, a growing fear and resentment of refugees spread across Europe, often attributed to the increase in the number of violent attacks and the social unrest these malicious acts caused. It started in November of 2015, when a series of terrorist attacks in Paris led by Islamic State militants killed 130 civilians.²² It was later discovered that some of the militants entered Europe along with refugees. These attacks were followed by hundreds of sexual assaults, thefts, and rapes during the 2016 New Year's Eve celebrations in Germany.²³ A majority of the suspects were asylum seekers and illegal immigrants from Northern Africa and the Middle East. The result of these acts fuelled debates about Germany's asylum policy and the social differences between European and Islamic countries. On January 9, 2016, about 1700 people joined a protest calling for German Chancellor Angela Merkel's resignation after she chose not to close Germany's borders and was portrayed as a traitor to both the German public and other EU states through the media.²⁴ When the police intervened, some protestors launched missiles at officers, which was met by tear gas and water cannons in response. The next day, eleven immigrants were beaten by a group of citizens in that same neighborhood.²⁵ Culture and religion have also become areas of opposition. On January 26, 2016, a gun battle broke out between the Muslim and Christian migrants in the Grande-Synthe migrant camp in France.²⁶ A senior Catholic Relief Services officer claimed that "the Muslims were trying to expel the Christians from the camp".²⁷ The rise of right-wing and anti-immigrant governments and their propaganda also contribute to the overall distrust many citizens harbor towards refugees.

As a result, Europe, as a whole, has not been welcoming toward refugees. Many countries, such as Bulgaria, have closed off borders or tightened security around borders to stop people from entering. Before 2015, most people took the route across the Mediterranean to reach Europe from North Africa; in fact, over a million people did so in 2014 and 2015 alone.²⁸ The journey was deadly, however, as more than 3000 migrants died at sea in 2014. In total, there were more than 22 000 deaths from 2000-2014.²⁹ At the time, the Italian government funded a rescue operation called "Mare Nostrum" to help save people's lives. In 2014, Italian naval ships were able to save around 100 000 migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean.³⁰ However, in the fall of that year, the Italian government decided to stop this operation amid concerns about rising numbers of migrants. Baroness Joyce, a British politician, once criticized these rescue attempts, noting that such attempts had become a "pull" factor for migrants to try to come to Europe.³¹ "Mare Nostrum" was replaced by

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“Triton,” a patrolling operation. Furthermore, in specific countries like Germany, there is more discussion about the Obergrenze, a plan that would limit the number of migrants who would be accepted into the country, than there is about Germany’s need for immigrants to help its economy. There is also more focus on the Ankerzentren, the centralized institutions for refugees to register and live in until their request for asylum has been reviewed, than the lack of funding for language courses or the injustice of forcing people to return to a country where they face persecution. As the discourse shifts further and further right, there is more and more pushback against migration.

A pushback against migration is also a pushback against multiculturalism. As current German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated in 2010, multiculturalism has “utterly failed”.³² After the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, once-distant, worldwide conflicts spread to Europe.³³ There have been disagreements about culture, religion, and beliefs. There have been specific restrictions for specific groups of people, such as the stricter visa requirements for Iraqi citizens travelling into Turkey. There have even been legal battles, such as the 2004 ban on headscarves in France and the 2004 Madrid train bombings that killed 193 people and injured 2000 others.³⁴

Past UN Action

Established on December 14, 1950 during the Second World War, the UNHCR, or UN Refugee Agency, is the official UN agency for refugees.³⁵ On July 28, 1951, the UNHCR created the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.³⁶ 145 State parties from different nations gathered and ratified the Refugee Convention that defines who a refugee is, the rights guaranteed to them, and the responsibilities of nations that grant asylum.³⁷ The core principle is non-refoulement, which states that refugees shouldn’t be forced to return to a country where their lives would be endangered. Although the agency had initially aimed to complete its work and disband after three years, it still exists today. Its headquarters are located in Geneva, and it has a team of around 9700 staff members in 126 countries, helping nearly 59 million refugees.³⁸

In 1949, the UN General Assembly mandated the creation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.³⁹ UNRWA responded directly to the needs of about 750 000 refugees by providing education, health care, social

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³⁵<http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/refugees/>

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services, and microfinance in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, East Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.⁴⁰

The UN also provides a lot of support for those living in refugee camps. UN peacekeepers are often there to provide safety and security, as well as basic necessities such as food, water, and health care. The UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration, an intergovernmental organization that provides services and advice to migrants, together, lead camp coordination, camp management, and emergency shelter.

The European Union was founded in the 1950s as an organization for trading coal and steel across borders. Economic imperatives always took precedence.⁴¹ However, the EU has taken several actions in attempts to solve or better the migrant crisis. The crisis offers an opportunity for the government and citizens of the continent to make significant reforms to the European Union. At the beginning of the crisis, the EU held an emergency meeting to discuss funding and resources for rescue operations in the Mediterranean, as well as ways to capture and destroy smugglers' boats and ways to deploy immigration officers to non-EU countries. An agreement was reached to triple the funding and for several EU member states, such as Italy, to provide more ships and resources. At another European Council meeting on June 26, 2015, it was agreed that 40 000 migrants from Italy and Greece should be relocated to other EU member states seeing that, during the first half of 2015, about 63 000 migrants arrived in Greece and about 62 000 migrants arrived in Italy.⁴² It was also agreed that another 20 000 refugees should be taken in from outside the EU.⁴³ Another relocation of refugees was voted into action by EU ministers meeting in the Justice and Home Affairs Council on September 22, 2015.⁴⁴ They wanted to distribute 120 000 refugees from Greece and Italy across the EU.⁴⁵ Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia voted against the plan, but much to their dismay, they were overruled. On October 7, 2015, the EU began "Operation Sophia"⁴⁶ in an attempt to stop boats from smuggling immigrants into Europe. Naval vessels that were initially focused on surveillance and rescue operations were now allowed to search and seize suspicious vessels. Furthermore, the EU contributed greatly in terms of helping individual countries deal with the rising number of refugees. On October 15, 2015, the European Council leaders agreed to speed up visa liberalization talks for Turkish citizens if Turkey considered joining the EU.⁴⁷ The EU and Turkey also made another deal on March 18, 2016 to tackle illegal migration.⁴⁸ Migrants arriving in Greece whose asylum was rejected would be sent back to Turkey and replaced with another Syrian refugee who would be

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⁴¹www.prospect.org/article/migration-crisis-and-future-europe.

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resettled within Europe. Turkey would also enforce stricter regulations to prevent illegal migration in exchange for €3 billion from the EU to help their nation host refugees, and freedom for Turkish citizens to travel into the Schengen zone, which is any country that signed the Schengen Agreement.⁴⁹ Lastly, the heads of eleven EU states and three non-EU states held an emergency summit in Brussels to help Slovenia when it was receiving an influx of immigrants after Hungary and Croatia closed their borders. It was agreed that 100 000 spaces would be added to refugee centres and 400 police officers would be sent to Slovenia.⁵⁰

Current Situation

Currently, Europe remains divided on the issue. Several mini summits were held in the last few years in failed attempts to get European countries to agree on a solution to the crisis. While most countries agree to tighten external borders and provide extra funding to prevent people from reaching Europe and to reduce illegal migration, the issue of the distribution of asylum seekers remains. Recently, there has been a decline in the number of migrants arriving in Europe after the EU gave Turkey money to host refugees and prevent more from coming. However, many “frontline” countries, such as Greece and Italy, still feel that it is unfair that they have taken in more refugees than other countries. Italy, with its anti-immigrant, populist government, has especially clashed with the European Union.⁵¹ Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe has spoken out multiple times on ending the concept of “first country responsibility,” which requires refugees to register in the first country they arrive in, causing Italy to have to process thousands of migrants and straining their resources.⁵²

Past concerns and problems on solutions to the distribution issue remain today. In 2015, the European Union proposed a quota system to fairly distribute migrants, but the proposal was met with strong opposition from countries such as Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Estonia for reasons such as a lack of resources to support migrants and a widespread fear of terrorist attacks.⁵³ In addition, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic chose to boycott multiple mini summits. With the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments in the European Union, many political parties have also chose to reject refugees in order to appeal to and appease voters.

Ultimately, new solutions will have to balance the needs of the “frontline” southern states and those of the wealthy, northern “destination” states while addressing the complete refusal of hardline central and eastern states, such as Hungary and Poland, to accept any migrants at all. While most countries want to put an end to the ongoing migrant crisis, not many have actually offered to or are willing to help. As a result, there is a pressing need for the European Union to come together and find solutions to better Europe as a whole.

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Possible Solutions

Securing Borders

The first step toward solving the migrant crisis is securing all of Europe's external borders and guaranteeing the freedom to move within the Schengen area. Europe's unilateral removal of its central Mediterranean borders is linked directly to the increase in the number of migrants over the past few years. Despite the deal between Turkey and the European Union, thousands of migrants still enter the country on a daily basis. It is crucial that there is a dramatic reduction in this flow of refugees.

The most critical border is the one between Greece and Turkey. An estimated 2000 European and national officers are needed to fingerprint, screen, and register refugees.⁵⁴ These officers must also be responsible for distinguishing between refugees and economic migrants; after all, not every migrant is a refugee who is fleeing war or persecution. Helping those in need of safety and protection is a moral responsibility for all countries, but accepting everyone who wishes to come to Europe at the expense of the countries' own stability and resources is not. Furthermore, it is rare that the European Union removes individuals who do not necessarily deserve protection due to moral implications and the difficulties of defining and finding those who do not qualify for protection. Removing asylum seekers whose applications have been denied and illegal immigrants has to become a priority.

It is important to note that this does not mean dismissing economic migrants completely. It depends on each country, as some countries may not have the money to integrate unskilled immigrants who may not have had the chance to receive proper education and training, especially since integration is a difficult and expensive progress. The European Union should work to facilitate training for both high and low level jobs for workers of all levels, as those who are seeking to work in Europe can very well boost its economy and workforce.

Europe also needs to find a way to ensure that there is a safe and legal way for refugees to reach European countries; this means closing the illegal and dangerous Aegean migration route. This, again, requires support for Greece and Turkey as well as cooperation from the two countries. A coalition of willing European states should offer to take about 100 000 Syrian refugees from Turkey, which may require funding for projects, such as schools or medical care, for the children.⁵⁵ In return, Turkey should take back any refugees who reach Greek islands. Since most migrants are looking to reach the richer northern countries, the journey across the Aegean will become less desirable when it is clear that it simply leads back to Turkey.

⁵⁴<http://www.politico.eu/article/solve-migration-crisis-europe-schengen/>

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It is also necessary to look at Europe's border as a whole. The European Commission's proposal to transform Frontex, the EU agency for external border control, into a full-fledged European Border and Coast Guard is one potential solution. However, it would require both substantial funding and agreement from all European states, which would be difficult to achieve, given the variety of national policies and beliefs.

Establishing Asylum Laws and International Responsibility

A prominent conflict regarding the migrant crisis is how to fairly distribute migrants across Europe. To solve this conflict, the EU must agree on one set of asylum laws that can be applied to all countries.

Under the Dublin Regulation, refugees may only claim asylum in their country of entry. However, countries such as Greece and Italy that receive thousands of migrants daily strongly oppose the regulation. The failure to enforce this regulation, in addition to Germany's open borders to refugees in 2015, resulted in migrants ignoring the regulation and moving around freely.⁵⁶

It is important to leave decisions regarding migration policy and the protection of national borders to the countries. After all, every country has different political views and capabilities. The countries' financial status determine whether or not they are willing to host refugees. Some countries are wealthy enough to integrate unskilled immigrants while others only have the money to accept skilled immigrants. Differences in social opinions and political parties lead some countries to embrace multiculturalism while others recoil from it due to fear. Finally, migrants boost the economy of some countries while they take up too many spots in the labor market in others. Although it will be difficult, countries must come to an agreement on how many migrants each country should take in depending on their social, political, and economic states. Although the proposal of a fixed quota scheme was met with opposition from countries such as Austria and Sweden, support should still be offered in some form to the countries that are hosting the most migrants.

Bloc Positions

Southern Bloc

The southern bloc includes Greece, Italy, and other "frontline" countries. These countries receive the largest amount of refugees to process due to their location. They need more support, specifically funding and resources from the wealthier countries of the northern bloc, in order to host refugees. Generally, these nations prioritize finding a way to distribute refugees fairly across the EU. As a result, they are highly opposed to the Dublin Regulation, which states that refugees may only claim asylum in their country of entry, and are highly in favour of establishing a quota scheme. The anti-immigrant, populist government of Italy has

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spoken out multiple times on ending the concept of “first country responsibility.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, they wish to tighten external borders by introducing checks and higher security measures to stop the problem at the beginning by preventing migrants from entering the continent.

Northern Bloc

The northern bloc includes Austria, Sweden, and other “destination” countries. These countries have stronger economies and many job opportunities for migrants, which makes them the most appealing to those seeking a better future. Most migrants who arrive in Europe aim to end up in one of these wealthier places. In general, countries of the northern bloc are focused on tightening border controls. They do not wish for the arrival of more migrants, which means that they are in favour of the Dublin Regulation and opposed to the quota scheme.

Central-Eastern Bloc

The anti-immigrant bloc consists of Hungary, Poland, and other central and eastern countries who are opposed to accepting any refugees. These countries are led by anti-immigrant governments. They have closed their borders and boycotted mini summits where other countries gathered in attempts to come to an agreement and solutions. They are in favour of tightening external border controls and opposed to the quota scheme.

⁵⁷www.prospect.org/article/migration-crisis-and-future-europe.

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Topic 2: Digital Single Market

Questions to Consider

1. What are the benefits of the Digital Single Market for citizens and businesses?
2. What strategies and initiatives can the EU take on in order to improve the process of digitisation?
3. How are different countries reacting to digitisation and how do their reactions differ in terms of priorities and strategies?
4. How is the EU doing as a whole in terms of digitisation globally?

Overview

The Digital Single Market Strategy was first adopted on May 6, 2015.⁵⁸ It was announced by the Juncker Commission for Jean-Claude Juncker, the head of the European Commission. According to the European Commission, the Digital Single Market is “one in which the free movement of persons, services, and capital is ensured and where individuals and businesses can seamlessly access and engage in online activities under the conditions of fair competition, and a high level of consumer and personal data protection, irrespective of their nationality or place of residence.”⁵⁹ Essentially, it is a goal for the European Union to combine 28 national digital markets into a single European digital market. Up until recent years, European citizens and business have faced barriers in using online tools and services; for example, many consumers have restricted access to goods and services and business often cannot reap all the benefits of the digital market. A European Digital Single Market will provide individuals and businesses all over Europe with the best possible access to the online world. Many new opportunities will arise with the removal of barriers to cross-border online activity. It will help connect national and regional initiatives and boost investment through strategic partnerships and networks. With the arrival of the Digital Age and the increase in the amount of influence technology, especially the Internet, has on people’s lives, the European Digital Single Market is currently one of the European Commission’s top ten political priorities.

The European Digital Single Market will serve to benefit Europe in three ways.⁶⁰ Firstly, it will help improve access to digital goods and services for consumers and businesses by removing barriers to cross-border e-commerce and providing access to online content

⁵⁸<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/shaping-digital-single-market>

⁵⁹ibid

⁶⁰<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/ict/bloc-4.html>

while increasing consumer protection.⁶¹ Key concerns regarding online activity today include cybersecurity, data protection/e-privacy, and fairness and transparency of online platforms. The market will also help establish an environment where digital networks and services can prosper by providing high-speed, secure, and trustworthy infrastructures supported by the right regulatory conditions.⁶² Lastly, the European Digital Single Market will help maximise the growth potential of the European Digital Economy so that every citizen can benefit from it by enhancing digital skills, which are essential for an inclusive digital society.⁶³

There are many steps that need to be taken in order to create a single European Digital Market. The European Union is focused on boosting the European digital industry, building a European data economy, improving connectivity and access to online resources, investing in network technologies, advancing in digital science and infrastructures, supporting media and digital culture, creating a digital society, and strengthening trust and security.⁶⁴

Timeline

May 2015: The Digital Single Market Strategy is adopted by the Juncker Commission. Jean-Claude Juncker is the head of the European Commission.⁶⁵

December 2015: Two Commission initiatives on digital contract rules are presented and approved by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. These rules simplify and promote access to digital content and online sales across Europe. For example, if a consumer is unable to play purchased music on their device, they have the right to ask the trader to fix the problem, or get a refund.⁶⁶ The Commission's proposal for cross-border portability of online content services is also presented and approved by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. This allows people to use online subscriptions to films, sports events, e-books, video games, and music services when travelling within Europe.⁶⁷

February 2016: The Commission's proposal to coordinate the use of the 470-790 MHz band for mobile services is presented and approved. This improves internet access for all Europeans and introduces 5G.⁶⁸

April 2016: The Commission plans to digitise the European industry by creating the EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020, prioritizing common Information and Communication Technology (ICT) standards to boost digital innovation, and establishing a European Open

⁶¹ibid

⁶²ibid

⁶³ibid

⁶⁴<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/shaping-digital-single-market>

⁶⁵<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/creating-digital-single-market-european-commission-actions-2015>

⁶⁶ibid

⁶⁷ibid

⁶⁸ibid

Science Cloud, “a network of organisations and infrastructures from various countries and communities that supports the open creation and dissemination of knowledge and scientific data”.⁶⁹ The action plan’s three policy priorities include modernising public administrations using digital enablers such as eSignature or eDelivery, enabling the mobility of citizens and businesses across borders, and facilitating digital interaction between administrators and citizens for better quality services.⁷⁰

May 2016: The Commission’s plan to tackle unjustified geo-blocking, which is the system used to limit one’s online access based on geographical location, is presented and approved.⁷¹

June 2016: The Commission’s initiative to regulate wholesale roaming prices is presented and approved.⁷² This means that travellers don’t have to pay roaming charges in the EU.

September 2016: Two Commission proposals to modernise EU copyright rules and to allow access to online content are presented and approved.⁷³ These are the Marrakesh Treaty which is implemented in EU law, and the WiFi4EU Initiative starts to provide free public Wifi hotspots in communities across Europe.

January 2017: The Commission proposes for stronger privacy in electronic communications by extending ePrivacy rules to all “electronic communication providers in full alignment with the General Data Protection Regulation”.⁷⁴ ePrivacy rules regulates the privacy of electronic communications.

May 2017: The Commission’s initiative to create a Single Digital Getaway, which provides access for people to manage their paperwork online in different countries, is presented and approved.⁷⁵

September 2017: The Commission’s proposal for a cybersecurity package in response to cyber attacks is presented and approved.⁷⁶ The package includes a proposal for an EU Cybersecurity Agency. The Commission also successfully passes a proposal for a framework for the free flow of non-personal data.⁷⁷ Removing data localisation restrictions helps

⁶⁹<https://ec.europa.eu/research/openscience/index.cfm?pg=open-science-cloud>

⁷⁰<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/european-egovernment-action-plan-2016-2020>

⁷¹<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/creating-digital-single-market-european-commission-action-s-2015>

⁷²ibid

⁷³ibid

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⁷⁶ibid

⁷⁷ibid

improve the EU data economy. Moreover, a directive on the combat against fraud and counterfeiting of payment is presented and approved.⁷⁸

October 2017: All the EU Member States signed the Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment in Tallinn, Estonia during the Ministerial Meeting. By doing so, they all reaffirmed their commitment to providing public eServices and implementing the electronic IDentification, Authentication, and trust Services (eIDAS), which is “an EU set of standards for electronic identification and trust services for electronic transitions in the European Single Market”.⁷⁹

January 2018: The Commission’s proposal establishing the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking, which suggests pooling European resources to develop exascale supercomputers for processing big data based on competitive European technology, is presented and approved.⁸⁰ Five days later, the Commission creates the Digital Education Action Plan, which includes 3 goals and 11 actions to support technology use and the development of technology in education.⁸¹ For example, the first goal is “making better use of digital technology for teaching and learning” and can be reached through actions 1-3: connectivity in schools, self-reflection tool and mentoring scheme for schools, and digitally signed qualifications.⁸²

March 2018: The FinTech Action Plan was established on March 8, 2018.⁸³ FinTech, or technology-enabled innovation in financial services, combines financial services with the digital single market. The plan will benefit consumers, investors, banks, and new market players by helping the financial industry make use of advances in technology such as blockchain and strengthen cyber resilience.⁸⁴

Late March 2018: The EU Blockchain Observatory and Forum, a European Commission initiative to accelerate blockchain innovation and development, is established. According to the European Commission, blockchain is “an immutable time-stamped series record of data that is distributed and managed by a cluster of computers”.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ibid

⁷⁹ibid

⁸⁰ibid

⁸¹https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

⁸²<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/creating-digital-single-market-european-commission-actions-2015>

⁸³ibid

⁸⁴<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/shaping-digital-single-market>

⁸⁵<https://www.eublockchainforum.eu>

September 2018: The Commission's proposal to create a European Network of Cybersecurity Competence Centres is proposed and approved.⁸⁶

March 2019: Following a referendum on June 23, 2016, where 51.9% of voters supported Brexit, the UK chooses to leave the EU.⁸⁷ This sparks an ongoing debate on the UK's involvement in the European Digital Single Market.

Historical Analysis

On January 1, 1993, the EU established a single market to enable European citizens to live in, travel to, and have access to the resources and produces of any European country.⁸⁸ By removing technical, legal, and bureaucratic barriers, the EU also ensures that citizens can trade and do business freely. This benefits the "20 million businesses that employ 175 million citizens and supply goods and services to 500 million consumers both in the EU and abroad", as stated by the European Commission.⁸⁹

The Single Market Act was proposed in 2011.⁹⁰ It created the foundations for a business-friendly environment within Europe and strengthened Europe's competitive capabilities in international markets. The Commission's plan against counterfeiting and piracy, as well as a framework directive on the management of copyrights, helped combat piracy and encouraged businesses to use online services. The Commission's Energy Tax Directive and energy efficiency plan helped promote sustainable growth. The Commission's action plan for small and medium-sized enterprises helped create jobs. The act also proposed several measures for citizens, striving to improve public services and infrastructure like public transportation, by developing a trans-European transport network. The Commission also conducted a systematic analysis of the social impact of the proposal.

In 2012, the Single Market II Act was proposed in addition to the Single Market Act.⁹¹ This new act aimed to boost economic growth and jobs and successfully improved the single market in four ways. Firstly, it developed fully integrated networks such as railways, maritime transportation, aviation, and energy.⁹² Furthermore, it enhanced the mobility of citizens and businesses across borders.⁹³ For example, it developed the European Job Mobility Portal, a platform to help job seekers to move abroad by finding a job in Europe.⁹⁴ The Single Market II Act also supported the digital economy across Europe through online

⁸⁶<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/creating-digital-single-market-european-commission-actions-2015>

⁸⁷<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/0/what-is-the-eu-single-market/>

⁸⁸https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/single-market_en

⁸⁹ibid

⁹⁰ibid

⁹¹ibid

⁹²ibid

⁹³ibid

⁹⁴ibid

payment, broadband networks, and electronic invoicing.⁹⁵ Finally, it strengthened social entrepreneurship and social confidence through safer products and access to banking.⁹⁶ In total, the single market generated almost 2.8 million jobs and 2.13% in GDP between 1992 and 2008.⁹⁷

In May 2016, the Commission implemented a plan to tackle unjustified geo-blocking. This system was able to limit one's online access based on the user's geographical location. It ensures that consumers seeking to purchase items online are protected from discriminatory terms of access to prices, sales, or payment conditions. The Commission's initiative to improve cross-border parcel delivery through increased price transparency and regulations is also presented and approved.⁹⁸

The Commission's proposal to update the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which governs the coordination of national legislation on audiovisual media, by extending the rules applying to traditional broadcasters to video providers is presented and approved.⁹⁹ The Commission's initiative to revise the consumer protection cooperation and giving more powers to national authorities is presented and approved.¹⁰⁰

In late 2016, the Commission forwards two initiatives: the Marrakesh Treaty and the Wifi4EU Initiative. These proposals help create better access to content across borders, improved rules on education and research, and a fairer and more sustainable marketplace. The Marrakesh Treaty intended to make published works more accessible online for the visually impaired and blind.¹⁰¹ The WiFi4EU Initiative enhanced the role of the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications, an agency created to improve EU telecom rules. The Commission's initiative to modernise EU telecoms to boost investments through better use of radio frequencies and stronger consumer protection is presented and approved.¹⁰²

Now, Europe is trying to make the digital market a single one. The digital transformation of businesses and society presents enormous growth potential for Europe and European industry. New technologies such as the Internet of Things, big data, advanced manufacturing, robotics, 3D printing, blockchain technologies, and artificial intelligence offer new opportunities in many areas.¹⁰³ For example, big data and digital platforms have grown dramatically and are transforming every industry. The large volumes of data that can be generated fuel innovation, new business models, and smart products and services. They

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represent the “next frontier for European businesses to drive industrial leadership, growth, and great value for society”.¹⁰⁴ The rise of digitisation also means the rise of the range of digital skills needed for employment. The widening skills gap will impact the ability of European businesses and governments to benefit from technology as it becomes more complicated and more difficult to use. Different cities and regions are major enablers of the digital transformation. They are responsible for bringing together local resources and encouraging the participation and awareness of citizens. Decision-makers in the public and private sectors and civil society are all starting to understand the social and economic implications of advanced technology and the importance of the European Digital Single Market.

Past UN Action

On May 6, 2015, the Juncker Commission called for a European Digital Single Market Strategy in order to improve the access of European countries to digital resources.¹⁰⁵ Since then, the European Commission has made several proposals and initiatives that have been approved by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers aiming to boost the digital market. These include initiatives on digital contract rules, cross-border portability of online content services, use of the 470-490 MHz band for mobile services, tackling unjustified geo-blocking, cross-border parcel delivery, consumer protection, regulating wholesale roaming prices, copyright rules, telecoms, free public wifi, 5G, e-commerce, online businesses, cybersecurity, fraud, blockchain, and other measures of access to online information.¹⁰⁶

The EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 was established on April 19, 2016.¹⁰⁷ Its three policy priorities include modernising public administrations using digital enablers such as eSignature or eDelivery, enabling the mobility of citizens and businesses across borders, and facilitating digital interaction between administrators and citizens for better quality services.¹⁰⁸ At its launch, the eGovernment Action Plan included 20 actions to help reach its goal.¹⁰⁹ However, numerous actions have been added since then and are continuing to be added to the plan throughout its lifetime. The EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 prioritizes common Information and Communication Technology standards to boost digital innovation and the creation of a European Open Science Cloud (EOSC).¹¹⁰ The European Open Science Cloud is “a network of organisations and infrastructures from various countries and communities that supports the open creation and dissemination of knowledge and

¹⁰⁴ibid

¹⁰⁵<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/shaping-digital-single-market>

¹⁰⁶ibid

¹⁰⁷<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/european-egovernment-action-plan-2016-2020>

¹⁰⁸ibid

¹⁰⁹ibid

¹¹⁰ibid

scientific data”.¹¹¹ The EOSC was proposed in two reports: “Prompting an EOSC in Practice” and “Turning FAIR into reality”.¹¹² FAIR stands for data that is “Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable”.¹¹³

The Digital Education Action Plan was created on January 16, 2018.¹¹⁴ It includes 3 goals and 11 actions to support technology use and the development of technology in education.¹¹⁵ The first goal is “making better use of digital technology for teaching and learning” and can be reached through actions 1-3: connectivity in schools, self-reflection tool and mentoring scheme for schools, and digitally signed qualifications.¹¹⁶ The second goal is “developing digital competences and skills” and can be achieved through actions 4-8: higher education hub, open science skills, EU code week in schools, cybersecurity in education, and training in digital and entrepreneurial skills for girls.¹¹⁷ The final goal is “improving education through better data analysis and foresight” and can be reached through actions 9-11: studies on ICT in education, artificial intelligence and analytics, and strategic foresight.

¹¹⁸

The Commission adopted a cybersecurity package in response to cyber attacks on September 13, 2017.¹¹⁹ The package included a series of initiatives to improve EU cyber-resilience and defence, as well as a proposal for the creation of an EU Cybersecurity Agency. A year later on September 12, 2018, the Commission proposed a European Network of Cybersecurity Competence Centres.¹²⁰ The competence centres are the main bodies that deal with EU financial resources dedicated to research on cybersecurity. This further improved EU cybersecurity by stimulating the European cybersecurity ecosystem and coordinating and pooling necessary resources across Europe.

Current Situation

The EU currently has several goals for the European Digital Single Market. Industry is one of the pillars of the European economy, and the market will help boost the European digital industry. The manufacturing sector in the EU alone account for 2 million enterprises, 33 million jobs and 60% of productivity growth.¹²¹ Today, the world is facing an industrial revolution, driven by new information technologies such as the Internet of Things, cloud computing, big data and data analytics, robotics, and 3D printing. It’s estimated that the

¹¹¹<https://ec.europa.eu/research/openscience/index.cfm?pg=open-science-cloud>

¹¹²ibid

¹¹³ibid

¹¹⁴https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

¹¹⁵ibid

¹¹⁶ibid

¹¹⁷ibid

¹¹⁸ibid

¹¹⁹http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI%282019%29635518

¹²⁰ibid

¹²¹<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/digitising-european-industry>

digitisation of products and services can add more than EUR 110 billion of annual revenue to the European economy within the next five years.¹²² Europe is strong in digital sectors such as electronics, security and energy markets, telecom equipment, business software, and laser and sensor technologies. In addition, Europe hosts world-class research and technology institutes. However, its high-tech sectors face competition from other countries, and traditional small and medium enterprises are falling behind.

Another part of the Digital Single Market Strategy is building a European data economy. Digital data is essential for economic growth and societal progress. In order to enable the best use of data, the Commission intends to unlock the re-use potential of data and facilitate its free flow across Europe. The value of the EU data economy in 2015 was more than 285 billion euros and represented 1.94% of the EU GDP.¹²³ With a year-on-year growth rate of 5.03%, the EU data economy in 2016 was around 300 billion euros and worth 1.99% of the GDP.¹²⁴ If favourable policy and legislative conditions are created and investments are encouraged, this number may increase to around 739 billion euros and 4% of the GDP.¹²⁵ The Commission intends to create a common European data space and make data as accessible as possible for reuse over the next few years.

On March 29, 2019, the UK chose to leave the EU following a referendum on June 23, 2016, where 51.9% of voters supported Brexit.¹²⁶ Many of these voters decided to vote in favour of Brexit because they wanted the creation of an independent immigration policy. This sparked an ongoing debate on the UK's involvement in the European Digital Single Market. The UK economy is service heavy, as almost 80% of economic activity is generated by service firms rather than the manufacturing of goods, agriculture, or fishing.¹²⁷ The EU single market is an important market for these services. With the rise of technology and digital services, it will also be beneficial for the UK to be a part of the digital single market. However, according to EU officials, it's impossible for the UK to remain within the single market while ending freedom of movement for the development of an immigration policy.¹²⁸ Thus, there is an issue as to what aspects of the EU membership the UK should be, or should be allowed to be involved in.

¹²²ibid

¹²³<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/building-european-data-economy>

¹²⁴ibid

¹²⁵ibid

¹²⁶<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/0/what-is-the-eu-single-market/>

¹²⁷ibid

¹²⁸ibid

Possible Solutions

Manage Funding

One of the biggest issues surrounding the creation of the European Digital Single Market is how funding and investments should be distributed across different areas of research and development. Today's plans should mobilise up to 50 million euros of public and private investments for the digitisation of industry.¹²⁹ The Commission suggests that about 37 billion euros should be invested in boosting digital innovation, 3.5 billion euros should be invested in building digital innovation hubs, 6.3 billion euros should be invested in producing next-generation electronic components, and 6.7 billion euros should be invested in supporting the European Cloud Initiative.¹³⁰ The initiative will provide "European science, industry, and public authorities with a world class data infrastructure to store and manage data, high-speed connectivity to transport data, and powerful High Performance Computers to process data".¹³¹

Furthermore, it will make it easier for researchers, businesses, and public services to benefit from Big Data, a field that treats ways to analyze large and complex data sets, by helping institutions move, share, and reuse data across borders. The European Cloud Initiative proposes a European Open Science Cloud, which will offer Europe's 1.7 million researchers and 70 million scientists and technicians a place to store, share, and reuse large amounts of information.¹³² In addition, the initiative proposes a European Data Infrastructure to deploy high-bandwidth networks and supercomputing capacities to access and process datasets in the Cloud. While the plan is to initially focus on the science community, it would be beneficial for the infrastructure to be enlarged to the public sector and industry.

The initiative supports High Performance Computing and Quantum, which uses supercomputers to solve complex technical problems and data intensive tasks. They are especially useful for scientists, engineers, and financial analysts who need to model and visualize different projects; however, HPC and quantum are involved in several industrial applications and scientific domains. They also improve productivity and competitiveness of industries and small and medium sized enterprises that are falling behind in the global digitisation process. Finally, the European Cloud Initiative supports the development of a High Performance Computing ecosystem based on European technology, as the goal is for the EU to have top quality exascale supercomputers, which are computer systems that have the ability to do a billion billion calculations per second.¹³³

In order to implement the initiative, an estimation of around 4.7 billion euros of more funding is needed in the next five years to reach the public and private investment goal of 6.7

¹²⁹<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/digitising-european-industry>

¹³⁰ibid

¹³¹<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/%20european-cloud-initiative>

¹³²<https://ec.europa.eu/research/openscience/index.cfm?pg=open-science-cloud>

¹³³<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/%20european-cloud-initiative>

billion euros.¹³⁴ In order to get more public funding, wealthier countries, such as Luxembourg, Norway, and Ireland, may offer more of their budget to establishing the initiative. In order to get more private funding, more awareness needs to be raised on the importance of the European Digital Single Market and the importance of the initiative to establish one through the media.

Improving Connectivity and Access

An important aspect of the Digital Single Market Strategy is improving the connectivity and access citizens and businesses have to digital services and resources. Broadband Europe is a policy that will help Europe do so. The Commission proposes that by 2025, all schools, transport hubs, and main providers of public services should have access to internet connections with download speeds of one gigabit of data per second.¹³⁵ Furthermore, all European households should have access to internet connections with download speeds of 100 Mbps which can be upgraded to one gigabit per second.¹³⁶ Urban areas, major roads, and railways should have uninterrupted 5G wireless connections, and the Commission plans for fully-fledged commercial service in at least one city in each EU member state in the future.¹³⁷

The Commission is also focused on supporting media and digital culture by creating policies that allow European citizens to access digital content from anywhere in Europe. The TV market is currently in need of a set of common rules for the audiovisual sector and new media sector. These rules should cover areas including advertisements, promotion of European works, and protection of minors. In order to do this, there must be legislation supporting a true Digital Single Market of content and promotion of media freedom and pluralism with the establishment of a regulatory framework for copyright.

Bloc Positions

Although all EU countries support the creation of the European Digital Single Market because of the many benefits it brings to Europe as a whole, each country has different strategies in mind to achieve the end goal of establishing the single market. These strategies are often created based on each countries' individual progress on digitisation. While some countries are prepared to be global leaders in digitisation, others are falling behind in areas such as connectivity and access. The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) summarizes indicators on specific European countries' digital performance and evolution. These indicators include connectivity, human capital, use of internet services, integration of digital technology, and digital public services. Blocs are unlikely to be oppositionary but are important in identifying which nations are prioritizing resources to improve their digitisation progression.

¹³⁴<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/digitising-european-industry>

¹³⁵<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/improving-connectivity-and-access>

¹³⁶ibid

¹³⁷ibid

Top Ranking DESI Bloc

This year, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark are among several other countries that have scored the highest ratings in DESI and are considered global leaders in digitisation, with Finland becoming the EU digital leader.¹³⁸ These countries are followed by Luxembourg, Ireland, Estonia, and Belgium.¹³⁹ Generally, these countries are strong in connectivity and providing digital public services. They want to focus on integrating the use of digital technology into businesses and institutions by managing funding and supporting programs and initiatives.

Developing in Digitisation Performance Bloc

Countries such as France, Spain, Austria, Hungary, and Italy are among the countries that have neither excelled nor fallen behind in the process of digitisation. For example, France scored better in four of the five dimensions, especially in connectivity, and moved up in rankings this year to 15th out of 28 EU member states.¹⁴⁰ However, it still remains a considerable distance from the countries in the top ranking DESI bloc. Spain, which ranks 11th, has also improved significantly in connectivity as well as in digital public services thanks to the availability of fast and mobile broadband networks.¹⁴¹ However, one fifth of Spain's citizens are not yet online and around half lack basic digital skills.¹⁴² Although countries in the developing in digitisation performance bloc differ in strengths and weaknesses, they are all, in general, making moderate progress with digitisation.

Lower Ranking DESI Bloc

Countries that scored a lower rating in DESI this year include Poland, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria, with Bulgaria ranking 28th out of the 28 EU member states.¹⁴³ However, this doesn't necessarily mean that these countries are not improving in digitisation. It simply means that compared to their fellow EU countries, these countries have weaker internet services and digital technology. In general, these countries want to focus on improving connectivity, digital public services, and the use of internet services. They want to focus on providing easier access to digital resources and encouraging citizens and businesses to take advantage of the many opportunities digitisation offers.

¹³⁸<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/countries-performance-digitisation>

¹³⁹ibid

¹⁴⁰ibid

¹⁴¹ibid

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