



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

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

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## 1. How to make a submission

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

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

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

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

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

## 2. Background information

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

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

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

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

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

### THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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

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

- Agriculture and Fisheries (AGRIFISH)
- Environment (ENVI)
- Competitiveness (COMPET)
- Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO)
- Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN)

- Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS)
- Foreign Affairs (FAC)
- General Affairs (GAC)
- Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)
- Transport, Telecommunications and Energy (TTE)

## THE COUNCIL PRESIDENCY

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

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

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

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

## 3. The Presidency Policy Programme

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

The Presidency programme generally has two parts. One part highlights a range of high-level priorities for the Presidency term, setting out the overall areas of thematic focus for the Presidency. A second

part details the specific legislative and policy proposals that the Presidency will seek to take forward during its term across each of the ten different policy configurations in which the Council meets.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 6. General Data Protection Regulation

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

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

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

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

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



## 7. Submission Form

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

Mandatory questions	
Name ;	Liam O'Sullivan
Organisation (if any)	Care Alliance Ireland
Date of submission	December 9th 2025
Do you agree to all of the terms set out in this consultation process, including those set out under section 5 and 6?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Optional questions	
<i>The following questions are asked only to help us understand the range of perspectives received as part of this consultation process.</i>	
Respondent type (i.e. individual, NGO, business, academic, local authority, etc.)	NGO – Alliance of Organisations supporting Ireland's Family Carers
What is your sector/area of work?	Informal/Family Carer Support – Research and Policy – Online Carer Support interventions
What is your connection to the issues you are providing feedback on? For example, are you an expert practitioner, person affected by a policy issue, member of the public with a general interest in the topics, etc.?	Our organisation has 30 years' experience operating in the family carer support area and are founding members of Eurocarers ( <a href="http://www.eurocarers.org">www.eurocarers.org</a> ).  We have developed a particular expertise in online family carer support interventions reaching and engaging with thousands of family carers.
Describe your geographical focus in the context of your submission? For example, rural, urban, national or EU wide.	National and EU Wide

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Supporting Informal/Family Carers and Disabled people through an Equality Lens

Often key to the well-being of large numbers of disabled people, and representing a hidden workforce, Ireland's estimated 600,000 family carers<sup>1</sup> deserve a better deal to be less isolated and experience a better quality of life.

Nearly half (45%) of the EU population provides unpaid care<sup>2</sup>. Unpaid carers provide in excess of 80% of care across the EU<sup>3</sup>. In many EU countries, family carers face even greater challenges in securing recognition and supports than some of their Irish counterparts. The 2022 European Care Strategy is a key document, and this Presidency has the opportunity to move it forward. Historically, and continuing today, Irish MEP's have been key supports for, and drivers in, developing a formal EU Agenda for Care (including Frances Fitzgerald, Marian Harkin and Luke Ming Flanagan). We understand that the EU Commission is also intending to come forward with a 'Care Deal'.

This is also an opportunity at a carer focused event to showcase good examples of comprehensive Irish state funded support for family carers – in the area of income supports (Carers Allowance, Carers Benefit, Carer Support Grant, Pensions for Carers); direct face-to-face carer supports (e.g. Citizens Information, Family Carers Ireland, Dementia Advisors) and online carer support interventions (delivered by our own organisation, Care Alliance Ireland).

<sup>1</sup> 600k family carers estimated using the Healthy Ireland 2025 report

([https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/2b9f909b/Healthy\\_Ireland\\_Summary\\_Report\\_2025\\_Web\\_07.11.2025.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/2b9f909b/Healthy_Ireland_Summary_Report_2025_Web_07.11.2025.pdf)) finding that 14% of the population aged 15 and over is providing care, alongside the most recent population figures from the CSO.

<sup>2</sup> Eurofound (2025). *Unpaid care in the EU*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>3</sup> <https://eurocarers.org/about-carers/>

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

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

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

#### 1. Focus on Resilience & Work-Life Balance

The core challenge for informal/family carers of working age is balancing their care duties with paid work, which impacts their financial security, mental health, and the overall labour market.

- **Goal:** Advance the effective **implementation and monitoring** of the **Work-Life Balance Directive** across all Member States, specifically concerning **carer's leave and flexible working arrangements**.
- **Specifically:**
  - Prioritise work by Eurofound and the Commission to establish and monitor **EU-wide qualitative and quantitative data** on the living conditions and needs of informal/family carers. This data is critical for evidence-based policymaking, addressing the "invisibility" of the role and it complements the EU Monitoring Framework on the Council Recommendation on the access to affordable high-quality long-term care.
  - Drive discussions in the EPSCO on ways to ensure that informal carers are identified across the EU and that periods of registered, intensive informal care contribute to the carer's **social security and pension entitlements**, mitigating the long-term risk of poverty and the gender pension gap.

#### 2. Invest in Quality Care & Professionalisation

A major theme of the European Care Strategy is improving the formal care sector to reduce the forced reliance on informal/family care.

- **Goal:** Facilitate agreement and commitments on **sustainable funding** for professional long-term care, making informal care a **choice, not a necessity**.
- **Specifically:**
  - Focus Council discussions on Member State National Action Plans to ensure guaranteed access to **high-quality, affordable respite care** (day care, temporary residential care, in-home support). Push for a shared best-practice framework for respite services.
  - Promote policies that ensure **professional care staff are trained to cooperate with and support informal/family carers**, formally recognising informal/family carers as "co-creators" of care who require support, counselling, and training themselves.
  - Promote the mental health and well-being of professional carers and informal/family carers.

#### 3. Leverage Digitalisation in Care (linked to the competitiveness/single market)

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

Digital solutions have the potential to significantly improve the efficiency and quality of care, linking to the goal of a robust Digital Single Market.

- **Goal:** Promote the adoption of accessible, interoperable **digital solutions** to support informal care.
- **Specifically:**
  - Promote the existing EC/WHO online training for carers<sup>4</sup> which includes country factsheets outlining the rights, support services (e.g., respite care), and financial benefits available to family carers in their specific country.
  - Fund initiatives across the EU that drive the adoption of online family carer peer-to-peer support interventions (using such interventions as delivered by Care Alliance Ireland as a possible template)

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

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

The core objective must be to transform the role of the informal/family carer from an invisible necessity that drives poverty and gender inequality into a recognised, valued, and supported choice.

#### 1. Address Carers' Economic Security and Competitiveness

By linking the care agenda to the Presidency's anticipated focus on Competitiveness and a robust Single Market, the work of the Council can directly support businesses and individual livelihoods.

The Presidency should prioritise the effective monitoring and enforcement of the Work-Life Balance (WLB) Directive, particularly the provisions for Carer's Leave, and encourage Member States and stakeholders to go beyond the legal requirements of the WLB Directive - for example by providing paid Carer Leave. The Council should advance discussions on how periods of registered intensive caregiving can be integrated into social security and pension systems at the EU level. This directly mitigates the risk of poverty, a substantial concern for both Care Alliance Ireland and for Eurocarers and its members, and helps women in particular remain economically active, thereby improving overall labour market participation.

#### 2. Enhance Data and Recognition of the Carer Role to Unlock Support

The Presidency can champion a common framework, building on the Work-Life Balance Directive and the Care Strategy, for the early identification and assessment of carers' needs across all member states. This requires political endorsement in the Council of the EU for a refined harmonised data collection methodology on informal care, complementing the EU monitoring Framework on the Council

<sup>4</sup> Care and self care competences for informal carers: online training on WHO Academy.

<https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/27-10-2025-who-launches-new-online-course-to-support-informal-caregivers-across-europe>

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care. This evidence is crucial to inform policy, ensure support reaches those who need it, and make the 'invisible workforce' visible to policymakers.

### 3. Prioritise Implementation and Investment in Quality Care

The most significant impact will come from ensuring that the Council Recommendation on Long-Term Care is not merely adopted, but actively implemented and triggers a change of approach to informal carer in policy making and societal representations.

The Presidency must drive the translation of the Council Recommendation into concrete national action plans with dedicated funding under the European Semester process, and the next EU funding period. This includes facilitating ministerial agreement in the EPSCO to set common, ambitious quantitative targets for the provision of affordable, high-quality care – both formal and informal.

By focusing on these three implementation-oriented areas, the Irish Presidency can make a profound and lasting positive impact on the health, financial stability, and societal inclusion of millions of EU citizens.

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

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

The Irish Presidency can best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership and foster a sense of citizen ownership, particularly among informal/family carers, by placing the European Care Strategy at the heart of its public engagement.

The strategy must be to make EU action directly relevant to the most profound challenges in people's daily lives.

#### 1. Focus on Tangible, Personal Impact

Instead of abstract policy discussions, the Presidency should frame its work through the lens of intergenerational solidarity and gender equality, which are core EU values visible in care policy.

Highlight how the EU, through the Work-Life Balance Directive and the European Care Strategy, provides tangible rights such as Carer’s Leave and financial protections that prevent poverty and contribute to pension entitlements for carers.

Use real-life testimonials from carers across Ireland and Europe (e.g., in short videos or web articles) to demonstrate how these EU measures have allowed them to stay in the workforce or access essential respite services. This connects the EU Presidency’s agenda to personal empowerment.

#### 2. Involve Carers as Partners, Not Just Beneficiaries

The Presidency should consider a means by which citizens can co-shape policy by hosting targeted "Citizens’ Care Dialogues" or high-profile public events that specifically invite Eurocarers and national

## Guiding Questions for Stakeholder Consultations

carer organisations to share their expertise. Enable a clear communication stream that explains policy developments in simple terms and also enables citizens the chance to be heard. This should be framed so that citizens perceive themselves as co-producers of care and partners in policy implementation. This would demonstrate that Ireland's role as the Presidency is about listening to and incorporating the lived experiences of vulnerable groups into EU policy.

### 3. Translate EU Policy into Local Benefit

The communication must show the 'EU-to-Local' pathway, connecting Presidency decisions in Brussels to services in local communities. Launch a clear information campaign explaining how member states are investing in local, high-quality formal and informal care and digital support services. Utilise local media and community networks to host events showcasing EU-funded projects that improve care, demonstrating that the Presidency is focused on delivering a Europe that provides support and dignity for those who care, thereby strengthening the public perception of EU membership benefits.

### **Question 5 – Any other comments**

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

We understand that our colleagues in Family Carers Ireland and Eurocarers are already liaising with the Irish government and the EU commission with respect to a possible event on care/long-term care and family members as a central role in this. We are supportive of such proposals.