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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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.*
Community Law & Mediation, like many, has observed a worrying increase in division, racism and anti-immigrant sentiment in the communities in which we work and across broader society. This has been accompanied by a hardening of government rhetoric, and efforts to roll back on and erode the protections enshrined in human rights frameworks, including the European Convention on Human Rights. This is evident most recently in the call by 27 Council of Europe members, including Ireland, to weaken key protections under the European Convention on Human Rights. In parallel with this, and despite the significant, urgent and complex climate and environmental challenges facing the EU and wider world, there has been a concerted effort to weaken EU climate ambition and climate governance. In Ireland, this has most recently been reflected in moves to restrict access to justice in environmental matters. Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union presents an opportunity to champion bold measures that advance fundamental rights and promote a socially just, ecologically sustainable society. In this context, and in line with the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, we believe the high-level thematic priorities for Ireland's Presidency should be as follows:

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- The rule of law, with a focus on promoting and upholding the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights, respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.
- Housing and homelessness, with a focus on progressing the commitment to effectively and urgently tackle the homelessness and housing crisis in Ireland and across Europe, by making affordable, sustainable, and decent homes available to everyone, and ensuring European social fairness.
- Climate justice, with a focus on ambitious and measurable actions to reduce the EU's reliance on fossil fuels and delivering long term solutions to our shared climate and social justice challenges; and promotion of access to information on the environment, public participation in environmental decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters in line with the Aarhus Convention.

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.

Rule of Law

In a speech last month (November 2025[1]), the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O'Flaherty, warned of a global rise in authoritarianism worldwide, a decline in democracy and the sidelining of the United Nations.

Reflecting on how to navigate these challenges, he identified human rights law as the only credible roadmap for safeguarding human dignity. He noted that Ireland "has been transformed by judgments of the European Court of Human Rights" and "that the Court and the Convention have been the primary drivers for Ireland's social transformation into the confident and outward-looking society that it is today."

We call on Ireland to lead by example during its Presidency by:

- Upholding and affirming Ireland's and the EU's commitment to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Advancing the essential reforms highlighted in the 2025 Rule of Law report, including reform of Ireland's civil legal aid system to ensure access to justice for those who need it most.
- Protecting access to information on the environment, public participation in environmental decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters in line with the Aarhus Convention.

[1] https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/the-european-human-rights-architecture-a-roadmap-for-navigating-volatile-times

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- Recognising the unique rights held by children and young people under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by supporting child rights-based access to justice.

Housing

People across Europe are struggling to find an affordable place to live, work, raise their families, and go about their daily lives. The housing crisis across the EU was expressly mentioned by President von der Leyen in her State of the Union Address 2025. Affordable housing has been identified as a top priority for the European Commission.

In this context, Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union must prioritise:

- Progressing the commitment to effectively and urgently tackle the homelessness and housing crisis in Ireland and across Europe, by making affordable, sustainable, and decent homes available to everyone, and ensuring European social fairness.

Climate Justice

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to human rights, posing a serious risk to life, health, food and an adequate standard of living of individuals and communities across the world.
Ireland and all EU states have a legal and ethical duty to adhere to their obligations on climate change, to protect children, citizens and future generations from the most dangerous impacts of the climate crisis and to prevent the need for more abrupt and forceful action later.

In April 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found that Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights encompasses a right to effective protection by State authorities from the serious adverse effects of climate change on lives, health, well-being and quality of life. With all 27 EU member states bound by the Convention, EU action must reflect this judgment.

In this context, Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union must prioritise:

- **The EU's 2040 target:** CLM has called upon the EU to adopt a 2040 target which aligns with the best available science and the EU's obligations under the Paris Agreement, and to avoid reliance on carbon credits.
    - CLM recommends that the EU continue its practice of achieving its binding climate targets domestically for the 2040 goal, as already enshrined in the EU Climate law for the 2030 target and the 2050 climate neutrality goal. The EU has already faced significant challenges in regulating carbon credits due to poor quality, a lack of transparency, and potential for double-counting (where a credit is sold more than once). Carbon credits are increasingly subject to litigation – earlier this year, Energy Australia acknowledged that carbon credits do not mitigate dangers caused by greenhouse gas emissions and apologised to their customers for misleading advertising.
    - CLM supported GLAN and CAN-Europe in its challenge to the adequacy of the EU's 2030 climate targets as implemented by the EU Effort-Sharing Regulation. Judgment in this

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case is awaited. Adopting a 2040 target that aligns with climate science, as proposed by the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change, is critical to ensure an adequate target for 2040. It can furthermore provide long-term certainty for communities and Member States governments (at all levels), as well as the private sector and investors. Most importantly, it will ensure the delivery of a Just Transition, by protecting the rights of those most at risk from the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

- **Resource the Transition via the MFF:** to ensure the effective and timely implementation of the European Climate Law, the transition must be adequately resourced across all member states. The European Commission has proposed that 35% of the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which runs from 2028-2034, be ringfenced for climate and environmental measures. In its role as President of the Council of Europe, Ireland should use its leadership position to ensure that EU spending is aligned with the targets set out in the EU Climate Law, and that it drives a fast and fair transition.

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.

In the broadest sense, during the term of the Irish Presidency, the Council can make its most substantial positive impact by demonstrating firm and consistent leadership in its commitment to human rights and climate justice. The protections enshrined in the Charter and the ECHR must not be weakened. The message must be clear: that all people are equal in terms of the universality of human rights.

Regarding our shared climate goals, the adoption of a 2040 target which is fully aligned with the best available climate science and consistent with the EU's obligations under the Paris Agreement, supported by the effective resourcing of the EU's transition across all Member States via the MFF, establish the foundation for a fast and fair transition. Ensuring that all member states are equipped to reduce their emissions at the scale and pace required could enable, for example:

- The equitable delivery of decarbonised homes that are cheaper and safer to heat;
- Improved public and active transport that prioritises connectivity and accessibility for all;
- An energy system that is resilient, sustainable and more cost-effective for all homes around Ireland;
- Food and water system transformation that protects human health and biodiversity;
- The creation of employment in the development of domestic renewable energy.

Such action would lead to cleaner indoor and outdoor air, healthier water, and reduced environmental degradation. It would improve health outcomes particularly for those most at risk of energy poverty, air pollution and the effects of biodiversity loss.

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.

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The benefits of EU membership may effectively be communicated by promoting the rights protected under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the ECHR and the Aarhus Convention, to promote these essential protections and environmental democracy as core European values.

Central to this is the protection of civil society and its funding. As the new EU Civil Society Strategy enters its implementation phase during the Irish Presidency, Ireland should champion an "enabling environment for civil society." This should prioritise the protection of the right to:

- Access to information on the environment. Ireland should encourage transparent and proactive provision of environmental information across the EU and its member states.
- Meaningful public participation in environmental decision-making, to ensure that those most impacted are heard.
- Access to justice to ensure that the EU's climate and environmental laws remain effective, and that decision-makers are held to account for their full and timely implementation.

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.