



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. 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 |
| • Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN) | Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) |

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

THE COUNCIL PRESIDENCY

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

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

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

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

3. The Presidency Policy Programme

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Preparing the Irish Presidency Programme

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Freedom of Information Act 2014 and Publication of Submissions

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

6. General Data Protection Regulation

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

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

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

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

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



7. Submission Form

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Mandatory questions	
Name	Magdalen Rogers
Organisation (if any)	Neurological Alliance of Ireland
Date of submission	12.12.2025
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"/> yes No <input type="checkbox"/>

Optional questions	
<i>The following questions are asked only to help us understand the range of perspectives received as part of this consultation process.</i>	
Respondent type (i.e. individual, NGO, business, academic, local authority, etc.)	NGO
What is your sector/area of work?	Health and disability
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.?	National advocacy organisation
Describe your geographical focus in the context of your submission? For example, rural, urban, national or EU wide.	National

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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.

The Neurological Alliance of Ireland understands that Ireland's 2026 Presidency will need a coherent cross cutting theme that accommodates the files from the previous Presidency but also reflects current and emerging EU priorities across healthcare as they impact on the wider EU economy and society. By choosing "Knowledge Based Healthcare" this theme recognises the unique strengths that Ireland brings as a knowledge based economy to the healthcare challenges facing the EU. We recommend that brain health is featured as a key priority under this theme.

Neurological disorders represent one of the most significant health challenges facing the European Union affecting millions of Europeans and carry substantial societal and economic costs. As Europe's population ages, the prevalence and impact of neurological disease will continue to grow.

Neurological disorders affect more than 41% of the global population, are the leading cause of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) in Europe and one of the top causes of death. The economic burden, including direct healthcare costs, long-term care, productivity losses, and informal caregiving, has recently been estimated to amount to €1.7 trillion annually within the EU, according to a soon to be published survey by the European Academy of Neurology. Europe's demographic trajectory will amplify this pressure. Focusing on brain health during the Presidency allows Ireland to push for coordinated EU action in prevention, early detection, research funding, and health-system preparedness. Ireland has a positive narrative to share in terms of developing healthcare policy approaches to the management of neurological disease including clinical frameworks aimed at identifying and responding to these conditions at the earliest stages. Ireland's growing strength as a hub for advanced neuroscience research positions it to drive innovation and highlight EU-level opportunities for scientific collaboration in this area. Prioritising brain health strongly aligns with several ongoing EU initiatives aimed at strengthening collective resilience against major health challenges, addressing long term care needs for ageing populations, boosting research and innovation and promoting data driven health solutions. Leadership in brain health also aligns with Irish priorities: supporting ageing populations, addressing rare disease, integrating care through Sláintecare reforms, and promoting innovative health technologies while

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implementing a human rights based approach to the needs of people with disabilities. The EU has endorsed the WHO's Intersectoral Global Action Plan on Epilepsy & Other Neurological Conditions and the Parliament is pressing the Commission for a dedicated EU brain strategy, in response to the calls of EU wide umbrella organisations including the European Federation of Neurological Associations, the European Brain Council and the European Academy of Neurology with strong support from Irish MEPS who are members of the MEP interest group on brain health and neurological conditions. Ireland has a unique opportunity to position itself as a leader in brain health, responding to the calls of its own citizen advocates at European and national level for greater action to address the needs of people living with neurological conditions while also availing of the opportunity to showcase the best of what our knowledge economy has to offer in mobilising innovative research and technology responses to one of Europe's greatest healthcare challenges.

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.

The overarching priority for Ireland's Presidency in 2026 should be to recognise the growing political momentum, strongly supported by Irish MEPs in response to the work of Irish patient advocates and patient organisations at EU level, for a unified response to brain health and neurological conditions. Ireland should use its Presidency to advance the call for an EU wide brain health strategy to link the commitment to implement the WHO Intersectoral Action Plan on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Conditions to EU policy and integrate research and other initiatives in this area across the EU.

Ireland should also use its Presidency to support and advance the following key policy areas to develop and strengthen the EU wide response to neurological conditions

1. By delivering on its commitments under the UNCRPD, Ireland can send a strong signal of its support for those living with neurological and other disabilities throughout the EU. Specifically, Ireland should prioritise the implementation of its National Neurorehabilitation Strategy to directly advance human rights goals for people with a neurological disability.
2. Ireland should aim to show leadership by using the opportunity of the Presidency to launch a comprehensive and ambitious Life Sciences Strategy. A national life sciences strategy is needed for Ireland to drive innovation, attract investment, and create high-skilled jobs in a rapidly growing global sector. A comprehensive Life Sciences Strategy is critical to provide the funding, collaboration, infrastructure and regulation needed to position Ireland as a growing hub for neuroscience research across the EU.
3. Ireland should aim to show leadership by prioritising its implementation of the European Health Data Space legislation to enhance patient care through secure and seamless access to health data across the EU. This legislation is critical to enable and support diagnosis, treatment and research in neurological conditions. Ireland remains the only country without a national Electronic Health Record limiting digital health adoption and data driven R & D.

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4. Ireland should aim to show leadership by prioritising the implementation of its Rare Disease Strategy launched in 2025, critical to ensuring equitable access to specialised services, genetic testing, and emerging therapies for rare neurological conditions and to support and develop Ireland's research infrastructure as a growing hub for research and treatments for rare neurological disease.
5. The EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA), in force since August 2024, recognises that AI has huge potential in the treatment of complex health conditions such as neurological conditions but only if implemented safely and ethically. Ireland should aim to show leadership in this area by implementing the findings of the 2025 IPPOSI Citizen Jury on AI in Healthcare including the creation of a statutory regulator to oversee AI use in healthcare in Ireland, the development of a 5 year strategy addressing workforce preparedness, ethical safeguards and integration of AI technologies, safeguarding of patient autonomy and data security, public engagement and dedicated funding.
6. Implementing Ireland's 2024 Strategy for Accelerating Genetic and Genomic Medicine in Ireland is critical for advancing brain health and in positioning Ireland as an EU leader in precision medicine.

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.

Neurological conditions have a substantive and increasing impact on people, businesses and communities across the EU, affecting the health, quality of life, social participation and employment of millions of individuals living with neurological conditions and the family members who care for those increasingly disabled by their condition. Neurological conditions represent a major economic as well as an individual and societal issue across the EU. To address these challenges, an EU-wide action plan for neurological health is needed which would co-ordinate the EU response to these conditions across policy, research, healthcare delivery, and societal support.

During its presidency of the EU Council in 2026, Ireland should aim to drive the agenda for brain health by prioritising neurological health as a thematic focus, organising dedicated Council working group meetings and stakeholder consultations to gather input from national health ministries, patient organisations, scientific experts, and industry representatives. These consultations would inform the scope and objectives of the action plan, ensuring it addresses key areas such as early diagnosis, access to care, research and innovation, workforce training, and public awareness. Ireland could also facilitate the drafting of a Council Recommendation on brain health, setting out shared EU-level objectives while respecting national competencies in healthcare delivery. This recommendation would provide a framework for member states to align policies, share best practices, and establish common indicators for monitoring progress. The Council, under Ireland's presidency, could also task the European Commission with supporting implementation through funding programs, such as Horizon Europe for research initiatives, the European Social Fund for workforce development, and EU4Health for improving access to high-quality neurological care. Ireland's presidency could ensure that multi-sectoral engagement is

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embedded in the action plan. This involves collaboration between public health authorities, healthcare providers, patient advocacy groups, academic institutions, and industry partners. Such engagement would promote innovation in treatment, diagnostics, and digital health solutions, while fostering public-private partnerships that enhance access to therapies and improve care pathways across the EU.

By prioritising brain health, the Council of Europe during Irelands presidency could take the first positive steps towards the development of a co-ordinated EU-wide action plan for neurological conditions which would have substantial benefits for people, businesses and communities across the EU. For individuals with neurological conditions and EU wide action plan would mobilise EU states to improve access to diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and long term supports for people with neurological conditions and their families. Communities would benefit from co-ordinated action at EU level to reduce inequalities in access to neurological care across the EU and promote greater inclusion and participation of EU citizens with neurological conditions. Businesses would benefit from policies aimed at supporting and enabling workforce participation for people with neurological conditions and family carers and developing and strengthening the growing position of the EU as a global leader in research and medical technology in brain health.

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.

By prioritising brain health as a thematic focus for its Presidency of the European Union in 2026, Ireland has the opportunity to take leadership in a policy area that impacts directly on the one out of every six Europeans who live with a neurological condition, their families and wider communities. For people with neurological conditions and their families, the focus on neurological health sends a message of recognition and validation. It acknowledges the social, economic, and emotional challenges they face while promoting inclusion, accessibility, and support. It also sends a message to communities across the EU to reduce stigma and enhance public understanding and recognition of neurological conditions.

Research by the European Federation of Neurological Associations highlights the impact of a neurological diagnosis on the health, social participation and employment of Eu citizens. According to the 2022 EFNA survey with over 1000 respondents from 30 countries across Europe, only one in five of those living with a neurological condition have access to affordable treatments that satisfactorily manage their condition. 84% said they experienced stigma or discrimination in areas including employment, education and obtaining insurance or mortgage cover while condition specific research points to lower levels of workforce participation and a high percentage of people with neurological conditions leaving the workplace due to their condition. These findings are echoed here in Ireland, with the over 860 respondents to the 2024 Neurological Alliance of Ireland Patient Experience Survey highlighting significant deficits in access to diagnosis, specialist care and rehabilitation and the impact of their neurological condition on mental health, employment and financial wellbeing.

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The growing burden of neurological conditions represents a huge challenge for healthcare systems, economies and societies across the EU. Member states, and Ireland in particular, are however increasingly mobilising their healthcare and life sciences sector towards a greater focus on neurological health with the potential to position the EU as a world leader in this area.

By adopting brain health as a key priority, Ireland can achieve tangible benefits from its Presidency to leave a lasting legacy in an emerging priority area for health, economic and social policy across the EU.

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.

Ireland has a timely opportunity to champion brain health as a thematic priority for its 2026 Council Presidency of the European Union. Neurological conditions are among the leading causes of disability across Europe, and EU-level momentum on brain health is growing rapidly. By placing neurological health at the centre of its Presidency agenda, Ireland can help shape a coordinated European response that strengthens prevention, early diagnosis, treatment pathways, and long-term supports for millions of its citizens.

The Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI), with its membership of 39 neurological patient organisations, offers Government a strong, experienced partner with deep connections across Europe. NAI works in partnership with EU-level umbrellas representing neurological and brain health organisations, all of whom play a central role in advancing the EU agenda through their stewardship of the MEP Interest Group on Neurological Conditions and Brain Health. These partnerships provide Ireland with immediate access to expertise, networks, and advocacy capacity to focus on the brain health agenda during Ireland's Presidency.

Focusing on brain health also aligns strategically with Ireland's strengths. It showcases Ireland as a leader in healthcare research and innovation, supporting growth in neuroscience, digital health, medical technologies, and patient-centred innovation. Prioritising brain health would therefore deliver both societal impact and economic opportunity while reinforcing Ireland's reputation as a forward-looking, research-driven EU member state.

Ireland's neurological community is exceptionally strong, dynamic, and innovative, characterised by a depth of expertise and collaboration that positions the country as a leader in neurological care, research, and advocacy. At its core is a highly skilled cohort of specialists many of whom have trained and worked in leading institutions across Europe, North America, and beyond. This international experience enriches Irish clinical practice with global standards and cutting-edge insights, fostering a culture of excellence that benefits patients and fuels research. Complementing this clinical strength is Ireland's growing reputation in neuroscience research, anchored by internationally recognised investigators and research centres driving advances in areas such as neurodegeneration, brain injury and rare neurological diseases.

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Vital to the strength of Ireland's neurological community is its vibrant and proactive patient advocacy sector. Irish neurological patient organisations are highly engaged, informed, and influential, playing a central role in shaping national policy, research priorities, and service improvement. Their presence is strongly felt at European level as well, where Irish advocates contribute to key platforms and advisory groups, ensuring that the perspectives and needs of people living with neurological conditions in Ireland are represented in broader European initiatives. This active participation underscores the maturity and credibility of Ireland's patient voice, which is recognised as an essential partner in the development of effective neurological strategies.

At the centre of this community is the Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI) and its member organisations, uniquely positioned to bring together clinicians, researchers, industry leaders, and patient organisations to mobilise Ireland's action during the Presidency to prioritise brain health as a strategic pillar of public health policy across Europe.