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EU awards 40,000 DiscoverEU rail passes in Schengen anniversary for 18-year-olds

To mark the Schengen Area's 40th anniversary, the European Commission is granting 40,000 free DiscoverEU rail passes to 18-year-olds, enabling young Europeans to explore up to 36 countries between March 2026 and May 2027. With nearly 247,000 applications, the scheme highlights strong demand among young people for low-carbon mobility, as well as persistent access constraints.

The European Commission has selected more than 40,000 18-year-olds to receive free [DiscoverEU](#) travel passes following the latest application round, held in autumn 2025. The scheme allows successful applicants to travel across eligible European countries mainly by train for up to one month between 1 March 2026 and 31 May 2027.

Eligibility for this round was limited to young people born between 1 January and 31 December 2007 who are citizens or residents of EU Member States or Erasmus+ associated countries, including Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye. According to the Commission, 246,782 applications were submitted, underscoring continued high demand for the programme.

Applications closed on 13 November 2025 via the [European Youth Portal](#), requiring proof of identity and completion of a

short EU knowledge quiz. Applicants could apply individually or in groups of up to four eligible friends.

Key figures highlight the scale of interest. Roughly 40,000 passes were awarded from 246,782 applications, implying an acceptance rate of about 16%. Since the scheme's launch, around 1.9 million young people have applied for a total of 431,931 passes. Successful applicants can travel for between one and 30 consecutive days, with rail positioned as the default mode in line with EU climate objectives. Special arrangements are again in place for participants from islands, outermost regions or remote areas, as well as for those with disabilities or health-related access needs.

Beyond the travel pass itself, participants receive a [European Youth Card](#), which offers discounts on accommodation, museums, cultural activities, local transport and food. According to the Commission, the intention is to lower the overall cost of travel and broaden access beyond those who could already afford extensive cross-border trips.

This edition of DiscoverEU is also being positioned as part of the EU's broader cultural strategy. The Commission says the programme will contribute to the "Culture Compass for Europe" through stronger promotion of DiscoverEU Culture Routes, curated thematic itineraries focused on areas such as film, fashion, food and fine art.

One flagship event will take place in Lyon in July 2026, during [European Youth Week](#), bringing together more than 200 young travellers to focus on themes of solidarity and fairness.

From a policy perspective, DiscoverEU sits at the intersection of youth, mobility and climate agendas. Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, said: "DiscoverEU gives thousands of young Europeans the chance to explore our continent, meet new people and experience the value of free movement first-hand. This special Schengen 40th anniversary edition is a reminder that mobility is a right we cherish; a cornerstone of our shared European identity."

The 2025 round carries added symbolism. Marking four decades of passport-free travel under the Schengen system, the Commission [has framed DiscoverEU as a reminder](#) of free movement. Persistent oversubscription, however, continues to raise questions about access and equity. As in previous years, demand has far exceeded supply, suggesting that the programme's reach is constrained by budgetary ceilings and not by lack of interest.

