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Free rail passes for 18-year-olds

How to apply to DiscoverEU before the deadline

The European Union is offering young people a free pass to see the continent, mostly by train. The European Commission announced on 1 October that applications are open for [DiscoverEU](#), a scheme for people turning 18. The window closes at midday Brussels time on 15 October, which is 11:00 in London because UK clocks do not go back until 25 October. According to the official rules (section 1), the Commission and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) plan to award around 40,000 passes from a planned budget of €23.5 million.

Who can apply?

This round is open only to people born between 1 January and 31 December 2008, according to the European Youth Portal. Applicants must be citizens or residents of one of the following, per section 2 of the rules:

an EU member state, including its outermost regions

one of the overseas countries and territories associated with the EU

an Erasmus+ associated country: Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia or Türkiye

The UK is not on that list. The Youth Portal's DiscoverEU page says the UK will join Erasmus+, DiscoverEU included, from 2027.

Applicants must enter an identity card, passport or residence-permit number. The rules (section 4) say the details are checked against documents after the award, and anyone found to have made a false declaration is excluded.

What winners receive

Winners get a pass for seven travel days within a period of up to one month. They can use it at any point between 1 March 2027 and 31 May 2028, on consecutive days or spread across the month, according to the rules (sections 1 and 8). Travel is in second class, and the trip must include at least one other eligible country.

The Commission says the pass is for the most environmentally

friendly transport, such as trains, with other modes in specific cases. The Youth Portal says travel is predominantly by rail. The rules (section 9) reserve flights for special cases and only for the outward and return legs. These are residents of outermost regions, overseas territories and regions not reachable by other transport, people facing more than 18 hours of land or sea travel to the nearest international station, and residents of Cyprus, Iceland, Ireland and Malta travelling to mainland Europe.

Winners also receive a discount card covering accommodation, culture, sport, local transport and other services.

How to apply

Applications are made through the European Youth Portal. After entering personal details, applicants answer five multiple-choice questions on the EU and its youth initiatives, plus one estimate-style tie-breaker. Per section 3 of the rules, candidates are ranked by quiz score and then by how close their estimate comes to the right answer, within a quota for each country. Where applicants are still tied at the cut-off, the last places go to whoever applied first.

Applicants may go alone or bring up to four friends, provided all are eligible. Only the group leader takes the quiz. The others register with the leader's application code, and the group is assessed as a single application. Each person may submit only one application. Anyone who has already booked a DiscoverEU pass in an earlier round cannot receive another.

The rules (sections 8 and 11) give January 2027 as the indicative date for results. Winners who applied this autumn have until 15 March 2027 to activate their pass, by choosing the start date of their one-month validity.

The small print

For most winners the package is the pass and the discount card. The rules (sections 8 and 10) say accommodation, meals, insurance and travel supplements are the traveller's own expense. Up to four seat reservations are free, though not in first class, in sleeping accommodation on night trains or on trains missing from the booking system. The 250 best-ranked applicants across all programme countries also receive one free night in a shared room at a participating youth hostel, subject to availability (section 4).

Winners must not buy tickets themselves. Passes are booked solely through a contractor appointed by EACEA, and tickets

bought independently are not reimbursed. The pass is in the traveller's name, cannot be transferred and is non-refundable (section 12).

Participants must have their own travel documents in order. The EU says it will cover the cost of issuing any visa required, and the contractor provides health insurance where a visa makes it mandatory. Otherwise the EU advises, but does not require, health and travel insurance (sections 15 and 16). A pass will not be rebooked because of a late visa if the application was lodged less than four weeks before departure or less than eight weeks before the end of the travel period.

Applicants with a disability or health condition that makes travel difficult can receive assistance and support.

DiscoverEU is part of Erasmus+, the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport. Its stated aims, set out in the rules (section 1), are to foster young people's sense of belonging to the Union, let them explore Europe's diversity, cultural heritage and history, and connect them with people across the continent.