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EU courts

The court system of the European Union (EU) is composed of three strands: the Court of Justice, the General Court, and the specialised courts in specific areas. These EU courts ensure that the interpretation and application of EU law is observed.

The [Court of Justice of the European Union](#) (which sometimes is also referred to as the European Court of Justice), constitutes the highest judicial authority of the EU. It ensures, in cooperation with the courts and tribunals of the Member States, the application and uniform interpretation of European Union law.

The Court of Justice is composed of one judge from each Member State.

The [General Court](#) hears cases in first instance, which are not referred to the specialised courts or directly to the Court of Justice. It also deals with appeals against decisions (of first instance) by the specialised courts. The General Court is composed of at least one judge per Member State.

Specialised courts can be set up for specific areas. They can hear and determine cases at first instance, with the possibility of an appeal to the General Court.

The EU courts have their seat in Luxembourg and are multilingual institutions. Any of the official languages of the EU can be the language of a court case.

The EU courts are required to observe the principle of multilingualism, because of the need to communicate with the parties in the language of the proceedings and to ensure that their case law is disseminated throughout the Member States.

It should be kept in mind that the application of EU law is not only the task of the EU courts: the courts and tribunals of the [Member States](#), also have to apply EU law. In other words, the courts of the EU and of the Member States work together for a sound and uniform application and interpretation.

For disputes between the EU and its civil servants (for instance on their recruitment, career or social security), a [Civil Service Tribunal](#) composed of seven judges has been created.

The Court of Justice and the General Court are assisted by Advocates-General, who deliver an impartial opinion on certain cases before they are decided.

The Court of Justice of the EU should not be confused with the [European Court of Human Rights](#) (ECHR). The ECHR is not a court of the EU, but was created in the framework of the [Council of Europe](#) by the [European Convention on Human Rights](#), to ensure respect for the rights and freedoms guaranteed in this Convention. However, case law developed by the European Court of Human Rights can have an important influence on EU law, since the fundamental rights guaranteed in the European Convention also constitute general principles of EU law.

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