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Case law

The term 'case law' refers to rules and principles developed in judgments and judicial opinions from courts of law. When deciding a case, the courts make interpretations of the law, which contribute to case law. Case law is published in various ways (law reports and journals, court websites, legal databases).

Court judgments and opinions provide us with interpretations of the law. These interpretations can then be cited by other courts or authorities as "precedents" and/or case law. The influence of case law can be particularly important in areas which are not or only partly covered by so-called statute law, that is written law set down by a legislature (such as a Parliament). This means that in certain circumstances law can also originate from the courts.

For some countries case law is a major source of law and decisions of higher appellate courts are regarded as normative - laying down rules that should, or in some cases must, be used to decide similar legal disputes (called "binding precedent", particularly in countries with a legal system based on common law, such as in the United Kingdom). In many other countries (particularly among those following the civil law tradition derived from Roman law), the courts are not strictly bound by rules and principles from case law.

Much of the:

[case law of the European Union](#),

[European Case Law Identifier \(ECLI\)](#),

[case law of its Member States](#),

and [international case law](#)

is accessible via a considerable number of databases. Without intending to be exhaustive, the European e-Justice Portal provides you with a central entrance point to such databases. Most of these are free of charge, but some databases are payable.

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