

Guide to the European Citizens' Initiative



HELP SHAPE THE EUROPEAN UNION

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INTRODUCTION

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is every EU citizen's right to get involved in EU policymaking and put the issues that matter most to them on the European agenda. It is a bottom-up way of starting a political debate and raising awareness of common causes which unite people across borders.

There are two ways to get involved: you can choose to sign ongoing citizens' initiatives that you support - this takes just a few minutes to do - or you can launch a citizens' initiative with other EU citizens. By launching a citizens' initiative, and collecting the required signatures, you invite the European Commission to propose new laws in areas where the Commission has powers to act.

The tool was launched in 2012, and successful initiatives have already led to concrete results, including legislative proposals by the European Commission and a range of non-legislative actions linked to specific initiatives. To make the process even more accessible and easier to use for organisers and supporters, revised rules became applicable at the beginning of 2020.

The European Citizens' Initiative is your tool to give a voice to your ideas and help us build a better Europe.

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THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE AT A GLANCE

What is the European Citizens' Initiative?

The ECI is a unique way for you to help shape the EU by calling on the European Commission to propose new laws. Once an initiative has obtained 1 million verified signatures, the Commission will decide what action to take.

The European Citizens' Initiative is governed by EU Regulation 2019/788.

What can a European citizens' initiative be about?

A citizens' initiative is possible in any area where the Commission has the power to propose laws such as the environment, consumer protection, agriculture, fisheries, energy, transport, trade, etc.



Who can organise a European citizens' initiative?

An initiative can be launched by at least seven EU citizens (nationals of an EU country), who live in seven different EU countries and who are old enough to vote in European elections. In most EU countries, EU citizens can vote from the age of 18 years, but in some countries, you can already vote in European elections at the age of 16 or 17 years old (¹).

These seven people can also set up a legal entity in one of the EU countries to manage the initiative.

Citizens' initiatives cannot be run by organisations that are already established, but these organisations can promote or support initiatives as long as they do so openly.

¹ Check here for details: https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/data-requirements_en

Who can sign a European citizens' initiative?

All EU citizens, wherever they live, and who are old enough to vote in the European elections (see above) can sign a citizens' initiative (²).

To engage young people in the democratic processes of the EU, the Commission encourages EU countries to lower the minimum age for supporting an initiative to 16. Check our website for more information.

² You do not need to be registered to vote, just old enough to vote.





HOW TO SUPPORT A EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE

Support an initiative online or on paper

You can find all open citizens' initiatives on the [ECI website](#). You can support an initiative only once.

Organisers can choose to collect their signatures online or on paper. To support an initiative, you need to provide the following data:

- The country of which you are a national.
- Your full first names, family names and, depending on the country, either your date of birth and your full address or a personal identification (document) number and the number/document type.

If you sign online, you may use your e-Identification (eID) instead, if your country has enabled this option.

If you sign on paper, you also have to fill in the date, sign the form and give it back to the organisers.

For the online collection, initiatives use the online collection system that is managed by the Commission. The Commission's system uses the highest security and data protection standards. The Commission ensures the protection of personal data in line with the EUGDPR.

What happens to your data, and how is it protected?

When you support an initiative, and after it collects over 1 million signatures, your statement of support will be sent to the authority in your country of nationality that oversees verification. The initiative organisers, the Commission and the national authorities are all required to protect your data and are not allowed to make the list of signatories public. The national authorities must destroy all statements of support no later than three months after completing the verification process.

The data of supporters of initiatives that do not reach the thresholds and that are not submitted for verification are deleted after the end of collection period in accordance with the data retention limits set out in the ECI Regulation.

Before signing, read the privacy statement on the paper form or online so that you are fully aware of how your data will be processed and how to exercise your rights.





HOW TO ORGANISE A EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE

Step 1: GET STARTED



First consider whether the ECI is the right way to promote your idea. A citizens' initiative must ask the Commission to propose new laws and must be on [an issue where the Commission has the power to act](#) ⁽³⁾.

If your idea has a different focus, consider other ways of addressing the EU institutions. You can find more information about this on the [Commission website](#) ⁽⁴⁾.

Before launching an initiative, form a group of organisers made up of at least seven EU citizens who are old enough to vote in European elections and who live in at least seven different EU countries (the group members do not have to be nationals of seven different EU countries).

When you submit your request to register a citizens' initiative, indicate who the group members are, and select a representative and a substitute to speak and act on behalf of the group. If the initiative is registered, the names of all the members and the email addresses of the representative and substitute will be published on the ECI website.

You can also set up a legal entity to manage your initiative.

For ideas and help in preparing your initiative, visit the [European Citizens' Initiative Forum](#) ⁽⁵⁾ to find guidance materials, get expert advice and team up with like-minded individuals.

⁵ Visit: https://citizens-initiative-forum.europa.eu/_en

³ For guidance on the Commission's powers, see: https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/faq-eu-competences-and-commission-powers_en

⁴ Find out more about alternative ways of approaching or influencing the EU at: https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/get-involved_en

Step 2: GET YOUR INITIATIVE REGISTERED



When you are ready to submit your initiative, ask the Commission to register it via the ECI website by creating your organiser account. When submitting your request for registration through your account, you must include:

- the title of your initiative (maximum 100 characters);
- a description of the initiative objectives (maximum 1,100 characters) – you can also add an annex on the subject, objectives and background to the initiative (maximum 5,000 characters);
- The provisions of the EU Treaties you consider relevant for the proposed action ⁽⁶⁾;
- personal details and documents of minimum seven organisers (full names, postal addresses, nationalities and dates of birth), indicating specifically the representative and the substitute, as well as their email addresses and telephone numbers;
- the names of the other members of the group of organisers;

⁶ For more information on the EU Treaties, please see: https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/faq-eu-competences-and-commission-powers_en

- for all group members proof of their country of nationality and their country of residence;
- where appropriate, documents that prove the creation of a legal entity set up to manage the initiative and the fact that the representative can act on its behalf;
- all sources of funding and support for your initiative known at the time of registration.

You can also attach a document with further information, as well as a draft legal act.

Registration is not automatic. The Commission will check your proposal, in particular to ensure that:

- your group of organisers has been formed correctly (you need to provide for each member proof of country of nationality and country of residence);
- your initiative falls within the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for a legal act;
- the initiative is not abusive, frivolous, vexatious or contrary to the EU values described in the EU Treaties ⁽⁷⁾ or the rights enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

⁷ Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union: 'The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.'



The Commission has 2 months to register a proposed initiative. However, if your proposal does not fall entirely within the Commission's powers, you have the chance to revise your proposal and have an extra 2 months to work on it and resubmit it, after which the Commission can fully or partially register your initiative or refuse registration.

When your initiative is registered, the Commission formally notifies your group's representative and substitute and publishes your initiative on the ECI website.

The Commission translates the initiative into all official EU languages free of charge. This will help you when you are campaigning to collect signatures across the EU.

Step 3: GET SUPPORT



You need to get the support of at least 1 million EU citizens, with minimum numbers in at least seven EU countries. They must fill in a specific statement of support form.

You can choose the date when you start collecting statements of support, as long as it is within 6 months of the date of registration. You can collect statements of support for up to 12 months.

For collection on paper, you can download ready-made forms for your initiative from your organiser account. These are available in all official EU languages.

To collect support online, you use the Commission's free-of-charge online collection system. It is ready to use and includes some customisation options.

Collect as many statements of support as possible, as some may be invalidated during the subsequent verification process, e.g. if there are multiple statements of support submitted by the same person.

Data protection

Throughout the procedure, you must comply with data protection legislation. For more information, see the guidance for organisers on the ECI website.

Minimum number of signatories per country

You are not required to collect statements of support in all EU countries. However, you will need to reach a minimum number of signatories in at least seven EU countries. The thresholds for each country are available on the ECI website ⁽⁸⁾.

Statements of support collected in countries where the [threshold](#) has not been reached also count towards the 1 million target.

Step 4: GET STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT VERIFIED



If you have collected at least 1 million statements of support by the end of your collection period, you must ask the relevant national authorities in the countries where you reach the threshold to certify the number of valid statements of support for that country.

You have to submit the statements of support for verification within 3 months of the end of the collection period.

⁸ https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/thresholds_en

At your request, the Commission will transfer the statements of support collected online through its online collection system to the national authorities.

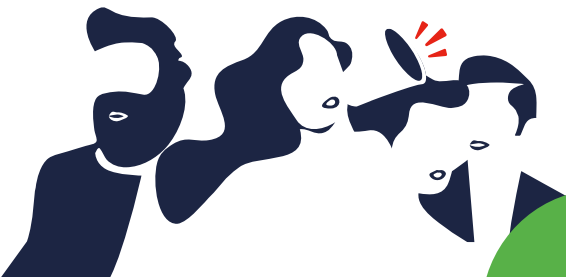
You can choose to send the statements of support collected on paper to the national authorities using a secure file exchange system made available free of charge by the Commission.

The national authorities have up to 3 months to certify the number of valid statements of support. They will issue for you a certificate with the total number of validated signatures.

Step 5: SUBMIT YOUR INITIATIVE



If you have obtained the minimum number of statements of support, you have 3 months from the end of the verification stage to submit your initiative and the certificates issued by the national authorities to the Commission.



Step 6: GET AN ANSWER



The Commission has 6 months to examine and reply to your initiative. The Commission will arrange to meet you within 1 month

from the submission date, and you will have a public hearing in the European Parliament within 3 months. Both provide you the opportunity to present your initiative and explain your objectives in detail. The European Parliament might also hold a debate on your initiative in a plenary session and may adopt a resolution.

After examining the initiative, the Commission will adopt a formal response stating what action it intends to take, if any, and its reasons, as well as a timeline for such actions. The Commission formally adopts this response and publishes it in all official EU languages.

If the Commission considers proposing a law in response to a citizens' initiative, it will take steps such as [public consultations](#) and [impact assessments](#) to prepare its proposal.

Once adopted by the Commission, the proposal is submitted to the European Parliament and the Council (or in some cases only the Council), which will need to adopt the proposal for it to become [law](#) ⁽⁹⁾.

⁹ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/legislative-procedures.html>

HAS THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE HAD ANY EFFECT SO FAR?

Of the initiatives that have successfully obtained the number of signatures needed, some have resulted in new laws and others have produced other meaningful results. For example:

In response to the ['Right2Water' initiative](#), the Commission committed to stepping up efforts towards full implementation of EU water legislation and adopted a proposal to revise the EU Drinking Water Directive, obliging EU countries to guarantee access to safe drinking water for Europeans, including vulnerable groups. This Directive entered into force in January 2021 and Member States were required to transpose it into national law by January 2023.

The ['Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides'](#) initiative saw the Commission propose, in 2017, a law on the transparency and sustainability of EU risk assessment in the food chain. It improves the transparency of scientific studies that help inform the authorisation of substances that may end up in our food, such as additives or pesticides. The 'Transparency Regulation' applies since March 2021.

The [initiative 'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade'](#) called for banning the import, export and transit of loose shark fins. In July 2023, the Commission committed to launching an impact assessment on such a ban. It followed up in early 2024 with a questionnaire for stakeholders and public consultation. Based on the results, the Commission will consider further steps, while working on the best enforcement of existing rules concerning shark protection and reaching out to international partners with the aim of reducing global shark fin consumption.

In response to the ['Save Cruelty Free Cosmetics – commit to a Europe without animal testing'](#) initiative, the Commission committed to start a series of actions to accelerate the reduction of animal testing in research, education and training, and to work on a roadmap towards replacing animal testing in chemical safety assessments. The ECI organisers are closely involved in the consultation process and participated in a December 2023 workshop on the roadmap.

A European citizens' initiative lets you have an impact on EU policies and on the lives of people in the EU. Make change happen by launching or supporting initiatives.

Take the initiative!



FIND OUT MORE

European Citizens' Initiative website

https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/_en

On this website you will find:

- information on all citizens' initiatives, classified according to their status, including the replies given by the Commission
- detailed information on the European citizens' initiative rules, guidance and FAQ
- the list of relevant authorities and contact points in each EU country
- for organisers of initiatives, access to your organiser account so you can submit your registration request and manage your initiative once the Commission has registered it
- promotional materials, including the 'EU Democracy in Action - Have Your Say with the European Citizens' Initiative' toolkit for secondary schools
- information on ECI Ambassadors, National Contact Points and the latest news on the European Citizens' Initiative.

European Citizens' Initiative Forum

https://citizens-initiative-forum.europa.eu/_en

Learn more about the practical tips and tricks of managing a European citizens' initiative, ask for expert advice and assistance, learn about experiences of other initiatives, and find people to join your organiser group.

Newsletter

Subscribe to the newsletter on the European Citizens' Initiative website for the latest updates.

Europe Direct

Tel. 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (*)

Email or chat: https://european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu_en

You can also contact a Europe Direct centre in your country. To find one, please consult:

https://european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en?topics=1040

(*) Most calls are free, although some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you.

Important notice

This publication provides general information on the rules and conditions governing the European citizens' initiative. Its content is not legally binding and does not claim to be exhaustive.

The detailed rules on the European citizens' initiative are set out in Regulation (EU) 2019/788:

<https://europa.eu/!tU34yK>





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