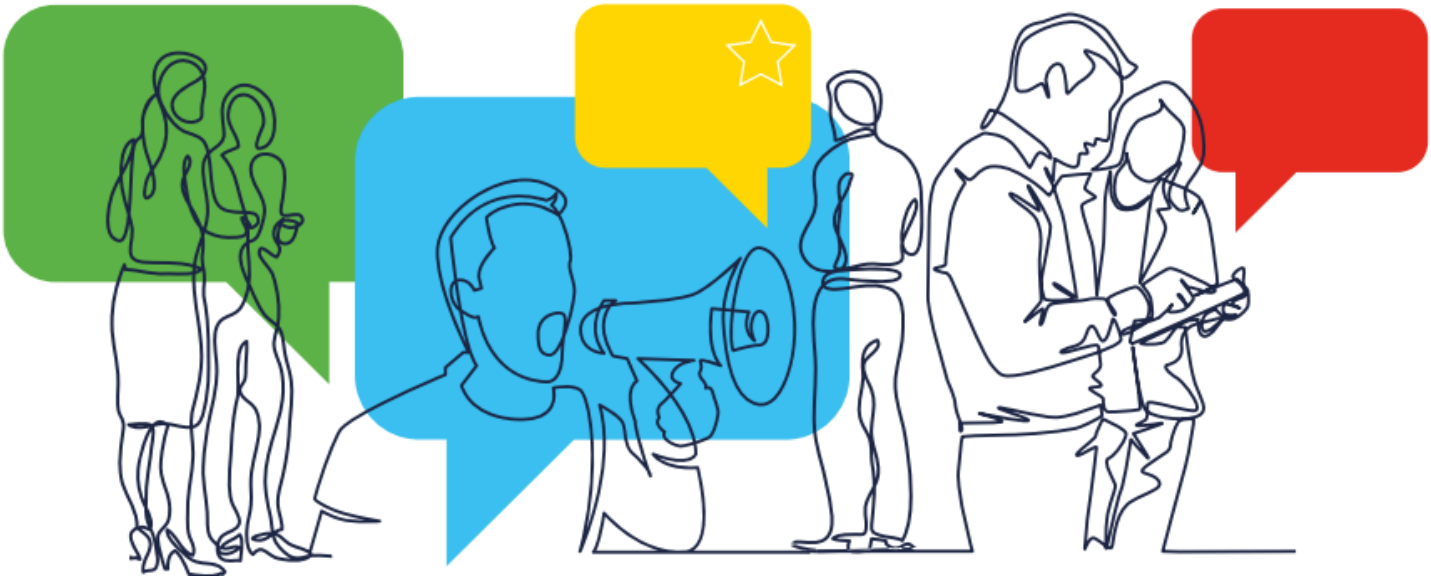
SUCCESS STORY

FORUM ZUR EUROPÄISCHEN BÜRGERINITIATIVE

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The initiatives that did not reach the 1 million signature threshold but still had an impact on EU policy.

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is the first supranational instrument of participatory democracy, allowing EU citizens to contribute to the EU's agenda. Introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, the ECI enables EU citizens to propose new legislation in areas where the EU has competence.

To be considered by the European Commission, an initiative must collect **at least one million signatures** from EU citizens, with a **minimum number of signatories required in at least seven Member States**, reflecting the initiative's broad support across the Union. By bridging the gap between citizens and EU institutions, the ECI empowers individuals to contribute to the democratic process, fostering dialogue and collaboration on matters that impact European communities. In the first 13 years, 120 initiatives were registered on various topics that are important to EU citizens.

These are the stories of some European citizens' initiatives that did not reach the 1 million signature threshold, but their organisers found that they had an impact, nevertheless.

What can you achieve with the European Citizens' Initiative?

Tax the Rich



The Taxing Great Wealth to Finance the Ecological and Social Transition initiative (commonly known as ‘Tax the Rich’) was officially registered by the European Commission on 11 July 2023. It was launched by a broad coalition of political figures and civil society actors, including Belgian politician Paul Magnette, French MEP Aurore Lalucq, economist Thomas Piketty, and NGOs such as Oxfam and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) (more information about the organisers). The campaign aimed to push for EU-level legislation introducing a coordinated progressive wealth tax on the richest individuals, with revenues intended to fund climate and social policies across Europe.

The signature collection period ran from **9 October 2023** to **9 October 2024**. During this time, the initiative gathered around **232,000 signatures**. Despite not reaching the one million signature goal, the campaign succeeded in bringing renewed attention to wealth inequality and fair taxation at the EU level.

While the Tax the Rich initiative did not reach the required one million signatures to trigger an official response from the European Commission, it had a substantial impact on both public discourse and political agendas across Europe and beyond. The campaign helped reignite debates on wealth

inequality and fiscal justice, bringing the idea of progressive wealth taxation back into mainstream political conversation. In terms of institutional impact, the initiative helped stimulate broader policy discussion: the European Commission's 2024 Annual Taxation Report acknowledged that public and expert interest in wealth taxes was increasing, a shift attributed in part to the awareness generated by this initiative.

In countries like France, Spain, Germany, and the UK, this initiative coincided with and in some cases spurred new policy discussions around introducing or strengthening national-level wealth taxes. In France, for example, lawmakers referenced this initiative in debates over reviving the solidarity tax on wealth (ISF), while in Spain, progressive coalitions cited the campaign as a reason to maintain the temporary solidarity wealth tax introduced in 2023. In the UK, although not part of the EU, think tanks and academic circles drew on this initiative's arguments to call for a similar redistribution mechanism to tackle inequality and fund public services.

Beyond Europe, the initiative's ideas resonated in international policy arenas. Notably, the campaign's messaging, bolstered by influential supporters like economist Gabriel Zucman and civil society organisations such as Oxfam, FEPS (Foundation for European Progressive Studies), and the EU Tax Observatory, contributed to a growing momentum for a global minimum tax on the ultra-rich. These ideas gained traction in discussions at the G20 and OECD, where policymakers are increasingly exploring coordinated international frameworks to tax extreme wealth more effectively.

Moreover, the campaign helped foster cross-border solidarity among European citizens, researchers, and activists, demonstrating the potential of citizen-led initiatives to challenge dominant economic narratives. Even without legislative success, Tax the Rich served as a catalyst for renewed scrutiny of wealth accumulation, opening new political space for future reforms at both EU and global levels.

Learn more about their campaign from one of their organisers in our webinar, Unlocking Engagement: Strategies for Reaching and Activating the Unengaged for Your ECI, and in their blog post, Let's make wealth tax a reality: urgent call for greater social and climate justice.

Good Clothes, Fair Pay



The Good Clothes, Fair Pay' initiative was registered on **1 June 2022** and started its signature collection period on **19 July 2022**. It was launched and led by Fashion Revolution and its global network, alongside Fair Wear and ASN Bank. Moreover, this initiative received funding from the CERV [Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values] programme. The initiative called on the Commission to propose targeted due diligence legislation to ensure workers' human right to a living wage is protected across the supply chains of garment, textile, leather and footwear companies. The key campaigning partners of this initiative were the Clean Clothes Campaign, World Fair Trade Organisation (WTFO), Fairtrade International and Solidaridad. This initiative was supported by over 15 organisations throughout the EU. Although the initiative reported collecting around **216,100 signatures** across the EU, it did gain, until July 2023, the attention of the media and some politicians.

"Our approach was to launch different story angles at the beginning of the campaign. Our global team provided two press releases to support the ECI campaign: one for news and current affairs media and one for fashion and lifestyle media, because they have quite different audiences with Politico vs. Vogue." - Organiser of Good Clothes, Fair Pay

Learn more about their campaign from one of their organisers in our webinar Communicating Your ECI! Tips and tricks on how to promote your initiative.

On 20 April 2022, before registration of their initiative, the organisers of the initiative organised an online panel discussion and Q&A session with industry experts, including MEP Lara Wolters, during their yearly Fashion Revolution Week. This panel discussion introduced the initiative to the participants and discussed its potential impact.

On 25 April 2023, Fashion Revolution and the Fair Trade Advocacy office, in collaboration with MEP Delara Burkhardt and MEP Saskia Bricmont, hosted a Fair Fashion Day event at the European Parliament (see press release). This event took place a couple of days before the ENVI Committee (Committee on the Environment, Climate and Food Safety of the European Parliament) vote on the EU Textile Strategy and when the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI) was expected to vote on the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. Following this event, the initiative organisers, with the two MEPs, held a stunt outside the European Parliament and in 6 other cities across the EU (see social media post).



During Fashion Revolution

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Moreover, a spokesperson for the campaign also participated in the Steering Committee of Experts to discuss the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence with MEP Lara Wolters, who was the rapporteur on the directive of this topic.

After closing the collection period, this initiative was debated in the Committee on Petitions (PETI) at the European Parliament on 24 October 2023 (see recording [minute 17:42] for the organisers' contribution). The Parliament sent it to the European Commission as a petition and Commission answer was received on 6 March 2024 (see Petition and Notice to the Members).

This campaign also garnered the attention of different news outlets and publications. For example, in July 2022, an article titled ‘This Campaign Needs Your Help To Turn Living Wages For Garment Workers Into Law’ was published in British Vogue.

Ban Fossil Fuel Advertising and Sponsorships



The Ban Fossil Fuel Advertising and Sponsorships initiative was collecting signatures between **4 October 2021** and **4 October 2022**. The aim of the initiative was to prohibit the advertising and sponsorship activities of companies promoting fossil fuels. The initiative sought to address the pervasive issue of "greenwashing", where companies mislead the public about their environmental impact while continuing to profit from fossil fuels. This includes ads for fossil fuel products, vehicles powered by fossil fuels, and related sponsorships, such as for sports or cultural events.

This initiative was supported by a coalition of over 20 civil society organisations, including Greenpeace, ClientEarth, and Friends of the Earth Europe. Although this initiative did not reach the 1 million signature threshold, and reported collecting around **280,000 signatures**, it succeeded in raising awareness about fossil fuel advertising's role in climate change.

In August 2022, France became the first EU Member State to implement a ban on fossil fuel advertisements under a newly introduced climate law, setting a precedent for national-level action. Following this, in March 2024, the Irish Parliament proposed a series of bills aimed at prohibiting the

promotion of fossil fuels, reflecting growing legislative momentum within Europe.

At the global level, in June 2024, UN Secretary-General António Guterres delivered a compelling speech advocating for a worldwide ban on fossil fuel advertising (see speech). He also called on public relations and lobbying firms to end partnerships with fossil fuel companies, emphasising the urgent need for systemic change in combating climate misinformation. This speech highlighted the widespread support for such measures among global citizens and policymakers alike.

Building on this wave of action, the city of The Hague in the Netherlands introduced a landmark regulation prohibiting advertisements for fossil fuel products and high-carbon services, such as cruises and air travel. The ban, which came into force on 1 January 2025, targets public spaces, including billboards and bus shelters, making The Hague the first city to successfully implement such a measure. The policy was quickly challenged in court by travel industry groups, including ANVR and TUI, who argued that the ban overstepped municipal authority, infringed on freedom of expression, and would be ineffective. However, on 25 April 2025, a Dutch court upheld the legality of the ban. The ruling confirmed that while the city's definition of "fossil fuel advertising" need not be perfect, its implementation met requirements for good governance. The court also emphasised that advertisements do not need to fully solve climate issues to be valid public policy measures; it is enough that they contribute meaningfully to environmental and public health goals. Importantly, the ruling affirmed that municipalities have the right to prioritise public health and climate protection over commercial interests, and that the targeted, proportionate nature of the ban does not violate freedom of speech.

Following this court ruling, a domino effect took place in the Netherlands, with Utrecht, Delft, Nijmegen and Leiden introducing similar local laws against fossil fuel advertising. This achievement stands out as a critical milestone in local climate policy, underscoring the growing role of municipalities in addressing environmental challenges through legislative measures.

These developments demonstrate that the efforts of citizens who launched the European citizens' initiative (ECI) to ban fossil fuel advertising align with a broader demand for action shared by many across the EU and the world. This alignment illustrates the increasing push for regulatory measures to curb fossil fuel promotion and accelerate the transition toward a sustainable future.

Reclaim Your Face

The Civil society initiative for a ban on biometric mass surveillance practices initiative, more commonly known as 'Reclaim Your Face', launched by the European Digital Rights (EDRi) network and a broad coalition of civil society organisations, was officially registered by the European Commission on **7 January 2021**. Its goal was to call for a ban on biometric mass surveillance practices, including facial recognition and other forms of automated public monitoring, within the EU. The campaign ran until **1 August 2022**, ultimately collecting around **80,000 signatures**, far short of the one million required for formal Commission consideration. However, despite not meeting the threshold, the initiative had an outsized influence on public discourse and policy development at both the national and EU levels.

“Campaigning at any time is a challenging task, trying to mobilise people and translate a quite heavy policy message into something that helps others understand why this topic actually affects their daily lives.” – Ella Jakubowska, campaign coordinator.

The campaign significantly shaped the political debate around biometric technologies. It contributed directly to the inclusion of a ban on remote biometric identification in public spaces in the European Parliament's negotiating position on the EU Artificial Intelligence Act. This initiative’s impact was further reinforced by support from the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) and the European Data Protection Board (EDPB), both of which echoed calls to prohibit biometric mass surveillance (Reclaim Your Face, 2021; reclaimyourface.eu). Nationally, the initiative prompted significant action, including a moratorium on facial recognition in Italy, a ruling by the Hamburg Data Protection Authority against ClearviewAI, and legal scrutiny of biometric tools in countries such as Greece and the Netherlands.

Though this initiative did not result in direct legislative change via the signature mechanism, it was widely recognised for its political impact. An insider from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC**)** referred to it as “perhaps the most politically powerful ECI ever” (Reclaim Your Face, 2023; reclaimyourface.eu). The campaign received several accolades, including the Digital Civic Engagement Award in 2022 and being named Europe AI Policy Leader in Civil Society in 2024. Its legacy continues in the ongoing civil society push for strict safeguards in the implementation of the AI Act and broader digital rights protections across the EU.

Learn more about this initiative by reading and watching their interview with the ECI Forum team.

Ending the aviation fuel tax exemption in Europe



The Ending the aviation fuel tax exemption in Europe initiative, often referred to as ‘Fairosene’was formally registered on **10 May 2019** after seven students launched it to push the European Commission to propose a tax on aviation fuel (kerosene) used within the EU, arguing that the sector benefited from tax advantages despite its substantial greenhouse gas emissions. The official signature collection period ran from **10 May 2019 to 10 May 2020**, and by the end, this initiative collected around **74,000 signatures**.

“Advocacy is only successful when synergies are present. To widen the geographical reach of our initiative, we connected with umbrella organisations that have members across different countries and local networks. We also built online hubs of passionate volunteers who spread the petition by word of mouth, both online and offline.” - Tassos Papachristou, organiser

Despite not reaching the 1 million signature threshold, Fairosene achieved notable influence. The campaign's strategy combined many different public awareness efforts. One of the organisers stated, *“We lobbied policymakers from the EU institutions, (while) simultaneously raising awareness, collecting signatures, and overall advocacy… The support that we received from organisations, citizens and civil society overall was utterly unexpected and arguably the most positive experience.” After closing the signature collection, the organisers presented their initiative to the European Committee on Petitions (PETI).* These efforts contributed to other efforts to push the topic of kerosene taxation onto the European Commission’s agenda, ultimately leading to its inclusion in the Fit For 55 climate package, which proposed ending the fuel tax exemption for aviation.

Although a unanimous Member State agreement is needed to revise the Energy Taxation Directive, and some countries remain resistant, this initiative helped catalyse policy discussion and laid the groundwork for future action. It demonstrated how a relatively small grassroots campaign could elevate environmental tax reform to the heart of EU legislative planning.

Read the blog article written by one of the organisers of this initiative to learn more.

Single Communication Tariff Act



The Single Communication Tariff Act, also known as the *One Single Tariff* European citizens' initiative (ECI), was one of the first ECIs launched following the mechanism's introduction in 2012. Officially registered on 10 May 2012, the initiative aimed to eliminate roaming charges for mobile phone users across the European Union. Its core demand was to establish a uniform communication tariff within the EU, ensuring that consumers would not face extra charges when using mobile services across Member States. The campaign was rooted in the principle of a truly unified digital single market, reflecting growing public frustration with high cross-border mobile fees that contradicted the EU's promise of free movement.

Although the initiative ultimately did not meet the threshold of collecting one million signatures across the EU, its impact was far from negligible. The campaign drew considerable media and institutional attention and helped amplify pressure on EU policymakers to tackle telecom inequalities. It contributed to the political momentum that led to the adoption of the “Roam Like at Home” rule in 2017, which allows EU consumers to continue to call and transfer data across EU borders for the same cost as at home. This landmark policy achievement was widely celebrated as a breakthrough in consumer rights and digital integration.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) President cited the Single Communication Tariff Act as a compelling example of how ECIs can influence policy outcomes even when they fall short of signature requirements. It demonstrated the role ECIs can play in shaping public discourse, guiding legislative agendas, and providing legitimacy to broader regulatory reforms. In this case, it helped pave the way for a key EU success story, ending roaming fees, by translating citizen concern into political will.