



## FORUM TAL-INIZJATTIVA TA?-?ITTADINI EWROPEJ

### Ban on Conversion Practices in the European Union



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## About the ‘Ban on Conversion Practices’

**Ban on Conversion Practices** (full name: "**Ban on Conversion Practices in the European Union**") was the thirteenth European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) to successfully collect more than one million valid signatures. Registered on **24 January 2024**, the initiative officially launched signature collection on **17 May 2024**, marking the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.

Conversion practices are interventions aimed at changing, repressing or suppressing the sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression of LGBTQ+ persons. Through this initiative, the organisers called on the European Commission to propose a binding legal ban on conversion practices targeting LGBTQ+ people across the European Union. In 2020, a United Nations Special Rapporteur qualified conversion practices as a form of torture, and an increasing number of

European countries have since introduced legal bans. At the time the initiative reached its goal, eight EU Member States had already prohibited these practices.

Following the successful completion of the signature collection campaign, and the verification of signatures, the initiative was formally submitted to the European Commission on **17 November 2025**, together with certificates confirming the validity of **1,128,063 signatures**. As part of the ECI reply process, the organisers met with the Commissioner for Preparedness, Crisis Management and Equality, **Hadja Lahbib**, on 12 December 2025 and presented their proposal at a public hearing in the European Parliament on 2 March 2026.

The European Commission adopted its official response on 13 May 2026 through a Communication (see the press release). On the same day, Commissioner Lahbib, met with the organisers and issued a public statement (see the video).

In its assessment, the Commission examined the available legal avenues and committed to adopting a Commission Recommendation calling on Member States to ban conversion practices. The Commission also reaffirmed that every member of the LGBTIQ+ community should be able to be who they are and live their lives with pride, free from violence, discrimination and fear.

The 'Ban on Conversion Practices' initiative demonstrated that a determined group of grassroots organisers can successfully mobilise citizens across Europe, bring important issues onto the EU agenda, and contribute meaningfully to shaping EU policymaking.

**Initiative registered**

24/01/2024

**Collection start date**

17/05/2024

**Collection closed**

17/05/2025

**Verification**

16/06/2025

**Submission of the initiative**

17/11/2025

**Answered initiative**

13/05/2026

**What helped this initiative achieve a successful collection of signatures?**

**Fighting for what you believe in**

The organisers' determination was central to the campaign's success.

## **Creating a sense of community**

Building strong partnerships made a significant difference.

## **Making the most of social media**

A strong online presence played a key role in the campaign.

# **The strategy behind the initiative**

## **Preparation**

The idea for the 'Ban on Conversion Practices' initiative originated with Mattéo Garguilo, the lead organiser, while he was still a high school student, three to four years before the initiative was launched. Around 2020, the issue of conversion practices gained significant public attention in France, where Mattéo is from. Conversion practices (also referred to as conversion therapies) are interventions aimed at changing, repressing or suppressing the sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression of LGBTQI+ persons. Mattéo was struck by the fact that these practices remained legal in many European countries, with only eight of the 27 EU countries having introduced a legal ban.

At the same time, Mattéo had developed a strong interest in participatory democracy and citizens' engagement, including instruments such as the Shared Referendum Initiative in France. He recognised the European Citizens' Initiative as the right tool to bring this issue to the European level.

To launch the initiative, Mattéo founded ACT, the European Association Against Conversion Therapy, together with two friends, at the age of 21 while studying at Institute of Political Studies (I.E.P.) of Lyon.

To build support for the campaign, Mattéo and the other co-presidents of ACT reached out to LGBTQI+ and human rights organisations across Europe. They sent more than 500 emails to organisations in search of partners willing to campaign alongside them. As a newly established organisation, they initially found it difficult to secure the support of larger organisations. However, through persistence, they succeeded in bringing together 12 associations defending LGBTQI+ rights from 12 different EU Member States to jointly launch the initiative.

## **Fundraising and resources**

The organisers did not receive any financial support for the initiative. Although they considered seeking donations, they ultimately decided against launching a fundraising campaign. As a small team with limited time and capacity, they concluded that the administrative work involved (such as completing paperwork, contacting potential donors and managing funding requirements) would divert valuable resources from their main objective.

Instead, the organisers chose to focus their efforts on mobilising supporters and collecting signatures, prioritising the campaign itself over fundraising.

## Campaign strategy

The 'Ban on Conversion Practices' campaign took an unexpected turn during the signature collection period. Although the collection period opened in **May 2024**, by **April 2025** the initiative gathered only around **234,000 signatures**. With just one month remaining, the organisers still needed to collect more than **770,000 signatures** to reach the required threshold.

*"This is the hardest part: keeping people active. We struggled a lot with this. Many NGOs stopped supporting the campaign when the signatures stopped flowing in. It is hard to keep a campaign going for a whole year." – Mattéo Garguilo*

The organisers recognised that conversion practices were still a relatively little-known issue compared with other fundamental rights campaigns, such as those on abortion rights, making citizens less likely to support the initiative. This challenge was particularly evident in countries where the rights of LGBTQI+ people remain less established, making it more difficult to attract partner organisations and generate public attention.

Moreover, the campaign relied entirely on a team of student volunteers. For them, running the ECI was an act of activism carried out alongside their studies. Social media, particularly Instagram, became the campaign's primary communication and mobilisation channel.

Ten days before the end of the collection period, the organisers launched one final effort that transformed the campaign. They began contacting as many influencers, artists and politicians as possible, asking them to publicly endorse the initiative and encourage their followers to sign it.

One of the first public figures to respond was the Belgian singer **Angèle**, who called on her Instagram followers to support the initiative. Her message was simple and engaging: she promised to give a kiss to her famous dog for every fan who signed the ECI.



lecoindeslgbt and act\_lgbt



**ANGÈLE APPELLE À SIGNER  
ET À PARTAGER DANS TOUTE  
L'UNION EUROPÉENNE L'INITIATIVE  
POUR FAIRE INTERDIRE LES  
THÉRAPIES DE CONVERSION  
EN EUROPE !**

**LIEN DANS LA BIO DE @LECOINDESLGBT**

Source: Instagram page of "Le coin des lgbt"

Following endorsements from Angèle and the French singer **Hoshi**, many other artists joined the campaign. Within just a few days, the initiative gained around **500,000 additional signatures**.

A similar momentum emerged in the political sphere. Through contacts established by a feminist organisation, the French left-wing party became the first political party to endorse the initiative, followed by the Socialist Party and the Greens. On the final day of the campaign, French President **Emmanuel Macron** published a message supporting the initiative on social media. Around 30 minutes later, Slovenian Prime Minister **Robert Golob** also publicly encouraged citizens to sign.



**Emmanuel Macron** 

@EmmanuelMacron



Full support to the European citizens calling for a ban on conversion therapies. France banned them in 2022. This is a fight for freedom, dignity, and respect. Together we will succeed.

7:25 PM · May 17, 2025 · **548.6K** Views

Source: X page of Emmanuel Macron

The organisers also sought support from the team behind the successful **My Voice, My Choice** European Citizens' Initiative. The Slovenian organisers agreed to help by activating the network they had built during their own campaign, which had recently collected almost 1.2 million signatures.



**MY VOICE  
MY CHOICE**

**"No one should be told  
they need to be 'fixed' just  
for being who they are.  
Banning conversion practices is  
not just necessary – it's urgent."**



**Nika Kovač,  
MVMC campaign coordinator**

This collaboration proved invaluable. It helped the campaign reach civil society organisations in Germany, while in Croatia the initiative succeeded in reaching the national threshold in a single day.

*"Once we got one country, we moved on to another country, sending the followers off to reach out to people, whether LGBT influencers, LGBT singers, or women because, in general, women are very supportive of LGBT rights." – Mattéo Garguilo*

The organisers also understood the power of urgency. As the countdown to one million signatures intensified, more people became motivated to participate. Combined with growing public attention to LGBTQI+ rights, this sense of urgency created the momentum needed for the campaign to succeed.

France became the campaign's strongest base of support. More than half of all signatures came from the country, thanks in large part to the Instagram account **@lecoindeslgbt**, which played a major role in spreading the initiative's message. The account was supported by the French feminist collective **NousToutes**, which also helped mobilise supporters and facilitated political contacts.

*"They helped us a lot, and so we pushed a lot in France, and we had a few contacts in politics." – Mattéo Garguilo*

The strategy paid off. At around **4 p.m. on the day before the collection period ended**, the initiative surpassed the milestone of **one million signatures**. By the time the campaign officially closed, it had collected **more than 1.2 million signatures**.

## **Signature collection and verification process**

The 'Ban on Conversion Practices' initiative officially opened its signature collection period on 17 May 2024, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, and closed the campaign one year later on the same date.

Most of the initiative's signatures were collected during the final week of the campaign, demonstrating how momentum can rapidly build in the closing stages of an ECI.

Following the end of the collection period, the initiative was formally submitted for examination by Member States on 16 June 2025. After the verification process was concluded 1,128,063 statements of support were confirmed as valid.

**Number of statements of support collected by 'Ban on Conversion Practices' per Member State**



*Note: “Ban on Conversion practices in the European Union” reached the minimum thresholds in ten Member States Source: European Citizens' Initiative website, 2026. The full table with statements of support is available on the [dedicated webpage of the ECI website](#).*

Throughout the campaign, the organisers focused their efforts on countries that have traditionally reached the national threshold for ECIs, such as **France** and **Spain**, while also targeting smaller Member States where public support for banning conversion practices was considered particularly strong, including **Slovenia** and **Ireland**.

After reaching the milestone of one million signatures, the organisers continued campaigning instead of stopping immediately. Their aim was to build a sufficient safety margin to account for signatures that might be declared invalid during the verification process. By the end of the campaign, they had

collected more than **1.2 million statements of support**, in the attempt to ensure that more than one million valid signatures remained after verification.

## The impact of this initiative

Following the formal submission of the initiative, the organisers met with Commissioner **Hadja Lahbib**, Commissioner for Preparedness, Crisis Management and Equality, on **12 December 2025**.



Organisers meet with the Commissioner Hadja Lahbib, Commissioner for Preparedness, Crisis Management and Equality. © European Union , 2025



12th of December, 2025

Hearing at the European  
Commission

# BAN ON CONVERSION PRACTICES IN THE EU

## European Parliament public hearing

The initiative was presented at a public hearing in the European Parliament on **2 March 2026**. The hearing was organised by the **LIBE Committee** with the involvement of the **Committee on Petitions (PETI)** and the participation of the **Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Rights (FEMM)**. During the Parliament hearing, the organisers mentioned that they are well aware of the difficulties involved in proposing legislation and referred to the issuance of a Commission Recommendation as a measure that might produce effects rapidly.



Organisers at the public hearing at the European Parliament. © European Union, 2026

The topic kept on being discussed at the European Parliament. On 25 March 2026, the European Parliament held a debate on this initiative in its plenary session (watch the [recording](#) here). Moreover, roughly one month after, on 29 April 2026, the LIBE Committee adopted the [annual report on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU in 2024–2025](#). In this report, the Committee took into account the results reached by the initiative by stating, at point 57, that “*the absence of legal gender*

*recognition procedures constitutes a violation of fundamental rights; condemns conversion practices, such as practices aimed at changing, repressing or suppressing a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression, as violations of fundamental rights, and urges the Commission to tackle them through concrete actions; further urges, in this regard, the Commission to present a proposal for a legal act establishing an EU ban on conversion practices in all Member States as a follow-up action to the 'Ban on conversion practices in the European Union' European Citizens' Initiative;"*

## **European Commission's formal response**

The European Commission had already taken into account and mentioned the 'Ban on Conversion Practices' in the **LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030, adopted on 8 October 2025**. The Commission announced that it *"will also promote structured dialogue on the topic, in particular through the expert group on LGBTIQ+ equality, under the High-Level Group on non-discrimination, equality, and diversity. Based on the study's findings, the Commission will take appropriate action to combat conversion practices, with a particular focus on supporting Member States, who play a critical role in this area. [...] In developing its approach to combating conversion practices, the Commission will, in particular, take into account the recent European citizens' initiative, 'Ban on conversion practices in the European Union'.*

Following this, the European Commission adopted its formal response to the ECI on **13 May 2026** through a Communication (see the press release).

The initiative called on the Commission to propose a binding legislative act banning conversion practices throughout the European Union. In its assessment, however, the Commission concluded that such legislation would first require the establishment of a new legal basis through a unanimous Council decision extending the list of EU crimes ("euro-crimes"), followed by the adoption of a directive based on that legal basis. The Commission considered that initiating such a process would not be the most effective way to combat conversion practices.

Therefore, the Commission announced that it would adopt, in 2027, a **Commission Recommendation** encouraging Member States to ban conversion practices. The Recommendation will build on the good practices developed in Member States that have already introduced legal bans and will be prepared through a comprehensive consultation process, including with the **Expert Group on LGBTIQ+ Equality** and the new **LGBTIQ+ Policy Forum**. The work will also build on the ongoing in-depth study on conversion practices, with results expected in early 2027.

Commissioner Lahbib met with the organisers of the initiative on the day of the adoption of the Commission's reply, 13 May 2026, to explain its content to them. Following the meeting, Commissioner Lahbib gave a press statement in which she said:

*"To every LGBTIQ+ person who has suffered under these practices: there was nothing wrong with you. You never needed to be fixed. You are perfect exactly the way you are. And the European Union stands with you."*

## **Legislative impact and follow up**

The organisers expressed mixed feelings about the Commission's response. While they welcomed the Commission's clear condemnation of conversion practices and its commitment to encourage Member States to prohibit them, they regretted that the Commission chose not to propose a binding legislative act at EU level.

The organisers and their network nevertheless committed to continuing their advocacy on this issue and on related topics, including by supporting other European Citizens' Initiatives that remain open for signature collection.

## **Hints and tips for future organisers**

### **Rely on networks**

ACT, the organisation behind the initiative, consisted of only two core organisers. However, the broad network they built across Europe proved to be one of the campaign's greatest strengths. Working closely with civil society organisations, volunteers, influencers and partner initiatives allowed the campaign to reach far beyond what such a small team could have achieved alone.

### **Use social media to your advantage**

Creating momentum was essential to the campaign's success. The organisers recommend building a sense of urgency, especially in the final stages of the campaign, and working with influencers and content creators in different countries. Once a campaign gains visibility and engagement online, social media can significantly amplify its reach and help attract new supporters.

### **Develop a country-based campaign strategy**

Rather than trying to campaign everywhere at once, the organisers focused first on Member States where they believed they had the best chance of reaching the national threshold. Once momentum was established in one country, they shifted their attention to the next, encouraging supporters to contact local influencers, artists, public figures and organisations that could help spread the message.

### **Be prepared and never give up**

A committed team that genuinely believes in the cause is essential. The ECI campaign requires determination and resilience, as signature collection can take unexpected turns, and momentum can arrive at any moment.

## **Additional information**

Additional information regarding 'Ban on Conversion Practices' is available on the dedicated [page in the ECI website](#) and on the initiative's [Instagram page](#).