

Testimony, Olga Kikou, End the Cage Age European citizens' initiative organiser

Hello, I'm Olga Kikou, I'm one of the organisers of one of the successful ECIs, having collected over 1.6 million signatures and having surpassed the threshold in 21 Member States.

From our experience we've had two lessons regarding signature collection. One is that you have to develop a network that you can depend on, a network of people and organisations that support your cause. The second one is that you have to pay a lot of attention to your online campaigning.

One of the first things we decided to do was to develop this network. We managed to finally get about 170 federations and organisations across Europe to join us and they committed to spreading the word themselves. This was a big success story, but it also involved a lot of planning and a lot of work from our side too.

Something that is very important nowadays is the fact that most signatures are collected online, and not on paper. This is something that has changed over the years. In the past campaigning had a very public face and was very much out in the squares, in the streets, talking to people directly, now this has changed, therefore we had to change too. Social media has become a very important tool, in spreading the message first of all, and second, in collecting signatures.

An important lesson for us was volunteer participation. We depend on volunteers. We need to have volunteers across Europe. The ECI is not just a national tool, it's an EU tool, so we need to have presence in many countries and of course, we cannot afford to do this without volunteers - citizens who care about the issue, who then take this issue on and spread the message in their own home countries.

During the process of the ECI, since we started signature collection, we saw that there's a big rush in the beginning, lots of citizens sign; however, later on, maybe after a month, or two months, or three months, numbers tend to fall down, so you need to be prepared to face this, you need to come up with other tools and other ways to bring the signatures back up again.

I would like to point out that being involved in an ECI, starting an ECI as an organiser is a cumbersome process. It involves a lot of time and many people working together. Therefore, I wouldn't want to create any false hopes that this is an easy to do thing. It is not! It is quite difficult, it takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of planning; and it takes a lot of people. Even if the idea is good, still just the idea by itself will not work, if others are not quite engaged and committed to carrying this out.

The Forum comes at a very good time, because we've had the experience with a number of ECIs already and quite a few of them were successful, so there are many people around that you can depend on to discuss your ECI, to learn from their experience and to also see and

plan your own work in the future. We have many individuals, many citizens who participated in ECIs actively, and also many organisers, and you can depend on them to provide information for you. So, it's a learning process, learning from what has happened in the past, but also planning ahead, and as long as you take on these good experiences from others, and you listen to others, and you're able to also ask questions, you will be in a very good place to start your own ECI.

So, come and join the Forum with us, let's discuss what your plans are, let's see what you want to do, and learn from each other, and we look forward to working with you in the future!