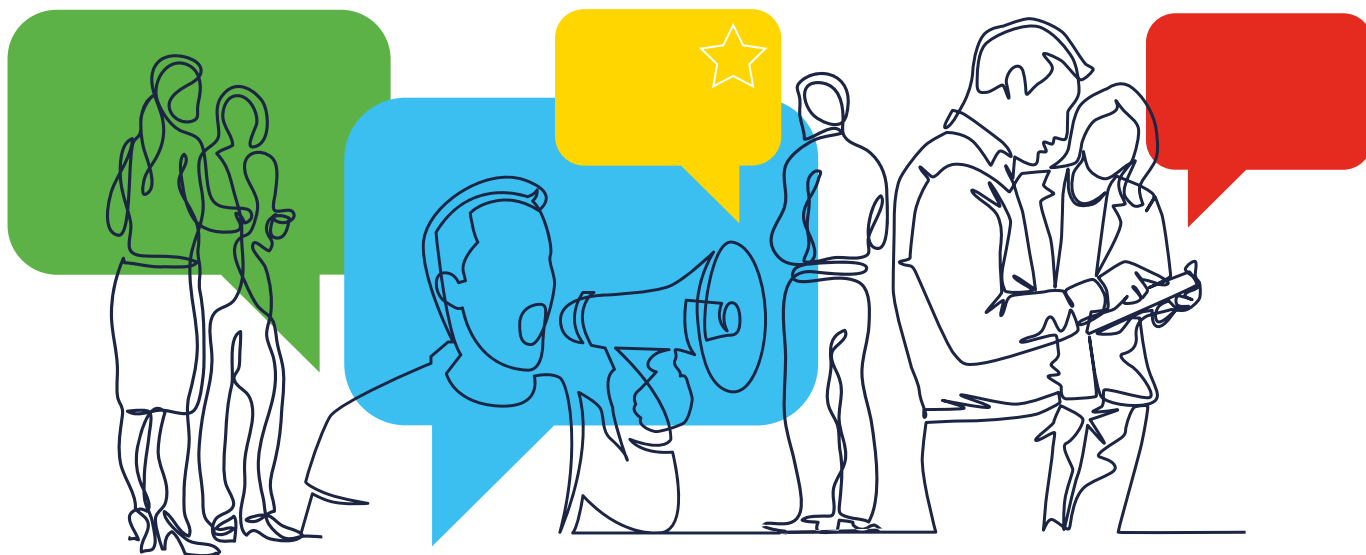




EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FORUM

SAVE BEES AND FARMERS!

Towards a Bee-Friendly Agriculture
for a Healthy Environment



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Save bees and farmers! Towards a bee-friendly agriculture for a healthy environment

The 'Save bees and farmers! Towards a bee-friendly agriculture for a healthy environment' European citizens' initiative was registered on 30 September 2019, and started its signature collection period on the same day. The initiative calls on the Commission to propose legal acts to phase out synthetic pesticides by 2035, to restore biodiversity, and to support farmers in the transition.

The objectives of the initiative are:

- Phase out synthetic pesticides in EU agriculture by 80% by 2030, starting with the most hazardous, to become free of synthetic pesticides;
- Restore natural ecosystems in agricultural areas so that farming becomes a vector of biodiversity recovery;
- Reform agriculture by prioritising small scale, diverse and sustainable farming, supporting a rapid increase in agro-ecological and organic practice and enabling independent farmer-based training and research into pesticide and GMO-free farming.

The 'Save Bees and Farmers!' initiative succeeded in gathering 1.05 million verified statements of support with the minimum thresholds reached in eleven Member States. The collection period was extended by one year, to 30 September 2021, to allow to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the campaign ¹.



¹ In line with Regulation (EU) 2020/1042, Decision C(2020) 9226 and Decision C(2021) 1121.

After the signature collection phase ended, the initiative went through the verification process of the statements of support. Afterwards, it was formally submitted to the European Commission on 7 October 2022 ([press announcement](#)). The Commission published the Communication replying to this initiative on 5 April 2023.



Success factors

- Maintaining weekly video meeting with all organisers for the whole period of two years (extensions due to the pandemic).
- The steadfastness of those partners who persevered for two years despite the external difficulties and spread positive energy in every meeting.
- The joining of forces of the existing NGO alliance (more than 200 NGOs across Europe), as well as the recruitment of new partners with great mobilisation power in the home stretch.



- SAVE BEES AND FARMERS! -

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Save bees and farmers! Campaign

Preparation

The organisers of the “Save bees and farmers!” initiative had substantial experience in organising a European citizens’ initiative as some of them successfully organised the “[Stop Glyphosate](#)” initiative which collected 1 070 865 signatures. This previous experience was beneficial for the organisers in the preparation and implementation of this new initiative

Building a **network of partners** was essential to the success of this initiative.

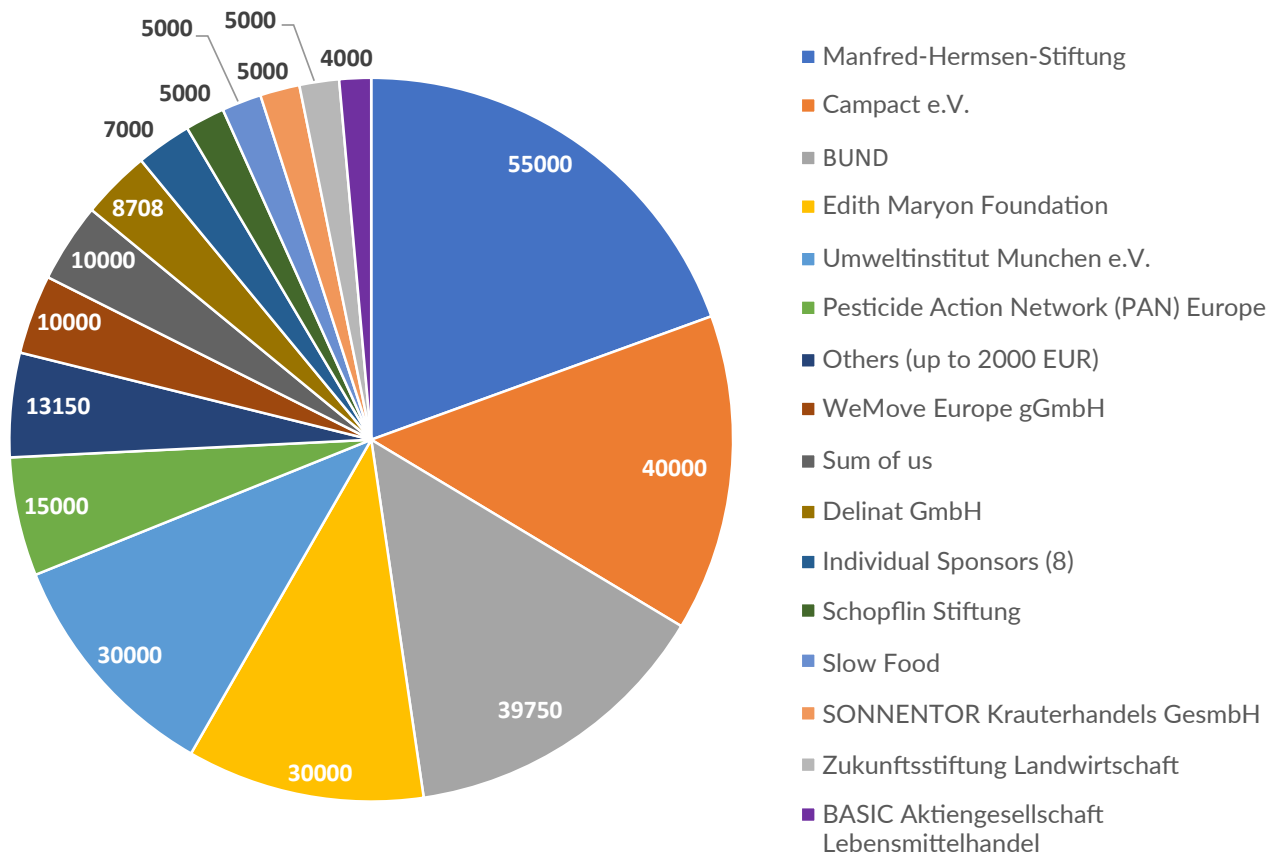
The organisers started with an inner circle of 10 NGOs from different countries and each organisation was tasked with finding other NGOs to support the initiative. Ultimately, the initiative had the support, to a varying degree, of more than 200 environmental NGOs, farmer and beekeeper organisations, charitable foundations and scientific institutions distributed throughout the European Union. However, ensuring that the NGOs actively supported the initiative was a challenge. The organisers overcame it by inviting the supporting NGOs to the regular online meetings where the organisers strategised over the campaign. The “Save Bees and Farmers!” initiative was supported by such NGOs as Bee Life, Générations Futures, Global 2000, Umweltinstitut München, Pesticide Action Network – PAN Europe, and Romapis.

Building an **online presence** was also a crucial part of the initiative’s communication strategy. The organisers built a multilingual website with **downloadable online supporting tools** such as paper signature forms, letters for neighbours and friends, leaflets, posters, stickers and videos. The process of building the website and creating supporting tools – both with translations - was time-consuming and resulted in the organisers postponing their official collection start date by about six weeks. The organisers also built their online presence on social media: [Twitter](#) (1752 followers), [Instagram](#) (2735 followers) and [Facebook](#) (2870 followers).

Overall, the organisers of the “Save Bees and Farmers!” initiative collected €282,858 of support and funds.



Sources of Funding (€)



| Implementation of the campaign

Initially, the organisers had planned a grassroots movement to collect signatures with direct contact with citizens on the street to strengthen the movement and 'contribute to the urgently needed social change and transition'. Ultimately, due to the pandemic, they had to revise their strategy.

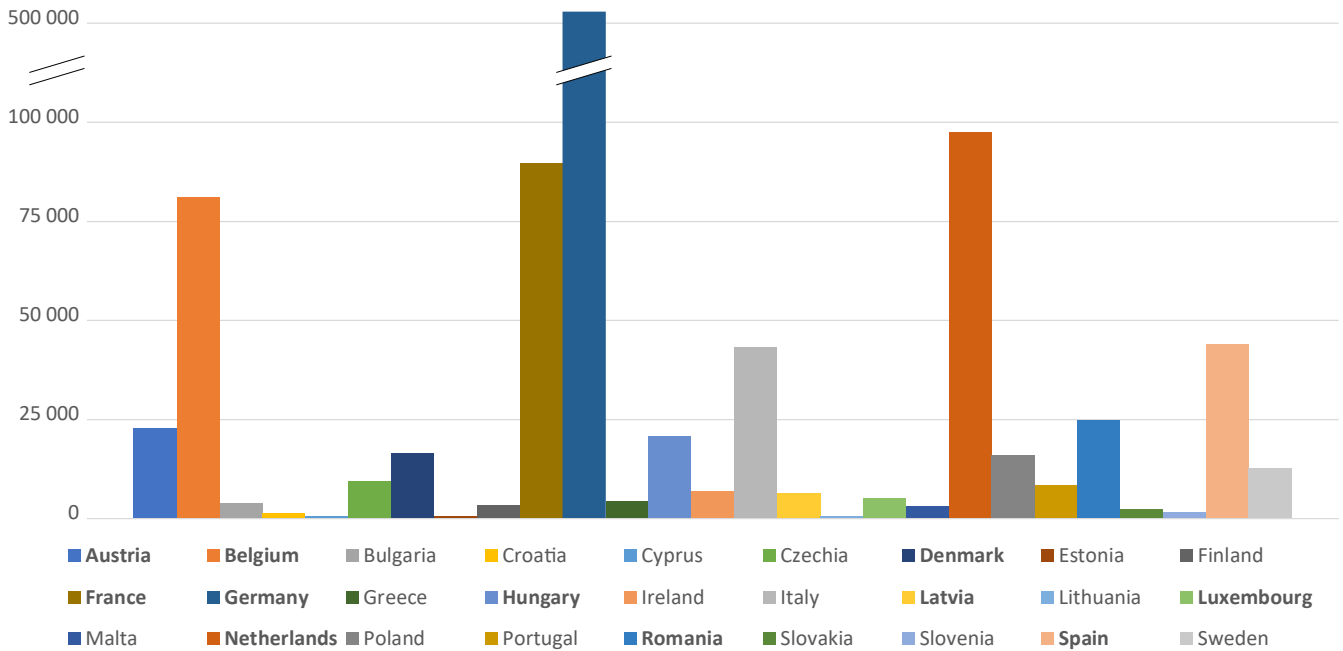
From the outset, the "Save Bees and Farmers!" campaign decided to collect signatures from all EU countries, instead of focusing on just a few. However, the difficulties brought about by the pandemic required the organisers to rethink this strategy. The organisers managed to collect signatures **in countries where they or their network partners had a strong presence**. Given the transnational nature of the instrument, an active presence in many countries and the role of network partners and volunteers were pivotal for the campaign.

| Collection of signatures

Even though the organisers had originally wanted to create a strong grassroots campaign and directly talk to people, they realised that, due to the pandemic, most signatures would be collected online and not on paper. The "Save Bees and Farmers!" initiative used an individual online collection system. The pandemic and the concrete fears associated with it also pushed many people's concerns about protecting biodiversity and the climate into the background. In the beginning, the organisers could not find a working strategy to fully overcome these obstacles. As a consequence, the collection of signatures became more difficult and slowed down. However, with the extension of the signature collection period and with the help of their network of partners, the organisers were able to overcome this obstacle.



Number of Statements of Support
(in bold: countries where threshold was reached)



| Verification and submission

Altogether, after the extension, the initiative collected 1.18 million signatures in 27 EU Member States, of which 89% were considered valid by national authorities. On 7 October 2022, the organisers submitted the certificates proving this collection of **1,054,973 verified statements of support** to the European Commission. This step opened the 6-month examination period.

Keeping the campaign alive and **maintaining a high level of citizens' interest** in the initiative was crucial during the submission period. The organisers wrote numerous **open letters** to representatives of the Member States and the European Parliament and organised in-person meetings with them. The organisers also coordinated a **press conference** with IFOAM Organics Europe to promote the proposals of this initiative and discuss the progress, so far, in the reduction of pesticides. The organisers of this campaign are determined to increase these activities in the future to push for change and advancement in the reduction of pesticides in the EU.

3

The impact of the campaign

Examination and Commission decision

After the formal submission of the initiative on 7 October 2022, the organisers met with **European Commissioners Věra Jourová, Vice-President for Values and Transparency, and Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety**, on 25 November 2022 ([Press Release](#)). On 15 December 2022, the European Economic and Social Committee issued their opinion on the initiative (see [EESC Opinion](#)).

On 24 January 2023, the European Parliament held a **public hearing** on the 'Save Bees and Farmers!' Initiative ([public hearing](#)). The organisers presented the initiative objectives and engaged with the Members of the European Parliament ([EP Hearing Highlights](#)). On the same day as the public hearing, 24 January 2023, the European Commission presented '[A New Deal for Pollinators](#)' to tackle the alarming decline in wild pollinating insects in Europe, revising the [2018 EU Pollinators Initiative](#). (See [Press Release](#)). On 16 March 2023, the 'Save Bees and Farmers!' initiative was debated in a plenary session at the European Parliament (See [recording](#)).

The European Commission adopted, on 5 April 2023, a **Communication setting out its actions in response** to "Save Bees and Farmers!" ECI. The European Commission welcomes the initiative and highlights its importance as the interlinked crises of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss constitute growing challenges for Europe's agriculture and food security. The Communication assessed each of the initiative's proposals on its own merits (See [press release](#)). More specifically, the Commission will prioritise that the proposals for a [regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides](#) and for a [nature restoration law](#) currently under negotiation by the European Parliament and Council, are adopted and implemented, together with effective implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy.

In response to the Commission's communication, the organisers endorse the Commission's call on co-legislators



[European Parliament and Council] to find swift and ambitious agreements on its legislative proposals that will translate the citizens' ambition into law. Additionally, the organisers encourage the involvement of concerned citizens and scientists in the process till the goals are achieved and state that Save Bees and Farmers initiative is far from over'. (See [press release](#))

Commissioner Sinkevičius and representatives of involved directorates-general presented the Commission reply to the organisers in a [meeting](#) on 25 April 2023.



Hints and tips for future organisers

- Never give up! Be prepared that organising and running an initiative can be a long and arduous journey.
- Take the time to prepare carefully.
- Talk to other organisers and stakeholders who have had experience with the European citizens' initiative.