European Citizens' Initiative Info Packet for Civil Society Organisations

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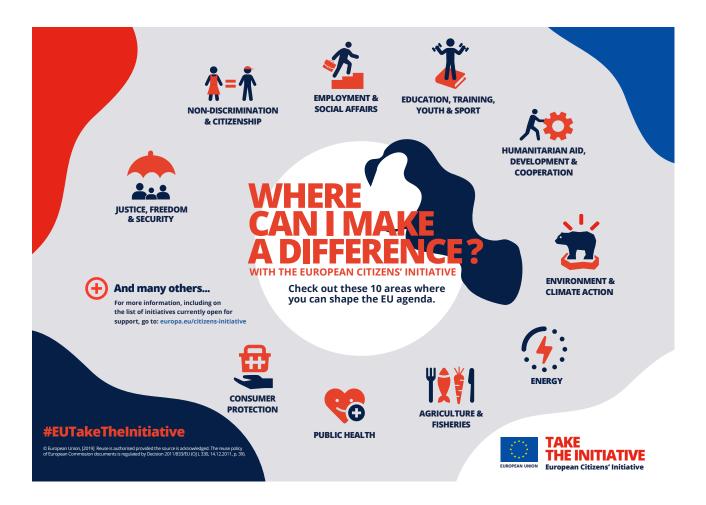
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# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.	THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE: THE BASICS	. 3
2.	HOW TO LAUNCH AN ECI	. 5
3.	YOUR ECI SUPPORT CENTRE	. 7
4.	HOW CITIZENS CAN SUPPORT AN ECI	. 7
5.	HOW CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS CAN SUPPORT ECIS	. 8
6.	FURTHER REFERENCES	. 9

# 1. THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE: THE BASICS

Since 2012, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) has been a way for EU citizens to set the EU's agenda. It allows EU citizens to shape proposals on issues that matter to them and that are in the area of competence of the EU. A group of 7 EU citizens from 7 different EU countries can propose EU policies through an ECI. Once the initiative is registered, other EU citizens can sign the initiative online, via an online collection system, or on paper. If the initiative reaches 1 million signatures from at least 7 EU countries, the European Commission decides how to follow up to the initiative in question.



## $| \rightarrow$ Why is the ECI an effective tool?

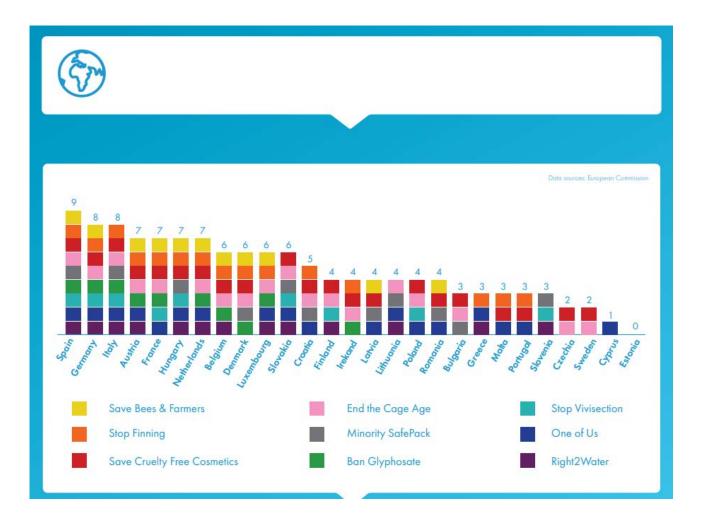
#### A. The ECI enables you to influence EU policy making:

The ECI is a democratic instrument that enables European citizens to place issues important to them on the EU's agenda. Previous successful initiatives have already left their mark on EU laws and legislation. One concrete example is the ECI **"Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a com-modity!"**, which was launched to ensure that drinking water remains a public service and a public good. • In 2018, the European Commission proposed changes to the **EU Drinking Water Directive**, with a focus on improving access to clean water, especially for vulnerable groups. The European institutions adopted these changes in December 2020, and the new rules went into effect in January 2021.

#### B. The ECI helps organisers raise awareness on a topic:

Creating an ECI raises your issue on the European stage, drawing the attention of the European Commission, European Parliament, as well as the European public. The ECI allows organisers to elevate the level of debate and exposes the topic to a broader audience, effectively boosting awareness about the subject at hand.

### $\rightarrow$ Some of the successful ECIs and their success in Member States:



In some Member States, such as Spain, Germany, and Italy, the ECIs have seen great success. The ECI has helped raise the level of debate on the issues brought forward by these initiatives.

# 2. HOW TO LAUNCH AN ECI

## $| \rightarrow \mathsf{Eligibility}$

- Any EU citizen of the age that they can vote in European elections can launch an ECI. The only two requirements are:
  - The initiative has to be launched by 7 EU citizens residing in 7 different EU countries.
  - The initiative must focus on a subject that falls within the EU's area of legal action.

TIP: In some Member States, EU citizens from the age of 16 can sign and launch an ECI. Today, these include Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Malta, Austria, and Greece (17).

• The ECI can be submitted in any of the official EU languages.



## $| \rightarrow$ Timeline & Main Steps

1. A total of at least 7 citizens from 7 EU countries, who are eligible to vote in European elections or at least 16 years old in some countries, compose/create the ECI group of organisers and define the objective(s) of their initiative.

#### 2. The organisers submit their initiative to the European Commission to be registered:

- They create an organiser account. They will use this to manage their initiative and interact with the European Commission throughout the ECI's lifecycle.
- They will provide a description of their initiative in one of the official EU languages (as well as details and relevant documents on the group of organisers, funding received, etc.)
- If the European Commission decides to register the ECI, the initiative is published on the ECI website. The organisers will receive an answer on the registration of their ECI typically within 2 months.
  - The organisers then have 6 months to choose the start date of the collection of support.

#### 3. Signature collection begins! Collect 1 million signatures from at least 7 EU countries within 12 months (online or on paper).

- To be eligible to sign an ECI, supporters must be:
  - EU citizens
  - Old enough to vote in European elections or aged at least 16 in some countries

## 4. Submit the 1 million + signatures for verification by national authorities. Organisers have up to 3 months to submit the signatures to the competent authorities in each Member State.

• The authorities then have another 3 months to verify which statements of support are valid.

## 5. Submit the initiative and the certificates received from the national authorities in Step 4 to the European Commission for examination.

• Organisers have 3 months to submit their initiative and certificates to the European Commission. This can all be done through the organiser account. This moment defines the rest of the timeline.

#### 6. Receive an answer:

- The European Commission invites the group of organisers for a meeting, where they have the chance to make their case about their ECI.
  - Within 1 month of submission (Step 5)
- The European Parliament invites the organisers for a public hearing, followed by a plenary debate, with the possibility of a resolution on the subject matter.
  - Within 3 months of submission (Step 5)
- The European Commission issues its detailed written response to the initiative. This includes its legal and political conclusions, any actions it intends to take, and its reasons for taking or not taking actions.
  - Within 6 months of submission (Step 5) and after the public hearing at the European Parliament

#### $| \rightarrow$ Key Challenges Ahead: Questions Organisers Encounter

- How can I identify citizens in other countries to launch an ECI with me?
- How can I mobilise citizens in other countries to sign my ECI?
- How can I fundraise for an ECI?
- How can I budget my ECI?
- What channels can I use to reach out to citizens?

You can find answers to these questions on the ECI Forum.

### YOUR ECI SUPPORT CENTRE 3.

The ECI Forum is an online platform for collaboration, accessible in all official EU languages. Its purpose is to offer guidance and information to ECI organisers or to people interested in the ECI. It is an essential support centre for gaining practical information, campaigning, and legal advice, and discussing topics related to ECIs.

The platform is operated by European Citizen Action Service (ECAS), a non-profit organisation, under a contract with the EU Commission.

In the ECI Forum's Learn section, you'll find valuable resources, guidance materials, success stories, webinar recordings, and more information related to the ECI.



The Seek Advice section offers free, tailor-made guidance on various topics including legal matters (for example, checking if the idea falls into the EU's areas of legal action), campaign strategies, fundraising or other.

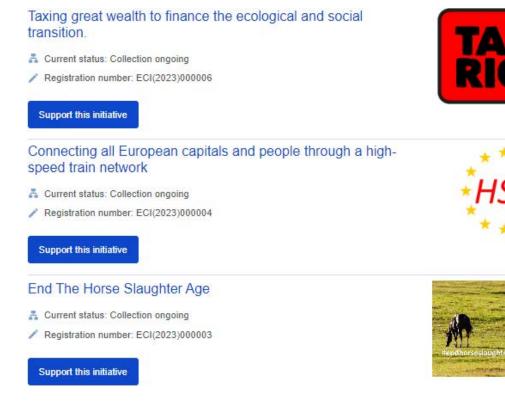


Organisers can also reach out to contacts: National Contact Points (in most countries located within public administration).

#### HOW CITIZENS CAN SUPPORT AN ECI 4

You can find and sign all open initiatives on the European Citizens' Initiative website. To support an ECI, you can fill out a statement of support either online or on paper.

Here you can find examples of the latest ECIs that are currently open for signatures:







# **5. HOW CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS CAN SUPPORT ECIS**

As an organisation, you can support an ECI by offering support through various means, such as joining or creating a coalition of NGOs around an ECI. By joining the campaign efforts, you effectively increase the outreach of the ECI. You may consider to be actively engaged in campaign areas such as: advocacy, promotion, community building, offering expertise, sharing research, signature collection efforts, financial support, and/or providing human resources.

For example, the successful '**End Cage Age**' ECI was structured through a collaboration of 170 civil society organisations across Europe. Each one played a role in helping the ECI reach success. Here are some of the organisations behind that initiative:



Your organisation, too, can help an ECI reach success!

# 6. FURTHER REFERENCES

- ECI website: https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu
  - How it works
  - How to start
  - Data protection
- ECI-Forum website: https://citizens-initiative-forum.europa.eu/
  - Learn section
    - How to Collect Signatures
    - How to Draft and Submit an Initiative
    - How to Look for Partners
    - How to Raise Funds
    - How to Organise a Campaign
  - Seek Advice section
- Local contacts: National Contact Points and ECI Ambassadors
- Subscribe to the monthly newsletter (EN+ 23 languages) to stay in the loop on ECI News: https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/newsletter/subscribe
- Join the ECI Facebook group