SUCCESS STORY





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1 The Initiative: Fur Free Europe

"Fur Free Europe" is the 10th successful citizens' initiative. It calls for an EU-ban on fur farming and on the sale of products containing fur in the Single Market.

The "Fur Free Europe" initiative was registered on 16 March 2022 and started its signature collection period on 18 May 2022. It succeeded in gathering **1,502,319 verified statements of support** with the **minimum thresholds reached in 18 Member States**.

The signature collection phase was closed by the organisers on 1 March 2022, two and a half months before the deadline of 18 May 2023. The signatures were sent for validation soon after. Following the validation of statements of support by authorities responsible in each Member State, the initiative was formally submitted to the European Commission on 14 June 2023 (Press Announcement). The Commission published the Communication replying to this initiative on 7 December 2023.



Success factors

- Preparation: "organising an ECI is not a sprint, but a marathon"
- Developing a strong network with various partner organisations as well as expanding this network with other organisations throughout the campaign;
- Establishing a budget and a strategy to collect support and funding.



EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FORUM

2 The Campaign

Preparation

The organisers of the "Fur Free Europe" initiative had substantial experience in organising an ECI as some of them successfully participated in the "End the Cage Age" and "Save Cruelty Free Cosmetics" initiatives, which collected approximately 1.4 and 1.2 million signatures respectively. This previous experience benefitted the organisers as they knew that preparation is the key to successfully organising and launching an ECI.

Before implementing the campaign, it was important for the organisers to **invest time into building a network of partners** in order to secure a strong support base before starting the signature collection. Eurogroup for Animals, the main NGO supporting this initiative, is an umbrella NGO with more than 90 member organisations. A third of these organisations have been actively engaged in banning fur for several years, and they were invited to participate in the campaign. The organisers also partnered with organisers outside their direct network by mapping out organisations in Member States. The initiative had the support of 82 organisations.



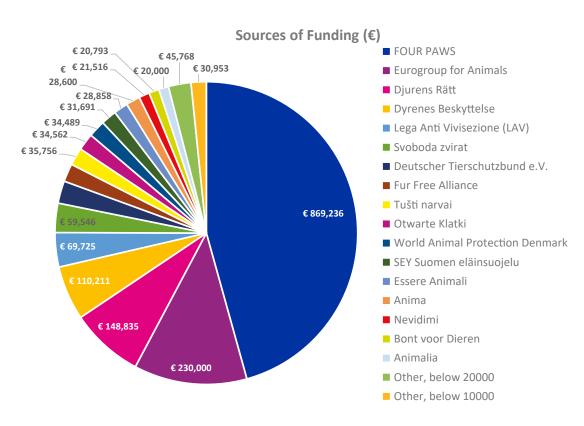
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In order to support their volunteers and partners and ensure that these networks of partners actively supported the initiative, the organisers created a "campaign asset bank". This "bank" included all the relevant communication material the partners needed to promote and support the campaign. The organisers also held regular meetings with the partners to keep them updated on the progress of the initiative, maintain coordination and discuss any challenges that occurred during the campaign.

The main campaign strategy of the organisers was to **build an online presence** because "this is where you can easily reach most citizens and engage with citizens from different target groups". The organisers built a multilingual website with background information on the initiative, the requests of the initiative, the signature collection page and a newsletter. Additionally, the organisers built their online presence on social media: Instagram (5 405 followers and 270 posts). The organisers also used their own social media channels to promote the initiative: X (formerly Twitter) (15 900 followers), Youtube (619 subscribers), Instagram (3 874 followers), and Facebook (20 000 followers).

Overall, the organisers of the "Fur Free Europe" initiative collected EUR 1,904,595.00 of support and funds. Only contributions of over EUR 500 per sponsor are reported.



- FUR FREE EUROPE -

| Implementation of the campaign

The organisers carefully planned the signature collection phase, setting targets for each Member State based on several factors, including whether the fur industry is still active in that country, the number of signatures previously collected in that country on similar campaigns and the number of supporting organisations active there. The organisers decided to focus on a maximum number of Member States to show that support for the initiative came from all over the European Union.

"Reaching more than 1 million signatures is not easy, so you should not limit yourself to focusing on the minimum seven Member States" – Organiser of Fur Free Europe ECI.

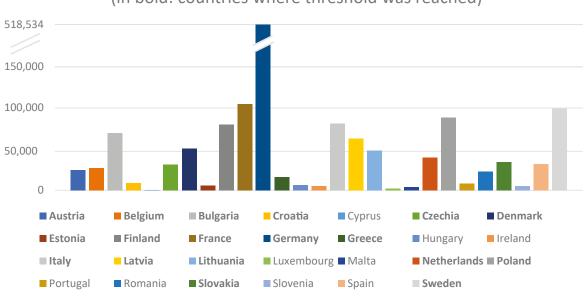
Collection of Signatures

The initiative organisers used an independent online collection system¹. Their campaign strategy focused mainly on social media, relying on their network to promote the Fur Free Europe campaign to the various audiences of the different partner organisations. The organisers overcame the challenge of losing momentum during the year-long campaign by actively analysing their campaign strategy and communicating with partners on what worked well and what did not.

"You always need to analyse, test, redo your plan, see what works and where, and keep-up the spirit!" – Organiser of "Fur Free Europe" ECI



1 As of 1 January 2023, the Central Online Collection System is the only system that organisers can use to collect signatures online.



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

| Verification and submission

The organisers of "Fur Free Europe" decided to close the collection of signatures on 1 March 2023, two and a half months before the deadline. Altogether, the initiative collected 1,701,892 signatures in 27 EU Member States, of which 88% were considered valid by national authorities. The required thresholds were reached in a record 18 Member States. On 14 June 2023, the organisers submitted the **1,502,319 validated statements of support** to the European Commission. The submission of signatures opened the 6-month examination period.

- FUR FREE EUROPE -

3 The Impact of the Campaign

Examination and Commission reply

After the formal submission of the initiative, the organisers met with Věra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Values and Transparency, and Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety on 20 July 2023 (Press Announcement).



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On 10 October 2023, the European Parliament held a public hearing on the "Fur Free Europe" initiative where the organisers presented the initiative objectives and engaged with the Members of the European Parliament (recording of the public hearing).





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On 19 October 2023, the "Fur Free Europe" initiative was debated in a plenary session at the European Parliament (see recording part 1 and part 2).

The European Commission adopted, on 7 December 2023, a <u>Communication</u> setting out its actions in response to the "Fur Free Europe" ECI. The European Commission welcomes the initiative and will undertake the following steps of action (see <u>press release</u>):

The Commission asked the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to provide a scientific opinion on the welfare of fur animals **by March 2025**. EFSA's opinion should focus on the animals kept exclusively for fur production, namely mink, foxes, racoon dogs and chinchilla and analyse the welfare of these animals, common husbandry systems and how any welfare problems can be prevented or mitigated under current farming conditions. The Commission will then evaluate the bans requested by the "Fur Free Europe" initiative, including an assessment of the economic and social impacts of these bans in the EU.

By March 2026, taking into account the EFSA opinion and the outcomes of the evaluation, the Commission will communicate if it considers it appropriate to propose a ban on fur farming and the marketing of fur in the EU after a transition period.

In the meantime, the Commission will also continue its preparatory work on other animal welfare proposals, as announced in the Farm to Fork Strategy. It is also taking several measures in relation to the welfare, public health and environmental impacts of fur farming. These include on-site visits to fur farms in Member States exploring "One Health" mechanisms in place, as well as an impact assessment in view of a possible revision of the Textile Labelling Regulation. The Commission will follow a One Health approach – acknowledging that human, animal and environmental health are inextricably linked - to prevent, detect and respond to disease outbreaks on fur farms.

On 9 February 2024, the organisers met with Commissioner Kyriakides to discuss the reply to their initiative.



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Hints and tips for future organisers

- Do your homework before starting an initiative!
- Make sure you partner with civil society organisations that already have citizens' attention and support
- Make new connections to develop your outreach
- Empower those who join your initiative to actively promote your campaign on their own channels by providing them with intel, communication tools and major campaigning dates.

