



European Democracy Passport



European Economic
and Social Committee

The European Democracy Passport

Your Guide to Active Citizenship in the European Union

Welcome to the European Union (EU), the world's first transnational and participatory democracy. As an EU citizen, you have the constitutional right to influence the rules that apply to almost 450 million people across an area of more than 4 million km² in 27 Member States. You may well say: that sounds great, but HOW can I make my voice heard in practice? This publication by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) answers this question. This is your guide to active citizenship in the EU.

Throughout the text, you will be assisted and guided in making your voice heard by asking some basic questions first. Is it a genuinely European matter you want to address – or might it be advisable to start at the local level instead? And if you're going European with your idea, what is the most meaningful and successful way to make it happen? An email to your

Member of the European Parliament may be enough – or maybe you should petition the European Parliament directly? Why not join a civil society organisation or even a political party and run for office yourself?

Or how about organising and supporting a European Citizens' Initiative to set the agenda for legislation?

This European Democracy Passport, researched and written by Bruno Kaufmann, is published by the EESC and is available in 23 official languages. This guide is designed to assist you with timing (when should you become active?), teams (whom should you join forces with?) and tools (which available participatory instrument should you use?) when it comes to active citizenship and participatory democracy in the European Union.



It is your voice! It is your Europe!
It is your Passport to European democracy and active citizenship!

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The European Economic and Social Committee

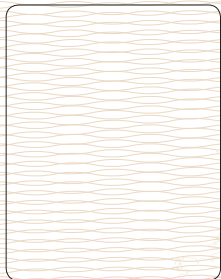
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MORE SUPPORT

Support is all around – you just have to use it



This **European Democracy Passport**
belongs to:

.....
(Name)

.....
(Contact details)

who is an eligible citizen of (tick if applicable)

- The municipality of
- The district/region/province of
- (country name)
- The European Union**
- (other political entity)
- (other political entity)

Still unsure about your own citizenship status? Check your (travel) passport or national ID card or consult an information officer in your hometown. For further assistance in using this publication, contact citizensinitiative@esc.europa.eu.

QUICKGUIDE

to active European citizenship



1. Here are your main rights

The status of «EU citizen» provides four types of political rights and freedoms:

- to move, reside and work freely within the EU territory;
- to be protected by the diplomatic authorities of any Member State when outside the EU;
- to vote and stand for election at the local and EU level in any Member State;
- to participate in the legislative process of the EU, for example by petitioning the European Parliament or organising/supporting a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).

2. A little bit of history

Does 1 November 1993 ring a bell? On that day, the citizens of all the Member States achieved a new legal status as «citizens of the European Union». On that day, the (economic) «European Community» was replaced by the (political) «European Union». This was and still is a worldwide and historic first – no other citizens across the globe enjoy transnational rights to participate actively in the shaping of legislation across nation states. Since then, the formal rights to make your voice heard have been systematically strengthened, most powerfully by the introduction of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) in 2012. This tool was further updated in 2020, creating even better opportunities to make your voice heard.

3. Not yet an EU citizen?

There is only one way you can become a citizen of the European Union. You need to be or become an eligible citizen of one of the (currently) 27 Member States. In other words, there is no other way to get this status without being a citizen of one of the Member States. EU citizenship complements local, regional and national citizenship – but never replaces it. In an increasing number of Member States, you are eligible to support a citizens' initiative (especially an ECI) and to participate in elections when you are 16 years old, whereas you have to wait until you are 17 or 18 years old in other states.

►► *More about minimum age to vote in elections and/or to support an ECI per country: europa.eu/citizens-initiative/data-requirements_en*

A stylized world map in light orange and yellow tones serves as the background. Overlaid on the map are several small, semi-transparent icons of people: one standing with a laptop, one sitting at a desk with a laptop, and another person's head and shoulders. A network of thin, light-colored lines connects these icons across the map, suggesting global connectivity and communication.

Activate your EU Citizenship now!

Become informed!

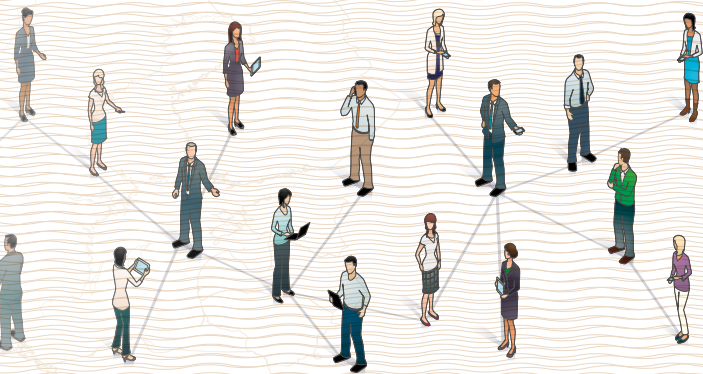
You have the right to know exactly what is going on in the European Union, so you can ask for and receive information about basically everything the EU is doing. You also have the legal right of access to documents of all the EU institutions, a right that is enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 42) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 15).

The Europe Direct service will answer your questions about the EU – in your own language [europa.eu/europedirect, tel.: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (weekdays, 09.00-18.00 CET)]. You should get an initial answer within three working days. The service includes free postal delivery of (certain) EU publications.

Be consulted!

As the European Union has a major impact on your daily life, it is important to know that the public decision-making process in the EU is legally required to be open and responsive. For this reason, the EU institutions are obliged to «maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue» (Article 11.2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), also known as the Lisbon Treaty) and to «carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent» (Article 11.3 TEU).

▶▶ *The "Have your say" service is an official "access point" to ongoing consultations and public discussions related to European policy-making processes. When you register, you can sign up for email notifications and even be invited to participate in formal consultation processes ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say.*



Participate!

The European Union is a modern representative democracy, in which citizens co-govern both indirectly (via the institutions) and directly (via participatory tools). The fundamental charters, treaties and laws of the EU comply with Article 21 of the Universal Charter of Human Rights, which stipulates that «everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country directly», and, for the first time in world history, bring this practice to the transnational level.

In other words: you have every right and are most welcome to participate actively in the EU policy-making process, for example by joining a political party represented in the European Parliament [europarl.europa.eu], by petitioning the EP [petiport.europarl.europa.eu] or taking part in an official Citizens' Dialogue [ec.europa.eu/info/events/citizens-dialogues_en]. The most powerful tool for participatory democracy in the EU is the European Citizens' Initiative [ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative], which allows you to set the agenda of the European Union.



NAVIGATOR

to local, regional, national
and transnational People Power

Hello, super-citizen!

Life is not written in stone! It is up to you, your friends and all of us to make our voices heard – and to make your town, province, country, Europe and the world a better place. Here we go!

My place: municipal level

Your hometown is probably the most important place when it comes to active citizenship and participatory democracy. Even though your municipality may be the lowest level of state authority, it is here that important issues such as waste management, local infrastructure and sometimes even primary education and social welfare services are decided on. Whats more, the local level is closely intertwined with legislative levels at the national and European level – and plays a key role in implementing various rules and laws.

There are almost 100 000 local democracies across the European Union, many of them responsible for a huge share of overall tax collection and applying various kinds of participatory rights to their own citizens, including indirect (via political parties and local parliaments) and direct (initiatives and referendums) channels.

▶▶ *Check with an information officer in your local administration about what, how and when you can best make an impact.*

My region: provincial level

In between your municipality and your country, you have (in at least 25 out of the 27 Member States) one or more levels of regional government structures. Currently, there are about 1 500 such regional democracies across the EU. In some federated Member States, the provinces enjoy considerable sovereignty, including constitutions of their own, far-reaching legislative powers and comprehensive tax incomes – while in other EU Member States, provinces/regions mainly fulfil (unelected) administrative roles.

Depending on the status of your province/region, you may enjoy more or less extensive rights of political participation including indirect (via political parties and local parliaments) and direct (initiatives and referendums) channels.

▶▶ *The European Committee of the Regions [cor.europa.eu] is the European Union's Assembly of Regional and Local Representatives.*

My country: national level

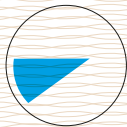
The Member States are the single most important level of governance within the European Union, in terms of political and legal powers and control of public funds. For this reason, your citizenship in one (or sometimes several) Member State(s) is crucial to your ability to make your voice heard and to have an impact on the public decision-making process.

The availability of participatory political rights at the national level varies considerably between the 27 Member States. While all countries have electoral rights, about two thirds of the countries also allow citizens to make their own proposals through petitions and initiatives – and to have a say on substantive issues through the referendum process.

▶▶ *For an overview and details on participatory opportunities at the national level, visit the Direct Democracy Navigator [direct-democracy-navigator.org] or check with the information services of your national parliament.*

My Europe: transnational level

The European Union is the world's first transnational democracy. As an EU citizen, you enjoy a wide range of opportunities to make your voice heard, by voting and/or standing as a candidate for the EU Parliament [europarl.europa.eu], or you can have a more direct say by sending in a petition (directed to the Parliament) [petiport.europarl.europa.eu] or launching a European Citizens' Initiative (directed to the Commission) [ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative]. And that's not all! Read more about other available tools in the next section "My Say in Europe".



MY SAY IN EUROPE

Welcome to the big stage of European politics

European governance matters more than ever. What is decided on at EU level has huge implications for our daily lives at local, regional and national level. Together we agree in the EU on matters such as free trade agreements with other countries, how to conserve our marine resources and which rules should be applied to ensure free and fair economic competition.

As the EU is a modern representative democracy with a system of shared powers and specialised institutions, it is not always easy for individual EU citizens to identify, assess and influence the policy-making process at the right moment with the most efficient tool.

So let's familiarise ourselves with the various ways in which we, as citizens, can elect and task various institutions and become stakeholders when it comes to EU-wide decision-making:

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1. We regularly elect our parliaments in our **national capitals** and in the **European Union**. Here you have an opportunity to become a candidate yourself and run for office.
- The **election of the national parliament** is critical to the EU decision-making process as it influences the composition of the national government (and in many cases also the head of state). The national government itself is part of the **European Council and of the Council of the European Union**, two of the seven EU institutions. However, the national parliament also has a say when it comes to the EU legislative process.

• The **election of the European Parliament** (EP) is the most direct means of public influence at EU level. Over the years the powers of the 705-member Assembly have been greatly increased – and are now in many ways equal to those of the Council of the European Union (made up of Member State governments).

2. The direct elections to the national and European parliaments also have indirect consequences: for example, national governments and the European Parliament are instrumental in forming the **European Commission**. This is the executive body of the EU, which is responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions and managing day-to-day business. Even the composition of other EU institutions, including the European Courts, the office of the European Ombudsman and the advisory European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and European Committee of the Regions, is shaped by the decisions made by Europeans in elections.

3. The European Union is more than a **representative government** system; it is a modern **representative democracy** based on day-to-day participation by

EU citizens. This principle, enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU), has consequences for the functioning of the European Union. In short, EU citizens are not just on the big stage of European politics on election days – they can have a say every day! For this reason, the EU has established a comprehensive toolbox of participatory instruments, which links citizens, institutions, policy-making processes and decisions.

4. While you have the right to participate in EU affairs on a day-to-day basis, most of us will not have the time, know-how and resources to do so. It is therefore very important to choose carefully the best time, the best partners and the best instrument to make your voice heard in an efficient and sustainable way. In order to do so, you may want to choose between a more permanent role on this stage (for example as an elected official, an employee or a civil society representative) or an issue-driven one-off engagement – which in 99 cases out of 100 may be the only way to reconcile your role as an active EU citizen with all your other roles in public, private and professional life.



HOW TO GET IT RIGHT

Your idea, issue, moment, team and tool

So you have a great idea; Now it's time for your initial Q&A!

European citizens, it is up to you now! You may have a great idea about changing Europe – or maybe just a small problem with setting up a business across the border. You may want to launch a major campaign against an existing European law – or even complain about an EU official. There are 101 reasons to become an active EU citizen, but there are a few key questions you need to think about before going live:

Your issue: a European one?

The European Union deals with many things. Some may say too many – and according to others, too few. But independently of that important discussion, the EU does have a clear list of policy issues (based on its treaties and agreed by all Member States) that it deals with, either as *exclusive*, *shared* or *supporting* competences. So when you want to address an issue of any kind, check the possible European nature of your idea/concern first. It may turn out to be an issue that could be dealt with more efficiently at the local, regional or national level instead.



Your moment: the right time to get active?

Timing is critical when it comes to successfully making your voice heard. You may arrive on the scene too early and nobody will notice – or you may be far too late and the decisions will already have been taken. But in between there is a big window of opportunity to become active. For example, if you want to launch a rather new idea, it will take a lot of patience and resources to get attention and a response, but you are relatively free to choose the right time for action. However, if you want to influence ongoing public discussions at the EU level on a certain issue, you need to check what stage the debate has reached in the (legislative) process. EUR-LEX [eur-lex.europa.eu] is a very useful public website for this job. Choosing your moment also has implications for the kind of partners you need and which participatory instrument you go for.

Your team: collective action ahead?

Addressing a European issue at the European level will in most cases require a solid partnership with other citizens and/or civil society organisations. The simple reason for this is that you need to convince many others first (both other EU citizens, but also people in elected bodies and EU institutions) before you can make an impact. However, sometimes even strong and committed individual action can make a difference: this is especially the case if you are the victim of maladministration, if you see your rights infringed or if you are simply able to pinpoint an issue of concern for the general public. On the other hand, it may be a really good idea to reach out as far and as transnationally as possible since your issue/proposal/idea will be met with greater interest and respect by the EU institutions if there is a truly European team of active citizens behind it. In the case of the European Citizens' Initiative, for instance, there is even a requirement for your team to be composed of at least seven EU citizens from at least seven different EU Member States.

Your tool: which form of participation?

Choosing the best available participatory instrument for your issue is paramount for success. Most tools are designed to be handled by several citizens together (or even civil society organisations) but can also be used by individual citizens, such as launching a complaint to the Ombudsman, addressing a cross-border issue with the online problem-solving network SOLVIT or petitioning the EU Parliament. Other participatory instruments however require collective action from the outset – such as the European Citizens' Initiative. What makes things easier is the very fact that in most cases participatory projects at EU level can be managed online – although, while you can make your voice heard without buying stamps, you may need to travel at some point, maybe to Brussels to meet with an institutional representative or to a village across the border where you have support partners.

Assessing these questions and choosing answers carefully takes time. However, as you are about to change the European Union – a transnational political community of 450 million people – the quality of your preparatory steps will be critical to success. So, take care – and get active!



EUROPEAN ISSUES

From agriculture to research

European issues matter: Including at local, regional and national levels

What happens in the EU is vital for every European citizen – at all levels. And in order to make your voice heard it is crucial to understand which European issues are decided by whom.

According to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Title 1) there are three different kinds of EU competences: exclusive (the EU decides alone), shared (the EU decides together with the Member States), and supportive (the EU assists the Member States).

Based on these powers, policies are shaped by implementing acts, regulations, directives, legislation or simply institutional decisions without any formal impact on legislation. Furthermore, there are decisions made by the Parliament, the Courts, advisory bodies, such as the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Committee of the Regions, with various kinds of driving forces, impacts and consequences – not least for other levels of governance.

Exclusive EU issues/competences

- customs union;
- establishing the competition rules necessary for the functioning of the internal market;
- conservation of marine biological resources under the common fisheries policy;
- common commercial policy;
- conclusion of an international agreement when this is provided for in a legislative act;
- monetary policy for the currently 19 Member States whose currency is the euro.



Shared EU issues/competences

- internal market;
- social policy;
- economic, social and territorial cohesion;
- agriculture and fisheries, excluding the conservation of marine biological resources;
- environment;
- consumer protection;
- transport;
- trans-European networks;
- energy;
- area of freedom, security and justice;
- common safety concerns in public health matters;
- research, technological development and space;
- development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

Supportive and coordinating EU issues/competences

- economic policies;
- employment policies;
- social policies;
- protection and improvement of human health;
- industry;
- culture;
- tourism;
- education, vocational training, youth and sport;
- civil protection;
- administrative cooperation.

Based on this overview, you can tailor your action to the relevant competence (exclusive, shared or supportive) and consider complementary action at national (or some other) level in the case of shared/supportive EU competences. Proposals for action which lie outside this comprehensive list of European issues may have great problems in being deemed admissible in the first place by the EU institution to which you want to present your idea.

►► *More about division of competences within the European Union: [europa.eu/citizens-initiative/faq-eu-competences-and-commission-powers_en](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e3000420/1/1617122211121_en.pdf).*



PARTICIPATION TOOLKIT

Complaint, advice, consultation, initiative and other ways

The transnational participation toolbox: spoilt for choice

Ever since the European Union became more than an intergovernmental body, where representatives from national governments used to gather to make decisions behind closed doors, proposals for participatory tools have been put forward, practical mechanisms have been introduced and existing ones revised to make active EU citizenship and participatory democracy at the transnational level more than a nice idea: it has to become everyday practice.



So, when becoming active as an EU citizen and going transnational with your own idea/concern/proposal, please assess carefully the available participatory instruments in the toolbox first. Here are the most important ones to date:

Complaint

If you are not happy with an EU-related measure you can lodge a formal complaint with the European Ombudsman, who offers an online form in the 24 official treaty languages. Important: this channel is open not only to EU citizens but to all residents across the European Union including businesses, associations and other bodies registered within the EU.

▶▶ ombudsman.europa.eu/en/make-a-complaint

Problem advice

If you, as an EU (or EEA) citizen or business, face obstacles in another country because a public authority is not doing what is required under EU law, then you can turn to the SOLVIT problem-solving mechanism provided by the EU Commission. This online service in 25 languages (EU languages and Norwegian) also handles problems with a cross-border element that have occurred due to the improper application of EU law by public authorities within the EU Member States.

▶▶ ec.europa.eu/solvit

Consumer Power

If, for example, you have a problem with your rights as a consumer or are seeking compensation for damages, you should approach the European Consumer Centres Network to address issues of faulty products or services in any of 30 countries (EU/EEA – EU languages, Norwegian and Icelandic).

▶▶ ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel/eu/consumers/resolve-your-consumer-complaint/

Education and work

If you are looking for a job or education opportunities across Europe, there is a service in all EU official languages + Norwegian and Icelandic called EURES, the European Job Mobility Portal, which offers tools both for jobseekers and employers (and in spring 2020 featured no fewer than 2.8 million vacancies and over 230 000 CVs).

▶▶ ec.europa.eu/eures

Consultations

When preparing a new policy or law, the European Commission often launches a public consultation on the issue at stake. This is a great opportunity to make your voice heard in the official process at an early stage. You can register to be notified when a consultation regarding an issue of interest to you is launched.

▶▶ ec.europa.eu/info/law/contribute-law-making_en

Indirect action

There are several EU institutions designed to help you as a citizen to make your voice heard at EU level. These institutions include the European Parliament (and your own MEP), the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions.

▶▶ *European Parliament:* europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/

▶▶ *European Economic and Social Committee:* eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work

▶▶ *European Committee of the Regions:* <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work>

Petition

This is one of the fundamental rights of European citizens: any citizen, acting individually or jointly with others, may at any time exercise their right of petition to the European Parliament under Article 227 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Important: this right includes all residents of the EU as well as associations and companies with headquarters within the Union. Your petition may present an individual request, a complaint or observation concerning the application of EU law or an appeal to the European Parliament to adopt a position on a specific matter.

▶▶ petiport.europarl.europa.eu

European Citizens' Initiative

It allows one million citizens from at least seven EU Member States to ask the European Commission to propose legislation in areas that fall within its competence. The organisers of a citizens' initiative have one year to gather the necessary support. Signatures must be certified by the competent authorities in each Member

State and can be collected online. Organisers of successful initiatives are then invited by the Commission for a meeting and by the European Parliament to a public hearing. The Commission has six months to examine the initiative and decide how to act on it.

►► ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative

When considering a tool for action, please also try to assess the type of action you intend to undertake: do you want to get something new onto the EU agenda? Or, conversely, maybe you want to stop something? Maybe you are seeking to improve an existing task? Alternatively, why not use one of the tools as a bargaining chip complementing other forms of action you are involved in? As you can see, there are many ways of becoming an active EU citizen and in the following section, you can read more about the most powerful tool available: the European Citizens' Initiative.

ECI GUIDE

How to use the European Citizens' Initiative



The European Citizens' Initiative: A first step towards transnational direct democracy

It has been called “the biggest innovation in transnational democracy” since the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament more than four decades ago: the European Citizens' Initiative. We, the citizens of the European Union, now have the same right as a majority in the European Parliament and the Member States to set the political agenda for the whole continent. An instrument used diligently: since its launch in 2012, more than 100 ECIs have been filed.

Here are the key facts about the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)

- In order to be politically considered by the EU Commission, an ECI has to be backed by at least one million EU citizens within one year of starting the collection of statements of support, from at least seven of the 27 Member States. A minimum number of signatories is required in each of those seven Member States.
- An ECI is possible in any field where the Commission has the power to propose legislation, for example the environment, agriculture, transport, public health or international trade.
- In order to launch a citizens' initiative, citizens must form a “group of organisers” composed of at least seven EU citizens resident in at least seven different Member States. The members of the group must be EU citizens.
- An initiative can be supported by all EU citizens old enough to vote in the European Parliament elections (16 in Estonia, Austria and Malta, 17 in Greece and 18 in all other Member States). To give their support to an initiative, citizens have to fill in a specific statement of support form provided by the organisers, on paper or online.
- Within one month of receiving a successful ECI, the Commission will meet with the organisers, the organisers can then present their initiative at a public hearing in the European Parliament and the Commission will adopt a formal response within six months. If the Commission decides to put forward a legislative proposal, the normal legislative procedure kicks off.

While the formal right to initiate pan-European legislation remains the prerogative of the European Commission alone, the European Citizens' Initiative constitutes an instrument for agenda-setting. It opens also the door to the future of participatory politics: it is more direct, more transnational and more digital than anything ever before in the EU and has inspired many Member States to introduce similar agenda-setting instruments at home.

This is the reason why the ECI is not just another right of petition, but is more of an everyday citizens' activation right regarding the next issues to be put on the agenda of the European institutions. Since 2012, more than 100 ECIs have been filed with the European Commission, which refused to register 26 of them because – in its view – they did not fulfil all the formal requirements. In several cases – the ECIs to stop the TTIP agreement and the Minority SafePack initiative, for example – the European Court of Justice later obliged the Commission to register the initiative.

The European Citizens' Initiative is based on a legal framework involving the EU Treaties, secondary European law and national legislation. While the various national provisions regulate the certification of online signature collection systems (independent collection platforms will only be accepted until the end of 2022, after which only the use of Commission's central online collection software will be authorised) and the verification of statements of support, the most important European legal documents include:

- **Foundation:** Title II (Article 11.4) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), Provisions on Democratic Principles; Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Official Journal of the European Union C83/389 of 30.3.2010)
- **Regulation:** European Citizens' Initiative Regulation (EU) 2019/788 with Annexes (Official Journal of the European Union L130/55 of 17.5.2019)
- **Implementation:**
Rules on online signature collection: Regulation (EU) 2019/1799 (Official Journal of the European Union L274/3 of 28.10.2019)
European Parliament: Rules 222 and 230 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure [[europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RULES-9-2020-02-03-TOC_EN.html](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/doi/10.31770/EUR-LEX/DOC-2020-02-03-TOC_EN.html)].

Important notice: according to the European Citizens' Initiative Regulation (Chapter V, Article 25), an official review of the ECI application has to be carried out every four years. This means that the next Commission review will take place by the end of 2023. In the review, the issue of a common minimum age (for example 16 years) will be given special attention.

▶▶ **Complete ECI regulatory framework:** european-citizens-initiative.eu/citizens-initiative/how-it-works/regulatory-framework_en

▶▶ **ECI verification and certification by Member States:** european-citizens-initiative.eu/citizens-initiative/authorities-verification-and-certification-statements-support_en

The European Citizens' Initiative: Many ways to take action

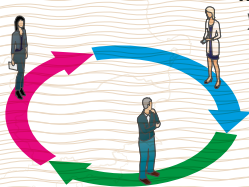
The European Citizens' Initiative is sometimes compared to a Swiss army knife: a smartly designed, adaptable multifunctional tool. As the ECI is available to nearly 450 million EU citizens across 27 Member States (and across the world, if you happen to live outside the EU as an EU citizen), it has addressed the way democracy is understood and is working at the transnational level.

Based on the experiences of the first 100 initiatives submitted between 2012 and 2019, an updated and more accessible version of the ECI came into force in 2020. A quarter of the initiatives were rejected due to the strict interpretation and application of the regulation by the Commission. However, under the new rules the organisers and the Commission are given more time for finding a solution, including the possibility of registering only the admissible parts of an initiative. More time is also given to prepare for the start of the signature collection, as well as all other steps in the process.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged everybody's way of interacting, discussing and decision-making. In order to safeguard the democratic potential of the ECI, the Commission has proposed a set of coronavirus-related rules allowing for the extension of deadlines for the collecting, verifying and examining ongoing initiatives [proposal No 2020/0099].

In an ECI process, there are three different kinds of roles: organiser, supporter and observer.

As organiser(s), you are at the very heart of the process, as you are in charge of all the key steps set out in the ECI regulation. You are also the responsible representative vis-à-vis the institutions, your supporters and the whole of Europe. For this reason, you need a great deal of careful consideration, patience, commitment and intensive communication and public relations work will be required.




As a supporter of an ECI, you are asked to share a certain European cause as one of at least one million people in at least seven different Member States. Your main role: to become a signatory of an ECI, which means that you fill in a "statement of support" on paper or electronically. Please make sure that you are signing a validated and formally registered initiative.

Finally, **as an observer** you may be curious to see what the ECI is about, want to understand it in greater detail and possibly be able to offer interesting insights and comments to organisers, the media, researchers and the EU.

As a group of organisers, supporters or observers, there are several aspects to think about before starting, signing or commenting. The key question is: what does a specific ECI want to achieve? What is your goal? Do you want to propose something new to Europe? Or is your idea to remove and abolish a particular EU policy? Many things, however, are not simply black or white, good or bad: they may just need to be adjusted. So you could be mostly interested in changing parts of a law in the EU as well. You may also want to use your ECI as a bargaining chip to back up an already ongoing legislative process. Or do you see your forthcoming ECI campaign as a catalyst for creating a broad transnational network or alliance? Maybe at the end of the day you are primarily interested in generating some real PR for your issue or organisation by using the ECI as a canvassing tool? It is up to you!

There are many ways of taking action with an ECI, which you can use as:

- an **accelerator** in order to get the EU to do something new. Here you need to be very patient as it will take a long time to see this kind of ECI through to the end. You need to find an appropriate and workable legal basis first, and you need to see public debate on your proposal as the main reward for your efforts;
- a **brake** to stop the EU from doing something. In this case, timing is critical, as you need to find the right moment to raise your concerns to achieve the maximum effect and support, which means that you need to gather the signatures swiftly;

- 
- a **valve** with the aim of making current EU legislation better. As you want to fix a certain problem by changing specific legislation, you need to keep things simple. “Valve” ECIs tend to be over-complex and hard to communicate, so do everything you can to stick to the main focus;
 - a **bargaining chip** by using the ECI process as an additional element in an attempt to influence European policy-making. But before you start such an ECI, take stock of your influence and political power independently of the initiative and check the possible additional benefits. Be clear about your intentions vis-à-vis supporters and be aware of the withdrawal option of an ECI and its timely use;
 - a **catalyst** to build broad alliances and networks across Europe. This is an especially appropriate option when you see your initiative as an element of a longer-term strategy to bring people across Europe together and/or to prepare a European election campaign;
 - a **canvasser** to make yourself and/or your group better known in the public sphere. In this case, you need to first identify a suitable and easily communicable substantive issue for your ECI. You should also be as open as possible about your goals to ensure that you do not deceive potential supporters.

A final note: the ECI offers many opportunities, but in the end it all comes down to your own understanding and capacities when assessing the options and limitations of an ECI. By becoming aware of the multifunctional capabilities of this new transnational and participatory process, you may be able to develop realistic expectations and thereby a realistic approach to your strategy and the options you choose.

The European Citizens' Initiative: Set the EU agenda in ten steps

Thinking of launching your own ECI? It will take you at least three years, probably even more (and quite a lot in terms of resources) to make it happen. However, if you are smart and careful, the process will offer you new insights and teach you many new lessons – and (hopefully) enable you to make a difference to Europe. Here are the main ten steps to expect during the ECI process:

Step 1: Idea.

You have an idea, project or concern that can be translated into European policy-making. Check first whether there are any other, possibly simpler and more accessible tools available to make your voice heard on this issue. If you go for the ECI option, go to step 2.

Step 2: Knowledge.

The European Citizens' Initiative is a process with a number of legal and political implications. Learn everything about the options and limitations of the process when it comes to promoting your own future initiative. Get support at this early stage by contacting the European Citizens' Initiative Forum (see Support section for details). Then try to evaluate: is it worth the effort? If you believe that it is, continue to step 3.

Step 3: Goals.

Another important checkpoint before taking the first formal steps: what do you want to accomplish with your initiative and what can you realistically hope to achieve? Define the aim, scope and specific function of your initiative. Keep it as simple as possible for everybody. In this step, it makes sense to look more closely at the lessons learnt by earlier ECI organisers.

Step 4: Design.

The wording and explanation of your initial proposal must be comprehensible in many different languages and even more political cultures across Europe. Like most organisers, you may want to use the official online signature collection system, which the EU provides for free. Now is the time to familiarise yourself with this system – and to use all available support.

Step 5: Registration.

This is the first formal hurdle for many “groups of organisers”, as you need to fulfil certain criteria in order to get registered. The most important thing is that your proposed initiative does not manifestly fall outside the framework of the Commission’s competences. Again, the European Citizens’ Initiative Forum can assist you during this step. And then it is time to submit your ECI on the official website, providing a title and the objectives of your proposal. Depending on the need to amend and update your proposal, the Commission will register (or refuse) your ECI within 2–4 months. After registration, the Commission will translate the title and the objective of your proposal into all 24 official languages.

Step 6: Signature gathering.

Now comes the best and, at the same time, the hardest part: you have to convince more than one million Europeans in at least seven different countries to sign your initiative in less than a year. This task needs to be prepared well in advance by creating a pan-European network of supporting partners across Europe. After the official registration, you have to start the actual signature collection within six months. You just need to inform the Commission 10 working days before your chosen starting date, so that the beginning and the end of the year-long gathering phase can be published. Please take note of the fact that you will need to use separate support forms according to the nationalities of the signatories. This means that all the signatories on any one form must be nationals of the same EU country.

Step 7: Dialogue.

Without communication, you will have no supporters: dialogue with all possible like-minded people – and even sceptics – will be critical for the lasting success of your initiative. So, complement your signature-gathering activities by reaching out via the (social) media and at public events. For this step, it again makes a lot of sense to learn from earlier ECIs. The people who worked on them have a great deal of experience and knowledge to share.

Step 8: Thresholds.

A full set of requirements and hurdles have to be dealt with before you can finally submit your initiative with all the required certifications to the EU Commission. First, you need to submit the gathered statements of support to the various national authorities within three months after the end of the signature-gathering phase. These authorities have at most three months to verify and certify the signatures. After that, you as the “group of organisers” have another three months to prepare to finally submit the certifications to the Commission. These demanding operations require a solid and well-prepared management team for your initiative. Silly mistakes will generate high additional costs, delays and frustration.

Step 9: Communication.

Submitting your ECI is just the beginning of another important chapter: communication on an official EU topic, which will bring you onto the political centre stage. After being acknowledged as a successful initiative, new doors will open to you: in formal talks with the Commission and at a public hearing at the European Parliament. Within one month of the submission of your successful ECI, you will be invited to an official meeting with the Commission to discuss your proposal and in the following months, you will be invited to speak at a public hearing at the European Parliament. Other EU institutions, such as the European Economic and Social Committee and all the national parliaments of all EU Member States, will also be informed. It will be your big opportunity to convince even more people – and ideally the right people!

Step 10: Conclusions.

The end of an exhausting, but hopefully empowering exercise. Do not forget to do the back-office work, the documentation and evaluation – in order to learn (and share) the conclusions drawn. By being part of the second generation ECIs (starting from 2020) you are about to make history.

▶▶ *A step-by-step legislative procedure and timeline:* [europa.eu/citizens-initiative/how-it-works_en](https://europea.eu/citizens-initiative/how-it-works_en)

The European Citizens' Initiative: or – how to make a difference



Pro-Life Movement: One of Us

The “One of Us” initiative was one of the first European citizens’ initiatives that succeeded in collecting more than one million signatures. The initiative addressed the dignity, right to life and integrity of every human being from conception. Its main objective was to end EU funding of activities involving human embryos, in particular in research, public health and development aid. The European Commission decided not to carry out the legislative review as it considered the existing legislative framework appropriate. The organisers appealed against this to the European Court – but lost.

▶▶ **Initiative website:** oneofus.eu

▶▶ **Official ECI Register:** europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000005_en

Protect the Animals: Stop Vivisection

The “Stop Vivisection” initiative aimed at phasing out animal experiments. The campaign was supported by an EU-wide alliance of more than 250 animal protection groups, scientific organisations and companies selling “animal cruelty-free” products – and managed to gather the support of more than 1.17 million EU citizens. The European Commission shared the organisers’ conviction that animal testing should be phased out, but did not accept that scientific principles invalidate the “animal model”.

▶▶ **Initiative website:** stopvivisection.eu

▶▶ **Official ECI Register:** europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000007_en



Banning Pesticides: Stop Glyphosate

The "Stop Glyphosate" ECI was launched in January 2017 and had three aims: to ban glyphosate, to reform the pesticide approval procedure and to set mandatory targets for reduced pesticide use EU-wide. Its main objective was to achieve a pesticide-free future. The organisers reached the one million threshold within less than six months! While the Commission decided not to ban glyphosate, it committed to a legislative proposal to increase transparency in the evaluation of pesticides and to enhance the quality and independence of the scientific studies that are the basis of the assessments carried out by the European Food Safety Authority. The Commission also committed to the revision of the Sustainable Use Directive.

- ▶▶ **Initiative website:** stopglyphosate.org/
- ▶▶ **Official ECI Register:** europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2017/000002_en



Right to Water: A Human Right

This initiative launched by trade unions across Europe was one of the first to ever be registered, on 10 May 2012. The aim was to invite the European Commission to propose legislation implementing the human right to water and sanitation, as recognised by the United Nations, and their provision as essential public services for all. The main objective of the campaign was that EU legislation should require national governments to ensure and provide all citizens with sufficient clean drinking water and sanitation. The Commission decided to take action in different areas related to the initiative (increase transparency, stimulate innovation, etc.) and made a legislative proposal to revise the Drinking Water Directive, including the obligation for the Member States to ensure access to water for the most vulnerable groups.

- ▶▶ **Initiative website:** right2water.eu
- ▶▶ **Official ECI Register:** europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000003_en



Minority SafePack: Protecting Diversity in Europe

As the name of this initiative already suggests, the “Minority SafePack” ECI proposed a whole package of measures to the Commission, containing aspects including the promotion of rarer languages, the protection of national minorities and research programmes on the benefits of linguistic and cultural diversity in the European Union. Initially launched in 2013, its registration was rejected by the Commission, a decision annulled by the European Court four years later. By spring 2020, this ECI had delivered more than one million signatures and was awaiting the next steps in the process of a successful initiative.

▶▶ *Initiative website:* minority-safepack.eu

▶▶ *Official ECI Register:* europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2017/000004_en



Stop Extremism: Support Human Rights in the EU

This initiative, registered in summer 2017, invites the European Commission to propose a new Anti-Extremism Directive, featuring a neutral definition of extremism, regardless of its motivation, and covering all “acts aiming at the destruction of fundamental rights”, as well as bans on extremists in schools and other public institutions. A European Directive in this area should also allow for compensation claims, inspired by the existing anti-discrimination law, to effectively protect women, children and persons at work. After one year of signature collection, the organisers announced they had gathered more than one million statements of support.

▶▶ *Initiative website:* stop-extremism.eu

▶▶ *Official ECI Register:* europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2017/000007_en



End the Cage Age: Aiming at Higher Animal Welfare

Over 1.6 million people supported this ECI that called on the Commission to impose clear anti-cage legislation in the European Union to give priority to the more humane treatment of farm animals. In particular, the organisers hoped to prohibit the use of cages for all poultry, individual sow stalls and calf pens etc., to ensure that animals have freedom of movement and can stay close to each other in their flocks or herds. In spring 2020, the End the Cage Age ECI had already been certified but not yet submitted to the European Commission (planned for autumn 2020).

▶▶ **Initiative website:** endthecageage.eu

▶▶ **Official ECI Register:** europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2018/000004_en

Eat ORIGINAL. Unmask Your Food: Know Where Your Food Comes From

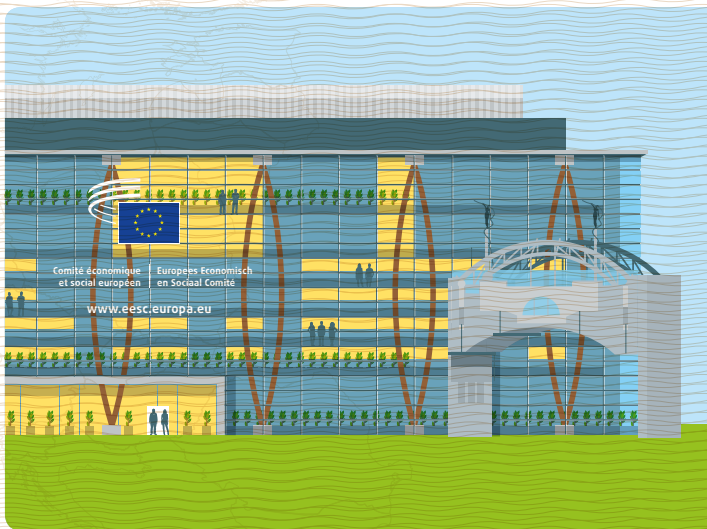
According to the organisers, over 1.1 million EU citizens signed this ECI to support the objective of mandatory declarations of origin for all food products in order to prevent fraud, protect public health and guarantee consumers' right to information. This ECI also called for clearer food labelling of all primary ingredients in processed food. In spring 2020, the ECI was in the process of certification of its statements of support.

▶▶ **Initiative website:** eatoriginal.eu

▶▶ **Official ECI Register:** europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2018/000006_en

TRANSNATIONAL BRIDGE

The European Economic
and Social Committee



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is one of the oldest EU institutions, established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The Committee is composed of 329 members from all EU Member States, representing employers, employees and a third group representing various activities such as farmers, consumer groups and professional organisations.

With its focus as an advisory body on democratic issues, the EESC's role has been strengthened recently, with it becoming the key bridge between European civil society and the EU institutions. In other words, the EESC today offers an important support infrastructure for active citizenship and participatory democracy.

During the initial period of the European Citizens' Initiative, the EESC had been pioneering an informal support infrastructure to active citizens across the EU including general advice, translation assistance and the holding of hearings at the EESC for ECIs in the making. Most of these services are now part of the regulatory obligations required by EU institutions such as the European Parliament and the European Commission.

As the most experienced citizens' support institution of the Union, the EESC continues to provide information, guidance and platforms to civil society organisations and ad-hoc groups of active citizens engaged in making Europe a more social and democratic place in the world. Since 2012, the EESC has hosted the annual conference, the **European Citizens' Initiative Day** (known in short as the ECI Day) in Brussels, offering an open and free meeting point to ECI professionals and activists across Europe.

▶▶ eesc.europa.eu/eci-day

Additionally, the EESC invites successful or nearly successful ECIs to its plenary sessions and ongoing ECIs to its section and group meetings as a contribution to increasing dialogue between citizens and the EU institutions and to making the initiatives better known in the European public sphere. These invitations included the *Ban Glyphosate* (2017), *Minority SafePack* (2018), *Stop Extremism* (2019), *End the Cage Age* and *Eat ORIGINAL. Unmask your Food* (2020) initiatives.

In addition to this 2020 edition of the EESC "European Democracy Passport", a number of other publications and services are available in 23 languages.

▶▶ eesc.europa.eu/eci

MORE SUPPORT

Support is all around –
you just have to use it



As a citizen of the European Union, you are quite literally not alone. There are more than 450 million people like you. Nor are you alone when it comes to getting government and civil society support for making your voice heard. Among the many resources available, we recommend the following transnational support, guidance and media across Europe:

European Citizens' Initiative

The **European Citizens' Initiative Forum** is an online collaborative platform that offers support to citizens at different stages of organising a European Citizens' Initiative. The forum provides practical information on the ECI and allows people to discuss EU policies and potential initiatives. It also helps them in the early organisational stages, from finding partners in other countries to seeking expert advice on campaigning, fundraising and legal issues. The objective is to foster interaction between potential organisers, citizens and experts on the topic of the ECI. The ECI Forum is a service offered by the European Commission, and is run by the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) in cooperation with Democracy International.

▶▶ europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/

The **European Citizens' Initiative Help Desk** gives advice and support to citizens and organisations across the EU considering starting an initiative. This independent Help Desk is hosted by the Association for the European Citizens' Initiative established by former and ongoing ECI organisers. The Help Desk supports individual ECIs with online signature collection software (until the end of 2022, when there will be only one central collection system provided by the European Commission), campaigning, fundraising and legal advice.

▶▶ citizens-initiative.eu

The **ECI Online Library**. The European Citizens' Initiative has an interesting history going back to the early years of the European Union in the 1990s (after its formal transformation from economic cooperation to political union). The Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe, which was established in 2001 to assist with the development of the ECI, has gathered the most important publications online and – on request – can guide you to further resources.

▶▶ iri-europe.org/index.php/publications/european-citizens-initiative

Participatory Democracy

The **European Parliament's Citizens' App** is an online application for smartphones offering information on topics and locations of interest to you. It informs you about events taking place near you; adds your favourites to your personal calendar; shows you the best route via your favourite maps application; provides multimedia content such as videos, podcasts and slideshows; is searchable and shareable, and can be customised and ranked. Available on Apple Store and Google Play in 24 languages (Citizens' App).

▶▶ europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/stay-informed/citizens-app

The **Democracy Community** is a transnational network of democracy supporters hosted by Democracy International. The platform is open for everybody for informational, educational and networking purposes and offers participatory stories and event opportunities. You can register yourself / your organisation / institution and create a democracy supporter profile.

▶▶ democracy.community

The **European Citizen Action Service** is an international organisation with pan-European membership. Its mission is to empower citizens in order to create a more inclusive and stronger European Union by promoting and defending citizens' rights and developing and supporting mechanisms to increase citizens' and citizen organisations' democratic participation in, and engagement with, the EU.

▶▶ ecas.org

The **Participo** platform provided by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). Here you can find all kinds of information around the research and practice of participatory and direct democracy at all political levels. The platform is part of the OECD's effort to explore the paradigm changes underway from traditional representative government towards modern representative democracy.

▶▶ oecd.org/gov/innovative-citizen-participation.htm

Citizens and journalism

Euractiv links active European citizenship with professional online journalism and offers stories, opinions, analysis and background about everything going on politically across Europe – in 13 languages: English, French, German, Italian, Czech, Bulgarian, Greek, Croatian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Spanish and Slovenian.


▶▶ euractiv.com

Reporting on modern participatory and direct democracy is the main task of the **#deardemocracy platform at Swissinfo**, the international service of the Swiss Broadcasting Company. It offers news, opinions and background on active citizenship and participatory democracy globally – in 10 languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Arab, Russian, Chinese, Portuguese, Italian and Japanese.

▶▶ swissinfo.ch/directdemocracy

Notes





This European Democracy Passport was researched and written by Bruno Kaufmann, Global Democracy correspondent and co-chair of the Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy. He lives in the small river town of Arboga, where the first Swedish Parliament gathered back in 1435. Contact: send@brunokaufmann.email.



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