



A NEW RIGHT FOR EU CITIZENS

**YOU CAN SET  
THE AGENDA!**

# Guide to the European Citizens' Initiative



European Commission

European Commission  
Secretariat-General  
B-1049 Brussels

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## FOREWORD



With the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union took a big step forward towards its citizens by giving them the possibility to participate directly in shaping the development of its legislation. Through the European citizens' initiative, one million EU citizens will be able to invite the European Commission to make a legislative proposal. A successful initiative may therefore be instrumental in setting the EU legislative agenda.

This brand new tool for participatory democracy is without precedent at transnational level. It will strengthen the democratic foundations of the Union and bring Europe closer to its citizens by providing a direct gateway through which they can make their voices heard in Brussels.

This guide explains what the citizens' initiative is about, how to sign up to initiatives and how to organise your own initiative should you have an idea for EU legislation that you think could gain the support of one million EU citizens.

I hope that EU citizens and especially young people will seize the opportunity and embrace this new right and I look forward to the lively cross-border debates that it will bring about.

**Maroš Šefčovič**

*Vice-President of the European Commission*

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# WHAT IS IT ABOUT?



## KEY FACTS ON THE CITIZENS' INITIATIVE



## What is the European citizens' initiative?

The European citizens' initiative enables one million EU citizens from at least seven EU countries to call on the European Commission to propose legislation on matters where the EU has competence to legislate.

It is a right that is enshrined in the EU treaties.

The rules and procedures governing the citizens' initiative are set out in an EU regulation adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union in February 2011 (1).

## What can be proposed as a European citizens' initiative?

A citizens' initiative has to be an invitation to the European Commission to propose a law in a field where it has the power to do so, for example in the fields of environment, agriculture, transport or public health.

## Who can organise a European citizens' initiative?

All EU citizens (nationals of an EU country) old enough (2) to vote in European Parliament elections (18 years old except in Austria, where the voting age is 16) have the possibility to be organisers of initiatives. However, they first have to form a citizens' committee composed of at least seven EU citizens living in at least seven different EU countries.

The citizens' committee is responsible for managing the initiative throughout the procedure.

Citizens' initiatives cannot be run by organisations. However, organisations can promote or sponsor initiatives provided that they do so with full transparency.

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(1) Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative

(<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:065:0001:0022:EN:PDF>).

(2) Citizens do not need to be registered to vote, just old enough.

## Who can sign up to a European citizens' initiative?

Any EU citizen (national of an EU country) old enough to vote <sup>(3)</sup> in European Parliament elections (18 years old except in Austria, where the voting age is 16) can sign up to a citizens' initiative.

## Where can I find out what citizens' initiatives are ongoing?

All the citizens' initiatives launched across the EU are registered on a central website managed by the European Commission:

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative>



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<sup>(3)</sup> Citizens do not need to be registered to vote, just old enough.





# HOW TO SIGN UP TO AN INITIATIVE



You are an EU citizen (national of an EU country) old enough to vote in European Parliament elections and you want to give your support to an initiative?

In order to do so, you have to fill in a specific statement of support form provided by the organisers of the initiative, either on paper or online (if the organisers have provided a website for that purpose).

The form should comply with the model set out in the regulation on the citizens' initiative and should include all the required information regarding the initiative (title, subject matter, objectives, etc.) as well as the Commission registration number for that initiative. If you wish, you can check that the initiative has been registered on the Commission's website.

The personal information you are required to provide on this form depends on the EU country which you come from (either your country of nationality or of residence). The required data correspond to what each EU country considers necessary to verify a statement of support.

If you live in an EU country but hold the nationality of another, or if you hold the nationality of several EU countries, you may have the possibility to choose between these countries depending on the data they require.

However, you may only sign up once to an initiative.

### Signing up on paper

- › Use the form corresponding to the (or one of the) EU country(ies) which you come from.
- › Fill in the required information (depending on the country).
- › Sign the form and give it back to the organisers.

### Signing up online

- › Go to the organisers' website (you will find the link on the initiative's page on the Commission's website).
- › Check that the organisers' online collection system has been certified by a competent national authority (organisers must publish the certificate on their website). This is important to ensure that your data will be protected and not used for any other purpose, which would be illegal.
- › Fill in the required information, making sure that you provide the necessary data required by your country.
- › You are not required to sign using an electronic signature when you submit your statement of support online.

Once organisers have collected the necessary number of statements of support, they will send them to the competent national authorities for verification.

Organisers and national authorities are required to protect your data and cannot make the signatories' list public. For more information on how your data will be processed, see the section 'How are signatories' data protected?'



# HOW ARE SIGNATORIES' DATA PROTECTED?



Throughout the procedure, all parties involved must comply with the legislation in force on protection of personal data <sup>(4)</sup>. In particular, before collecting statements of support, organisers may be required to notify the data protection authority(ies) <sup>(5)</sup> in the EU country(ies) where the data will be processed.

Furthermore, the regulation on the citizens' initiative includes more specific provisions on data protection.

### **Organisers must:**

- › take appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect personal data against accidental or unlawful destruction or accidental loss, alteration, unauthorised disclosure or access, in particular where the processing involves the transmission of data over a network, and against all other unlawful forms of processing;
- › ensure that personal data collected are not used for any purpose other than supporting that specific initiative;
- › destroy all statements of support and any copies no later than one month after submitting their initiative to the Commission or 18 months after its date of registration, whichever is the earlier <sup>(6)</sup>.

Organisers of a citizens' initiative are liable and subject to prosecution if they do not comply with the provisions of the regulation on the citizens' initiative, in particular in case of fraudulent use of data.

### **Likewise national authorities must:**

- › use the personal data only for the purpose of verifying the statements of support;
- › destroy all statements of support and any copies no later than one month after certifying the number of valid statements of support <sup>(6)</sup>.

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<sup>(4)</sup> Legislation resulting from Directive 95/46/EC.

<sup>(5)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/privacy/nationalcomm/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/privacy/nationalcomm/index_en.htm)

<sup>(6)</sup> Statements of support may be retained beyond these time limits if necessary for the purpose of legal or administrative proceedings relating to the initiative. In this event, organisers must destroy all statements of support and copies no later than one week after the date of conclusion of said proceedings by a final decision.

# HOW TO ORGANISE AN INITIATIVE

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THE PROCEDURE  
STEP-BY-STEP



## The procedure at a glance

### GET STARTED!



Prepare your initiative and set up your citizens' committee.



Register your initiative.

Commission answers within 2 months



You wish to collect online?  
Get your system certified.

National authority answers within 1 month



If the Commission decides to follow your initiative: the legislative procedure starts.



## COLLECT!



**4.**  
Collect statements of support in at least 7 EU countries.

Max. 12 months



**5.**  
Get statements of support certified by national authorities.

National authorities answer within 3 months

## SUBMIT!



**7.**  
The Commission examines your initiative and replies.

Commission answers within 3 months



**6.**  
You have at least **1 000 000** signatories? Submit your initiative to the Commission.



## Prepare your initiative

You first have to decide whether the European citizens' initiative is the best way to promote your idea. Remember that a citizens' initiative must be an invitation to the European Commission to propose legislation. It must concern an issue where the Commission has the power to act <sup>(7)</sup>. It is recommended that you check the existing EU legislation. You may also consider other ways of addressing the EU institutions that could be more appropriate for your request. These include petitioning the European Parliament, taking part in public consultations or lodging a complaint with the European Ombudsman <sup>(8)</sup>.

For more details on the conditions for launching a citizens' initiative, see the section 'Registering your initiative on the Commission's website'.



## Set up your citizens' committee

Prior to launching an initiative, you have to form a committee made up of at least seven EU citizens (nationals of an EU country) old enough to vote in European Parliament elections <sup>(9)</sup> and living in at least seven different EU countries. The committee members do not have to be nationals of seven different EU countries.

This committee is considered as the official 'organiser' of the initiative and is responsible for managing the procedure throughout.

The committee must designate from among its members a representative and a substitute to speak and act on its behalf vis-à-vis the Commission.

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(7) For guidance on the Commission's powers, please see :

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/competences>

(8) Find out more about alternative ways of approaching or influencing the EU at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/alternative-ways-eu>

(9) Citizens do not need to be registered to vote, just old enough

(18 in all Member States except Austria where the voting age is 16).

Commission answers  
within **2 months**



## Register your initiative on the Commission's website

Before you can start collecting statements of support from citizens, you have to register your initiative on the Commission's citizens' initiative website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/registration>



In order to register your initiative, you will have to provide the following information in one of the 23 official EU languages:

- › the title of your initiative (maximum 100 characters);
- › its subject matter (maximum 200 characters);
- › a description of its objectives (maximum 500 characters);
- › the provisions of the EU treaties you consider relevant for the proposed action <sup>(10)</sup>;
- › personal details of the seven committee members (full names, postal addresses, nationalities and dates of birth), indicating specifically the representative and his/her substitute, as well as their e-mail addresses;
- › all sources of funding and support for your initiative (known at the time of registration) worth more than €500 per year and per sponsor.

### **Optionally, you may provide:**

- › the address of the website for the initiative (if any);
- › an annex with more detailed information on your initiative;
- › a draft legal act.

<sup>(10)</sup> For more information on the EU treaties, please see: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/competences>

## Conditions

Registration is not automatic. Before your initiative is officially registered and appears on the website, the Commission will first, within two months, check whether:

- your citizens' committee has been formed and the contact persons designated;
- your initiative does not manifestly fall outside the framework of the Commission's powers to submit a legislative proposal to implement the EU treaties;
- your initiative is not manifestly abusive, frivolous or vexatious;
- your initiative is not manifestly contrary to the EU values as set out in the EU treaties <sup>(11)</sup>.

Once your initiative is registered, your representative and his/her substitute will have access to a secure account on the Commission's website, where they can get information on the next steps in the procedure and manage all submissions to the Commission in the context of their initiative.

In particular, you can provide, via this account, translations of your initiative in other official EU languages. You should strive to ensure that the translations are equivalent to the original. The Commission will not publish them if it finds manifest and significant inconsistencies.

In addition, you should provide, on a regular basis, up-to-date information on all sources of support and funding for your initiative worth more than €500 per year and per sponsor.

*Note: A registered initiative may be withdrawn by its organisers at any time before they send statements of support to be verified by a competent national authority. Withdrawal is irreversible. A withdrawn initiative cannot be resumed, and all statements of support collected become null and void. Withdrawn initiatives – marked as such – remain viewable on the Commission's website under the section on obsolete initiatives.*

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<sup>(11)</sup> Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union: 'The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.'

National authority answers  
within **1 month**



## Get your online collection system certified

If you wish to collect statements of support online, you must build an online collection system that responds to certain requirements.

Your system must be capable of ensuring that:

- › only real persons (not computers) may submit a statement of support form;
- › data provided online are securely collected and stored;
- › the statements of support can be produced in the format that can be verified by the competent national authorities.

The detailed technical and security features that your system must comply with are set out in a specific regulation (see link below).

To help you build your system, the Commission has developed open source software that already complies with all the relevant requirements.

Before starting to collect statements of support using your online collection system, you must have it certified by a competent authority in the EU country where the data will be stored.

Certification is required even if you use the Commission software since the software provides only part of your online collection system. In this case however, certification is facilitated.

The national authority has one month to respond to your request. Once you have the certificate, you must publish a copy on your website.

*Note: You can obtain certification either before or after registering your initiative with the Commission.*

### Useful resources

- › Regulation setting out the detailed technical and security features that your system must comply with: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:301:0003:0009:EN:PDF>
- › Open source software developed by the Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/software>
- › List of competent national authorities that certify online collection systems: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/authorities-online-systems>

Max 12 months



## Collect statements of support

As soon as the registration of your initiative has been confirmed, you may start collecting statements of support from citizens. You have one year to do so. Statements of support can be collected on paper and/or online.

In order to collect statements of support, you have to use specific forms which comply with the models set out in the regulation on the citizens' initiative and which include all required information regarding your initiative. That information must be identical to the information on your initiative published on the Commission's website.

In your organiser account, you can download customised and pre-completed forms for which you can choose:

- › the EU country where you want to collect statements of support;
- › the language for the name fields, among the official EU languages;
- › the language for the information on your initiative, among the languages in which your initiative is published on the website.

### Data protection

During the whole procedure, you must comply with the legislation in force as regards data protection. This means in particular that before collecting statements of support, you may be required to notify the data protection authority(ies) <sup>(12)</sup> in the EU country(ies) where the data will be processed. For more information on data protection, see the section 'How are signatories' data protected?'




























### Minimum number of signatories per country

You are not required to collect statements of support in all 27 EU countries. You will however need to have a minimum number of signatories in at least seven EU countries (see the thresholds for each country in the following table).

*Note: Statements of support collected in countries where the threshold has not been reached will also be counted to reach the one million target.*

<sup>(12)</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/privacy/nationalcomm/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/privacy/nationalcomm/index_en.htm)

## MINIMUM NUMBER OF SIGNATORIES PER COUNTRY

Austria		14 250
Belgium		16 500
Bulgaria		13 500
Cyprus		4 500
Czech Republic		16 500
Denmark		9 750
Estonia		4 500
Finland		9 750
France		55 500
Germany		74 250
Greece		16 500
Hungary		16 500
Ireland		9 000
Italy		54 750
Latvia		6 750
Lithuania		9 000
Luxembourg		4 500
Malta		4 500
Netherlands		19 500
Poland		38 250
Portugal		16 500
Romania		24 750
Slovakia		9 750
Slovenia		6 000
Spain		40 500
Sweden		15 000
United Kingdom		54 750

National authorities answer  
within **3 months**



## Get statements of support certified

Once you have finished collecting the necessary statements of support for your initiative, you need to ask the competent national authority, in each EU country where you have collected, to certify the number of valid statements of support collected for that country.

You must ask for certification separately, and one time only, for each country where you have collected statements of support.

You can send statements of support in paper or electronically. You will need to separate the statements of support collected in paper form, those collected through an online collection system and those which were signed using an electronic signature.

Statements of support collected online can either be printed and sent in paper form or sent in electronic form via a secure means, such as encrypted files in a CD-ROM. XML files could also be used if they are accepted by the national authority concerned (you can check that on the Commission's website). The software developed by the Commission allows the export of statements in XML format.

The national authorities have three months to certify the number of valid statements of support. They will use appropriate checks to verify the statements, which may be based on random sampling.

You may want to collect more statements of support than required, as the checks by the competent national authorities may lead them to certify a lower number of statements of support than have been provided.

### Useful resources

- › List of competent national authorities that certify the number of valid statements of support:  
<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/authorities-verification>





## Submit your citizens' initiative to the Commission

Once you have obtained the certificates from the competent national authorities demonstrating that you have collected the required number of statements of support (one million overall and the minimum thresholds reached for at least seven EU countries), you can submit your initiative to the Commission for consideration.

- › Don't forget that you have the legal obligation to destroy all statements of support and any copies no later than one month after submitting your initiative or 18 months after registering your initiative (if you do not obtain enough statements of support to submit it).



ONE MILLION  
SIGNATORIES?



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?



Commission answers within  
**3 months**

In the three months following the submission of a citizens' initiative which has received the required number of statements of support:

- › Commission representatives will meet the organisers so they can explain in detail the issues raised in their initiative;
- › the organisers will have the opportunity to present their initiative at a public hearing in the European Parliament;
- › following a careful examination of the initiative, the Commission will adopt a formal response spelling out what action it intends to take, if any, and its reasons.

This response, which will take the form of a communication, will be formally adopted by the College of Commissioners and published in all official EU languages.

In certain cases, it may only present the preliminary opinion of the Commission, which may require further studies on the subject before making its final decision.

If the Commission decides to put forward a legislative proposal in response to a citizens' initiative, the normal legislative procedure kicks off. The Commission proposal is submitted to the legislator (the European Parliament and the Council or in some cases only the Council), which will need to adopt it for it to become law.

# HOW TO OBTAIN FURTHER INFORMATION



## Consult the Commission's website and register for the citizens' initiative:

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative>

On this website you will find:

- › information on all citizens' initiatives classified according to their status (open, closed, obsolete, etc.);
- › a search tool to find initiatives that interest you;
- › detailed information on the rules governing the citizens' initiative as well as the list of competent national authorities, guidance and FAQ;
- › the registration form;
- › for organisers of initiatives, access to your organiser account through which you can manage your initiative once you have registered it with the Commission.

## Other questions — Contact Europe Direct

Tel. 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (\*)

E-mail: [http://europa.eu/europedirect/write\\_to\\_us/mailbox/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/europedirect/write_to_us/mailbox/index_en.htm)

Chat: [http://europa.eu/europedirect/web\\_assistance/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/europedirect/web_assistance/index_en.htm)

You can also contact a Europe Direct centre in your country. To find a Europe Direct centre, please consult:

[http://europa.eu/europedirect/meet\\_us/directory/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/europedirect/meet_us/directory/index_en.htm)

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(\*) Most calls are free though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you.

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## **Important notice**

This publication provides general information on the rules and conditions governing the European citizens' initiative. Its content is not legally binding and does not claim to be exhaustive.

The detailed rules are set out in Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the citizens' initiative:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:065:0001:0022:EN:PDF>



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