

Factual summary of the contributions received in the context of the open public consultation on the revision of Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 on the European Citizens' Initiative

The European Commission ran an open public consultation on the revision of the Regulation on the European citizens' initiative (ECI) from 24 May to 16 August 2017.

This open public consultation targeted both citizens and stakeholders in order to gather views on the current Regulation, and it focused in particular on the shortcomings and potential improvements. The questionnaire was published in all EU official languages. Participants to the questionnaires could reply in any of the 24 official languages. In addition to the replies provided through the questionnaires, 23 position papers were sent by public authorities, NGOs, academia and individuals¹.

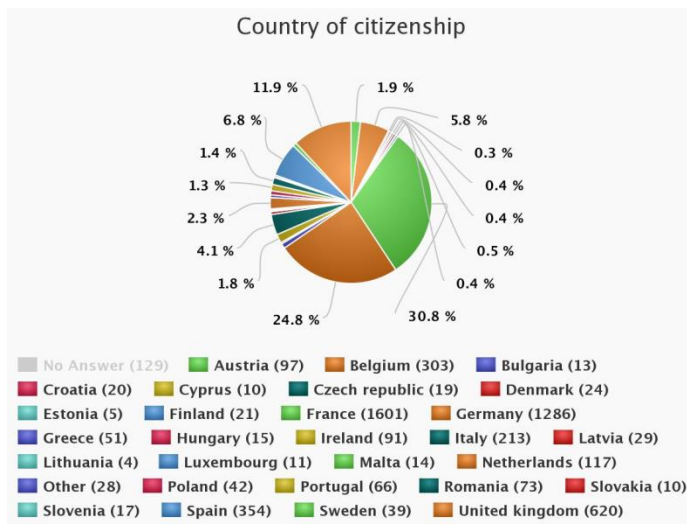
This open public consultation was also promoted through social media and further feedback was gathered via Facebook, Instagram, Medium, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

The contributions received cannot be regarded as the official position of the Commission and its services and thus do not bind the Commission.

Replies to the questionnaires

In total, this public consultation received **5323 replies; 5199 from individuals and 124 from organisations**. Contributions were mainly sent by French, German and British citizens (see figure 2 for details), while organisations which took part in the consultation are mainly based in Germany, Belgium and France.

Figure 1: distribution of the country of citizenship of individuals participating in the open public consultation



¹ This number includes the position papers which are focused on the ECI and relevant for this specific consultation.

Regarding the **type of organisations**, the big majority consisted of NGOs, platforms or networks (see figure 2 for details). Several civil society organisations organised a joint campaign² encouraging citizens to reply to the public consultation and suggesting positions.

Regarding the **level of awareness**, 37% of respondents replied that they had not heard of the ECI before. 5% of respondents had already organised an initiative or collected statements of support, 3% were preparing to launch one, and 6% indicated that they considered doing so but abandoned the idea. The input has been analysed using a data analysis tool³ complemented by manual analysis.

Figure 2: distribution of the type of organisations participating in the open public consultation



Citizens' committees which organise initiatives do not have legal personality under the current Regulation. Committee members therefore bear personal responsibility and liability for damages caused in the organisation of a citizens' initiative and often face obstacles for fundraising. Most respondents to the public consultation suggested the issue should be tackled indirectly by reducing the amount of personal data collected from signatories (55% of individuals and 57% of organisations) and/or transferring the responsibility for collecting statements of support from organisers to public authorities (46% of individuals and 37% of organisations). 44% of organisations and 28% of citizens who replied proposed organisations should be allowed to be part of the citizens' committees.

On the **registration phase**, 83% of respondents agreed to strengthen assistance to organisers and suggested other types of support should be provided, such as assistance for (re)formulating and translating initiatives, as well as financial support. Two options were proposed in the questionnaire on assistance in the preparatory phase and two on support to redraft initiatives. On assistance in the preparatory phase, 56% of respondents supported the option of a Commission helpdesk. 77% of respondents supported the option of services offered by independent experts (e.g. an online collaborative platform). Both options for support to redraft initiatives, i.e. independent experts and an ECI officer, were considered equally beneficial by 71% of organisations, while 78% of individuals supported independent experts and 63% an ECI officer.

² <https://www.democracy-international.org/please-participate-public-consultation>

³ The tool used is Doris Public Consultation Dashboard, an internal Commission tool for analysing and visualising consultation answers. It relies on open-source libraries using machine-learning techniques and allows the automatic creation of charts for closed questions, the extraction of keywords and named entities from free-text answers as well as filtering functions, sentiment analysis and clustering.

On the **minimum age for signatories**, almost half of the organisations and 42% of individuals that responded to the public consultation supported the idea of lowering the threshold to 16, while 32% overall suggested the voting age should be maintained. 18% of organisations and 25% of individuals proposed the age threshold should be harmonised at 18.

On the **data requirements** for supporting an ECI, 30% of respondents replied that none of the proposed data would be a problem; however, 83 respondents, of which 60 were from France, did not sign an initiative because of the personal data requested. Of the 2657 respondents who had supported an initiative, 297 felt that too much data was requested but provided them in any case. Overall, 33% found the process to support an initiative not user-friendly, mainly because it took them too long.

Personal identification numbers are considered particularly sensitive: around 50% of respondents were not willing to provide this number (41% of respondents from those countries which currently ask for it). The score is even higher as regards the driving license number with 58% of respondents not willing to provide it – note that it is currently not requested in the context of the ECI. This represents more than the option consisting of providing the last three digits of the personal identification (document) number/driving license number (37% including some respondents who selected it only for the driving license number), the place of birth (33%), the address (28%) and name at birth (27%).

On the possibility for **EU citizens living outside of the EU** to support an ECI, 49% of respondents to this question of the public consultation (60% of organisations) suggested they should be able to support initiatives, while 42% (34% of organisations) considered that it should be limited to citizens eligible to vote in European Parliament elections. 6% (4% of organisations) considered they should not be allowed at all.

On the **online collection of statements of support**, 98% of respondents considered that the Commission should continue to offer its own servers for free. 67% of respondents replied that the Commission hosting of systems should be made permanent but it should remain optional and organisers should have the possibility to set up their own online collection systems. 87% of respondents would prefer the Commission system instead of developing an alternative system.

On the **possibility to sign using electronic identification means (e-ID)**, 67% of respondents considered that using e-ID would make the process more user-friendly, while 87% agreed that several ways for providing support online should be offered in parallel.

For the **central online collection system**, 47% of respondents considered that paper statements should be sent to national authorities and their number reported on the platform during the collection process. 31% think the statements should either be scanned and uploaded or manually entered into the central system, and 13% that paper collection should not be allowed.

On the **time limit for collecting signatures**, 27% of individuals and 40% of organisations suggested revising the timeline, mostly suggesting an extension to 18 months.

On the **time limit for submission of initiatives**, two-thirds of respondents suggested a deadline should be set (80% of organisations).

On the **examination procedure and possible refusals**, 77% of respondents suggested the inclusiveness of the public hearings in Parliament should be reinforced, notably by inviting experts or stakeholders representing different views. 55% of respondents considered the 3 months deadline for the Commission to prepare the public hearing and to adopt the Commission Communication in response to the initiative to be too short, preventing wide and transparent consultation. 70% of respondents suggested both Parliament and Council should be involved before the Commission takes a position on an initiative. Finally, a majority of respondents would like to be kept informed about the initiative they supported and its follow-up by the organisers (65%) and the Commission (52%).

To note that respondents did not always reply to all the questions of the public consultation. Results (%) are therefore calculated on the basis of the total number of replies to each specific question only. Respondents also had the opportunity to answer a number of open questions.

Position papers

A vast majority of position papers converge on the idea that the ECI instrument has great potential which, however, has been so far hampered by complex rules leading to excessive burdens and barriers for organisers in several areas. Streamlining some procedural and technical aspects for citizens and organisers are amongst the main recommendations to simplify the whole process. Contributions stress the importance of improving the examination phase and follow-up to successful initiatives reaching the one-million threshold.

Contributions also converge on the importance of allowing citizens' committees to have legal personality and to receive support by the Commission and improvements in the registration procedure. Other specific aspects are also highlighted by several stakeholders are the need for improvements in the registration phase and in the organisation and representation in the hearings at the European Parliament.

Many stakeholders suggest improvements in the online collection systems for the ECI, including that the Commission hosting offer for ECI online collection systems, made available free of charge to organisers should be made permanent. In addition, increasing accessibility to information should be facilitated for potential signatories through the use of social media for campaigning purposes. Furthermore, the online collection systems should be made available to people with disabilities. A strong call towards the harmonisation of data requirements across all Member States emerged, together with a simplification of online and paper collection formats. Concerning the right to sign an ECI, many actors agree on clarifying the rules for citizens/residents. According to several participants, the age to support an ECI should be lowered to 16 years old.

It is considered that organisers should have the flexibility to decide when to start collecting the statements of support. In addition, language accessibility should be improved and, for several respondents, the Commission should provide or fund translation services for an ECI to be translated into all official languages. Awareness on the ECI should be increased through specific campaigns.

Social media campaign

The main feedback received via the social media echoes the views raised by the position papers: the ECI is considered as an important tool of democratic participation and, at the same time, the complexity of the process and the burdens for organisers and citizens prevent the instrument. Three polls run in Twitter showed that a) the majority of respondents, to support an ECI, would not be restrictive but rather willing to provide a wide range of personal identification data, such as name, date of birth, address, nationality, national ID number, e-mail addresses; b) public authorities would be best suited for access to supporters' personal data.