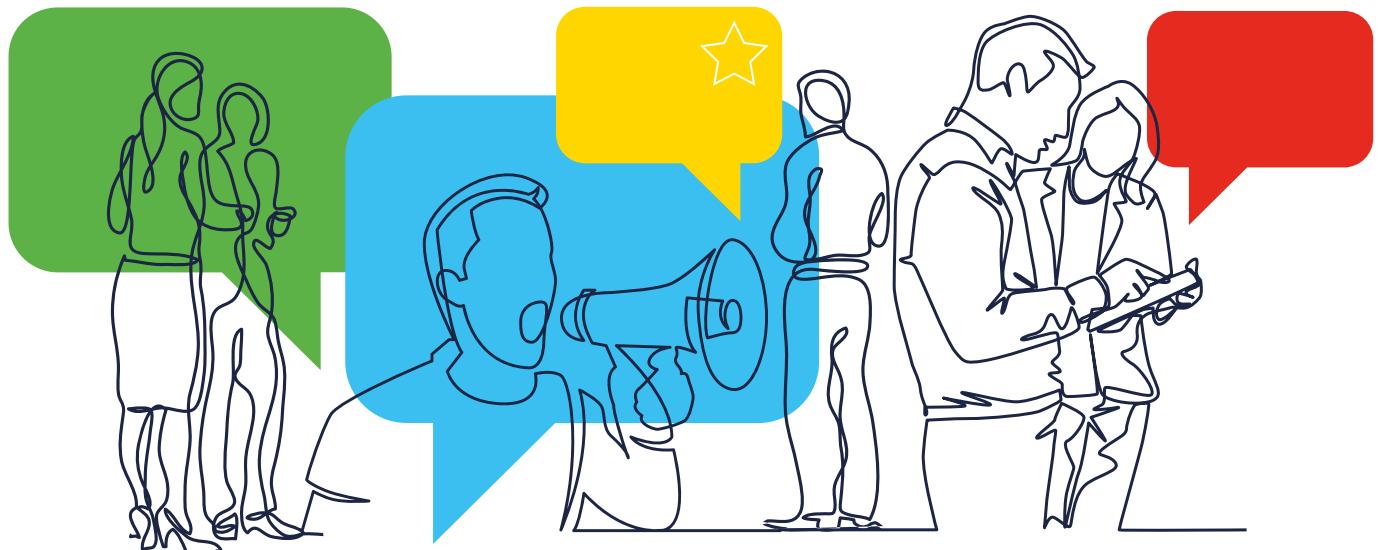


SUCCESS STORY 

EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FORUM

ONE OF US



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1

One of Us

One of Us, registered on 11 May 2012, was one of the first European citizens' initiatives that succeeded in collecting at least 1 million signatures. The initiative concerned legal protection for 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 One of Us initiative is an example of a successful initiative for which its organisers provided a draft legal act requesting three legislative amendments. Additionally, the organisers set up an organisation with its own legal personality dedicated to the campaign in September 2013, the 'One of Us Federation'.

The European Commission decided not to carry out the required legislative review as it considered the existing legislative framework appropriate.



2

The One of Us campaign

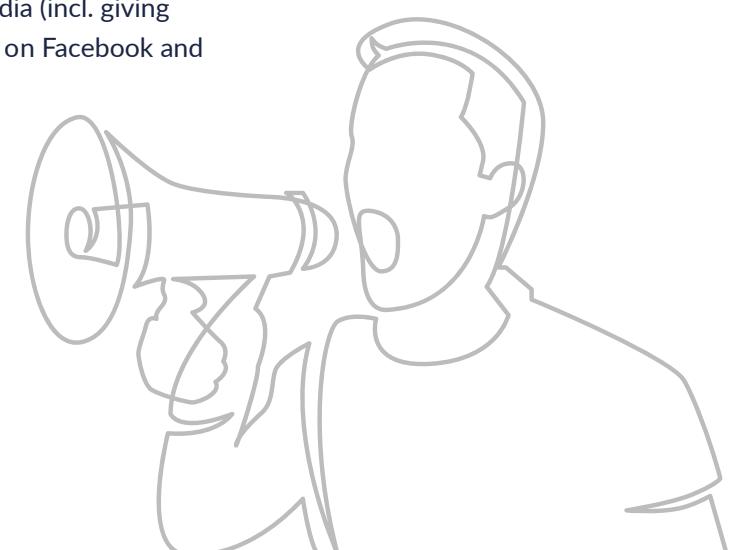
Preparation

NGOs from countries with solid and well-established pro-life movements (France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Italy) started contacting pro-life NGOs in other countries that could manage the campaign through national committees. They raised funds for the central coordination of the initiative in Brussels (to organise meetings, pay travel expenses, etc.) thanks to the contributions of the partner organisations. Furthermore, each national committee raised funds for its own national campaign.

Implementation

The campaign was set up right after the registration. (Please note that today, you have up to six months between registration and the start of the 12 months to collect signatures. When the 'One of Us' initiative was implemented, that was not the case yet). The first five months of the campaign "were mainly dedicated to build[ing] up some structure to develop the campaign within the 28 EU countries." The effective campaign and the collection of signatures was only implemented after their structure had been established. Consequently, the signatures were collected within 6 months.

The campaign applied a wide-spread approach to the use of media and online resources. To raise awareness and educate people, the organisers set up a dedicated website and reached out to traditional media (incl. giving interviews). At the same time, organisers were also active on Facebook and Twitter.



| Collection of signatures

An overall campaign strategy was agreed in which each national committee implemented its own version of the campaign, looking for a national ambassador to promote the initiative and encourage people to sign the statements of support.

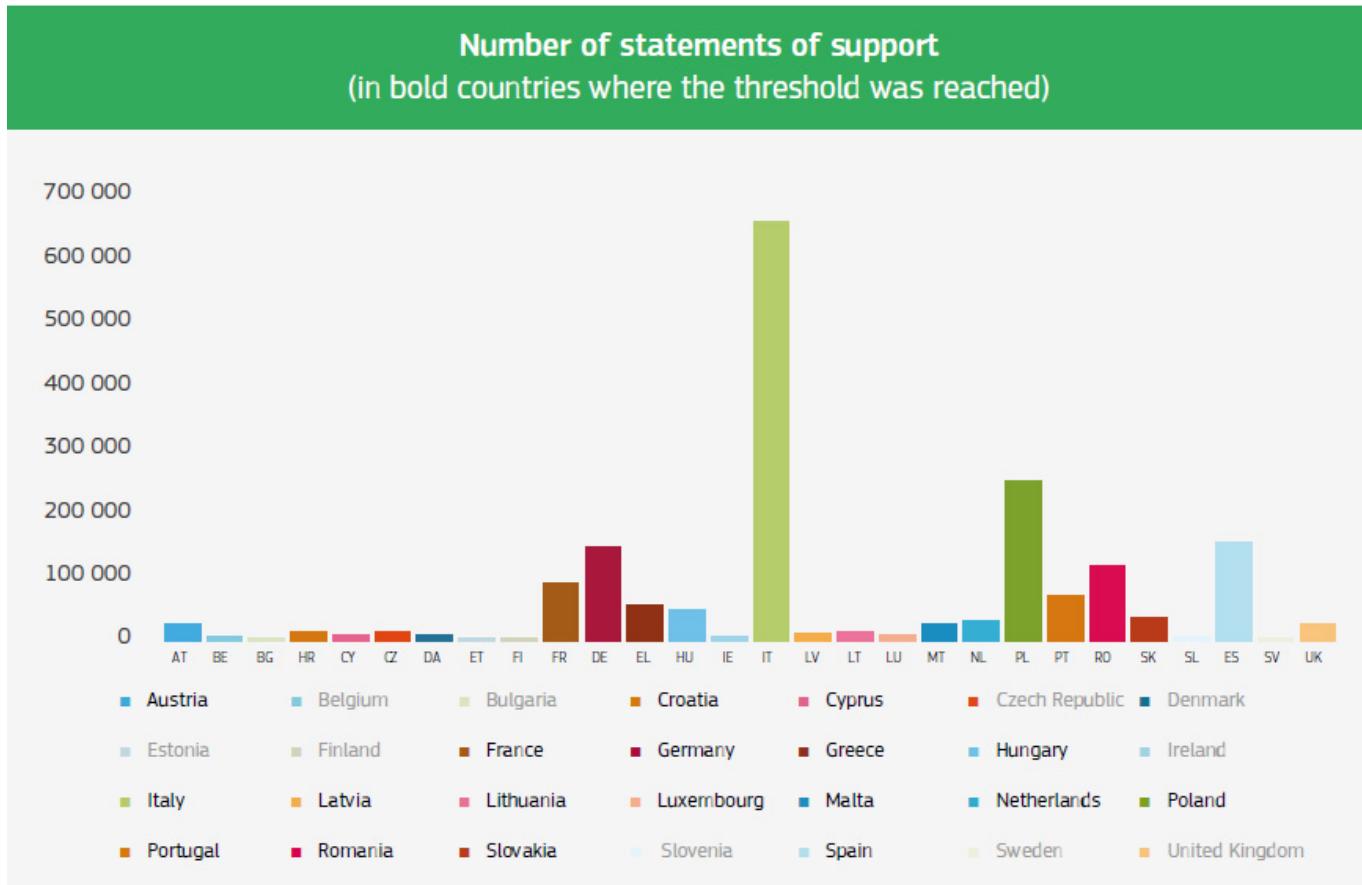
The strategy was based on the following milestones:

1. to meet the minimum signatures requirement in seven countries
2. to collect 1 million signatures
3. to collect 1.2 million signatures in case some were not validated
4. to collect 1.5 million signatures to strengthen the message of the initiative
5. to collect the maximum possible number of signatures from the largest possible number of countries.

One of the main challenges faced by the organisers was the technical difficulties of setting up the online collection system. However, in response to these difficulties faced by the organisers during the start-up phase of the European Citizens' Initiative, the Commission provided the hosting of the organisers' online collection systems beyond its obligations under the Regulation, as well as providing technical assistance and training. The Commission also exceptionally accepted statements of support collected until 1 November 2013 (beyond the official 12 months) for all initiatives registered before 31 October 2012.

When the collection phase ended on 1 November 2013, around 65 % of the signatures had been collected on paper by volunteers, and the remaining 35 % had been collected online





| Verification and submission

The initiative was submitted on 28 February 2014 along with certificates confirming the validity of 1 721 626 statements of support.

3

The impact of the One of Us campaign

Examination and Commission decision

The organisers met with the European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science and the Deputy Director-General for Development and Cooperation on 9 April 2014 (see [press release](#)). The organisers presented their initiative at a [public hearing](#) at the European Parliament the following day.

In its [Communication](#) of 28 May 2014 (see [press release](#)), the Commission stated it was not going to submit a legislative proposal because the funding framework had been recently debated and agreed upon by EU Member States and the Parliament.

More information on the follow-up actions can be found in the [European Citizens' Initiative website](#).



| Follow up

The organisers communicated the outcomes of the campaign to the supporters mainly via email. They “sent complete reports with the signatures collected to all the contacts in the different countries.” Here, the success of one country was aimed to motivate others. Once “the different countries gathered the minimum signatures required”, the organisers made use of that to push “the others to mobilise their national campaigns.”

The European citizens’ initiative was just the starting point of a longer lasting cooperation. In light of the campaign, the organisers “constituted the Federation One of Us that kept working at European and national level.” This example shows how a European citizens’ initiative cannot only help people make their voice heard in the first place but also to find like-minded individuals to follow a shared goal as part of a long-term strategy.

Despite their success, the organisers state that they would choose a slightly different approach if they were to implement another campaign. The main point to address would be the organisational setup of their campaign. “A solid structure in the different countries” would be envisaged by the organisers. This could enable more time during the campaign to collect signatures and would allow for even better long-term planning.



Hints and tips for future organisers

- Send your legal questions to the helpdesk of the European Citizens’ Initiative Forum.
- Communicate! Establish horizontal and vertical information flows within the campaign structure.
- Motivation is critical, so update national coordinators on signature collection weekly to encourage them.
- If the goal of collecting 1 million signatures seems too much to start with, set a series of clear country-specific and EU-wide targets and deadlines, and monitor progress carefully.
- Focus the campaign on countries where the topic of the initiative is already well known.
- Keep in mind that the final decision on the follow up to be given to successful European citizens’ initiative lies in the hands of the European Commission.



Lessons learned

- The organisers were aware that even if the Commission was not obliged to propose legislation, “a successful initiative would create considerable political pressure and debate across Europe”.
- Despite the fact that the initiative was publicly supported by both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, “the campaign was adversely affected by a lack of coverage in the media”.
- Last but not least, they focused the campaign on countries with solid pro-life movements (e.g. France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Italy). Few statements of support were obtained in countries where they lacked a solid national committee, where they had very limited financial resources.