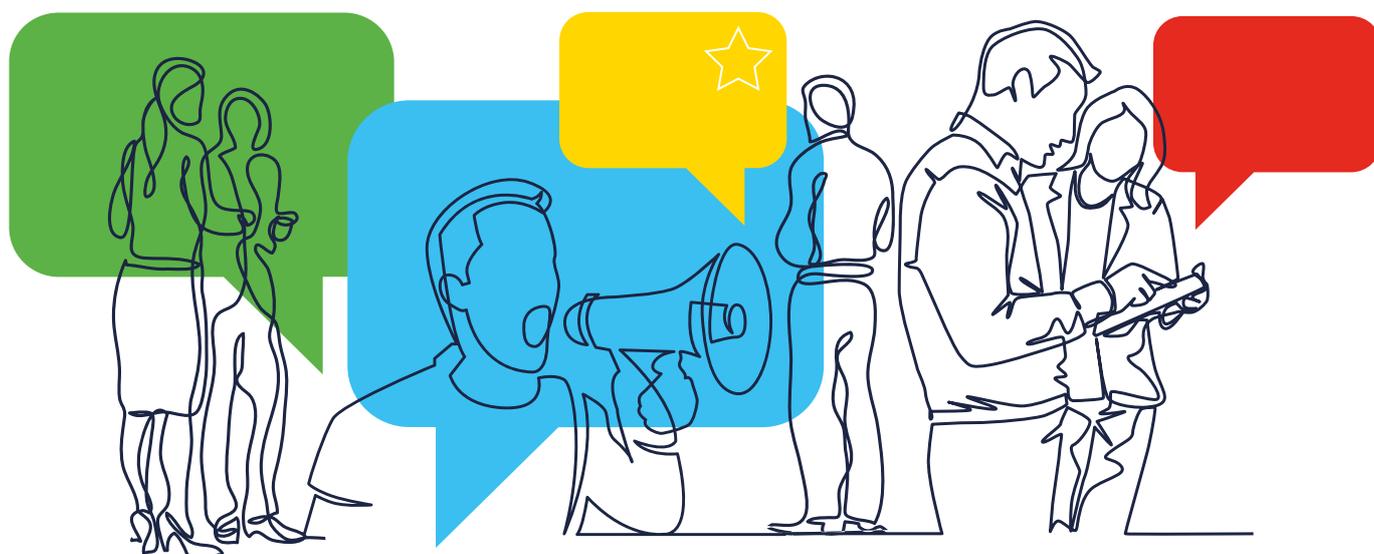




## EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FORUM

# MINORITY SAFEPACK – ONE MILLION SIGNATURES FOR DIVERSITY IN EUROPE



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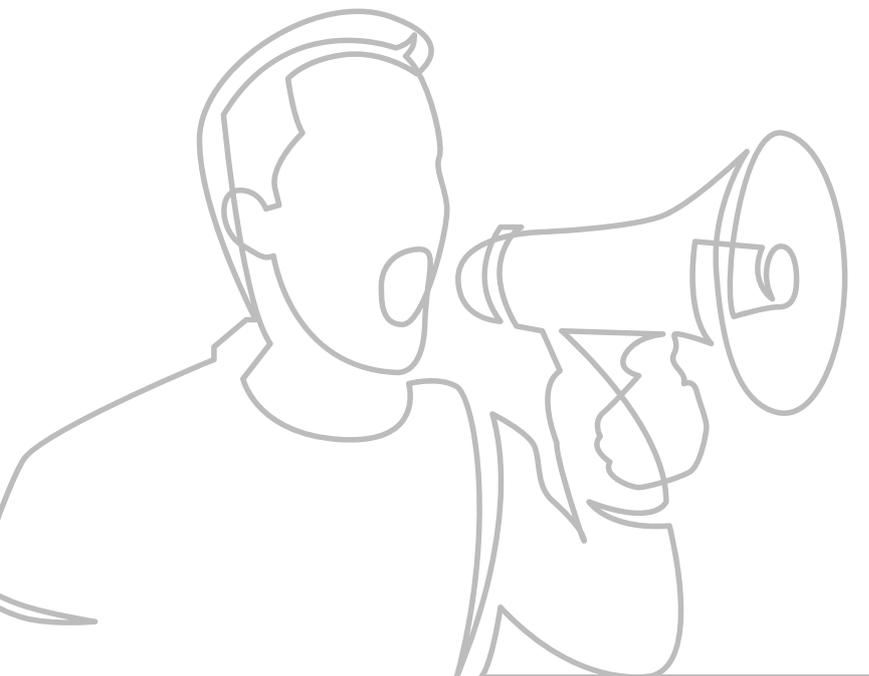


# 1

## Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe

The “Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe” initiative was registered on 3 April 2017, also marking the start of its one-year signature collection period. The Commission’s registration followed an initial decision taken in September 2013 to refuse registration for the initiative, which was annulled by the General Court of the European Union in February 2017.

The initiative requested the Commission to propose 11 legal acts in order to improve the protection of persons belonging to national and linguistic minorities and strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity in the Union. The initiative’s focus was placed on themes including regional and minority languages, education and culture, regional policy, participation, equality, audiovisual and other media content, and regional (state) support. It is noteworthy that 2 of the 11 acts proposed fell outside the framework of the Commission’s power to propose legislation. As a result, it was only possible for the initiative to collect statements of support on the basis of the 9 proposals that matched the Commission’s competences.



The nine proposals registered by the European Commission were:

1. EU Recommendation for the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity
2. Funding programmes for small linguistic communities
3. The creation of a Language Diversity Centre
4. The objectives of EU's regional development funds to include the protection of national minorities and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity
5. Research about the added value of minorities to our societies and Europe
6. Approximating equality for stateless minorities, e.g. Roma
7. A single European copyright law, so that services and broadcast can be enjoyed in the mother tongue
8. Freedom of service and reception of audio-visual content in the minority regions
9. Block exemption of regional (state) support for minority culture, media and cultural heritage conservation

The organisers view the European Citizens' Initiative as an essential instrument in the fight for minority rights. They stated that "it is the only strong tool of participative democracy in the EU, which can amplify the voice of European citizens and make it heard in the European institutions".

"Minority SafePack" succeeded in collecting 1,123,422 validated statements of support over the course of their one-year collection period. With regard to Member State thresholds, the initiative managed to reach the required number of signatures in 11 Member States.

After the signature collection phase concluded, the initiative went through the signature verification process and was formally submitted to the European Commission on 10 January 2020 (see [press release](#)). Next, the organisers met with European Commission Vice-President for 'Values and Transparency', **Věra Jourová** and Commissioner for 'Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth', **Mariya Gabriel** on 5 February 2020.

A public hearing at the European Parliament took place on 15 October 2020 (see [press release](#)) and the initiative was debated at a plenary session on 14 December 2020.



In the follow-up [resolution](#) adopted on 17 December 2020, the European Parliament expressed its support for the initiative (see [press release](#)).

During this phase, the Covid-19 pandemic was quite a challenge for the initiative. The public hearing had to be rescheduled twice and the pandemic made it difficult to keep minority rights on the public agenda.

The Commission adopted a Communication on the initiative on 14 January 2021 (see [press release](#)). However, the organisers were not satisfied with the Commission's response. In reaction to this dissatisfaction, on 24 March 2021, they filed an application for the annulment of the Commission's Communication at the General Court of the European Union.

Sources of funding (€)



■ The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)



## Success factors:

- Commitment to the cause and perseverance when things don't go according to the original plan.
- Well-designed campaigning strategy that matches the target audience. For instance, when campaigning for minority rights, reach out to people by using minority languages.
- Active campaigning on the field among local communities in different Member States while also targeting institutions and politicians on national and European levels.
- Identifying strong and reliable partners for the campaign.
- Building a hard-working and dedicated team.

## 2

# Minority SafePack campaign

## Preparation

The “Minority SafePack” citizens’ initiative was put together by a group of organisers supported by the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), the South Tyrolean People’s Party, the Democratic Alliance of the Hungarians in Romania and the Youth of European Nationalities. The preparations prior to the initial launch of the initiative in 2013 took two years.<sup>1</sup>

During this preparation period, the objectives the organisers had in mind were clear. They were especially keen to put together a series of legal proposals with a focus on **anchoring their demands into practice**. With this in mind, they organised meetings, had consultations with legal and minority rights experts, and made efforts to gain political support at different levels. They also made sure that the initiative’s **proposal was based on the EU Treaties and the wording was adapted accordingly**.<sup>2</sup>

What added additional challenges to the preparation phase of the initiative were its **broad focus and ambitious aims**. Instead of focusing on one single issue, the initiative wanted to take into account the numerous problems traditional minorities face in different Member States and to try finding comprehensive solutions to this large number of issues. The initiative’s aim was also much broader than just collecting one million signatures. In fact, setting off a debate in the European public space and using the one-year period to build a strong and long-standing coalition for minority rights were high on the agenda. The organisers did not want to limit themselves to collecting signatures in seven Member States but they wanted to present their initiative in as many European regions as possible.

The preparation phase was not easy for “Minority SafePack” as the first registration request was refused by the European Commission because the demands brought forward in the initiative fell outside its powers to propose EU legal acts. That Commission decision was challenged before the European Court of Justice. As a result, getting the initiative formally registered took several years and finally happened in 2017.

1 <https://www.fuen.org/en/article/What-will-be-the-next-steps>

2 <https://www.fuen.org/en/article/Expert-meeting-in-Brussels>



The campaign was coordinated by the Federal Union of European Nationalities, the umbrella organisation of European minorities uniting more than 100 organisations from 35 countries. As key steps during the preparation phase, organisers worked on developing a clear strategy, identifying partners and finding funds to run the European campaign.

## | Implementation

The “Minority SafePack” signature collection phase started in April 2017. The launch of the campaign was celebrated at an event at the Bánffy castle in Romania the following month, with over 400 supporters arriving from all corners of Europe and more than 50 journalists covering the event.<sup>3</sup> (Watch a video of the campaign launch [here](#))

Following the official launch event, several member organisations and partners in different Member States and regions immediately started **planning and organising their own events** in support of the initiative<sup>4</sup>. A **Europe-wide campaign strategy** was also developed, a new website launched with a focus on easy-to-understand stories from all across Europe, along with a “Minority SafePack” booklet and other promotional material<sup>5</sup>.

In the implementation phase, **the supporting organisations also divided responsibilities amongst themselves**. For instance, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) committed to collect 250 000 of the required 1 million signatures.

In order to reach their main target groups (national minorities), the organisers tried to link their campaign messages to the different problems faced by minorities in Europe. It was important to further personalise the messages, “as different minorities in Europe live under different circumstances depending mostly on the Member State they live in; some of them have full autonomy of decision in matters concerning them, while others are not even recognised. In the case of communities with problems, we tried to identify their most pressing problems and presented the Minority SafePack as a possible solution to them”.

The organisers also identified another important target group, namely citizens of Member States which have strong ties to their co-nationals living abroad, such as Denmark, Germany, or Hungary.



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3 <https://www.fuen.org/en/article/The-petition-campaign-for-the-Minority-SafePack-Initiative-started-in-Bonchida>

4 <https://www.fuen.org/en/article/The-Minority-SafePack-Initiative-is-now-available-for-online-signatures>

5 <https://www.fuen.org/en/article/The-Minority-SafePack-Initiative-is-now-available-for-online-signatures>

When it comes to the implementation of the campaign strategy, **translating materials and using a significant number of languages was essential.**

“Minority SafePack” ended up communicating in over 30 languages and organisers also decided to campaign in regional languages without an official EU status. This was important because up to 50 million EU citizens speak regional or minority languages and the goal was for every European citizen belonging to a national minority or language group to identify themselves with the initiative’s core message, that it serves his/her community’s best interest and that it is an investment in the life of the future generations. Hundreds of messages were tailored to the different target groups with success: “Imagine being one of the 41 thousand Ladin speakers in Northern Italy and seeing a post in Ladin on your social media feed!”<sup>6</sup>

**Obtaining strong support outside minority communities** across Europe was also essential to assuring success of the initiative. The need was to clearly state the campaign message: “We are on the right side. We mean to take nothing away from the majority communities!” as the president of the RMDSZ, **Hunor Kelemen** put it.<sup>7</sup> What is more, “Minority SafePack” organisers valued majority groups’ participation also because of their will to create a strong network of partners for “a coalition which will render the initiative unavoidable and inescapable for the European Commission.”

The organisers also wanted to implement their strategy at the European level by **seeking and winning the support of political leaders.** To do so, organisers travelled and visited many partners, institutions and member organisations in several countries. The “Minority SafePack” delegation also met with the Minority Intergroup of the European Parliament to discuss the campaign. The organisers called upon the Intergroup to help spread the message of the initiative within the Parliament, for MEPs to inform people and the media in their Member States about the initiative, and to help find partners to guarantee the initiative’s success. Co-chair **Nils Torvalds** assured the delegation of his support and several MEPs announced that they would become actively engaged in the campaign.<sup>8</sup> It was important for “Minority SafePack” to also have support within the Council of Europe. In order to secure this support, the “Minority SafePack” delegation visited the autumn session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

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6 [https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/blog/minority-safepack-advice-ongoing-initiatives-adapt-new-setting\\_en](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/blog/minority-safepack-advice-ongoing-initiatives-adapt-new-setting_en)

7 <https://www.fuen.org/en/article/FUEN-Congress-Cluj-NapocaKolozsvar-to-become-the-European-capital-of-minorities-in-May>

8 <https://www.fuen.org/en/article/MEPs-engage-in-petition-campaign-for-the-Minority-SafePack-Initiative>

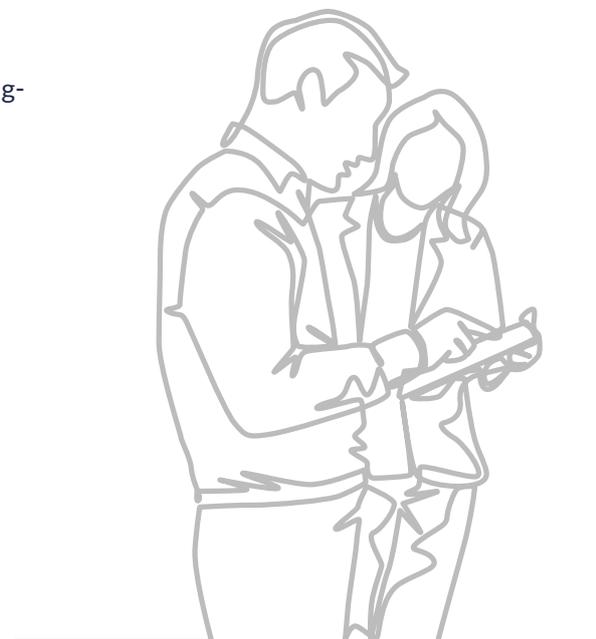
## | Collection of signatures

The contribution of the initiative's member organisations, regional partners and communities was crucial in collecting the required one million signatures. The campaign team worked actively to provide much needed information and share best practices and winning strategies with their network. The FUEN Presidium and the members of the Citizens' Committee were always available for visits in the Member States to raise awareness. Nevertheless, throughout the signature collection phase the network at the grassroots level was needed to tell personal stories and messages, and to show local communities that "Minority SafePack" was an "initiative that can improve the everyday life of minority communities and the 50 million EU citizens belonging to minority or language groups".<sup>9</sup>

The creation of a strong coalition of partners included organisations working on the topic with previous experience in campaigning. These partners were pivotal in the collection of signatures particularly in Lithuania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Spain. The organisers kept partners motivated by sharing the milestones reached and ensuring continuous communication amongst the members of the network. The collection of signatures focused on the Member States with large minority communities and in countries where the protection of minorities was perceived as more challenging.

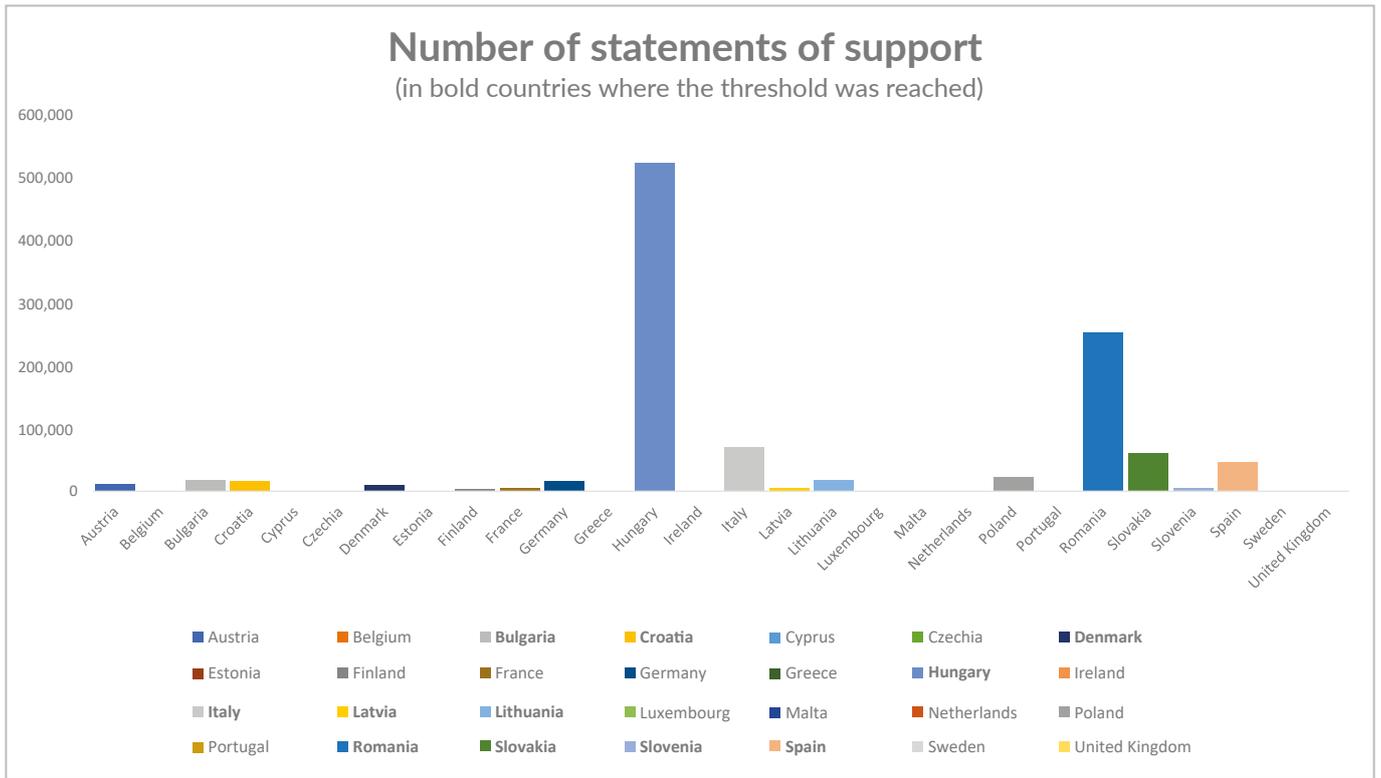
The technical conditions for signature collection were set in place in June 2017. The "Minority SafePack" campaign [website](#) allowed access to paper forms and the online signature tool. In September 2017, "Minority SafePack" organisers switched to the European Commission online collection system as it better matched their needs.

Besides optimising its online signature collection system, the initiative also relied heavily on collecting signatures **on paper forms**. This was done, for instance, by volunteers who started going door-to-door in their communities, introducing the campaign and supporting signatories in filling-in the required information. The organisers emphasised: "Our experience is that in order to collect signatures, we must go on the road, and talk to people."



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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.fuen.org/en/article/A-common-message-of-50-million-voices-and-your-personal-stories-The-winning-strategy-for-the-MSPI>



## | Verification and submission

“Minority SafePack” signature collection closed in April 2018, with 1,320,246 statements of support. These statements were sent to the national authorities responsible for their verification in each Member State. After the formal process, a final figure of 1,123,422 signatures was validated by national authorities. The required thresholds were reached in 11 Member States.<sup>10</sup>

Afterwards, the initiative was formally submitted to the European Commission on 10 January 2020.

‘Minority SafePack’ was one of the first initiatives to develop a long-term strategy for its submission to the European Commission. For this purpose, FUEN called together a team of European legal experts to develop a concrete set of legislative proposals based on the proposals of the initiative. It was basically a step-by-step guide on how to implement those points in the current legislative framework of the EU. These proposals were then presented to the European Commission along with the certificates of 1,123,422 validated statements of support.

The organisers also carried out an advocacy campaign as part of this strategy. The organisers met and presented the initiative to heads of state, government representatives, members of national parliaments, of the European Parliament and of regional governments. The organisers highlighted that the “results of the advocacy campaign were exceptional: many regions adopted statements of support, and the Bundestag, the Parliament of Hungary and the Lower Chamber of the Netherlands also voted on such resolutions. Even more, ‘Minority Safepack’ became the first European citizens’ initiative to have a plenary debate in the European Parliament, followed by a resolution voted by a large majority”.



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<sup>10</sup> [https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/blog/minority-safepack-advice-ongoing-initiatives-adapt-new-setting\\_en](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative-forum/blog/minority-safepack-advice-ongoing-initiatives-adapt-new-setting_en)

# 3

## The impact of the Minority SafePack campaign

### Examination and Commission decision

After the formal submission of the initiative on 10 January 2020, the organisers met with European Commissioners **Věra Jourová** and **Mariya Gabriel** on 5 February 2020.

Next, on 15 October 2020, a public hearing took place at the European Parliament. The hearing brought together MEPs from the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee and the Culture and Education Committee, in association with the Committee on Petitions, as well as other participating committees. Senior representatives from the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, and the Committee of the Regions also took the floor during the hearing. (See [press release](#))

The initiative was then debated at the European Parliament's plenary session on 14 December 2020. On 17 December 2020, the European Parliament expressed its support for the initiative by adopting a resolution with 524 votes in favour, 67 against and 103 abstentions. The Parliament pointed out that national and linguistic minorities in the EU are facing assimilation and are losing their languages, resulting in linguistic and cultural impoverishment. The European Parliament called on the Commission to propose legal acts to address the issue. (See [press release](#))

The European Commission adopted a Communication on 14 January 2021 setting out its actions in response to "Minority SafePack". It highlighted that inclusion and respect for the rich cultural diversity of Europe is one of its priorities and objectives. Nevertheless, it also stated that a wide range of measures addressing several aspects of the proposals of Minority SafePack have been taken since the initiative was originally presented in 2013. The Communication assessed each of the initiative's nine individual proposals on its own merits, taking into account the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. As a conclusion, the Commission considered that while no further legal acts were proposed, the full implementation of legislation and policies already in place provides a powerful arsenal to support the initiative's goals. (See [press release](#))



## | Follow up

After the publication of the Commission's Communication, the organisers of "Minority SafePack" expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of legislative follow-up. On 24 March 2021, the Citizens' Committee of the "Minority SafePack" filed an application at the General Court of the European Union for the annulment of the Commission's Communication on the initiative.



### Hints and tips for future organisers

- Actively reach out to different levels of potential stakeholders. Being present on the grassroots level is essential but also engaging with political leaders on the European and national levels is of paramount importance for your success.
- Take time to think about your target audience and make sure your communication strategy meets their needs. Take into consideration the different languages you can use to reach them, the importance of local stories that people can relate to, and both online and offline communication tools. It is important to reach your possible supporters through different channels.
- Things don't always go according to the plan. If you feel passionate about your cause, think about your campaign critically and challenge the structures and decisions if needed, and change course when required.
- Even though nowadays a significant part of signatures is collected online, don't overlook the value of going to the grassroots level. Getting involved, talking to people and engaging with local communities is an essential part of spreading your message and making sure your campaign reaches its goals.
- Try to be present on social media and convince local personalities to join your cause, it will boost the credibility of the initiative.