

# ACTIVITY REPORT

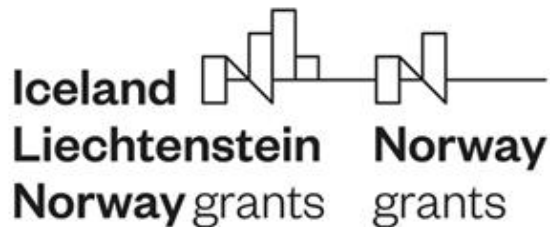
## 2021

**ecdas**

European Citizen Action Service



ECAS' activities in 2021 were supported by:



We would also like to warmly thank:

- **Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer** for their pro bono support, and
- **Mr. Daniel Cornelius Schily** for his personal support to ECAS.

# 1. CONTENTS

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<b>1. Contents</b>	<b>3</b>
About the European Citizen Action Service .....	4
Foreword by the Executive Director .....	5
<b>2. EU RIGHTS Focus Area</b>	<b>7</b>
Services to Citizens .....	9
Projects .....	17
Events .....	22
Advocacy Activities .....	23
PUBLICATIONS .....	24
<b>3. EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY Focus Area</b>	<b>25</b>
Services to Citizens .....	26
Projects .....	28
Events .....	35
Advocacy .....	38
Publications .....	40
<b>4. ECAS' Membership and Outreach</b>	<b>41</b>
ECAS' Membership .....	41
ECAS' Outreach .....	42
<b>5. Annexes</b>	<b>45</b>

# About the European Citizen Action Service

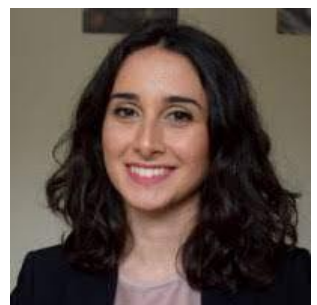
The **European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)** is an international, Brussels-based non-profit organisation with a pan-European membership and 30 years of experience in empowering citizens in order to create a more inclusive and stronger European Union by:

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 believes in an inclusive, transparent, citizen-centric and democratic European Union in which citizens' rights are at the heart of decision-making at all levels and in which citizens are informed, consulted and active participants.

ECAS delivers its mission by implementing projects, services to citizens, advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, research and high-level events in two focus areas: **EU RIGHTS** and **EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY**.





# Foreword by the Executive Director

## ECAS's 30th Anniversary Year – a Year of Reflection and Hopes for the Future



2021 was an eventful Year for both the European Union and ECAS on many levels!

While many of us have hoped that in 2021 the COVID-19 pandemic would either come to an end or would be uniformly managed across the EU, this expectation did not take place. The pandemic has further polarised our societies and the EU digital COVID certificate did not succeed in restoring freedom of movement in the EU as many Member States have imposed additional restrictions of their own, similar to the beginning of the health crises in 2020.

Civic activism has been impacted on a global and European level by the pandemic as well – we have seen many protests on divisive issues on the streets, further reduced civic and democratic space in many European countries, challenges to the efforts of organisers of European citizens' initiatives and non-inclusion and non-recognition of the organised civil society in important processes, such as the elaboration of the Recovery plans and even the Conference on the Future of Europe.

While, in the year of its 30th anniversary, ECAS could have wished to pause and reflect on its past in order to pro-actively plan its future, in the current societal and political environment in the EU, this was not an option. We needed to continue to support citizens in exercising their rights and strive for a more inclusive and stronger citizen-centric European Union.

This is the reason why in 2021 ECAS continued to provide a first-hand tailored legal advice to citizens moving across Europe and exercising their EU rights as consumers, voters, small and medium size enterprises and to support through a variety of means organisers of European citizens' initiative in challenging times. ECAS organised more than 14 events related to its mission in order to voice concerns and put forward proposals for improvement in its main areas of work: EU Rights and European Democracy. We have delivered 4 studies and publications on the [impact of COVID-19 on freedom of movement in the EU](#); [the potential of e-participation tools to foster democracy](#); [the impact of populism on the EU institution](#) and [the Power of Digital Democracy in EU legislation](#).

Moreover, we have launched two new alliances – **the Civic Hub for actors countering populism** and the **Alliance for citizenship competencies**.

ECAS is also leading the **civil society consultations on digital transformation** in the framework of the Civil Society Convention on the Future of Europe (a flagship initiative of Civil Society Europe) and took part on an expert level in two of the Citizens panels of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

We are looking with optimism and great hopes towards 2022, when, in addition to our ongoing work on EU Rights and European Democracy, we will launch new initiatives, such as the first EU-wide crowdsourcing process on the subject of 'air quality', involving citizens in 10 Member States and cross-sectoral alliances to counter disinformation in Central and Eastern Europe through our newly established branch office in Bulgaria.

We have accomplished a lot but more is here to come! I have no doubts that ECAS will succeed in being the front runner in our two focus areas for the benefit of European citizens!

None of this, however, would have been possible without the involvement and outstanding contribution to our mission of ECAS's Board, team and network members, and partners, to whom I would like to convey my sincere admiration for their commitment and professionalism!

Although we needed to postpone our planned 2021 in-person anniversary celebration to 2022 due to the pandemic, we are still proud to release our Anniversary videos, which take stock of what we have achieved and paves the way for the future through the eyes of our members, partners and close collaborators, to whom I warmly thank for sharing their experience in working with ECAS and wishes for its future! I invite you to watch them here:

- [Trailer: ECAS' 30th Anniversary Video](#)
- [European Citizen Action Service \(ECAS\) 30 Years Anniversary | 1991-2021](#)

Shorter videos on the fields covered by ECAS subjects can be accessed here:

- [ECAS Identity - 30th Anniversary Video](#)
- [Your Europe Advice - 30th Anniversary Video](#)
- [ECI Forum - 30th Anniversary Video](#)
- [Digital Democracy - 30th Anniversary Video](#)

Assya Kavrakova

*ECAS Executive Director*



## 2. EU RIGHTS Focus Area

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European citizenship lies at the core of the European project and freedom of movement is one of the most cherished rights of European citizens. In 2021, the COVID-19 crisis continued to negatively impact the mobility of citizens and businesses within the EU.

ECAS activities in the EU Rights Focus area aim at ensuring that the practical implementation of freedom of movement and other EU citizenship rights measure up to the spirit of the European legislative framework and the values of solidarity and non-discrimination.

In 2021, in the framework of the **'Your Europe Advice'** (YEA) service of the EU, ECAS legal experts provided advice to 19,002 European citizens. The quality of the service was maintained at a high level - more than 95% of the checked cases fulfilled all the quality assurance criteria (+ 1% compared to 2020) and 95% (-1%) of all replies were provided within the deadline. In 2021, the number of ineligible enquiries increased, probably as a result of Brexit, as some UK related enquiries were no longer covered by EU law, and certain COVID-19 questions were also considered ineligible for YEA. In terms of topics, YEA received a high number of social security enquiries (26%), followed by residence rights (20%) and entry (17%), which confirms the tendencies of the last six years. YEA received enquiries from citizens from all 27 EU countries and from Norwegian, Icelandic, and third-country nationals who are family members of EU citizens, the latter representing 11% of all the enquiries. YEA received less questions from British citizens (6%) compared to the previous years due to Brexit and much more enquiries from Italian (10%) and German (8%) citizens as well as less enquiries related to the UK compared to 2020 (it now ranks 7<sup>th</sup> compared to 5<sup>th</sup> last year) and more related to Germany, Spain, Italy, and France. The testimonials in Annex 1 illustrate the extent to which the service is greatly appreciated by citizens.

In the beginning of the year, ECAS concluded the projects **"Mobility and Political Rights Enhancement for EU Citizens"** (**MORE for EU Citizens**), launched in April 2019 and funded by the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM) and the two-and-a-half-year project **'Improving Inclusion of EU Mobile Citizens'** (**IMPEU**), coordinated by Agenzia per lo Sviluppo dell'Empolese Valdelsa (ASEV). The aim of MORE for EU citizens was to tackle the challenges experienced by EU mobile

citizens, in particular those that affect their rights to family reunification. IMPEU fostered political participation of EU mobile citizens and enhanced the capacity and knowledge of civil servants and relevant experts on EU citizenship and related political rights through roundtables with decision-makers, citizens dialogues, an online course for civil servants, [online Info Kiosks](#), [IMPEU toolkit for citizens](#).

In January, ECAS published the Study **“Under a Double Lockdown: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mobile EU Citizens’ Rights”**, conducted in the framework of MORE for EU Citizens. The main findings of the study indicate that the pandemic has both magnified the obstacles that mobile EU citizens have been facing in their host countries in recent years and given birth to new concerns. The research shows that mobile EU citizens were disproportionately affected by the pandemic and found it particularly hard to follow the moving target of divergent and constantly changing national rules. Based on these findings, ECAS has formulated recommendations to stakeholders on the role of civil society in the restoration of freedom of movement and of European citizens’ rights to the status quo ante.

In March 2021, ECAS, together with Alliance for Europe, ICPA and FEANTSA, launched the [“Hier in Europa” campaign](#) on freedom of movement in Germany. The campaign was organised in the framework of the project **“CORE Freedom of Movement Narrative Change Campaign”** and was funded by EPIM and the Porticus Foundation. The objective of the campaign was to positively shift the attitudes of movable middle audiences to EU mobility in Germany in order to open the space for support for targeted policy proposals, especially in light of the upcoming Communication on Directive 2004/38. The results of the campaign showed clearly that a value-based messaging approach to middle audiences can be used to shift public attitudes to strengthen support for the EU mobility and also to reduce anxiety around challenging frames in the mobility debate, e.g. the competition frame.

In October 2021, ECAS launched the project **“A European Positive Sum Approach towards AI tools in support of Law Enforcement and safeguarding privacy and fundamental rights’ (Pop AI)”**, with the objective to foster trust in artificial intelligence (AI) for the security domain via increased awareness, ongoing social engagement, consolidating knowledge on the topic and offering a unified European view across Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs). The aim is to create an ecosystem that will form the structural basis for a sustainable and inclusive European AI hub for Law Enforcement.

In January 2021, ECAS held the third edition of its **“State of the Union Citizens’ Rights”** event, an annual conference aimed at identifying challenges faced by EU citizens to their right to free movement and the solutions to overcoming them. The event started with a speech by the Commissioner for Justice, Didier Reynders, who presented the 2020 EU Citizenship Report and outlined the actions the European Commission (EC) will take in the near future to make sure that EU citizens can exercise their rights and was attended by 82 participants, while an additional 489 people viewed the live recordings on Facebook.

The conference also featured the presentation of the winners of the first edition of **ECAS’ Awards**: the European Disability Forum (EDF) in the category “Practices aimed at alleviating the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on mobile EU citizen”; Romanians in Belgium (ROMBEL) in the category “Practices aimed at improving the social and cultural inclusion of mobile EU citizens”; Paris municipality and its project “INCLUDE” in the category “Practices aimed at improving the political inclusion of mobile EU citizens”; and the European Future Forum (EFF) with their Euro Babble initiative in the category “ECAS’ choice”.



In 2021, ECAS continued advocating for better enforcement of EU citizens' rights and calling on the decision-makers to work towards enhancement of EU rights, especially taking into account the European Commission's commitment to publish the new Communication on Directive 2004/38/EC. ECAS provided **recommendations to their own-initiative report** on "EU Citizenship Report 2020: empowering citizens and protecting their rights" of the European Parliament, which were taken into consideration in the revised [report](#). ECAS also contributed to the **public consultations on supporting EU citizens' right to vote and stand as candidates** in another EU country, providing comments and recommendations based on its research and the results of previous projects, such as the [FAIR EU](#) and the [IMPEU](#) on the issues of eligibility, awareness raising, facilitating registration on the roll and monitoring the implementation of EU rights.

## Services to Citizens

### Your Europe Advice (YEA)

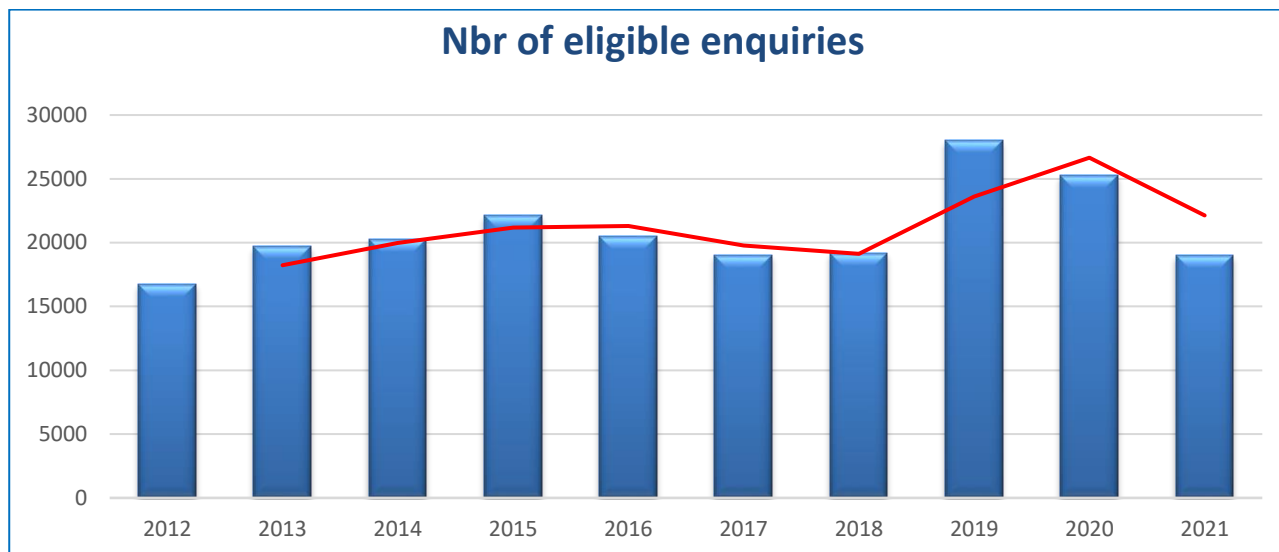
Your Europe Advice is an EU advice service on the personal EU rights of citizens and businesses that ECAS manages under contract with, and on behalf of, the European Commission.



ECAS' team of approximately 60 lawyers, who cover all 24 official EU languages and are experts in both EU law and national law in all EU countries, respond to citizens' questions within one week, free of charge and in the language chosen by the user. Enquiries can be submitted either via an [online form](#) or by phone (00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11).

### Performance in 2021

In 2021, YEA legal experts replied to **19,002 enquiries**, which is a decrease of 24.8% compared to the previous year, which could be due to the COVID-19 crisis which had a serious impact on the movement of citizens and businesses within the EU.

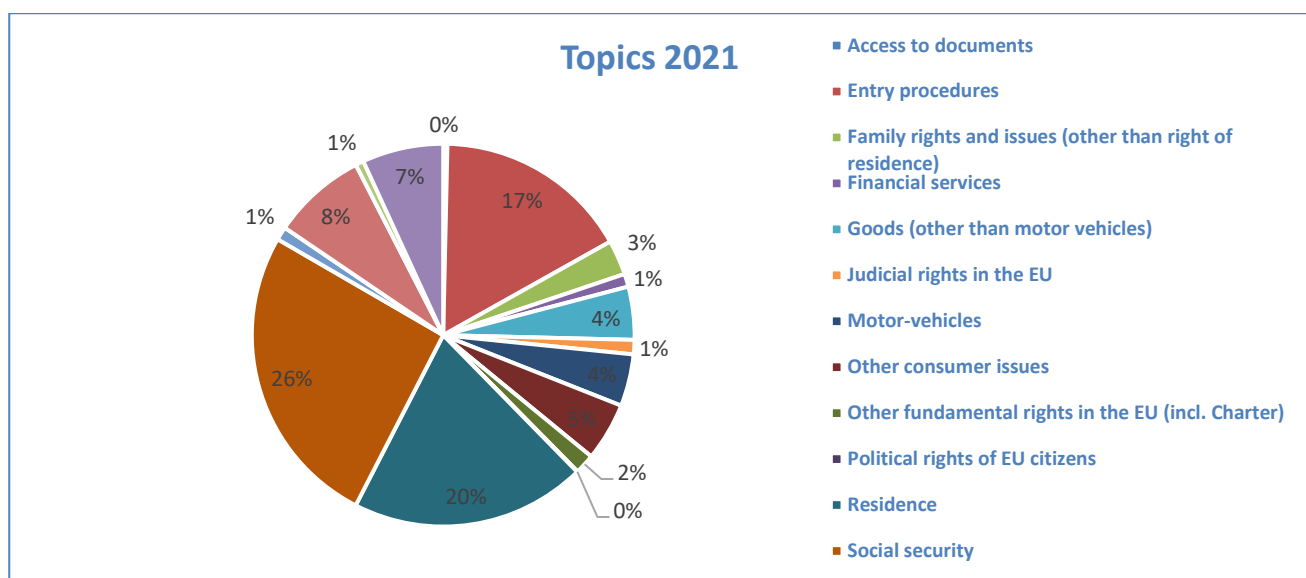


The quality of the service was maintained at a high level. Under the service contract, the European Commission requires ECAS to ensure a high level of quality of the replies and to carry out monthly quality controls based on a sample of the eligible enquiries that “should be 10% of all cases” and “not less than 150”. The quality of an answer is determined on the basis of nine criteria (e.g. the relevance of the legal references provided or whether the advice is complete) which shows how well the experts are performing and also counts as a measure of their overall competences. The results ensure that the management team can provide targeted feedback and guide the experts if and where necessary. The quality control thus also acts as a guarantee mechanism that citizens receive good and useful answers.

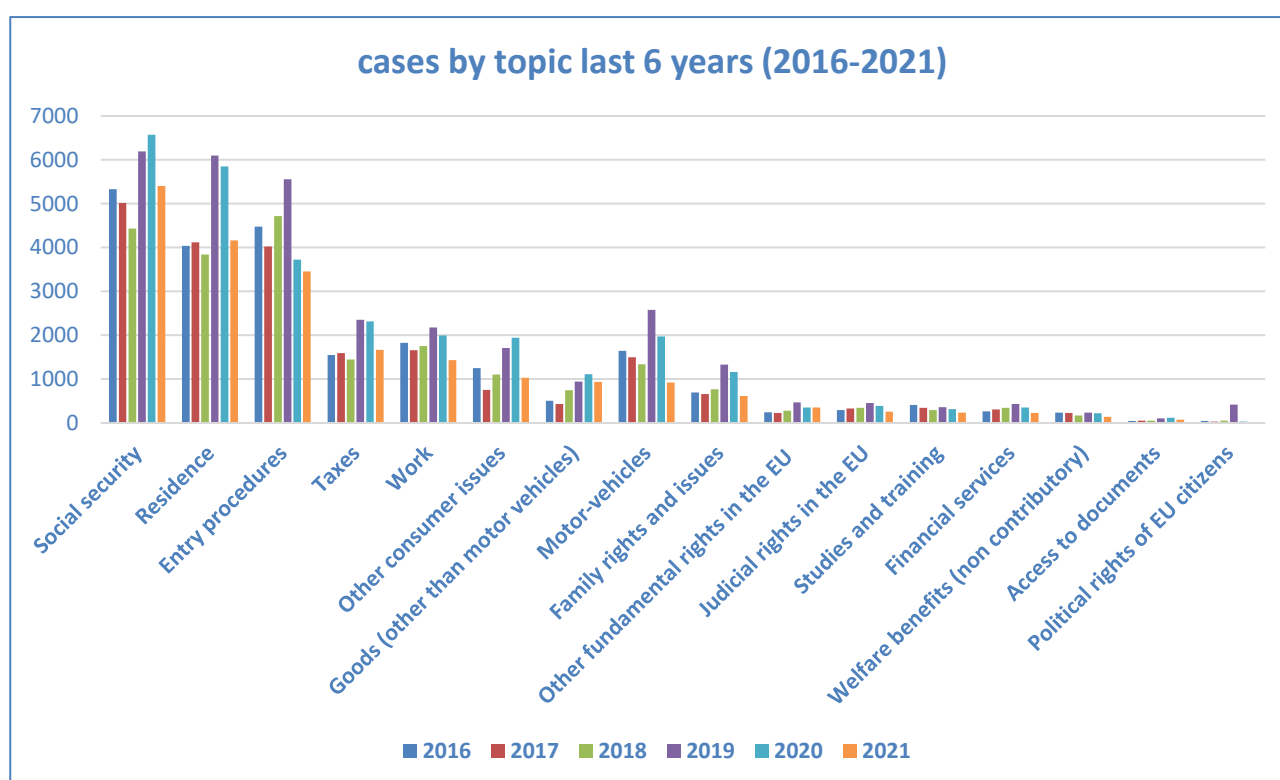
In 2021, more than 95% of the checked cases fulfilled all the quality assurance criteria (+ 1% compared to 2020) and 95% (-1%) of all replies were provided within the deadline.

### Nature of the Enquiries

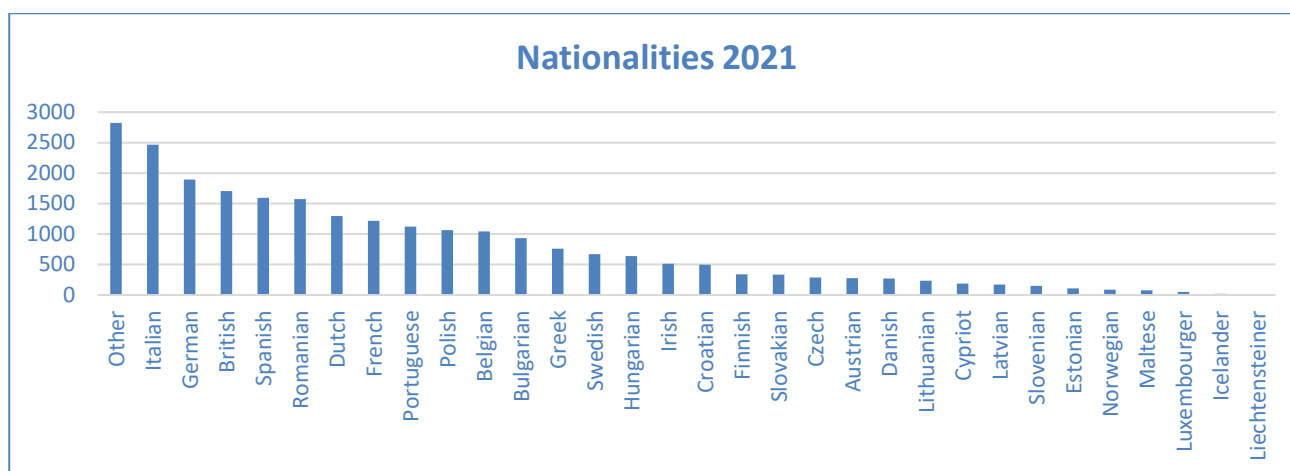
In 2021, the number of ineligible enquiries increased, probably as a result of Brexit, as some UK related enquiries were no longer covered by EU law, and due to the instructions from the Commission related to COVID-19 enquiries, some of which were also considered ineligible for YEA.



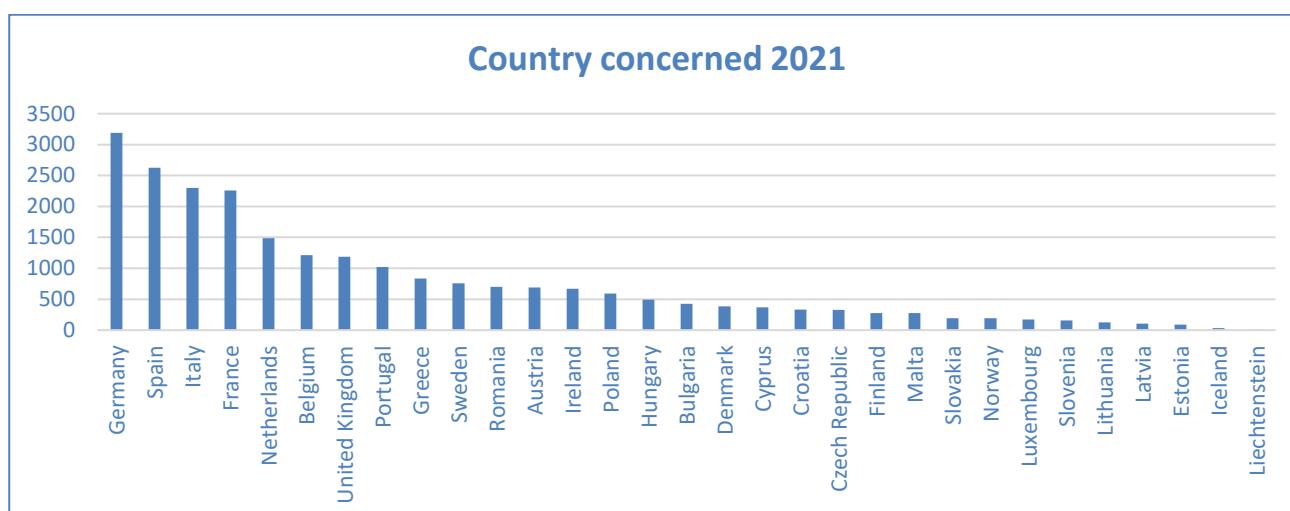
In terms of topics, in 2021, YEA received a high number of social security enquiries (26%), followed by residence rights (20%) and entry (17%), which confirms the tendencies of the last six year



YEA received enquiries from citizens from all 27 EU countries and from Norwegian, Icelandic, and third country nationals who are family members of EU citizens, while 11% of enquiries were from third country nationals. YEA received less questions from British citizens (6%) compared to the previous years due to Brexit and much more enquiries from Italian (10%) and German (8%) citizens.



The enquiries received related to all 27 Member States, as well as Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. YEA received less enquiries related to the UK compared to 2020 (it is now on the 7th position compared to the 5th position last year) and more related to Germany, Spain, Italy, and France.



## Outreach Activities

Four outreach activities (two online and two in person) were conducted by YEA experts in Austria, Greece, Lithuania, and Slovakia. The number of participants varied significantly according to the type of event, but based on the feedback reports of the experts, more than 500 citizens may have been reached.

The outreach activities can be categorised as network meetings and were organised by different services, networks, or agencies: University of Graz, the University of Peloponnese, the European Commission representation in Vilnius and the European Labour Agency in Bratislava. YEA experts complied with the two main objectives: presenting and explaining YEA to potential multipliers and 'institutional' users and liaising with representatives from other networks who provide help and advice to citizens and businesses.

## Your Europe Web Portal Assistance

The [Your Europe portal](#) is an EU website designed to provide comprehensive first-stop information and signposting to assist citizens and businesses in understanding, exercising and enforcing their rights and entitlements throughout the European Union under EU law. YEA Team contributes to maintain high quality and accuracy of the information on the Your Europe Portal, both on EU legislation and national implementation rules. Each time a legal expert or a Member of the Management Team identifies information gaps or contradictions, they are shared with the Editorial board of the YE Portal, which consequently acts upon them.

## **EU Legal Updates**

The Management Team ensures that the experts are kept up-to-date with new legislation and case law by providing them with a monthly newsletter entitled 'EU Law Updates'. This newsletter is tailored to the continuously evolving informational needs of the experts. It includes the latest news concerning the EU, information on recent infringement procedures undertaken by the European Commission and an analysis of the latest European Court of Justice judgments relating to areas dealt with by experts in their enquiries. Each month, by way of example, the newsletter also publishes one or more of the experts' answers to the enquiries which are considered to be either exemplary or interesting. Outreach activities, interesting websites, developments in individual Member States and references to academic EU articles, which may be relevant for the experts, are also included in this newsletter.

## **Feedback Reports**

At the request of the European Commission, ECAS provides four feedback reports to the Commission per year. These reports include details of the cases handled by the experts of YEA and a policy analysis of the topics covered in the enquiries. The reports provide a clear overview of the main problems citizens and businesses encounter while exercising their EU rights and help the Commission in understanding which issues require their attention.

The ECAS' Management Team also provides the Commission with a Monthly Report which focuses on the trends of the specific month. These reports include information on the number of enquiries, the quality of the answers, transfers made to and from SOLVIT and EDCC, late enquiries and operational matters. In addition, each month an exemplary or interesting answer of an expert to an enquiry is published by way of example.

## **YEA annual trends**

Based on the enquiries responded to in 2020, ECAS produced a [report](#) that identifies key trends in obstacles to free movement. This was published in April 2021. These trends provide useful information about the problems experienced by citizens who seek to exercise their right to free movement and can be consulted by citizens and organisations on the website of ECAS.



## Your Europe Advice – Annual Trends 2020



**25.281**

Enquiries handled by ECAS legal experts on EU-rights.

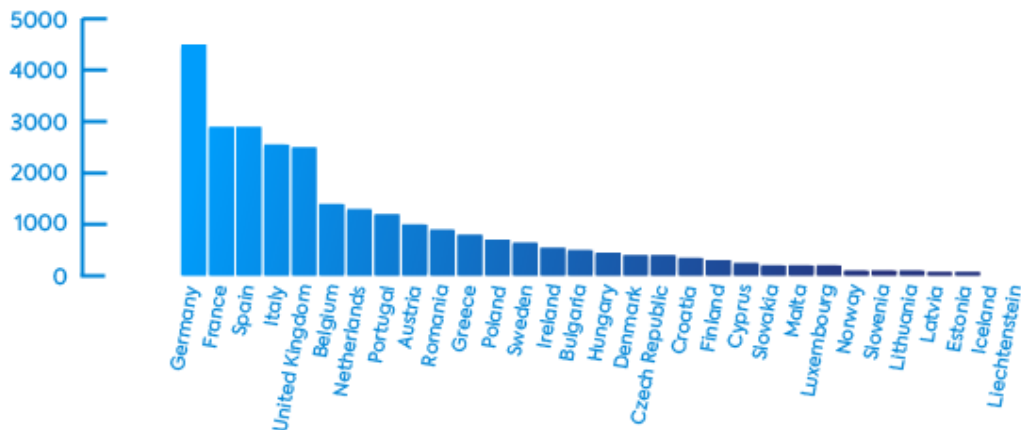


These enquiries provide an insight into the problems experienced by EU citizens and businesses regarding their personal EU rights, including freedom of movement.



In 2020, the COVID-19 crisis had an enormous impact on the movement of citizens and businesses within the EU.

### Number of enquiries per country



### Nature of the enquiries received (%)

In 2020, the most important topics, in terms of the number of received enquiries were social security, residence and entry procedures.

YEA received a higher number of social security enquiries (23%), mainly because of the COVID-19 crisis and Brexit.

There was also a significant increase in questions relating to the free movement of goods and enquiries linked to consumer rights.



23%  
Social Security



20%  
Residence



13%  
Entry Procedures



8%  
Taxes



7%  
Work



7%  
Motor - Vehicles



7%  
Consumer Issues



13%  
Other

### Top 5 Sub-Topics of Concern 2019 vs 2020





## Residence: Family Rights

An American citizen accompanied her Dutch husband to Greece where she attempted to register as an EU family member but was refused registration. She was told that she needed an independent reason to register her presence in Greece.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Irish authorities have accumulated delays in issuing residence cards to non-EU family members of EU nationals. The Ecuadorian spouse of a Polish national did not receive a residence card and was issued with the temporary residence document (a Stamp 4 letter) while his residence card application was pending. Prospective employers refused to acknowledge his right to work on the basis of this letter and insisted on presentation of a residence card.

## Our recommendation

Member States should ensure that national legislation is clear and sufficiently detailed to guarantee attainment of the Directive 2004/38/EC objectives. If necessary, national laws should be supplemented by adequate administrative guidelines providing clear instructions on the application of the Directive 2004/38/EC.

The definition of "durable relationship" should be harmonised for the benefit of Member States' authorities and national administrations should be trained to appropriately apply the rules. It should also be clear for the administrations that non-EU family members are not required to leave the host Member State and re-apply for an entry visa simply because the residence card application process is taking too long.



## Social Security: Country of Insurance

A German citizen living in Munich and working in Denmark commenced working from Munich due to COVID-19. When he sought advice on the necessary forms and where to submit these to ensure his social security rights while working remotely, both the German and Danish authorities failed to advise him. The Danish authorities directed him to apply in Germany while the German authorities advised him to apply in Denmark.

An Italian citizen entered the Netherlands with a view to finding employment there. On the day after he commenced working, his employer's business closed as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown. The citizen had not yet signed an employment contract. He was unable to return to Italy and did not know which country was competent for social security.

## Our recommendation

Administrative cooperation between national authorities must be improved. Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004 on the coordination of social security schemes provides for this. National authorities must be trained in the applicable social security rules when citizens move within the EU.

Requests for information should be attended to without delay and, in any event, within three months. In exceptional situations, when it is not possible to respond within three months, the competent authority should indicate deadlines and provide updates.



## Social Security: Health Care, Sickness or Maternity

A Slovak national working in Germany was required to remain in Slovakia for two weeks in COVID-19 quarantine. He queried who would pay his sickness benefits. He was advised by the Slovakian authorities that he was not insured in Slovakia. The German authorities advised that as the quarantine was declared by Slovakia rather than Germany, they were not competent for the benefits.

An Italian citizen was residing in Belgium. His mother, who lives in Italy, had come to visit him. However, following the lockdown, she was unable to return to Italy. She suffers from an illness which requires injections. She went to the pharmacy and to the hospital to obtain treatment, but both the pharmacy and hospital refused to consider her European Health Insurance Card.

## Our recommendation

Raise awareness of patients' rights to reimbursement (independently of possession of an EHIC) for cross-border healthcare to ensure that everyone who needs care knows his/her options.



## Entry: Others

Hungary banned all foreign citizens, including EU nationals who did not have residence in Hungary, from entry into the country from 1 September 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the German partner of an Hungarian citizen could not visit her in Hungary and their right to family life was infringed.

A Slovakian pensioner living in the Netherlands wished to return to Slovakia to be close to her family during the COVID crisis but, without proof of permanent residence there, she was not allowed to enter the country.

## Our recommendation

The COVID-19 crisis deserved an EU coordinated response and not a series of unilateral actions from each EU Member State. EU citizens' rights should be safeguarded even more in times of crisis when some citizens are particularly vulnerable.



## Social Security: Old Age Benefits

An Italian citizen who worked for 23 months in the UK, queried the future of his pension accumulated in the UK and whether it would be added to his Italian pension. He asked whether this would happen automatically or if he should contact the Italian social security authority (INPS).

An Irish citizen worked in Italy, Spain, Ireland and the UK. She is now 69 years old and while she receives pro rata pensions from the UK and Ireland, she is unable to receive any pension payment from either Italy or Spain. She sought assistance in enforcing her pension rights under EU law.

## Our recommendation

Pensioners need quality information both from the sending country before departure and the receiving country upon and after arrival. The obligation of communication and cooperation between Member States as stated in Article 76 of Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004 should be reinforced by the European institutions.

## **Brexit Webinars**

YEA still receives Brexit related enquiries in many areas. The experts have a deep knowledge of EU law and of the Withdrawal Agreement and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, but there were quite some challenging issues on which they needed additional training.

For this reason, in cooperation with the European Commission, three webinars were organized in 2021, covering questions related to entry, residence, work, and social security. Each time, the event brought around a hundred participants.

## **YEA training seminar**

On 18 and 19 November 2021, the European Commission and ECAS organised the annual training seminar of Your Europe Advice. Due to COVID-19, the seminar took place online for the second time. The internal session with the experts was organised on 17 November. Besides the YEA experts, attendees from SOLVIT, EEN, EDCC and the Commission were also present.

The content of the training focused on several topics e.g., Brexit, teleworking and COVID-19, Directive 2004/38, European Enterprise Network and European Labour Authority.

The seminar was attended by more than 75 people. The aim of the seminar was to inform the legal experts of new developments in EU law and the service's achievements during 2021, and to keep them up-to-date with the new challenges that the European Union is currently facing, e.g. COVID-19.

In 2021, the experts were trained on the latest legislative updates and developments in areas such as the impact of Brexit on the social security coordination and on residence and entry rights, cross-border VAT in e-commerce, EU Digital COVID certificate, or the legal challenges of teleworking.

## **YEA chat**

During the exceptional time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ECAS' Management Team made sure to keep the experts informed on the latest news and legislative developments regarding EU law and COVID-19 related policies, by organising a bimonthly chat where these topics were discussed in detail.

## **Other training tools**

On the YEA internal platform all useful information for the experts is being grouped. The platform is only accessible after registration following a personal invitation. The platform has an archive with all the reports, a chat function where the YEA bimonthly chat takes place and a forum where interesting links and documents are being shared.

In 2021, the YEA internal platform has been revamped. The archive has been organised according to different years enabling an easier search option for the experts. In addition, the lay-out and the user interface have been optimised and are now more user-friendly.

To support the experts' signposting in their answers, YEA Management Team publishes annually in December the so called 'Experts' Guide' in which links to government websites and other organisations are grouped per category linked to EU law, e.g., entry, residence, social security, vehicles, VAT. For every EU Member State, a significant number of links has been included in the guide. The links are checked every year and updated where needed. This way, the experts have a clear reference overview which makes their work easier.

## Projects

### MORE for EU citizens

In January 2021, ECAS concluded the project "Mobility and Political Rights Enhancement for EU Citizens" (MORE for EU Citizens), launched in April 2019 and funded by the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM). The aim of the project was to tackle the challenges experienced by EU mobile citizens, in particular those that affect their rights to family reunification and political participation. The overall objective was to improve enforcement of EU citizens' rights by the EU institutions, to increase awareness among EU citizens on what their EU rights are and to involve national decision makers in the discussions on the obstacles that mobile EU citizens face.

In January, ECAS published the Study **"Under a Double Lockdown: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mobile EU Citizens' Rights"**.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions introduced by the EU Member States had an unprecedented impact on the freedom of movement and on EU mobile citizens. With this in mind, ECAS decided to conduct a comprehensive research project on the effects of the pandemic and its related measures on freedom of movement in the EU.

Through two surveys on the ECAS crowdsourcing platform, empirical evidence from mobile Europeans and from NGOs working on citizen rights and mobility in the EU was gathered. The former were asked to share their first-hand experiences during the pandemic, while the latter were invited to propose changes to the overall approach to European mobility in light of COVID-19. Additionally, ECAS organised a dedicated session during the 18th European Week of Regions and Cities in October 2020 in order to gather evidence from a group of relevant stakeholders in the area of EU mobile citizens' rights.

The main findings of the study indicate that the pandemic has both magnified the obstacles that mobile EU citizens have been facing in their host countries in recent years and given birth to new concerns. The research shows that mobile EU citizens were disproportionately affected by the pandemic and found it particularly hard to follow the moving target of divergent and constantly changing national rules. Based on these findings, ECAS has formulated recommendations to stakeholders on the role of civil society in the restoration of freedom of movement and of European citizens' rights to the status quo ante.



In June 2021, ECAS concluded a two-and-a-half-year project '[Improving Inclusion of EU Mobile Citizens' \(IMPEU\)](#), coordinated by Agenzia per lo Sviluppo dell'Empolese Valdelsa (ASEV). The aim of IMPEU was to foster political participation of EU mobile citizens and enhance the capacity and knowledge of civil servants and relevant national, regional and local experts on EU citizenship and related political rights.

The project was funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Commission and is implemented by ECAS in consortium with:

- Agenzia per lo Sviluppo dell'Empolese Valdelsa (ASEV) - Italy
- Institut za Podgotovka na Slujiteliv Mejdunarodni Organizacii Zdruzenie (ITPIO) - Bulgaria
- Astiki Mh Kersoskopiki Etareia Helping Hand (HELPING HAND) - Greece
- Dimos Vrilission (MUVRI) - Greece
- Magenta Consultoria Projects SI (MAGENTA) – Spain

Multiple activities were organized as part of the project with an aim to improve political participation and inclusion of mobile EU citizens, for example: roundtables with decision-makers, citizens dialogues, an online course for civil servants, [online Info Kiosks](#), [IMPEU toolkit for citizens](#), Memorandum of Understanding.

### CORE Freedom of Movement Narrative Change Campaign



In March 2021, ECAS, together with Alliance for Europe, ICPA and FEANTSA, launched the '[Hier in Europa](#)' campaign on freedom of movement in Germany. The campaign was organised in the framework of the project CORE Freedom of Movement Narrative Change Campaign and was funded by the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM) and the Porticus Foundation.



The objective of the campaign was to positively shift the attitudes of movable middle audiences to EU mobility in Germany in order to open the space for support for targeted policy proposals, especially in light of the upcoming Communication on Directive 2004/38.

Based on the research, the campaign targeted two segments that are among the conflicted, movable middle at European level. Together they make up approximately 40% of the European public:

- Pragmatists (23% of Europeans) who believe, on balance, that migrants create jobs but are uncertain whether they contribute a lot to government budgets and are concerned that EU membership means not enough control at the borders, preferring skills-based restrictions;
- Dissatisfied Conservatives (21% of Europeans) who agree that free movement of people, goods and services is positive but think that migrants take away jobs and take out of government budgets, and that it's better for a country if everyone shares the same customs and traditions.

The two German segments from the movable middle, which matched the description above were the so called **Established** and the **Detached**:



Considering their profiles and finding an overlapping value space to engage these segments, the focus of the messaging to these middle groups based on an appeal to the following values:

- Personal Pride - honesty, ethics, simplicity
- Community bond - local community pride aspect building on family and interdependence (more for the established, than for the detached)
- Work ethic - work ethic, contribution, fairness, reliability and responsibility
- Safety - Safety/stability based more on interdependence, rather than a focus on security per se.

In order to achieve the goals of the Campaign, [three videos](#) were created showcasing issues and difficulties that mobile EU citizens face in Germany. In addition, a compilation of [testimonials](#) from EU citizens living in Germany was also produced.

The results of the campaign indicate that in terms of:

a. *Reach* - **The campaign reach was very high- between 17-22% to the target segments in the target cities of Berlin, Munich, Cologne**

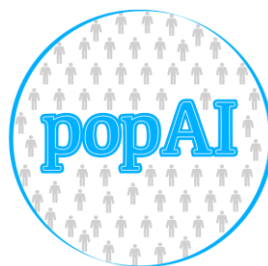
b. *Response* – **The campaign material significantly shifted attitudes in a positive direction on mobility, had over 1 million views, but did not create significant online responses or interest from media, influencers or political leaders.**

The evidence shows clearly that a value-based messaging approach to middle audiences can be used to shift public attitudes to strengthen support for the EU, mobility and also to reduce anxiety around challenging frames in the mobility debate, e.g. the competition frame. The fact that this works very well with older conservatives is especially promising and also speaks to the idea that this works particularly well with segments like the Established in Germany, and in many countries in Europe where similar populations exist. The fact that this reach can be achieved relatively cheaply is also a further incentive. The campaign approach showed a lot of promise in terms of the ability to put the positive messaging cheaply and at scale (in the target cities) in front of key movable middle segments and also, that the material acts to increase exiting support for the EU and mobility in general and also reduces anxiety around the more challenging mobility issues, e.g. EU citizens who are poor, low skilled and from vulnerable communities.

However, due to a number of competing factors, such as the ongoing coalition talks, an audience challenging to engage and EU mobility issues not on the political agenda, the project did not succeed in creating the momentum in the public debate to affect sustainable attitude shift or have influential players take on the campaign narratives.

These were important lessons learnt for the consortium, analysed by the partners, to be taken into consideration in future campaigns.

### **Pop AI Horizon 2020 project**



In October 2021, ECAS launched the project “A European Positive Sum Approach towards AI tools in support of Law Enforcement and safeguarding privacy and fundamental rights’ (pop AI)”. The core vision of the pop AI project is to foster trust in artificial intelligence (AI) for the security domain via increased awareness, ongoing social engagement, consolidating knowledge on the topic and offering a unified European view across Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs). The aim is to create an ecosystem that will form the structural basis for a sustainable and inclusive European AI hub for Law Enforcement.

The project is funded by the Horizon2020 Programme of the European Union and is implemented by a large consortium of organisations, where ECAS is a partner:

- National Center for Scientific Research “Demokritos”, Greece – leader of the consortium
- Trilateral Research Limited, Ireland
- Eticas Research and Innovation, Spain
- Kentro Meleton Asfaleias, Greece
- Ethniko Kentro Erevnas Kai Technologikis Anaptyxis, Greece
- Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, The Netherlands
- Zanasi Alessandro srl, Italy
- Hellenic Police, Greece
- Hochschule fur den offentlichen Dienst in Bayern, Germany
- Gobierno Vasco – Departamento Seguridad, Spain
- Akademia Policajneho Zboru V Bratislave, Slovakia
- Comune di Torino, Italy

In 2022-2023, in the framework of the project, ECAS will be responsible for crowdsourcing citizens’ attitudes towards AI and best solutions for avoiding harms and ensuring benefit from AI in policing. It will also set up a social listening exercise to consider real-time summary of monitored, relevant conversations ‘at a glance’. Six Pop AI Stakeholder Policy Labs will be organised to engage LEAs and relevant experts on the discussion on the AI. Finally, based on the outcomes of the project, ECAS will draft a White Paper outlining recommendations for and from the Civil Society in the field of AI.

### **ECAS Awards 2021 – EU Citizenship Innovation**



The second edition of ECAS Award, launched in July 2021, was forward-looking and aimed at gathering ideas on how to enrich and innovate EU citizenship with new meanings and practices, both among EU citizens and between them and the EU institutions.

The contributions were collected until 15 January 2022 in three categories:

- Concept Paper
- Project/best practice
- Image

The winners will be presented during the State of the Union Citizens' Rights Conference 2022 in March 2022.

## Events

### **'State of the Union Citizens' Rights 2021: Moving Together Beyond the Pandemic'**

On 21-22 January 2021, the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) held the third edition of its "State of the Union Citizens' Rights" event, an annual conference aimed at identifying challenges faced by EU citizens to their right to free movement and the solutions to overcoming them.

The conference was organised in the framework of the [IMPEU](#) project, under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Commission, and under the [Mobility and Political Rights Enhancement for EU Citizens](#) (MORE for EU Citizens) project supported by the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM). This time, due to the COVID-19-related restrictions, the conference was organised online and was live-streamed on Facebook. The event gathered 82 participants, while an additional 489 people viewed the live recordings on Facebook.

The conference started with a speech by the Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders, who presented the 2020 EU Citizenship Report and outlined the actions the European Commission (EC) will take in the near future to make sure that EU citizens can exercise their rights.

The first panel outlined the main challenges mobile EU citizens face in their host countries, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and gathered several speakers from different sectors and organisations: Dr Petar Markovic from ECAS, Dr Patrycja Pogodzińska from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Dr Sandra Mantu from the Radboud University, Rasmus Benke-Åberg, Director of Erasmus Student Network (ESN).

The second panel focused on possible future developments in the EU-rights field following the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and the debate on the EU's long-term budget for 2021-2027. Again, several interesting speakers were invited, including Dr Marek Benio, Vice-President of the European Labour Mobility Institute, Agnès Leroux, Policy Director at the Airlines for Europe (A4E), Maja Simunic, Policy Officer at the European Commission, Dr Anthony Valcke, founder and supervising solicitor of the EU Rights Clinic, and

Chrysa Psyllaki, Researcher at the Helping Hand, one of the organisations involved in the implementation of the IMPEU project.

The conference also featured the presentation of the winners of the first edition of ECAS' Awards:

- The European Disability Forum (EDF) for their project "Double Mobility" in the category "Practices aimed at alleviating the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on mobile EU citizen";
- Romanians in Belgium (ROMBEL) for their project "A Bridge Between Home and Europe" in the category "Practices aimed at improving the social and cultural inclusion of mobile EU citizens";
- Paris municipality and its project "INCLUDE" in the category "Practices aimed at improving the political inclusion of mobile EU citizens"; and
- European Future Forum (EFF) with their Euro Babble initiative in the category "ECAS' choice" based on the votes of ECAS' staff.

The full report from the conference is available [here](#).

## Advocacy Activities

In 2021, ECAS continued advocating for better enforcement of EU citizens' rights and calling on the decision-makers to work towards enhancement of EU rights, especially taking into account the European Commission's commitment to publish the new Communication on Directive 2004/38/EC.

In this regard, in November 2021, ECAS held a meeting with MEP Yana Toom (Estonia, Renew Europe), who was a rapporteur of our own-initiative report on "EU Citizenship Report 2020: empowering citizens and protecting their rights". The MEP was interested to know more about the research and activities undertaken by ECAS on the obstacles to EU citizenship, and agreed to consider ECAS' recommendations in its revised [report](#). The European Parliament is currently working on the file and ECAS will continue monitoring the developments in this regard.

In 2021, ECAS also contributed to the public consultations on supporting EU citizens' right to vote and stand as candidates in another EU country. ECAS provided relevant comments and recommendations based on its research and the results of previous projects, such as the [FAIR EU](#) and the [IMPEU](#). The recommendations concern mainly the issue of eligibility, awareness raising, facilitating registration on the roll and monitoring the implementation of EU rights.

More on the ECAS' recommendations can be found [here](#).



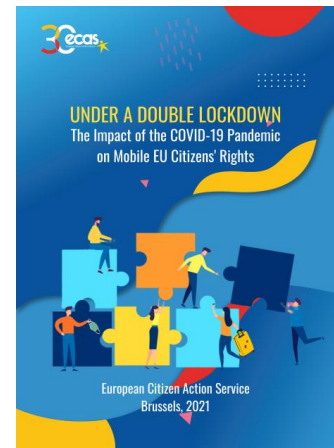
## PUBLICATIONS

### **Under a Double Lockdown: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mobile EU Citizens' Rights**

[https://ecas.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Under-a-Double-Lockdown\\_ECAS-Study\\_2021-1.pdf](https://ecas.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Under-a-Double-Lockdown_ECAS-Study_2021-1.pdf)

### **Participation of European Citizens in the EU Legislative Procedure**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8220111/>





## 3. EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

### Focus Area

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ECAS continued its work in the European Democracy focus area in 2021 despite the challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. ECAS keeps striving for a deliberative-collaborative e-democracy model that facilitates a more open and inclusive form of policymaking by involving citizens through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Furthermore, ECAS has been developing a more precise understanding of the imminent threats to democracy, such as populism, and has been focusing on encouraging other methods of participatory democracy that take into account a variety of civic actions.

In 2021, ECAS has slightly adapted its European Democracy Focus Area to base it on three main pillars:

- **Digital Democracy** – to explore the potential of ICT in reducing the gap between political elites and citizens while fostering engaged citizenship through civic tech.
- **Understanding Populism** – to develop a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of ‘populism’ in order to take greater account of citizens’ voices in democratic political systems.
- **Civic Engagement** – to make a difference in the life of European communities by encouraging civic actions and participatory democracy to address issues of public concern.

One of the most remarkable achievements of ECAS in 2021 was the start of the innovative Co-Deciding Europe (or CODE Europe) project together with the sister project DigiDem. The activities of these two projects would be building up to the implementation of a unique transnational Crowdsourcing of citizens’ ideas on air quality that will take place in 2022 in 10 different cities across Europe. Under CODE Europe, the consortium developed a universal Assessment Framework for E-Participation, Ethical Guidelines for Social Listening and 4 tech platforms where the Crowdsourcing exercise on air quality will take place during its four different phases. Together with its partners, ECAS is ensuring that the outcomes of the activities will contribute not only to citizens’ proposals on the issue of air quality but also to the

mainstreaming of participatory democracy mechanisms that allow more co-creation of policies between citizens and decision-makers.

ECAS continued its advocacy work by actively supporting and promoting the shaping of the future of (e)participatory democracy in the EU. For example, ECAS contributed to MEP Helmut Scholz's report on 'Citizens' dialogues and Citizens' participation in the EU decision-making'. Furthermore, ECAS was elected as a member of the Steering Committee of the Civil Society Convention on the Future of Europe and has been leading its Digital Transformation Cluster. Together with more than 90 civil society networks across Europe, the Convention has been representing civil society in the Conference of the Future of Europe (COFOE) and ECAS has been taking part in several activities related to it: as experts in the COFOE citizens panels, in COFOE working groups and plenaries, in debates together with foundations, think tanks and political parties.

In 2021, ECAS successfully continued to increase the visibility of the European Citizens' Initiative Forum together with its two subcontractors – Democracy International and ProMedia Productions. ECAS brought the number of unique visits to the Forum to 9,000 per month, which is a 275% increase since the start of the project. The Forum reaffirmed its role as a truly multilingual hub in which more than 75% of citizens now use its information and services in languages other than English. Through the Forum, ECAS provided tailored advice to almost 50 current and potential organisers, helping them to register and carry out their initiatives. A prominent new feature was the online course 'Essential Skills for European Citizens' Initiative Organisers', the first of this kind covering the European Citizens' Initiative. The online course exceeded its targets in terms of users' participation and satisfaction with more than 150 participants enrolled for only six weeks.

As a follow up activity of the H2020 research project DEMOS, ECAS initiated the "Civil Society Hub for Actors addressing populist movements". The hub provides a space for individuals, working in diverse fields, to engage, connect and exchange ideas. It is accompanied by a closed group on LinkedIn to enable an ongoing discussion amongst members. The end of 2021 marked the establishment of the first Work Programme of the hub (2022).

## Services to Citizens

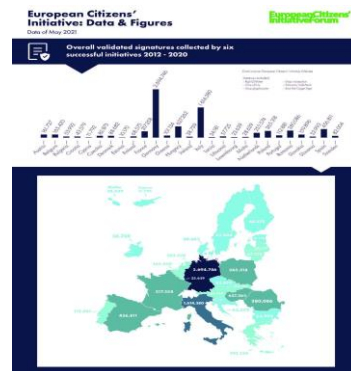
### European Citizens' Initiative Forum

The European Citizens' Initiative Forum, operated on behalf of and under contract with the European Commission, was implemented as part of a three-year service contract that started in November 2019.

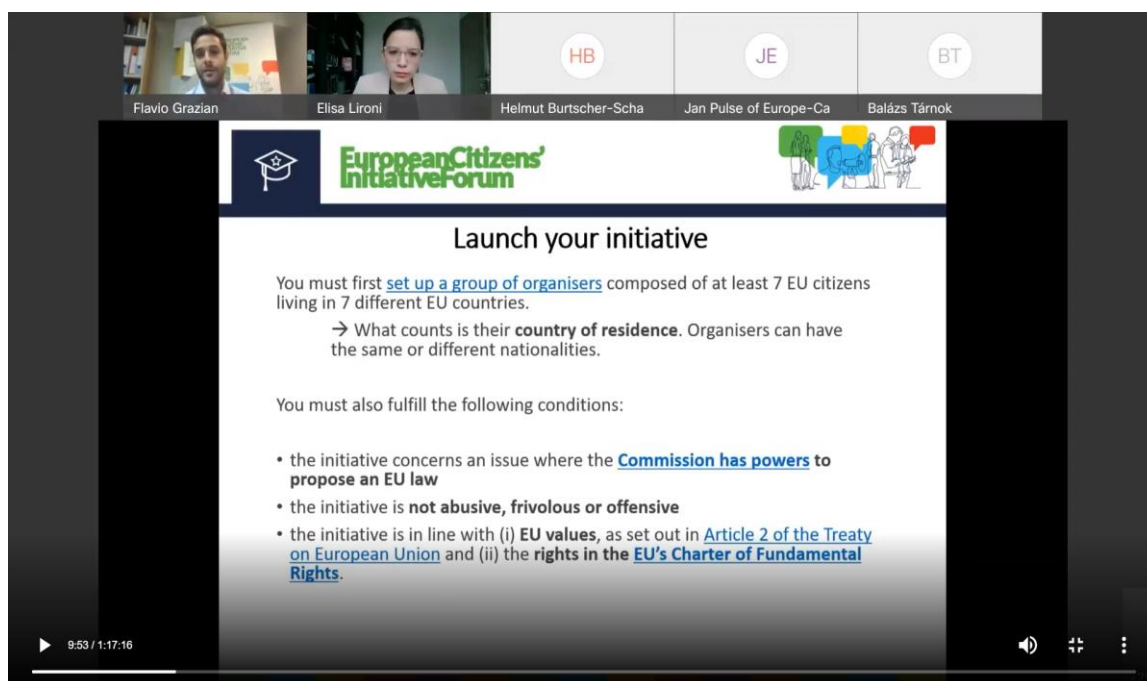
The purpose of the online collaborative platform is to provide advice and information to organisers before, during and after the process of launching and implementing an initiative. The objective is to foster interactions between (potential) organisers, citizens and experts on the topic of the European Citizens' Initiative and the Forum aims to become a reference entry point for all information and capacity-building related to the European Citizens' Initiative.

Over the course of 2021, ECAS entered the second year of the contract and supported the Secretariat-General of the European Commission in further developing and improving the European Citizens' Initiative Forum. ECAS operated the platform on a daily basis and implemented all the activities foreseen in the Work Plan, together with its subcontractors Democracy International and ProMedia Productions.

In 2021, ECAS continued its work aimed at improving the user-friendliness and interactivity of the platform and carried out a Focus Group specifically designed to collect suggestions on how to improve the Homepage of the Forum. As a result, a new reshuffled Homepage was created, featuring a preview of the different ongoing discussions on the Forum. The new Homepage also includes a new infographic providing statistics and figures on the European Citizens' Initiative. The infographic offers diverse data and figures, such as the geographic distribution of the European Citizens' Initiative and the sources of funding of successful initiatives.



The new learning materials created in 2021 included one video testimonial featuring organisers of three citizens' initiatives. ECAS produced three social media clips with the organisers to promote the Forum on the European Commission social media channels, which significantly increased the efficiency and the level of engagement of the campaigns. Throughout the year, ECAS updated the existing success stories and published two new success stories covering the 'End the Cage Age' and 'Minority Safepack' initiatives.



In 2021, due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the participatory activities were carried out online. ECAS held three webinars on different topics related to the European Citizens'

Initiative, covering: how to collect signatures, how to campaign, and the European Citizens' Initiative procedural steps. Approximately 120 people attended the three webinars in total. A prominent new element was the first edition of the online course 'Essential Skills for European Citizens' Initiative Organisers'. A total of 153 users enrolled in the course during the six-week period of its implementation.



ECAS NGO  
@ecas\_europe

Now is the time! Enroll for our brand new [#onlinecourse](#) about the [#EuropeanCitizensInitiative!](#) [@Flavio\\_Grazian](#), one of its three top expert authors, teaches online and offline campaigning, don't miss the opportunity to learn it all!

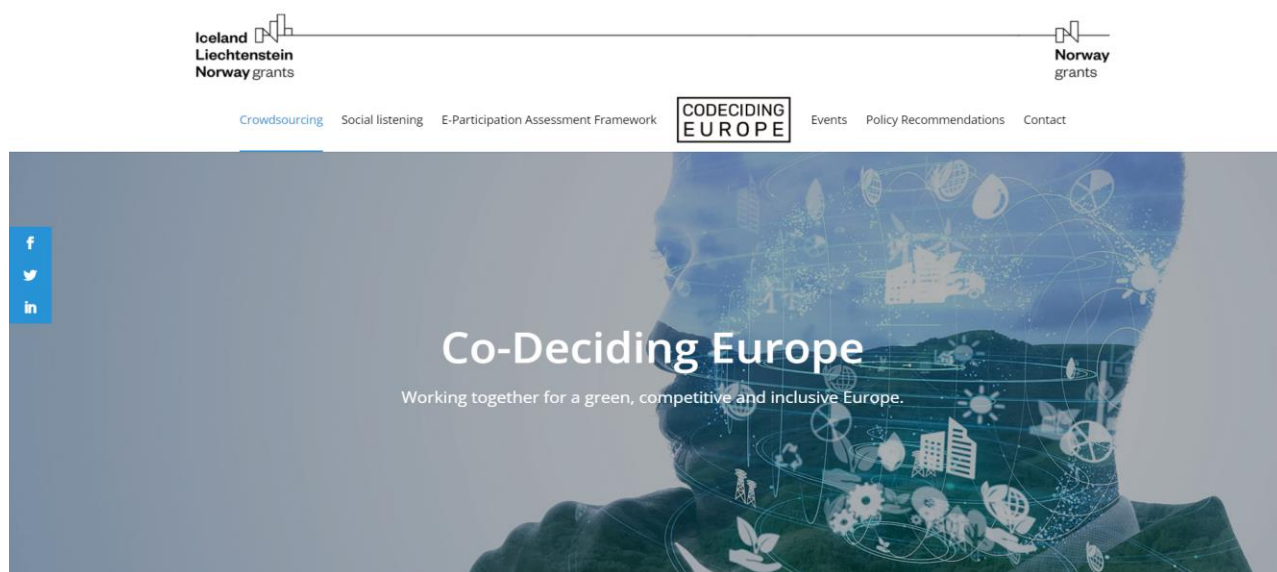
[#EUTakeTheInitiative](#)

The communication and outreach efforts of ECAS continued to produce excellent results with the number of unique visitors reaching an average of 9000 per month and an increasing geographical diversity of users accessing the platform. These results were achieved despite the policy changes adopted by social media platforms in 2021 that established stricter requirements for social media campaigns. Furthermore, ECAS organised five stakeholder consultation activities and contributed to the organisation of the ECI Day 2021.

Lastly, ECAS continued to manage the 'SEEK advice' section of the Forum, handling citizens' enquiries and providing legal, campaigning and fundraising advice to nearly 50 potential and current organisers over the course of 2021.

## Projects

### CODE Europe





In 2021, ECAS started the implementation of an innovative 3-year project funded by the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation: Co-Deciding Europe (or CODE Europe). CODE Europe involves both a transnational experimentation with e-democracy platforms for the co-creation of policies and a research project on e-participation.

The aim of this project is three-fold:

- (1) to allow citizens to co-produce solutions for Europe on the subject of 'air quality' through the method of crowdsourcing legislation in five different countries;
- (2) to implement a Digital Dashboard for social listening in order to gather online opinions on the issue of 'air quality';
- (3) to develop a universally applicable methodology for assessment of e-participation experiences and ethical guidelines for social listening. The success of the crowdsourcing pilots and the social listening will be evaluated through the assessment methodologies based on clearly defined criteria and indicators.

The focus in 2021 was on the development of the main research outputs and technological components: the Assessment Framework for E-Participation, the Ethical Guidelines for Social Listening, the Crowdsourcing Platform and the Digital Dashboard. The Assessment Framework for E-participation was created to allow objective comparison of the impact of e-participation projects across time and geographical space ensuring systematic and impactful knowledge-sharing, exchange of good practices and capacity building. It will be tested on the crowdsourcing pilots that will be running in 2022 and improved in 2023 according to the results. The Ethical Guidelines were developed to ensure that the Digital Dashboard will perform an ethical social listening of online conversations around the subject of air quality.

During the year, ECAS led the technological partners of the Consortium in designing and developing a unique platform which will be used for the implementation of four Crowdsourcing phases:

1. Phase 'Problem Mapping' (January-March 2022) – Citizens will identify problems related to air quality that they encounter in their daily life.
2. Phase 'Problem Solving' – Citizens will propose solutions to the 'air quality' problems they have mapped in Phase 1.
3. Phase 'Ideas Selection' – Citizens will evaluate the solutions proposed in Phase 2 in order to highlight the most popular ideas and priorities for European policy-makers.
4. Phase 'Policy Formulation' – Based on the previous phases, citizens will formulate policy proposals on 'air quality' with experts in the field and guided by the European Environmental Bureau.



The Crowdsourcing platform will run in parallel with the Digital Dashboard in 2022 in order to capture citizens' opinions about air quality across the entire European digital landscape. The Crowdsourcing pilots and social listening will run in Greece, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Portugal and Hungary.

**Project partners:**

- Hungarian Academy of Science – Centre for Social Sciences, Hungary
- European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Belgium
- Citizens Foundation, Iceland
- Scify, Greece
- DAEM, Municipality of Athens, Greece
- OneSource, Portugal
- ManaBalss.lv, Latvia
- ProInfo, Bulgaria
- E-Governance Academy, Estonia
- InePA, Slovenia
- Centre for Public Policy Providus, Latvia

## **DigiDEM**

The DigiDEM project started alongside CODE Europe to apply the same collaborative methods of crowdsourcing legislation and 'social listening' in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Montenegro on the subject of 'air quality' – a topic chosen because of its transnational nature and the problems associated with it (estimated 400 000 premature deaths in Europe each year). Citizens' contributions collected on the topic will feed into and impact EU policymaking.

In this project, ECAS will be piloting the crowdsourcing and social listening in Belgium, specifically in Brussels, in 2022. In November 2021, ECAS conducted a mapping of stakeholders involved in environmental and democratic issues in Belgium and organised an online event to present the DigiDem project. The objective was to outreach to NGOs, local authorities, media actors, academics and politicians to inform them about the upcoming crowdsourcing on air quality and have their support.

DigiDem will contribute to providing a blueprint for innovative methods of citizen engagement that are implemented as complementary to representative democracy. Through its activities and outputs, the project also aims to establish a transnational community of policy makers, academics, businesses, NGOs and citizens which will continue to apply and advocate for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to ensure inclusive and collaborative decision-making processes on all levels.

**Project Partners:**

- Stichting Netwerk Democratie, Netherlands
- Democracy International, Germany
- ProInfo Foundation, Bulgaria
- E-Riigi Akadeemia Sihtasutus, Estonia

- Gradjanska alijansa, Montenegro

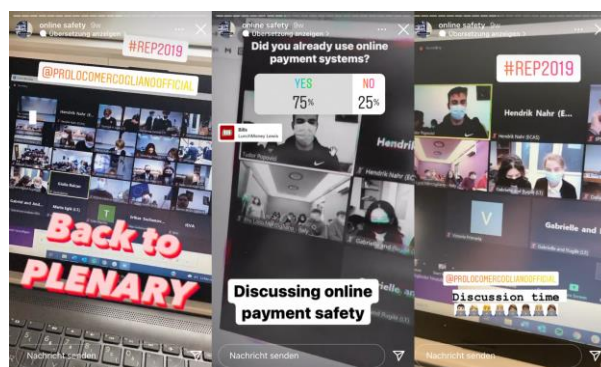
## REP2019



The Europe For Citizens project 'Road to European Parliament 2019 – Empowering a new generation of EU citizens' (REP2019) aims to contribute to the growth of a new generation of young European citizens that are able to critically assess the strengths and the weaknesses of the European Union and propose innovative solutions to enhance citizen participation in European democracy.

REP2019 aims to achieve this goal by designing and delivering a training programme on the role and functioning of EU institutions for students in their final year of high school. The training programme seeks to foster youth participation in the EU decision-making process.

The project involves 250 students from rural areas from five different EU countries – Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Spain and Romania.



The project was implemented in partnership with the following organisations:

- Dimos Alimou – Municipality of Alimos
- Ayuntamiento de La Palma del Condado
- Comuna Victoria
- Associazione Pro Loco "Pro Mercogliano"
- Novi Homines – Pilietiskumą skatinanti asociacija

ECAS supported the development of the training programmes in 2021 and led its communication activities. The specific tasks carried out by ECAS included:

- Implementation of the communication and dissemination plan;
- Management of the project website in cooperation with all partners;
- Management of project profiles on main social media accounts (Facebook and Instagram);
- Production of three electronic newsletters, covering the results of three online project events.

The newsletter editions were sent in November and December 2021.

ECAS participated in the third (12 November 2021), fourth (25 November 2021) and fifth (10 December 2021) transnational training and simulation events that were all held online. ECAS engaged with the young students participating in the events through a series of interviews. The interviews highlight the skills and the knowledge acquired by the students through participating in the project. ECAS also covered the events live on Instagram and on Twitter. The original project timeline was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the project ended in December 2021.

## NEXUS



ECAS continued its work on the three-year project entitled 'Promoting the nexus of migrants through active citizenship (NEXUS)'. The project empowers students (with particular attention to newly arrived migrant students and under-served students) to exercise their rights, uphold human rights and contribute positively to their society and the global community. The objective of the NEXUS project is to allow the development of necessary skills in order for students to become informed and active citizens. This project is implemented in partnership with the following organisations:

- Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain
- Unione delle Università del Mediterraneo (UNIMED), Italy
- Malmö University, Sweden
- Knowledge Innovation Centre (KIC) Malta
- Institut za razvoj obrazovanja (IRO), Slovenia
- Apis Institute, Croatia



In 2021, ECAS contributed to the NEXUS project by utilising its expertise in digital democracy and online participation. The consortium published the online course (MOOC) "Civics 4.0: active citizenship and participation in the digital age", and ECAS specifically provided expert feedback on the content and the design of the online course and in the identification of e-participation case studies in Europe. Furthermore, ECAS contributed to the evaluation of the projects submitted by users in the MOOC. Finally, ECAS worked on the collection and analysis of e-participation case studies in Belgium that will be included in the Inventory of Digital tools that will be published in 2022.



## DEMOS



The three-year project 'Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe' (DEMOS), under the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union, began in December 2018. The project is led by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and implemented by a consortium of 15 organisations. It explores the practical value of 'democratic efficacy' as the condition of political engagement needed to address the challenge of populism.



In 2021, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis continued to represent a challenge for the implementation of certain tasks under DEMOS. Some activities, in agreement with the European Commission, originally scheduled for 2020 were implemented in 2021.

ECAS worked on the identification of the main features of citizens' reactions to populism. For this purpose, ECAS analysed the data collected from 10 interviews with project managers working in the field of tackling populism. The final working paper was published in April 2022. ECAS also uploaded a related blog post on its own and on the DEMOS project website.



## Citizens' Assembly in Belgium

ECAS organised a deliberative polling activity - a citizen assembly in Brussels. It covered the topics "democracy and politics". The event took place on 11 December at ECAS' premises. Before the event, the participants responded to a questionnaire measuring their attitudes on the relevant issues. The same questionnaire was then also filled in by the participants after the event. The responses from both rounds of surveys (before the event and after) will be compared in a detailed analysis to understand how deliberative settings impact citizens' views and attitudes.

## Crowdsourcing citizens' opinions on populism-related subjects

ECAS worked with project partners to define the topics and questions to be covered by the DEMOS crowdsourcing questionnaire. The aim of the Crowdsourcing was to understand how citizens react to the solutions identified by DEMOS research. As a result of the work carried out in the other working packages, the topics of "Minorities", "Participation" and "Media" were included in the questionnaire. ECAS translated the questionnaire from English to German, French, Polish, Hungarian, Italian and Turkish. On 1 July 2021, the questionnaire was launched on the ECAS Crowdsourcing platform. ECAS developed and implemented a corresponding communication strategy to promote it. The strategy included different actions such as outreach to possible multipliers, blog posts, and a social media campaign.

## Digital Dashboard

With the goal to map Russian-influenced narratives online, ECAS continued its work on the DEMOS digital dashboard.

## Communication activities

ECAS also supported the project partners to further disseminate publications and promote on a regular basis the project activities stemming from the DEMOS web platforms. ECAS contributed to the project communication with its own large networks of established stakeholders relevant to DEMOS – policymakers, civil society organisations, researchers, and academics. Finally, ECAS conducted a targeted stakeholder outreach to Brussels-based actors. ECAS mapped 208 relevant stakeholders amongst EU decision-makers and civil society organisations working on the topics of democracy and populism. The identified stakeholders were contacted via email and three of them accepted the invitation for a personal





meeting to discuss the project's outcomes. With new findings being published, ECAS will continue the outreach to relevant stakeholders.



## Events

### Advancing Citizen-Driven Participation through Digital Tools - 25 February 2021

“How can the impact of citizen-driven e-democracy tools be strengthened throughout Europe” was the main question that the conference ‘Advancing Citizen-driven Participation through Digital Tools’ aimed to answer. On 25 February 2021, civil society representatives, policy makers, researchers and civic-tech practitioners convened to provide a multi-angle view on this topic. Organised by the European Liberal Forum (ELF) and supported by the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS), the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) and Project Polska, the conference was the final point of the corresponding research project ‘e-democracy: Driving citizen advocacy through digital means’.



#### REPORT



The conference report is available [here](#).

### Enhancing Citizenship Competences in the EU - 20 April 2021

*Based on the shared idea of the establishment of a European agency / platform for citizenship education, ECAS and Values Unite teamed up and organised a corresponding conference on 20 April 2021.*

ECAS hosted policy makers as well as civil society representatives and researchers. The takeaways from these initial debates are of great value and will feed into ECAS' future position on the matter. The five main points, shared during the conference, are: (1) Europe is not starting from scratch when dealing with citizenship competences, (2) a European curriculum for civic education could be beneficial, (3) established

mechanism have to be bottom-up and top-down, (4) sharing knowledge and experiences in the field from all across Europe is key and (5) equality of funding must be ensured.

The recording of the event can be found [here](#).

The whole conference report is available [here](#).

## ECI DAY 2021 - 3 & 4 June 2021

ECAS actively participated in the 2021 ECI Day organised by the European Economic and Social Committee. The 10th edition of the ECI Day took place online and over two days, on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2021. During the event, ECAS organised two sessions: 'How to campaign online: lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis' and 'Q&A session with the European Citizens' Initiative Forum'. ECAS also moderated the session 'ECI: the geography of success'.



During the session 'ECI: the geography of success', ECAS presented the ongoing work on the new infographic covering the European Citizens' Initiative data and figures. ECAS' Executive Director moderated the session that discussed the possible reasons behind the geographical differences around the use of the European Citizens' Initiative in the EU. In the session "How to campaign online: lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis", a panel of experts moderated by ECAS European Democracy Senior Manager, discussed the main lessons learnt from online campaigns during the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, the workshop, 'Q&A session with the European Citizens' Initiative Forum' provided attendees with further information on the available informative material and services of the online collaborative platform.

More information on the event is available [here](#).

## The Impact of Populism on European Institutions and Civic Society: Bridging the Gap between Research and Practice – 27 October 2021

On 27 October 2021, civil society representatives, academics and policy makers convened to discuss the findings from the newly published book, "The Impact of Populism on European Institutions and Civic Society". The purpose of this conference was to continue the debate on populism and to understand its

impact on European institutions and civil society. The event connected research with tangible action on the ground.

### Speakers:

- Carlo Ruzza, Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Trento, Italy
- Carlo Berti, Research Fellow at the School of International Studies, University of Trento, Italy
- Pierluigi Brombo, Head of the Foresight, Studies & Assessment unit at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
- Paolo Cossarini, Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Culture & Learning, Aalborg University, Denmark
- Assya Kavrakova, Executive Director of the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)

### Interventions:

- Zsolt Boda, Director General of the Centre for Social Sciences – Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence and principle investigator of DEMOS – democratic efficacy and the varieties of populism – Horizon 2020 project
- Kalypso Nicolaidis, professorial Chair of Global Affairs at the EUI School of Transnational Governance in Florence where she convenes the EUI Democracy Forum
- Salvatore Finamore, member of the Analysis & Research team of the General Secretariat of the Council
- June Bedaton, in charge of the Secretariat of the EESC Group on Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law
- Bruce Edmonds, Director of the Centre for Policy Modelling at the Manchester Metropolitan University & Professor of Social Simulation

### Digital Democracy Day 2021 - 23 November 2021

On 23 November 2021, civil society representatives and policy makers convened to discuss how participatory democracy can help to improve the environment. This event also introduced the DigiDEM project and the crowdsourcing platform that will enable the collection of citizens' proposals on air quality in January 2022.

To discuss the potential of citizen engagement when it comes to environmental policies, **Lucas Demuelenaere**, Counsellor to Alain Maron Ministre du Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, chargé de la Transition climatique, de l'Environnement, de l'Energie et de la Démocratie participative, **Ellen Vandenbroucke**, Sustainability Expert for the Educational Department Leuven and Coordinator of School 2030, **Dimitri Lemaire**, Director, Inventio Groupm **Michiel Nuytemans**, Owner, Tree Company and **Elisa Lironi**, Senior Manager European Democracy convened. The experts agreed that participatory democracy can indeed make a great difference to tackle environmental challenges.

The whole conference report is available [here](#).

# Advocacy

## Civil Society Convention - Digital Transformation Cluster

ECAS is part of the Steering Committee of the Civil Society Convention on the Conference of the Future of Europe - a network of more than 90 organisations from all over Europe that was initiated by Civil Society Europe to create a link between civil society organisations and the institutional setting of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The goal is to ensure **an ambitious, structured and forward-looking agenda for the Conference**, in which citizens' proposals and concerns are taken into account in the agenda setting and discussions and are followed up with the most adequate and concrete policy, legislative and, if relevant, treaty change solutions.



ECAS has also been leading the Civil Society Convention's **Digital Transformation Cluster** that will contribute to bringing proposals that will feed into the EU's strategy for "A Europe fit for the digital age". The ambition of the strategy is to strengthen EU's digital sovereignty and set standards on data, technology, and infrastructure - with a clear focus on education, ethics, fundamental rights and European values.

The elaboration of the Convention's Digital Transformation proposals went through a crowdsourcing exercise in 4 phases: 1. Ideas Collection (Jul-Nov 2021), 2. Ideas Selection (Dec-Jan 2021), 3. Policy Formulation (Feb 2022) and 4. Resolution and Adoption (Mar-Apr 2022).

In 2022, the recommendations that will result from the Cluster will be first presented and adopted by the Convention and will subsequently be brought to the COFOE as the positions of civil society on the topic of Digital Transformation.

## Civil Society hub for actors addressing populist movements



Based on its research on "[Civic Strategies Addressing Populism – Initiatives to safeguard liberal democracies](#)" carried out in the framework of the [DEMOS](#) (Horizon 2020) project, ECAS launched the "Civil Society Hub for Actors addressing populist Movements". A key finding of the research was that experts working in the field knew very little about each other despite their willingness to connect and cooperate. The Hub addresses the need of establishing a space for civil society actors to meet, discuss and exchange knowledge and best practices. It brings together civil society actors implementing projects with the aim of safeguarding liberal democracy values.



ECAS facilitated and actively moderated the discussion on relevant topics among the members of the network. Furthermore, ECAS started to outreach to new potential members of the hub. On 6 July, the first meeting of the hub took place. The meeting had the goal of getting partners acquainted with each other and set the first priorities of action. The second meeting took place on 16 November and adopted the Work Program for 2022. By the end of 2021, 27 members joined the Civil Society hub for actors addressing populist movements. The Work Program for 2022 is available [here](#).

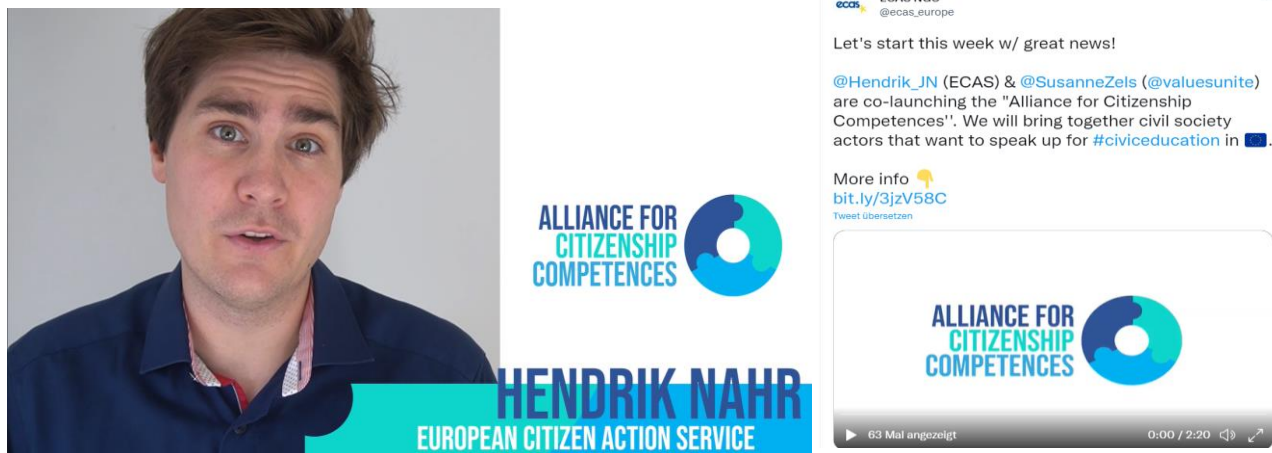
### **Alliance for Citizenship Competences**

On 25 October 2021, ECAS co-launched the Alliance for citizenship competences in Europe together with Values United. The goal of the Alliance is to enhance citizenship competences in Europe. The Alliance seeks to (1) establish a network, (2) jointly develop ideas and proposals and (3) advocate for those on the



EU level. Ultimately, the alliance wants to ensure that generations of European democrats will follow and shape our continent's future.

By the end of 2021, ECAS continued liaising with new potential members. Civil society organisations (pan-European, national, or regional) interested in fostering civic education in Europe are invited to join the



alliance.

## Publications

- Study: [Next level participation: citizen-driven e-democracy tools](#) (January 2021)
- Book chapter: [Crowdsourcing EU Legislation: Harnessing the Power of Digital Democracy](#) (April 2021)
- Working paper: [Civic Strategies Addressing Populism - Initiatives to safeguard liberal democracies](#) (May 2021)
- [Facing the Threat of Populism: How the European Commission Can Reconnect with](#) Citizens (August 2021)





## 4. ECAS' MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH

### ECAS' Membership

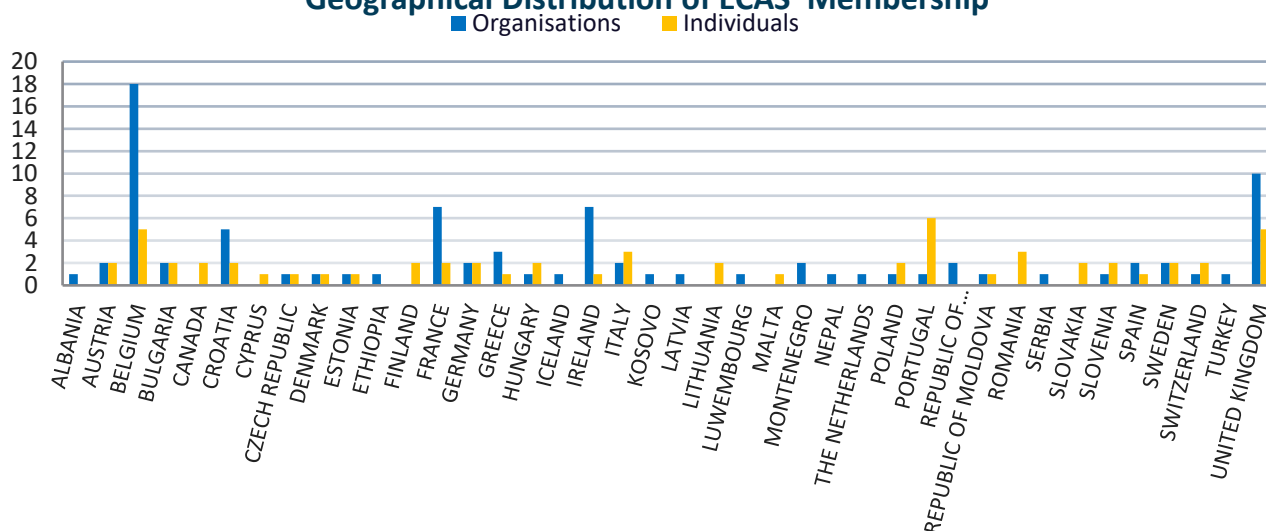
ECAS' membership is mission-driven and free-of-charge.

At the end of 2021, [ECAS Membership](#) consisted of 150 Members, including organisations and individuals, who subscribe to the [ECAS Mission and Vision](#) and are active in the ECAS focus areas (EU Rights and European Democracy).

ECAS' Network of Members covered 40 countries (27 EU Member States and 13 non-EU Member States) and included:

- **90 Member Organisations** (24 of which are network organisations) and
- **60 Individuals.**

#### Geographical Distribution of ECAS' Membership



ECAS actively involves its members in delivering its mission and in its activities focused on the promotion and defence of citizens' rights as well as the development and support of mechanisms aimed at increasing the democratic participation of citizens and citizen organisations in, and engagement with, the EU.

## ECAS' Outreach

### Overview

ECAS continued to expand its outreach in 2021 through its website, social media communication channels and newsletter.

The ECAS website ([www.ecas.org](http://www.ecas.org)) received a total of **88,434 page views** for the year. This constitutes an increase of 32,72%, compared to 2020 (66,632 views). It is worth noting that a number of projects and services (ECI Forum, REP2019, CODE and DEMOS) that ECAS carries out are supported through the creation of their own, separate platforms and the traffic generated on these separate websites is not included in the aforementioned total.

Day-to-day activities and updates of ECAS were also widely publicised via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. In 2021, ECAS has recorded a noticeable increase in followers on all platforms, as well as in audience engagement with ECAS posts.

### ECAS Communications

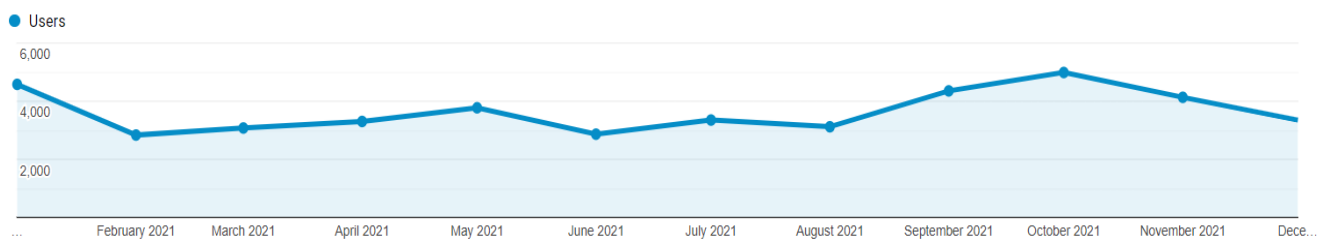
Internal and external communication is key to the work of ECAS. As a citizen-centric organisation, ECAS aims to offer immediate assistance and solutions to citizens in the challenges they encounter in their daily lives, while also working to eliminate factors that cause such challenges in the long-run.

This requires effective working synergies between ECAS, citizens, decision-makers and other civil society organisations to adopt a comprehensive approach to tackling issues. Based on that, ECAS aims to establish a strong dialogue with stakeholders and inform them of developments through the main communication channels of ECAS: website, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The ECAS monthly newsletters highlight the latest news from ECAS and its members.

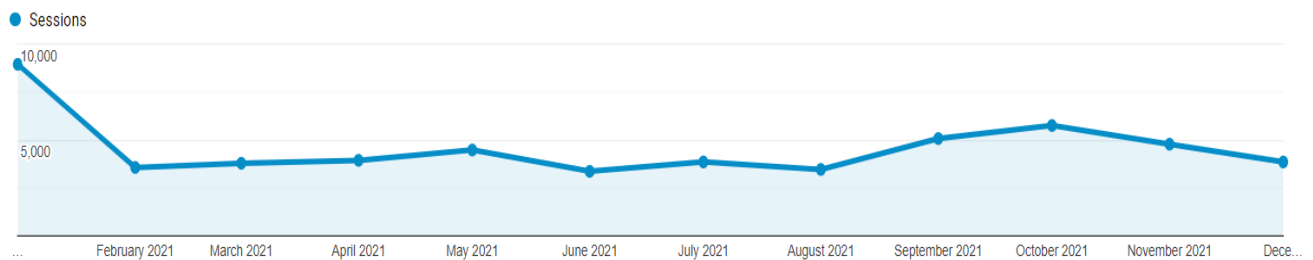
Detailed statistics of the communication activities of ECAS are as follows:

### Website activity

In 2021, the ECAS website continued to generate a steady flow of visitors, recording a monthly high of **4,987** (October) and a monthly low of **2,836** (February), for an annual total of **42,920 users**.



The number of sessions followed a similar trend, with a high of **8,938** in January and a low of **3,366** in June, for an annual total of **54,850**.



## Twitter

By the end of 2021, ECAS had achieved a total of **5,028 followers**, which represents a net increase of **142** from the previous year. ECAS posted **633 tweets**, generating **649,004 impressions** (e.g. the number of times a user sees a Tweet on their timeline or in their search results). ECAS posts have been retweeted **955** times. The posts have received **2078** likes. This constitutes an increase of 53.69% (1,352 likes) compared to 2020.

Some Tweets were boosted by paid advertising.

### The top three tweets were:

<p>How can #Crowdsourcing of citizens' ideas help to increase th...</p>	<p><b>November 17, 2021 12:14pm</b> <span>ecas_europe</span></p> <p>How can #Crowdsourcing of citizens' ideas help to increase the #AirQuality in Belgium Join the Digital Democracy Day 2021 online and discover the opportunities! 23 November   10h #ECASDDD21 Registration: <a href="https://t.co/W1S2mqI7ko">https://t.co/W1S2mqI7ko</a></p>				
	Clicks	Retweets	Likes	Impressions	Eng. Rate
	343	3	6	179,099	0.20%
<p>We want to better understand #populism! Therefore, we organis...</p>	<p><b>October 13, 2021 01:06pm</b> <span>ecas_europe</span></p> <p>We want to better understand #populism! Therefore, we organise a #conference to discuss "The Impact of Populism on European Institutions and Civil Society" 27 Oct, 2pm Sign up and join the experts from all over eu on this issue. <a href="https://t.co/jUYzoZj287">https://t.co/jUYzoZj287</a> <a href="https://t.co/zSz0clwKjb">https://t.co/zSz0clwKjb</a></p>				
	Clicks	Retweets	Likes	Impressions	Eng. Rate
	31	10	25	47,985	0.30%

<a href="#">How do populist narratives shape EU institutions &amp; society Join the upcoming conference, connecting academic researchers &amp; civil society practitioners, to discuss the impact of populism. 📅 27 October Wednesday 🖥️ Online event Register here 📌</a> <a href="https://t.co/TC1yYAIQSk">https://t.co/TC1yYAIQSk</a> <a href="https://t.co/gLATITDyLx">https://t.co/gLATITDyLx</a>	October 20, 2021 02:58pm				
	Clicks	Retweets	Likes	Impressions	
	7	2	8	17,158	Eng. Rate 0.20%

## Facebook

In 2021, the ECAS Facebook page reached a total of **5,274 followers** by the end of the year, achieving a net annual gain of **291**. The **540** Facebook posts published by ECAS reached **126,471 unique users**, with **12,155 Page & Post engagements** (7,463 users engaging with the posts in 2020).

## LinkedIn

By the end of 2021 ECAS had a total of **1,747 followers**, achieving a net gain of **526** from the previous year. The **127 posts** generated **32,487 impressions** and had an average engagement rate of **3.78 percent**.

## Monthly ECAS Newsletter

ECAS has published a bimonthly newsletter since January 2016. In 2021, the bimonthly rhythm was changed to a monthly newsletter, which was necessary due to the increased intensity of ECAS activities and news.

The newsletter is structured around the two focus areas of ECAS: EU Rights and European Democracy. It serves to promote the activities and events of ECAS, along with those of ECAS members and partners. The newsletter also informs stakeholders and citizens about the main ongoing initiatives at EU level relevant to the areas of work of ECAS, while facilitating discussions on these subjects.

By the end of 2021, the number of subscribers amounted to **2,478** - including EU decision-makers, experts in the fields of European democracy and EU rights, civil society organisations, citizens and other stakeholders.

## ECAS' 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Video

In 2021 ECAS released its 30th Anniversary video - [here](#) - presenting the developments and the evolution of the organisation through the eyes of ECAS' board and team members, partners, constituencies, etc.

## 5. ANNEXES

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### Annex I - Thank You Messages received by Your Europe Advice

*"Thank you very much for considering my situation and your clear and comprehensive explanation of my rights. I appreciate very much the time and care that you have taken in your answer."* (J.S., 29 November 2021)

*"Dear Europe advice center, thank you for all information you shared with me. I solved my problem with a company from which I bought something. Your webpage and your e-mail is very useful for me. Now I know my rights. Have a nice day and healthy life."* (E.S., 22 November 2021)

*"Hello, I don't know if this is a "no reply" email address, but I just want to thank you for the detailed and clear explanation of our options. I cannot thank you enough. These regulations are very complicated and you have made things clear."* (D.C., 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021)

*"Thanks for your reply it was exactly what I was looking for."* (A.W., 6 October 2021)

*"Thank you for your detailed reply to my enquiry. I would like to comment that the service you give is excellent."* (P.R.B., 18 October 2021)

*"With this letter I am saying "Thank you!" for your advice on enquiries ... Your help is much appreciated. Your advice is prompt, professional and above all correct. Thank you for being there for us and providing the necessary guidance and support."* (B.A., 18 October 2021)

*« Vi ringrazio per avere preso in considerazione la mia domanda, e Vi ringrazio per la velocità con cui ho ricevuto risposta, e per l'esposizione chiara della risposta stessa. »* (M.P., 20 October 2021)

*"Kiitos tästä erittäin valaisevasta selvityksestä ! Kiitos myös vaivannäöstä, on ihanaa kun on instanssi jonka puoleen voi kääntyä ja saada selvityksen !"* (T.H.-P., 26 October 2021)

*« Je vous remercie pour votre retour rapide et très utile. Ce sont exactement les réponses que je cherchais. Passez une tres bonne journée!"* (M.P., 10 November 2021)

*"Thanks for your reply it was exactly what I was looking for."* (A.W., 6 October 2021)

*"I just wanted to say thank you very much indeed for your help, your reply was very clear and helped me make plans about what to do. Huge thanks for all you are doing, in such an unclear and stressful situation it means a very great deal!"* (H.J.B., 18 June 2021)

*"Thank you so much for this invaluable advice, I am so appreciative of it. Whoever put it together did an incredible job and fully explained everything, making me feel much better this morning!!! MANY MANY THANKS"* (M.McC., 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021)

*"Let me to deeply thank you from such a rich info with quite easy detailed definitions. I am really, really proud of you, and my all questions were honestly answered. Thank you so much! God bless you. In case if I need further assistance then I may contact you again."* (S.S., 12 July 2021)

*„Ich bedanke mich vielmals für so eine ausführliche Beratung. Das war eben eine herausragende Leistung. Alle Fragen sind beantwortet und ich wünsche Ihnen einen wunderschönen Tag!“* (O. V., 1st August 2021)

*« Merci beaucoup pour l'attention donnée à mon problème et à votre conseil. Habitué à des réponses laconiques à mes courriers avec la France sur d'autres sujets et le Portugal en pire, quand on veut bien me répondre, je suis vraiment bluffé par la qualité du traitement de votre hotline ! »* (M.T., 24 September 2021)

*« I am reaching out to you again because in the recent past you provided excellent service and extensive information with regard to another query. The quality of your service caught me by surprise and I was provided with quite likely the best free advice I have ever received. »* (M.A., 26 September 2021)

*« Merci infiniment pour cette réponse très complète et apportée dans des délais inimaginables dans l'administration française. »* (T.V., 5 October 2021)

*"This was very helpful, thank you very much, what an outstanding service this is."* (C. McC., 14 May 2021)

*"Vi ringrazio infinitamente soprattutto perchè siete gli unici ad avermi dato una risposta chiara e delle direzioni concrete da seguire. Ho già ricevuto la mail dal Solvit che mi avvisa che la mia pratica è stata presa in carico e che sarà esaminata nelle prossime 10 settimane. Mi auguro davvero di riuscire a sbloccare questa situazione. Ancora grazie e buon lavoro. »* (D.M., 13 April 2021)

*« Je vous remercie vivement pour votre réponse qui nous aide énormément. Les différents sites web que vous avez mentionnés ainsi que les informations précises et concrètes que vous avez données vont nous permettre d'apporter des réponses concrètes aux demandes que nous recevons. Il est en effet important que les entreprises soient bien conseillées afin qu'elles puissent opérer leurs activités en toute conformité avec les lois en vigueur. Encore un grand merci à vous. »* (M.J., Ambassade de Danemark, 21st April 2021)

*« Ho ben ricevuto la vostra risposta, molto gradita, complimenti per tutto il vostro lavoro, et il vostro aiuto per tutte le molte persone in difficoltà in questo mondo di leggi a volte distorte, ed ingiuste. »* (S.S., 7 May 2021)

*"Thank you very much for your precious suggestions and for the time taken to collect all this!"* (C.C., 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021)

*« Thank you very much for your advice and information. I appreciate the time you shared as well as efforts to help me with the enquiry. Also, thank you for the links you sent me, I will review that information carefully."* (Y.F., 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2021)

*« Thank you very much for your answer. I had the same view on the issue as you, and now it is easier to go forward with the data request. I will proceed as you suggested."* (C.D. 25 March 2021)

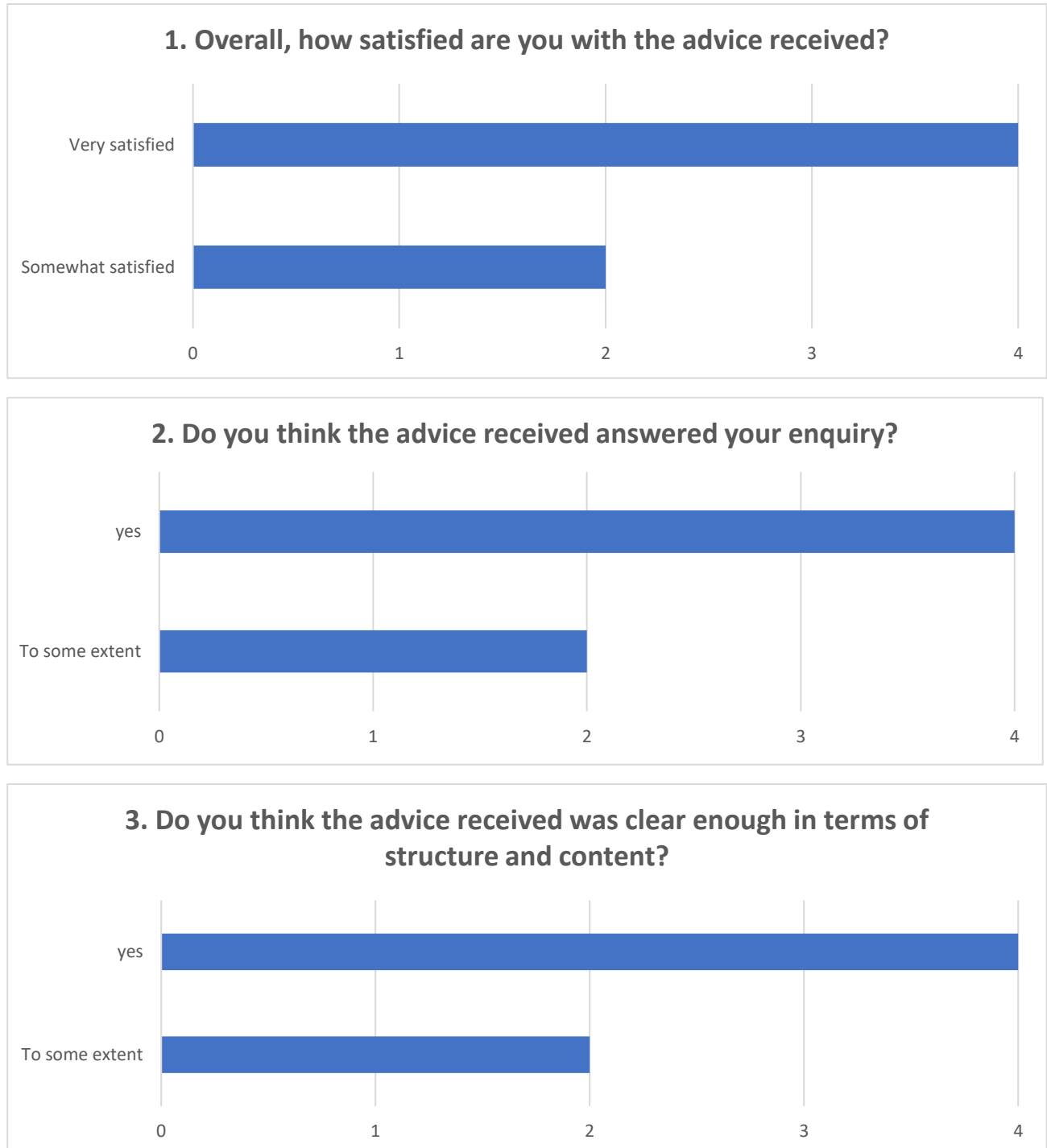


Ringrazio per la Vs rapida ed esaustiva risposta, che mi è molto utile per avviare le pratiche necessarie per ottenere la pensione che mi spetta. (M. G. 5 march 2021)

Ευχαριστώ πολύ για το μήνυμα σας!!! (v.P. 3 march 2021)

## Annex II - European Citizens' Initiative Forum Feedback

An overwhelming level of satisfaction with the Seek Advice service of the European Citizens' Initiative Forum can be observed: the enquirers that provided feedback indicated that (1) they were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the service provided and that (2) the advice given was clear. Some organisers that submitted more than one enquiry started their follow up enquiry by thanking the Forum team for the support previously provided.



#### 4. Do you have any suggestions for improving the quality of the service?

- Not at the moment. Thanks very much for you quick answers.
- Thank you!
- I will submit a follow-up request.

**ECAS ACTIVITY REPORT  
2021**

ECAS Brussels, February 2022

**European Citizen Action Service**

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