



European Economic and Social Committee **10<sup>th</sup> ECI DAY** #ECIDay2021 @EU\_EESC

3 June 2021 | 15:15 – 16:15  
**How to campaign online:  
lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis**

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European Committee of the Regions | BertelsmannStiftung

DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL

www.citizens-initiative.eu

**As part of the ECI Day 2021 (3 June 2021), ECAS carried out the session “How to campaign online: lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis”. Elisa Lironi, Senior Manager European Democracy (ECAS), moderated the event. She was joined by the guest speakers Liesbeth Van den Bossche, EU Campaign Manager (WWF), Flavio Grazian, Participatory Democracy Manager (ECAS) and Hendrik Nahr, European Democracy Outreach Coordinator (ECAS).**

Ms Lironi opened the session by providing a general introduction on the topic of online campaigning. She stressed how important it is to build a good outreach strategy for organisers of European citizens' initiatives. Especially during the ongoing pandemic, successful initiatives must be based on a solid, digital campaign. Continuing the session, Ms Lironi introduced and welcomed Ms Van den Bossche: as EU Campaign Manager for the WWF, she gained extensive experience in online campaigning and reaching out to great audience via the internet. Working for an international non-profit organisation on digital campaigns makes her experience very relatable for ECI organisers.

Ms Van den Bossche started her intervention by stating that the circumstances created by COVID-19 were challenging for international campaigns, but also created some additional opportunities in the digital sphere. She noted that due to the pandemic, people were generally more open for charity and spend more time at home. This provided them with more time to engage with online content.

She presented a case study of her work on #Together4Forests campaign that was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic. Just like European citizens' initiatives, this campaign had the goal of mobilising citizens from all over Europe. The aim was to make them submit a pre-drafted message in reply to a public consultation launched by the European Commission.

She emphasised the great importance of creating a large network of organisations that can function as multipliers to spread messages. The right approach to potential partners is crucial: organisers need a good pitch. Then, building a strong movement is key: this can be done by organising webinars, as well as sending regular, motivating updates to the network.

The campaign expert explained that direct mailing remains the most important channel of communication. Regarding social media, posts that triggered conversation between citizens are of

particular value. Drawing from her experience, Ms Van den Bossche also highlighted the efficiency of paid advertisement for campaigning on social media. However, different approaches for different social media channels are necessary.

She also explained that, even if the topic is very serious, messages must be digestible for a wider audience and using creative images or visual material can be an added value.

After Ms Van den Bossche's intervention, Mr Grazian and Mr Nahr shared their experiences when engaging with organisers of citizens' initiatives. Both speakers are helping the Secretariat-General of the European Commission in the management of the European Citizens' Initiative Forum and are therefore in touch with organisers on a regular basis. They remarked that one key element for a successful European citizens' initiative campaign is the preparatory period time that organisers now have before the start of the signature collection for their initiative. Finally, the speakers also highlighted the importance of building a clear multilingual website to provide the general public with information regarding the goals that the initiative seeks to achieve.

Ms Lironi closed the session by thanking all speakers and participants.