

Youth-Check

The youth-check is a regulatory impact assessment tool. It identifies the effects of proposed legislation on young people between 12 and 27 years of age.

Draft Bill on the Amendment of the Law on the European Citizens' Initiative (European Citizens' Initiative Amendment Law¹ (Version: 10.03.2022))

The European Citizens' Initiative Amendment Law aims to transpose Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative into German law. The regulation is intended to achieve several objectives, such as strengthening the European citizens' initiative (ECI) as an instrument of civic participation.² In the implementation in German law, the age at which one can support an ECI is to be lowered from 18 to 16 years. The law is to come into effect on 1st January 2023, cf. Art. 3 European Citizens' Initiative Amendment Law.

Possible Impacts

The Competence Centre Youth-Check has identified the following possible impacts:

- The new regulation will allow young people to support a European citizens' initiative from the age of 16 instead of 18 as before (§ 4 Sentence 1 Number 2 of the Law on the European Citizens' Initiative). This strengthens their participation opportunities, as by signing an ECI they can express their support for a political issue and contribute to placing issues on the EU's political agenda.
- European Citizens' Initiatives may generally address issues that are important to young people and about which they are dissatisfied with current policies. Therefore, it is possible that young people from the age of 16 may be interested in such initiatives and use the new regulation to participate in European Citizens' Initiatives in the future. In this way, young people can be involved earlier in political decision-making processes and actively participate in political life.

Affected groups of young people

Young people with German citizenship³ who are 16 and 17 years old and can from 2023 on support an ECI for the first time due to the new regulation.



Youth-relevant effects

Affected areas of life

- family leisure education & work environment & health politics & society digital world

Strengthening participation opportunities

§ 4 Sentence 1 Number 2 of the Law on the European Citizens' Initiative⁴

The Regulation on the European Citizens' Initiative makes it possible to decouple the minimum age at which an ECI can be supported from the voting age for the European Parliament and to set it to 16 years of age. This is to be implemented in German law with the proposed legislation. In future, young people in Germany are also to be able to support a European Citizens' Initiative from the age of 16, cf. § 4 Sentence 1 Number 2 of the Law on the European Citizens' Initiative.

The new regulation will allow young people to support a European Citizens' Initiative from the age of 16, instead of 18 as before. This strengthens their opportunities for participation, as by signing an ECI they can express their support for a political issue and contribute to placing issues on the EU's political agenda. European Citizens' Initiatives call on the European Commission to propose legislation in specific areas where the EU has legislative competence.⁵ The new regulation can contribute to involving young people from the age of 16 in political decisions and processes earlier and enable them to participate actively in political life.⁶ When looking at the issues that are of political importance to young people between 14 and 17, these include global issues such as climate change or conflict and peace, but also the insufficient political participation and representation of their generation.⁷ Topics with which young people between 14 and 17 years of age are discontented politically and which also fall within the EU's legislative competence are, for example, environmental and climate policies as well as policies ("exploitation") towards the Global South or in 2020 criticism of Art. 13 of the EU copyright reform.⁸ Currently, European citizens' initiatives are underway, among others, to reduce VAT for environmentally friendly products and services,⁹ to improve compliance with environmental protection measures in the EU¹⁰ or to introduce an EU-wide deposit system for the recycling of plastic bottles.¹¹ Since these ECIs generally concern issues that are important to young people and where they are dissatisfied with current policies, it is feasible that young people aged 16 and over may be interested in such initiatives and use the new opportunities offered by the proposed regulation to participate in similar European Citizens' Initiatives in the future. The new regulation can thus help young people to engage more deeply with issues that are important to them and to learn how they can influence political processes and initiate change through participation at an early age.¹² This can also help young people to engage more with the European Union, which is often seen as trustworthy, but which 14- to 17-year-olds know little about.¹³

Furthermore, statements of support for the European citizens' initiative can be submitted digitally, which gives young people the opportunity to engage in easily accessible participation. The support of online petitions is especially popular among the younger generation,¹⁴ which is why the possibility to support an ECI in digital form covers and appeals to forms of political participation young people reach for.



Further remarks

Whether young people between the ages of 16 and 17 will participate in European Citizens' Initiatives in the future remains to be seen and could depend on various factors. On the one hand, they will still not be able to initiate an ECI themselves in the future, as this is reserved for persons who also have an active right to vote in the European elections according to Art. 5 Para 2 Sentence 1 of the ECI Regulation.¹⁵ Therefore, they can support these political initiatives, but not initiate them themselves. Moreover, even a successful European citizens' initiative does not oblige the European Commission to present a legal act, but only to examine it and justify the reasons why no measures are adopted.¹⁶ Even if European citizens' initiatives are successful, which seldom happens, they have so far not lead to a legal act of their own.¹⁷ This could reduce the level of interest in supporting an ECI among young people. In general, approval of the EU among the generation of 15- to 24-year-olds is 60 percent and thus significantly higher than among people over 55. However, young people participate less often in elections of the European Parliament, which shows that approval does not necessarily have to go hand in hand with participation in political processes.¹⁸ This connection could carry over to ECIs if young people feel that they have no impact.

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- ¹ Original title in German: Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Änderung des Gesetzes zur Europäischen Bürgerinitiative (Änderungsgesetz zur Europäischen Bürgerinitiative – EBIGÄndG).
 - ² Cf. 'Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Änderung des Gesetzes zur Europäischen Bürgerinitiative (Änderungsgesetz zur Europäischen Bürgerinitiative – EBIGÄndG)', 10 March 2022, 1.
 - ³ Cf. § 1 Para 1 Sentence 1 Number 1 Law on the European Citizens' Initiative.
 - ⁴ Original title in German: Gesetz zur Europäischen Bürgerinitiative (EBIG).
 - ⁵ Cf. S. Seeger, 'Bürgerinitiative, Europäische', in *Das Europalexikon*, ed. Große Hüttmann /Wehling, 3rd edition (Bonn, 2020).
 - ⁶ 'EBIGÄndG', 15.
 - ⁷ Cf. Marc Calmbach et al., 'Wie Ticken Jugendliche? 2020 Lebenswelten von Jugendlichen Im Alter von 14 Bis 17 Jahren in Deutschland' (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2020), 405, 410.
 - ⁸ Cf. Marc Calmbach et al., 413.
 - ⁹ European citizens' initiative on: „Green VAT – Grüne MwSt – eine grüne EU-MwSt zur Förderung umweltfreundlicher Produkte und Dienstleistungen“, https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2021/000011_de, last accessed on 14.03.2022.
 - ¹⁰ European citizens' initiative on: „Aufruf zum Handeln – Umweltschutz in allen Politikbereichen“, https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2021/000010_de, last accessed on 14.03.2022.
 - ¹¹ European citizens' initiative on: „ReturnthePlastics: Eine Bürgerinitiative zur Einführung eines EU-weiten Pfandsystems für das Recycling von Plastikflaschen“, https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2021/000007_de, last accessed on 14.03.2022.
 - ¹² 'EBIGÄndG', 15.
 - ¹³ Cf. Marc Calmbach et al., 'Wie Ticken Jugendliche? 2020 Lebenswelten von Jugendlichen Im Alter von 14 Bis 17 Jahren in Deutschland', 421.
 - ¹⁴ Cf. Dominik Hierlemann and Christian Huesmann, 'Die Reform Der Europäischen Bürgerinitiative: Nicht Für Die Jugend?', *Zukunft Der Demokratie* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, May 2018), 6, https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/181010_D_BST-Einwurf-5-2018-DEUTSCH.pdf, last accessed on 14.03.2022.
 - ¹⁵ Cf. 'EBIGÄndG', 15.
 - ¹⁶ Cf. Europäische Union, 'Europäische Bürgerinitiative', 2022, https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/how-it-works_de, last accessed on 14.03.2022.
 - ¹⁷ Cf. Dominik Hierlemann and Christian Huesmann, 'Die Reform Der Europäischen Bürgerinitiative: Nicht Für Die Jugend?', 2.
 - ¹⁸ Cf. Dominik Hierlemann and Christian Huesmann, 5.