

**ecds**

European Citizen Action Service



# ACTIVITY REPORT 2023

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# 1. ABOUT THE EUROPEAN CITIZEN ACTION SERVICE

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The European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) is an international, Brussels-based, non-profit organisation with pan-European membership and more than 30 years of experience in empowering citizens 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 in Central and Eastern Europe: from the Region for the Region

The ECAS branch office in Bulgaria coordinates ECAS's initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) related to tackling the spread of disinformation and populist narratives; backsliding of the rule of law; and narrowing of civic space. The branch is also developing innovative online tools for citizen engagement, such as crowdsourcing through digital platforms and digital dashboards for ethical social listening.

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

## **2023: Towards a European Citizen Centre of Excellence on Citizens' EU rights and European Democracy in the evolving Digital Age**

In times of challenge to the international order and our European values, uncertainty and rapid change; citizens need an anchor – a safe, trusted reference on their rights and opportunities as Europeans, and a fair and forward-looking advocate of a citizen-centred Europe.

In 2023, to address these needs, ECAS, as a citizen-centric European civil society organisation, tripled its activities in the Member States, contributing to promoting EU values, countering disinformation and co-creating a blueprint for digital transformation that leaves no one behind. ECAS provided tailored advice to almost 20 000 EU citizens to help them exercise their EU Rights and supported them in launching and carrying out citizens' initiatives on a variety of subjects. ECAS continued to deliver high-quality training programmes to public administrations, civil society organisations and citizens and, for the first time, financially supported member projects – civil society organisations in the EU – in the areas of EU Rights and European Democracy.



Looking towards 2024 – a special year of European elections – ECAS developed three First Aid Democracy toolkits for citizens, civil society and decision-makers and compiled tailored information on the elections for each Member State and in all EU languages. Moreover, ECAS carried out an EU-wide crowdsourcing initiative, soliciting input from 1,500 citizens across the EU on a fictional European Elections Dystopia to identify fears, solutions to prevent those fears, personal pledges and recommendations to EU decision-makers regarding the future of European democracy.

In 2023, a dream came true – we were able, for the first time in the history of ECAS, to re-grant to our members in the EU. ECAS provided 374,078.12€, supporting 12 projects from Belgium, Italy, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain all of which implemented high-quality projects, contributing to ECAS's mission of empowering citizens to create a more inclusive and stronger European Union.

All our activities align with our ambition to develop ECAS by 2030 as an internationally recognized European Citizen Centre of Excellence on Citizens' EU rights and European Democracy in the evolving digital age. As a Centre of Excellence, ECAS will continue to build a team of highly skilled team members who collaborate and work together to drive leadership, guidance and support to citizens; and promote innovation, best practice and excellence at EU level.

To make this ambition come true, we require the continued support of our funders, engagement from our members and partners, the judicious advice of our Board of Directors and Governing Members and the commitment and highly professional work of our ECAS team.

I warmly thank all of them for their outstanding work and support during 2023 and look forward to a successful 2024!

**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.

ECAS's activities in the EU Rights focus area aims 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 2023, ECAS's work in EU Rights area was focused on:

- Providing practical legal advice to more than 18,700 European citizens on their EU rights;
- Building capacity of public authorities and EU Rights' advice organisations on how to better implement the EU Rights of EU mobile citizens through training and focus groups;
- Providing tailored evidence-based advice to the EU Institutions on the rights of EU citizens through the YEA quarterly feedback report;
- Building a knowledge base on the use of citizen-centric Artificial Intelligence (AI) in law enforcement.

### Services to Citizens

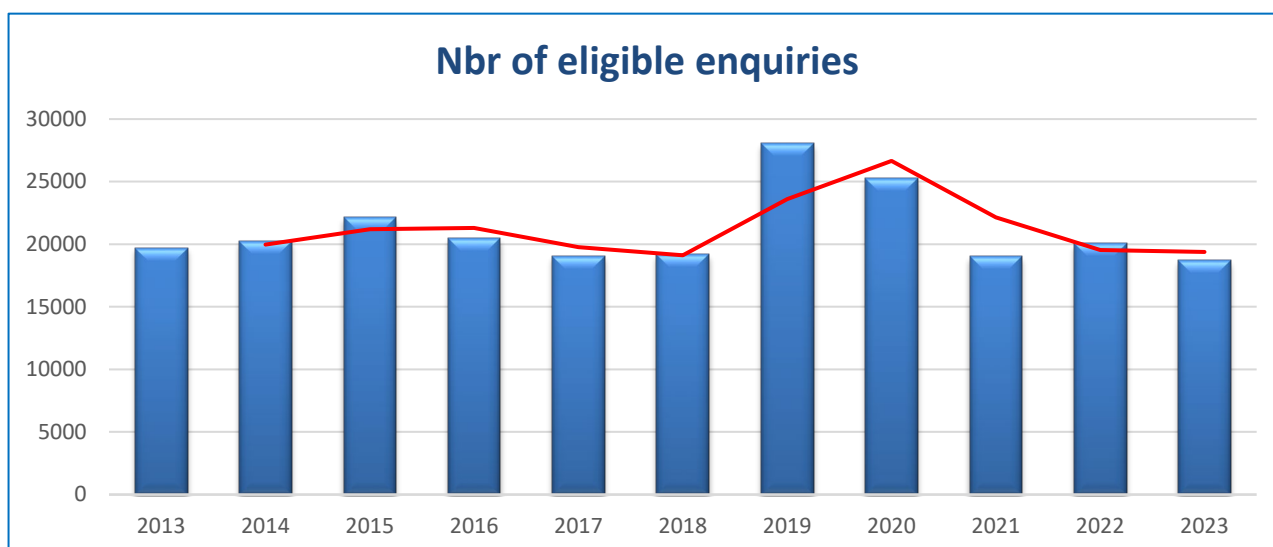
#### Your Europe Advice (YEA)

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

ECAS's team of 58 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 2023

In 2023, YEA received 25,559 enquiries. The YEA legal experts replied to 18,702 enquiries, which is a decrease of 6.8% compared with the previous year.

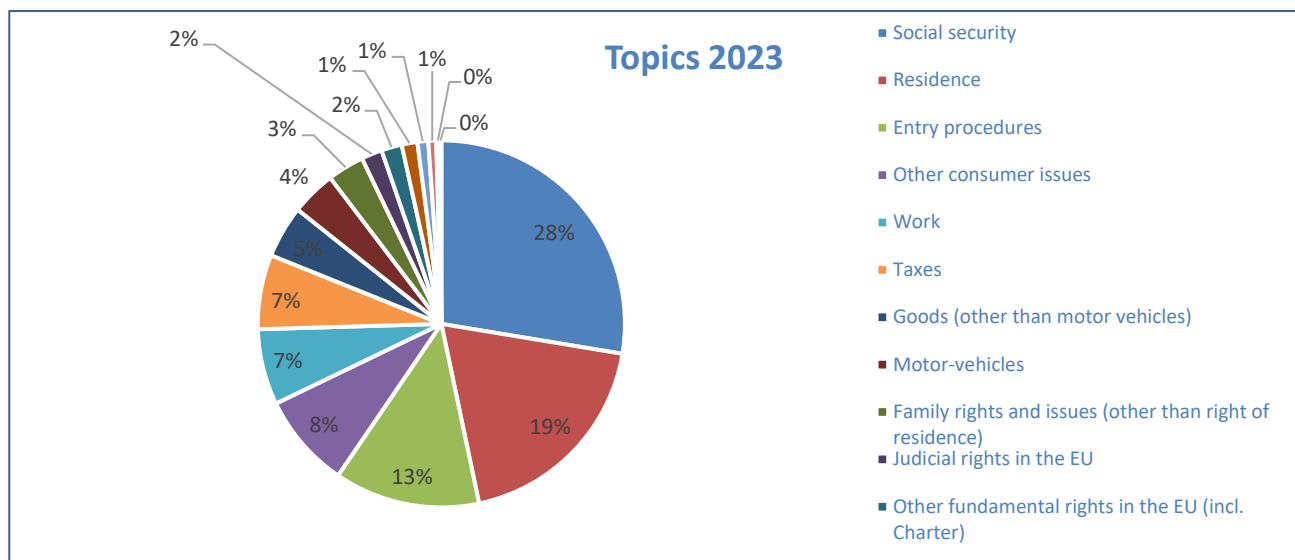


The quality of the service was maintained at a high level. Under the service contract, the European Commission requires ECAS to ensure a high level of quality of the replies and to carry out monthly quality controls based on a sample of eligible enquiries that “should be 10% of all cases” and “not less than 150”. The results ensure that ECAS can provide targeted feedback and guide the experts, if and where necessary. The quality control therefore also acts as a guarantee mechanism, ensuring that citizens receive accurate and constructive answers.

In 2023, more than 94% of the checked cases fulfilled all the quality assurance criteria and 94% of all replies were provided within the deadline. The quality of the answers is consistently high and has remained stable throughout the years, which demonstrates the high standard of YEA.

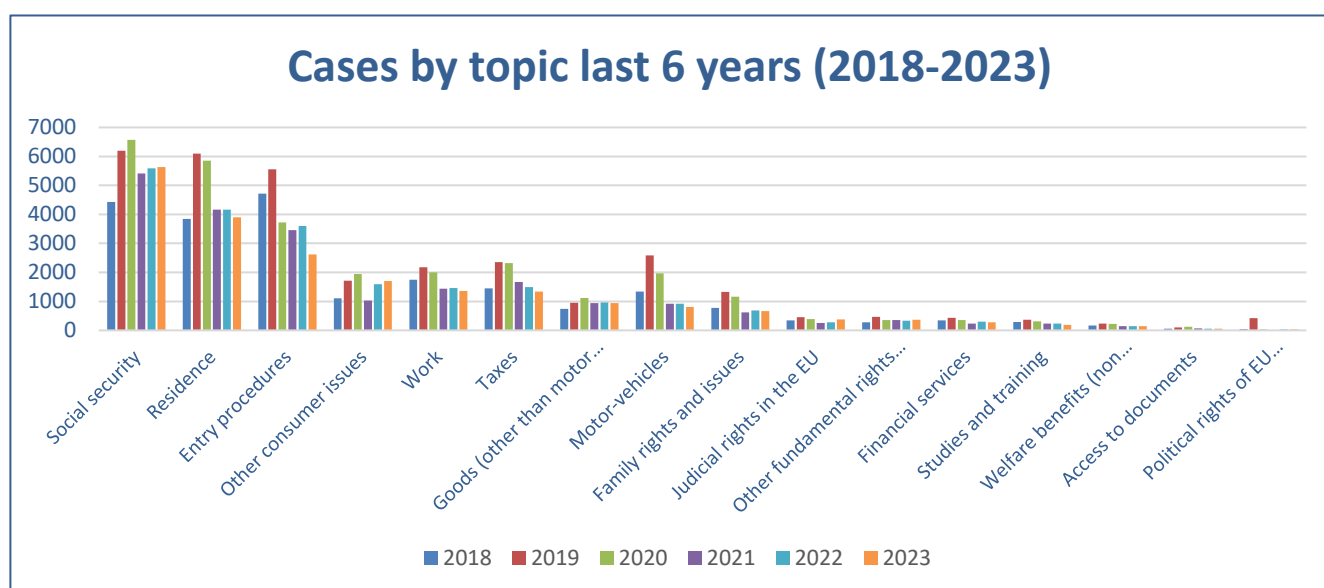
## Nature of the Enquiries

In 2023, there was a slight decrease in the number of questions the service received compared with the previous year. The number of ineligible questions was high (21%) but stable compared with 2022. Some UK related enquiries are no longer covered by EU law. There is a significant number of enquiries from third-country nationals and third-country businesses which are not related to EU law and cannot be dealt with by YEA.



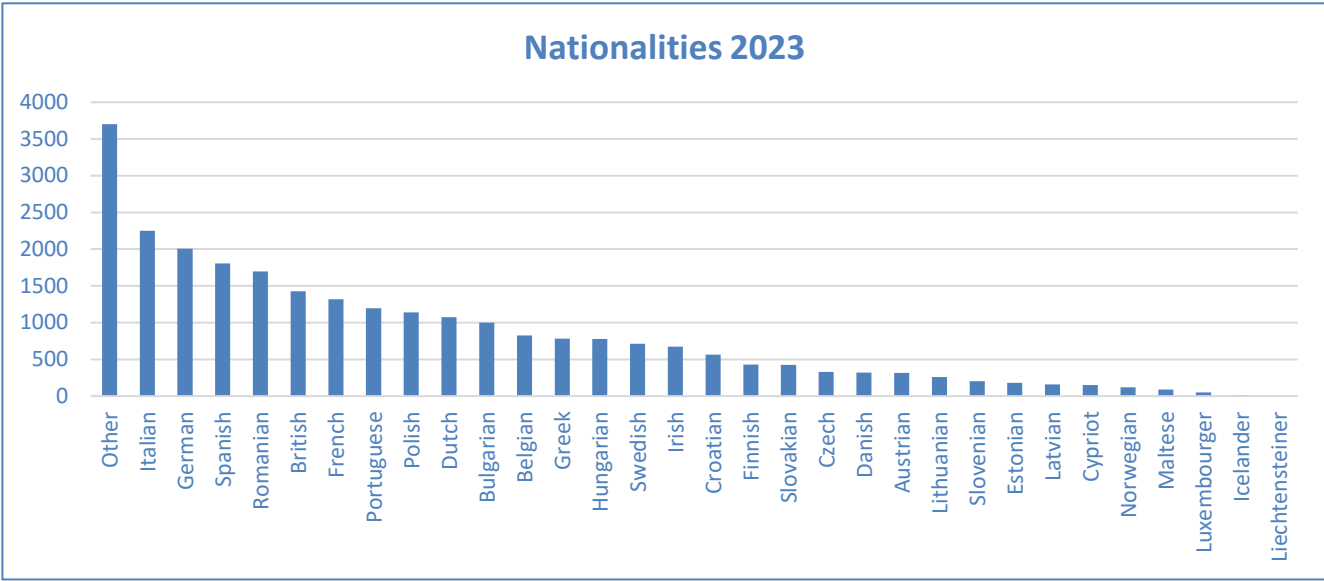
In 2023, YEA received a high number of social security enquiries (28%), followed by questions related to residence rights (19%) and entry procedures (13%). These are the same top three issues as in 2022.

By comparison with 2022, issues related to working in another country, consumer law and tax matters associated with the new concept of teleworking, remain stable.

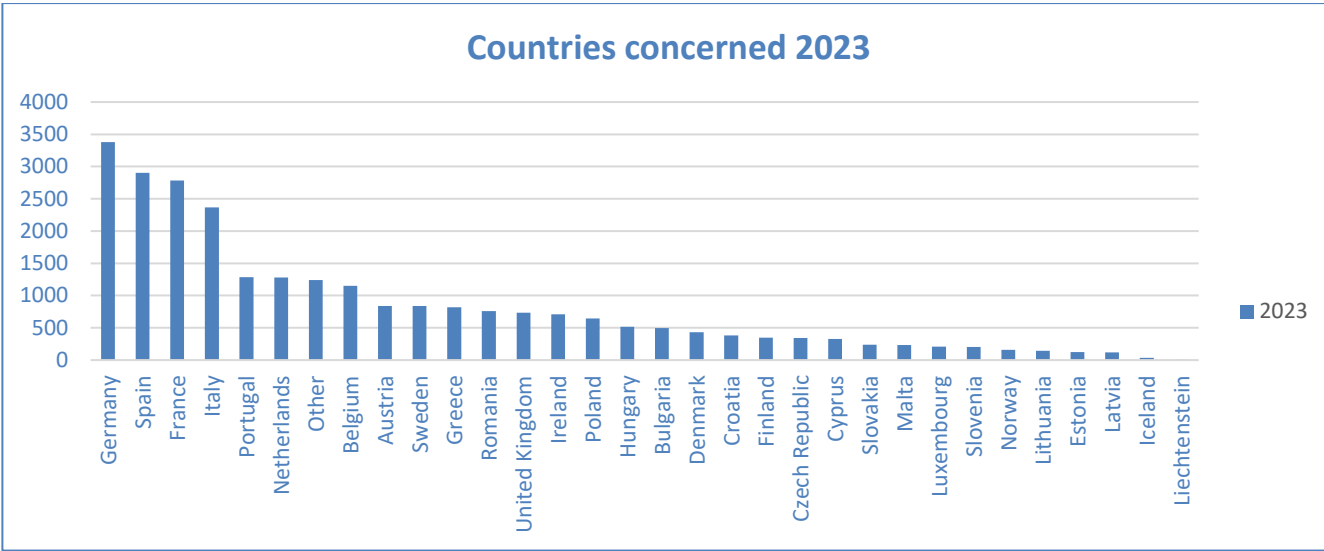


YEA received enquiries from citizens from all 27 EU countries and from Norwegian, Icelandic, and third-country nationals who are family members of EU citizens. While 14% of the enquiries were from third-country nationals, YEA received fewer questions from British citizens compared with previous years. The top ten nationalities that contact YEA remain similar to 2022.





The enquiries received concerned all 27 Member States, as well as Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. YEA received an increased number of questions relating to Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal.



## Outreach Activities

Six outreach activities were conducted by YEA experts in Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The number of participants varied significantly according to the type of event but, based on the experts' feedback reports, more than 600 citizens may have been reached.

The outreach activities can be categorised as network meetings and were organised by various services, networks, or agencies: the European Commission Representation in Bratislava, the European Commission and the EU assistance services in Vilnius and the European Commission Representation in Dublin. In these activities, YEA experts complied with the two main outreach 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.

### EU Legal Updates

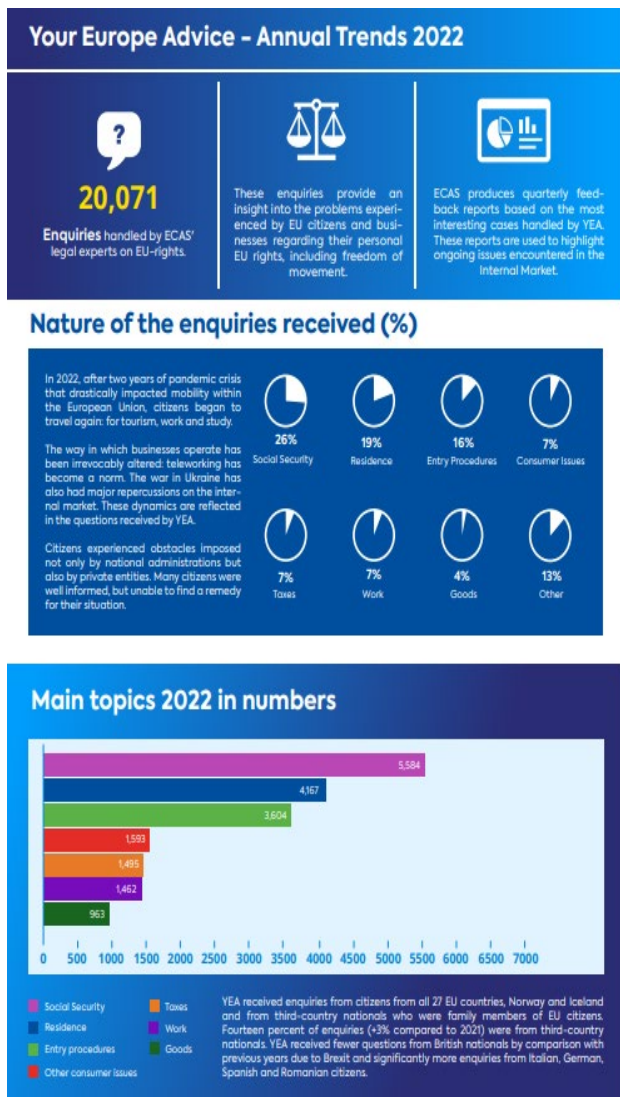
The Management Team ensures that the experts are kept up-to-date with new legislation and case law by providing them with a monthly newsletter entitled 'EU Law Updates'. This newsletter is tailored to the continuously evolving informational needs of the experts. It includes the latest news concerning 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.

### Feedback Reports

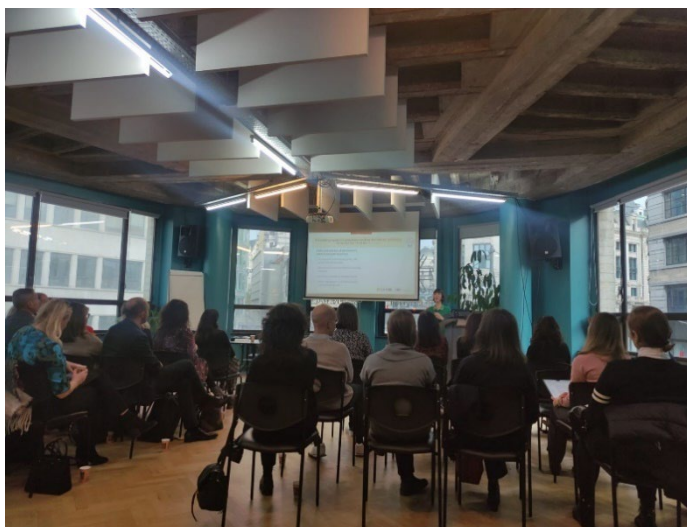
At the request of the European Commission, ECAS provides four feedback reports per year. These reports include details of the cases handled by the YEA experts and a policy analysis of the topics covered in the enquiries. The reports provide a clear overview of the main problems citizens and businesses encounter while exercising their EU rights and assist the Commission in understanding the issues which require their attention. The content of the reports is adapted to current events. For example, in 2023, there was a chapter on post-Brexit enquiries and also a chapter on enquiries associated with the war in Ukraine.

### YEA annual trends

Based on the enquiries responded to during 2022, ECAS produced a [report](#) identifying key trends in obstacles to free movement. This was published in March 2023. The 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 ECAS website.



## YEA training seminar



On 23 and 24 November 2023, the European Commission and ECAS organised the annual training seminar for Your Europe Advice. The seminar took place in a hybrid format, in person and online. The training covered topics related to Brexit, implementation of Directive 2004/38/EC and social security. Attendees from SOLVIT and the Commission were also present. An internal session with the experts was organised on 24 November.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the internal market, this seminar was an opportunity to look back over the 28 years of YEA's existence and the evolution of questions posed. The experts have had an excellent overview of the shaping of the Single Market, the existing barriers and the requirements to improve the Single Market. The Commission requested the experts to share this experience in small groups. Their conclusions were compiled in a report sent to the Commission in early December.

## YEA Knowledge

In 2023, the EU Commission (Secretariat General) requested YEA to provide figures for a report on the implementation of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement. YEA participated in training on EU Product Rules organized by European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) and provided an overview of cases related to this topic.

## Projects

### Pop AI Horizon 2020 project



During the period 2021-2023, ECAS took part in the popAI project, *"A European Positive Sum Approach towards AI tools in support of Law Enforcement and Safeguarding Privacy and Fundamental rights"*. PopAI is a Horizon 2020 project aimed at enhancing trust in the use of AI by law enforcement authorities by fostering a constructive dialogue between policymakers, law enforcement agencies and citizens.

In 2023, ECAS organised two Stakeholder Policy Labs in Spain and Italy, in collaboration with local law enforcement agencies. The aim of the Stakeholder Policy Labs was to present a concrete scenario on the use of AI in policing and to gather law enforcement authorities, civil servants, NGOs and academics to discuss concerns and define potential solutions. Participants successfully developed recommendations to support efficient use of AI tools which support the work of law enforcement authorities while respecting human rights and privacy. Further information about the Stakeholder Policy Lab methodology can be found [here](#).

The popAI project ended in September 2023. ECAS organised a closing event in Brussels where the project conclusions were presented.

The project was implemented by ECAS, as a member of a consortium with:

- National Center for Scientific Research “Demokritos”, Greece
- 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 für den öffentlichen Dienst in Bayern, Germany
- Madrid Police, Spain
- Akademia Policajneho Zboru V Bratislave, Slovakia
- Comune di Torino, Italy.

## EURECA (European Citizenship Accelerator) 2023

The EURECA 2023 project is part of ECAS’s four-year framework contract under the CERV operating grants. The project aims to further develop the capacities of ECAS and its members to empower citizens and promote EU citizenship rights, providing citizens with the opportunity to contribute to the implementation of the European Democracy Action Plan and the EU Citizenship Report 2020.



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

## ECAS Citizenship Innovation Awards





The 2023 edition of the ECAS awards was launched on 15 July 2023, through the ECAS crowdsourcing platform. In advance of the forthcoming European Parliament elections, during the first phase of the Awards, ECAS solicited citizens' ideas on how to encourage political participation. Participants shared their vision of the current challenges and potential solutions that should be implemented to foster political engagement.

During the second phase, citizens were invited to select the three best ideas. Winners will receive prizes and will be able to present their ideas during the State of the

Union Citizens' Rights Conference on 19 March 2024.

## Civil Society Accelerator



The Civil Society Accelerator is a community service provided by ECAS to support citizens and small Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in maximizing their impact and achieving their EU-related mission.

Under this service, ECAS experts respond to requests from civil society on the following topics:

- Advocacy for EU Rights
- Guidance for effective campaigning
- Making CSOs a credible source of information
- Financial management
- Programme strategy
- Human resource management
- Implementing training activity (new topic added in 2023)
- Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, Accessibility (new topic added in 2023)

To benefit from the CSA service, individuals are required to articulate their request via an [online form](#). Upon receipt of the form by ECAS, they are assigned to a suitable expert. ECAS provided advice in 2023 in "Advocacy for EU Rights", "Effective Campaigning", "Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, Accessibility", "Financial Management" and "Programme Strategy".

In addition, in 2023, within the framework of the CSA, ECAS organised two thematic one-hour lunchtime webinars endorsing a proactive awareness-raising and mentoring approach to reach out and support its stakeholders. In total, 36 citizens and organisations benefited from the



[Gender-inclusive language](#) and [Implementing a Training Activity](#) webinars.

## Focus groups on Voting Rights

To raise awareness on electoral rights amongst the EU mobile citizens community, ECAS organised two online “focus group” sessions gathering NGOs, policy makers and EU mobile citizens from Luxembourg and Spain a few weeks before local elections took place. The purpose of the focus groups on voting rights is to map challenges and elaborate recommendations to foster political participation of EU mobile citizens in municipal elections.

During the focus groups, we first discussed the challenges that EU mobile citizens face to fully enjoy their voting rights, including a lack of awareness of existing rights. The focus group sessions then gathered opinions and solutions on how to tackle these challenges, concluding with a set of recommendations for local authorities and civil society to increase political participation of EU mobile citizens.

Our reports can be found on the ECAS website:

[Focus Group: Political Participation of EU Mobile Citizens in Luxembourg - ECAS](#)

[Focus Group: Political Participation of EU Mobile Citizens in Spain - ECAS](#)

## Training on Freedom of Movement Rights

Since 2022, ECAS has organised training events with both civil society actors and civil servants on freedom of movement at national level, with the purpose of helping them understand and interpret current EU legislation.

In 2023, ECAS organised training sessions in cities with a high number of EU mobile citizens: Stockholm, Dublin and Berlin.

The format of the training sessions was interactive, including an audience quiz at the beginning and end of each session to assess whether the knowledge of participants had increased during the training. Each training session was conducted by legal experts who provided tailor-made advice to participants. The latter were able to raise questions related to their everyday work.



All training sessions took place in a hybrid format, in the local language. Gathering public authorities and civil society created a dynamic and positive synergy, enhanced by strong interest among participants to create networks and engage in future activities.

## ProEUValuesBG (Enhancing the role of CSOs in Bulgaria for protecting and promoting EU fundamental rights and values)



In January 2023, ECAS commenced implementation of the ProEUValuesBG project which raises public awareness of EU values at national, regional and local levels in Bulgaria. The project also provides capacity-building and financial support to Bulgarian CSOs to enhance their role as key messengers. The project is led by the Open Society Institute Sofia (OSIS), in collaboration with ECAS and the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation (WCIF). Two funding streams are available: one for grassroots CSOs; the other for initiatives and strategic actions from more experienced organisations.

ECAS leads the project's capacity-building work, providing online and in-person training to aspiring and selected applicant organisations developing projects in one of the three thematic areas: European rights, Democracy and Non-discrimination.

In 2023, ECAS organised and delivered:

- 1) Information days on EU Rights and Values: 144 representatives from civil organisations attended in person in each of the six Bulgarian planning regions.
- 2) Thematic webinars on EU Rights, European Democracy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion attended by 166 participants.
- 3) Two training sessions on practical implementation of EU values for third parties from the small projects scheme: participation by 48 organisations.

In terms of impact, the participating CSOs gained a thorough understanding of the three thematic areas (EU rights/ Democracy/ Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) and received technical and practical information and assistance in the preparation of their applications. The assistance comprised practical implementation of EU rights and values, narrowly defining the scope of projects; advance preparation and research; intersectionality; gender mainstreaming; strategic communication with different audiences; dissemination; and project impact assessment. The materials developed by ECAS were shared on the project website for further reference and use by the third-party applicants. All capacity-building activities contributed to the protection and promotion of Union values, specifically in the work of small, remote and rural based CSOs.

## BOLSTER



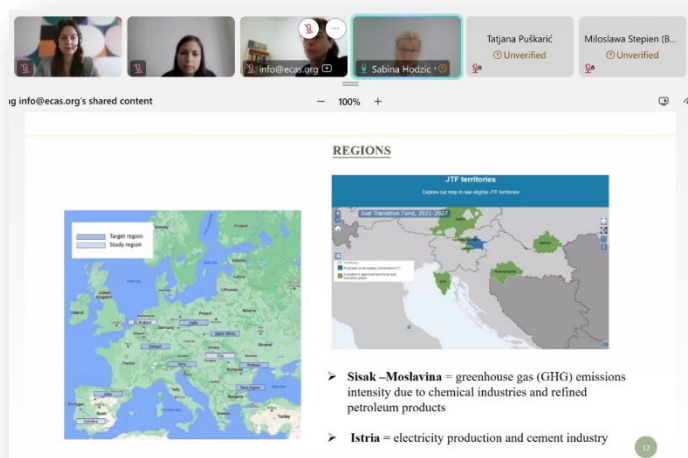
In September 2022, ECAS commenced implementation of the BOLSTER project (Bridging Organizations and marginalised communities for Local Sustainability Transitions in EuRope).

Funded by the European Commission's Horizon Europe Framework Programme, this three-year project is designed to understand how marginalised communities are affected by European Green Deal (EGD) related policies and whether involving these communities in decision-making processes increases support for transition plans. BOLSTER will deliver new scientific evidence on decarbonization transition strategies and how they intersect with various dimensions of inequality, such as gender, race, age and class. It will conceptualize the principle of "leaving no one behind" by developing participatory governance models and transition guidelines based on climate justice and gender equality.

ECAS is responsible for organising two types of policy dialogue: three EU-focused policy dialogues and ten regional policy dialogues, focusing on target regions of the project (Istria - Croatia, Silesia-Poland, Prahova-Romania, Hainaut-Belgium, Halle-Germany, Leon-Spain, Stara Zagora-Bulgaria).

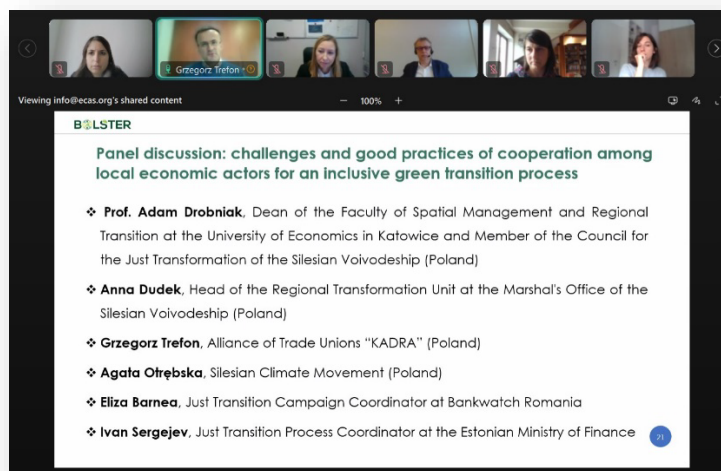
In 2023, ECAS organised the first two regional dialogues, which took place online on 26 September and 27 October.

The first event focused on challenges and lessons learned in leaving no one behind in the green transition. Perspectives were presented from Croatian regions going through the Just Transition process (Istria and Sisak-Moslavina). Cases from Carinthia (Austria) and Eindhoven (The Netherlands) were also presented. Further information on the event is available [here](#).



The second dialogue focused on the impact of the green transition on local economic actors,

their role and their relationships in the Just Transition process at regional and local levels in Upper-Silesia (Poland), Romania and Ida-Virumaa (Estonia). A short summary, presentations and recordings of the event can be found [here](#).



Both dialogues brought together perspectives of regional policymakers, NGO representatives, trade unions, civil society, business sector and academics, stimulating cross-regional policy learning and supporting validation of the project findings.

#### Project Partners:

- Stichting Katholieke Universiteit Brabant (Tilburg University), The Netherlands – leader of the project's consortium
- EU Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Spain SL (RMIT-EU), Spain
- Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny W Katowicach (UEKAT – University of Economics in Katowice), Poland
- Sociedade Portuguesa De Inovação Consultadoria Empresarial e Fomento Da Inovação Sa (SPI), Portugal
- Crowdhelix Limited (CHX), Ireland
- University of National and World Economy (UNWE), Bulgaria
- Sveučilište u Rijeci, Fakultet za Menadžment u Turizmu i ugostiteljstvu (FMHT - Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Rijeka), Croatia
- Université de Liege (ULiège), Belgium
- Asociația Make Better (MKBT), Romania
- Culture Goes Europe (CGE) - Soziokulturelle Initiative Erfurt EV, Germany
- CEE Bankwatch Network, Czech Republic

## Events and Advocacy Activities

State of the Union Conference 2023: Shaping the Future of European Citizenship – Understanding EU Mobile Citizens' Motivations and Adapting

## EU Citizenship to New Realities



The “State of the Union Citizens’ Rights” Conference has been the annual flagship event of ECAS’s EU Rights focus area since 2018. Its goal is to provide a forum to discuss current developments in the field of EU citizenship and engage stakeholders who have an interest in contributing to stronger EU citizenship. Each year, the focus of the Conference is different, depending on the latest political developments.

In 2023, the Conference, developed within the framework of the EURECA 2023 project under the CERV programme of the European Commission, focused on understanding the motivations of EU mobile citizens and making EU citizenship more inclusive. The event brought together 87 participants and was livestreamed on YouTube.

Marc Angel, Vice-President of the European Parliament, opened the 2023 State of the Union Citizens’ Rights Conference with a keynote speech on the current state of freedom of movement for rainbow families and what has improved and what remains to be done for LGBTQIA+ citizens to fully enjoy their rights when crossing borders.

Following his introduction, Marrit Westerweel, Citizen’s Advice Manager at ECAS, presented the annual trends in enquiries received from citizens as part of the Your Europe Advice service.

The first Conference panel discussed the reasons why EU citizens move to other Member States. Following an interactive session on the perceived motivations behind moving between Member States, moderated by ECAS’s Executive Director, Assya Kavrakova, Talitha Dubow from the [Maastricht University](#) presented her study on the complexity of intra-EU migrant decision-making.

The second panel focused on shaping a more inclusive citizenship. Sergio Pérez Barranco from [FEANTSA](#) presented the main issues and obstacles faced by destitute citizens. Nina Miller from the [University of Glasgow](#) took the floor to introduce her studies on the gender dimension of EU free movement. Her address was followed by a presentation from Marie Le Sourd from the organisation, [On the Move](#), on obstacles to freedom of movement of artists.

The final panel discussed the future of European mobility. ECAS's Claire Morot-Sir presented the freedom of movement training organised by ECAS in European cities with a high number of EU mobile citizens. Anna Sophie Liebst, project manager at [Info Norden](#), shared her organisation's strategy on the removal of cross-border obstacles in the Nordic region. The panel ended with an interactive session on rights that citizens would like to see granted, followed by a presentation of the European Commission's Directorate for Justice agenda by Jan Rohde-Stadler, Union Citizenship and Free Movement Leader.

The Conference closed with disclosure of the names of the ECAS Awards 2022 winners, presented by Jean Lambert, Chairperson of the ECAS Board. The ceremony awarded three winners for their ideas on creating new EU Rights:

- Mathilde Pottier for the following idea: "free access to health care independently on location";
- Patrick Lausch for the following idea: "access to bank funds without additional fees, transaction charges, and conversion fees";
- Konstantsa Karaleeva for the following idea "right to equal marriage and parental rights".

Further information can be found [here](#).





### 3. EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY FOCUS AREA

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ECAS's European Democracy focus area has two main objectives. It explores democratic innovation and a more open and inclusive form of policy-making by involving citizens through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It also develops a more precise understanding of how trends, such as populism and online disinformation, affect our societies and encourages civic engagement to increase the resilience of our democracy.

In 2023, ECAS's work in the European Democracy's focus area was on:

- **Digital Democracy:** In 2023, ECAS took stock of its period of almost ten years working in the field of e-democracy and published a comprehensive policy paper *"Crowdsourcing: The Citizens' Highway to Policy-making in the EU"*. The paper drew from the crowdsourcing activities in ten European cities on the topic of 'air quality' under the CODE Europe and DigiDem projects. Furthermore, ECAS continued its work on Digital Transformation by chairing the Digital Transformation Working Group, coordinated by Civil Society Europe, and holding additional discussions among CSOs at five local events in Member States to co-create further recommendations and update the Digital Inclusion Guidelines for the EU.
- **Understanding Populism:** ECAS has been fostering the creation of civil society coalitions in Central and Eastern Europe with a single goal: countering disinformation and building resilience against it. Throughout 2023, ECAS continued its capacity-building efforts in Czechia and Poland, where it supported CSOs in creating online disinformation campaigns allowing them to effectively counter fake narratives and drive democratic participation through targeted communication.
- **Civic Engagement:** ECAS has continued managing, on behalf of the European Commission, the European Citizens' Initiative Forum, an online collaborative platform (available in all 24 EU languages) providing advice and information to initiative organisers before, during and after the process of launching and implementing an initiative.

# Services to Citizens

## European Citizens’ Initiative Forum



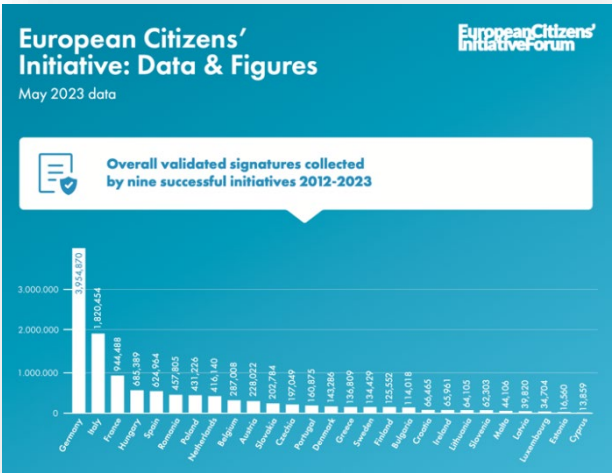
The European Citizens’ Initiative Forum, operated on behalf of and under contract with the European Commission, was implemented as part of a three-year service contract commencing in November 2019. In 2023, ECAS continued its work in the new contract for the ECI Forum (2022-2025).

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 European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI). The Forum aims to become a reference entry point for all information and capacity-building related to ECIs.

Over the course of 2023, ECAS operated the platform on a daily basis and implemented all the activities set out in the Work Plan, together with its subcontractors, Democracy International and ProMedia Productions.

The new learning materials created in 2023 included a video on the Seek Advice service of the Forum, a video on how to draft and submit an ECI; a meet and greet video with ECI organisers from two citizens’ initiatives; a guidance note on financial reporting; a welcome package for new organisers; and development of success stories about recent successful ECIs: Stop Finning – Stop the Trade; and Save Cruelty Free Cosmetics.

In June 2023, ECAS updated the infographic published in 2021. The infographic offers diverse data and figures on the ECI, such as geographic distribution and sources of funding of successful initiatives.



In 2023, ECAS held three webinars on topics related to the European Citizens' Initiative, covering the central online collection system; engaging young people in your ECI and what the ECI is and why it is an important participatory democracy tool. A total of approximately 55 people attended the three webinars.

In 2021, ECAS launched the first edition of the online course, *'Essential Skills for European Citizens' Initiative Organisers'*. In 2023, ECAS updated this course with additional visuals and information on financial reporting. Currently, a total of 1378 users are enrolled on this course and 17% of users have completed the online course.

In addition to the webinars and the online course, ECAS also produced tailor-made training (Welcome Call) for newly registered Initiatives. In the first year of this new contract, ECAS provided training to organisers of four newly registered ECIs.

In response to the growing number of young ECI organisers, (216 organisers of all ECIs from 2012 to 2023 are between the ages of 21 and 30) and and the European Year of Youth, ECAS continued its plan, commenced in February 2022, to increase outreach to young European citizens. The aim is to raise awareness about the ECI and the Forum, in the hope that more EU citizens will become aware of this unique instrument available for them to shape the European Union. In 2023, ECAS presented the ECI and the ECI Forum to five universities and 175 students and professors.

In addition to the university presentations, ECAS actively participated in the EESC's Your Europe Your Say (YEYS) event and the 2023 European Youth Event organised by the European Parliament in Strasbourg.



@EU2023 - source: EESC

On 23-24 March, ECAS conducted a workshop at the YEYS event for 105 high school students. ECAS used the framework of the ECI to develop a simulation game to help the students develop policy recommendations on the topic of youth engagement and sustainable democracy in Europe. On 9-10 June, ECAS organised and moderated two workshops, *'The European Citizens' Initiative – What it is, the tools available and how you can use it to fight for YOUR cause in Europe!'* at the 2023 EYE event.

ECAS developed case-studies on successful ECIs and an ECI simulation game where participants developed their own initiatives. The workshops were attended by 33 participants.



Moreover, ECAS continued its role in co-organising and participating in the EESC's annual ECI Day. On 8 June, ECAS organised and moderated a workshop, *'How to Turn Your Idea into a European Citizens' Initiative'*, which was attended by 51 participants. ECAS also participated in the opening session, *'Lessons Learnt: Dos & Don'ts'*.

The communication and outreach efforts by ECAS continued to produce excellent results, with the number of unique visitors reaching an average of 12,236 and an increasing geographical diversity of users accessing the platform. By the end of the contract's first year (2023), the ECI Forum reached 922 subscribers and 776 online course subscribers. Furthermore, ECAS organised five stakeholder consultation activities.

ECAS continued to manage the 'SEEK advice' section of the Forum, handling citizens' enquiries and providing legal, campaigning, and fundraising advice, available in all 24 EU languages, to 36 potential and current organisers over the course of 2023. Out of this total, eighteen enquiries concerned legal aspects, two related to campaigning, one related to fundraising and fifteen concerned other relevant topics.



# Projects

## CODE Europe

Co-Deciding Europe (or CODE Europe) was an innovative three-year project that concluded in December 2023, funded by the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation. CODE Europe involved both transnational experimentation with e-democracy platforms for the co-creation of policies and a research project on e-participation.

The aim of this project was three-fold:

- 1) to allow citizens to co-produce solutions for Europe on 'air quality' through crowdsourcing legislation in five countries;
- 2) to implement a Digital Dashboard for social listening to gather online opinions on '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 social listening was evaluated through assessment methodologies based on clearly defined criteria and indicators.



In 2023, the third and final year of the project, ECAS led the consortium in an analysis of the results of the first ever transnational crowdsourcing on 'air quality' in ten European cities (Greece, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Portugal and Hungary under the CODE Europe project and Brussels, Podgorica, Amsterdam and Berlin under the DigiDem project). The crowdsourcing had been held the previous year in which 4184 citizens actively participated by suggesting solutions for improving air quality. In addition to analysing the outcomes, ECAS worked with the partners to promote citizens' proposals to policy-makers at all levels, including the EU, where the citizens' recommendations were forwarded to Members of the European Parliament, targeting those working on the Ambient Air Quality Directives.

The CODE Europe partners used the Assessment Framework for E-Participation, developed during the first year to assess the process that ran in the ten cities. This led to a better understanding of the potential and challenges of crowdsourcing as an e-democracy tool for citizen participation in policy-making. As a result, in 2023, ECAS developed an online training course to ensure the sustainability of the knowledge accumulated in the project and published the policy paper, *"Crowdsourcing: The Citizens Highway to Policy-making in the EU"*, with recommendations on how to successfully crowdsource across the EU.

## 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 was implemented 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 (there are an estimated 400 000 premature deaths related to poor air quality in Europe each year). ECAS piloted the crowdsourcing in Brussels by implementing the *‘Brussels For Clean Air’* campaign and managed to gather more than 300 citizens on the crowdsourcing platform and 214 concrete contributions towards improving air quality in Belgium and at EU level.

In 2023, the final year of DigiDEM, ECAS organised a closing event in Brussels to showcase the top 10 solutions for ‘air quality’ upon which citizens believe their local and national political representatives should focus during the coming years.

Throughout the project, ECAS managed to secure the engagement of Alain Maron, Minister of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region, responsible for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Participatory Democracy, who acted as a patron at local level and encouraged engagement throughout the campaign.

He participated at the final event to show his commitment to listening to citizens’ ideas, explain his plans on improving air quality in the upcoming year and demonstrate his support for further citizen participatory democracy activities in policy-making processes.

Maron’s opening speech was followed by an official handover by ECAS of the crowdsourced citizens’ solutions to air pollution. The event continued with two panel discussions amongst experts and participants. The first panel focused on air pollution in Brussels, with experts discussing how this affects peoples’ lives and the policies which should be implemented to tackle this. The second panel focused on crowdsourcing and the potential and challenges of e-participation as a tool to





involve citizens in policy matters.

Project Partners:

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

## EURECA (European Citizenship Accelerator)

The EURECA 2023 project further developed the capacities of ECAS and its members to empower citizens and promote participatory democracy. The objective is also to give citizens the opportunity to contribute to implementation of the European Democracy Action Plan and the EU Citizenship Report 2020.

## Digital Transformation



In 2023, as one of the EURECA activities, ECAS, together with other partner CSOs across Europe, organised five interactive training and co-creation events focusing on five policy areas: Digital Democracy, Digital Economy, Digital Safeguards, Digital Rights and Digital Education. The events followed up on the co-creation exercises held in 2022 in Luxembourg, Belgium, Portugal, Latvia and Ireland which produced preliminary Digital Inclusion Guidelines to raise awareness on digital policies at EU level and allow local stakeholders to contribute to the discussion on digital inclusion.

The five events took place in different Member States in 2023: Germany, Greece, Croatia, Italy and Bulgaria. Each event invited civil society representatives, national policymakers, digital transformation experts and citizens from the Member State to discuss the state of play of digital policies and improved future inclusion.

During the events, ECAS and national experts presented the main challenges of digital transformation at EU and local level. ECAS had the opportunity to showcase the recommendations advocated by civil society organisations across Europe in the framework of the Civil Society Convention that contributed to the Conference on the Future of Europe. The event participants proposed their own recommendations during a co-creation session and

discussed citizens' interests, principally those in vulnerable groups.

Based on these recommendations, at the end of 2023, an updated version of the Digital Inclusion Guidelines was produced for dissemination at EU level in advance of the 2024 European Elections.

ECAS identified recurring themes in the five Member States and made practical proposals in two broad categories:

- infrastructure requirements; and
- the deployment of a supportive ecosystem.

## Anti-disinformation alliances in CEE

In 2023, ECAS fostered the creation of two coalitions in Central and Eastern Europe (Czechia and Poland) to build capacity and implement targeted anti-disinformation campaigns against fake narratives of national importance. In both countries, participating CSOs were trained to recognise and counter disinformation and connect with their audiences using social media platforms and marketing approaches. As a result, civil society organisations gained knowledge, and practical experience in effective (online) communication and addressing disinformation. All participating CSOs work with minority groups and are active in promoting gender equality and women's rights. In both Czechia and Poland, CSOs developed targeted campaign messaging which was delivered effectively: by experts and celebrities (Czechia) and through humanistic content (fairytales in Poland) to inform the population about the dangers of conspiracy theories and disinformation, thus creating resilience against disinformation and promoting free democratic participation. The partner CSOs in both countries carried out successful social media campaigns which reached an impressive number of people.

In Czechia, the anti-disinformation campaign was coordinated by the Europeum Institute for European Policy (Europeum), which organised a social media campaign on three distinct topics and in-person training on disinformation. The topics for the social media campaign were those, according to collected data, that are most often subject to disinformation narratives: 1) Czechia's accession to the Eurozone, 2) receiving refugees from Ukraine, 3) the EU Green deal. The campaign was timely, as the forthcoming European elections prompted massive disinformation on the relationship between the EU and Czechia. The campaign products successfully generated hundreds of thousands of views, engagements and comments at a very low cost.

In Poland, the social media campaign was implemented by Alliance4Europe, who informed the audience of the dangers of conspiracy theories and disinformation by introducing a humorous story based on familiar fairytales. With over 3.136 million views across Poland, and more than a million reach in the targeted Podkarpackie region, the campaign effectively engaged the intended audience.

The impact of the campaigns was two-fold. On the one hand, it provided CSOs with capacity to recognise and counter disinformation and develop skills to connect to their audiences using social media platforms and marketing approaches. On the other hand, the target audiences in each country were exposed to information that actively or preventively addresses fake narratives and propaganda, thus creating resilience against disinformation and ensuring free democratic participation.

## Civil Society Hub



In 2023, the Civil Society Hub for actors addressing populist movements comprised 29 individuals from 22 civil society organisations across 13 European countries. It brings together actors working on projects related to populist movements or safeguarding liberal democracy values. It aims to improve the quality and innovation of such projects across Europe and encourage joint action. This year, ECAS enhanced online interactions between participants by providing the Hub with a unique, private digital space to interact with other members. This took the form of a Private Group, *"Countering Populist Narratives and Disinformation"*, on the European Hub for Civic Engagement. Throughout the year, the Hub worked to gather knowledge and implement online surveys to develop the **"Go to Vote for European Values"** campaign strategy, dedicating itself to engaging communities and constituencies, in particular youth and the moveable middle, inspiring them to vote for values that unite Europe.

## European Elections Dystopia



In 2023, ECAS implemented the European Elections Dystopia crowdsourcing process in all 27 Member States, which challenged EU citizens to imagine fictional dystopian scenarios highlighting vulnerabilities the EU democratic system might face under extreme

circumstances. From a starting point of 'creative destruction' and a gamification approach, participants were encouraged to share their fears and commence thinking about their own actions to find possible solutions to avoid their worst nightmares for Europe. This crowdsourcing process was implemented online via ECAS's own Crowdsourcing Platform and through workshops, implemented in person, online, or in hybrid format by our civil society partners across the EU. This process garnered 1,435 citizen contributions, with 665 responses received through the online crowdsourcing questionnaire and 770 through the workshops.

Drawing from citizen insights, ECAS compiled concerns and recommendations on the future of European democracy. Citizens expressed concerns regarding potential geopolitical conflicts, the rise of extremist parties, nationalist tendencies, election fairness and voter apathy. To address these concerns, citizens emphasised several priorities for the newly elected European Parliament, including youth engagement, economic stability, social welfare and climate change.

The ultimate goal of this crowdsourcing process was for citizens to reflect and identify potential behaviours they could change or cease, to prevent their democratic nightmare. At the end of the activity, citizens pledged to vote responsibly, engage in political conversations and actively combat disinformation. In addition to personal commitments, citizens submitted suggestions to decision-makers, including expanding participatory democracy tools to include digital crowdsourcing and online forums, investing in civic education, combatting disinformation through cybersecurity and media literacy, ensuring fair elections and evaluating the European Parliament's functioning.

The European Elections Dystopia exemplifies digital citizen participation, showcasing its potential to create a more responsive, transparent and citizen-centric governance model for the future of the EU.

## Events and Advocacy Activities

### The ECI Day 2023

ECAS actively participated in the 2023 ECI Day organised by the European Economic and Social Committee. The 12th edition of the ECI Day on 8 June 2023 focused on '*Upskilling citizens for a successful ECI with impact!*'. During the event, ECAS organised and moderated the workshop: '*How to turn your idea into a European Citizens' initiative*'. This workshop focused on the skills and knowledge required to transform an idea into an initiative with a focus on the ECI Forum's Seek Advice Tool and presentations from an ECI organiser and a legal expert from the seek advice team.



@EU2023 - source: EESC

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

## International Democracy Day

On 19 September 2023, on International Democracy Day, ECAS and Smarter Together held a Democracy Lab on crowdsourcing for more robust EU policies and democracy at EU level.

Seven speakers presented their perspectives on how crowdsourcing can contribute to better policy-making; how citizens can be mobilised to help monitor the implementation of EU policies; and how we can combine expert-based crowdsourcing with problem-solving and scenario planning.



An audience of approximately 40 policy-makers, CSOs and social innovators participated in the event and contributed actively to the debate, providing solutions for increasing trust in policymaking through crowdsourcing and encouraging citizens to participate in crowdsourcing projects.

ECAS Executive Director, Assya Kavrakova's presentation focused on *"The case for crowdsourcing EU legislation with citizens"*. For the event, ECAS published a policy paper on *"Crowdsourcing: The Citizens' Highway to Policymaking in the EU"*, which provides a comprehensive understanding of the added value of crowdsourcing citizens' opinions to the quality of our European democracy.

Read this publication [here](#). Recording of the event is available [here](#).

## Advocacy Activities

In 2023, ECAS continued leading the Digital Transformation Cluster of Civil Society Europe to update policy recommendations together with the Working Group members of the Cluster.

In 2022, the first version was developed to allow civil society recommendations to feed into the Conference on the Future of Europe. Twenty CSOs and seven individuals participated in a crowdsourcing activity to generate approximately 216 ideas and recommendations. These were distributed between the five subtopics of digital transformation (Digital Democracy, Digital Economy, Digital Education, Digital Safeguards and Defending Rights & Freedoms Online). The Working Group members were all network organisations, representing approximately 1200 CSOs across Europe.

In 2023, ECAS continued to work within the Digital Transformation Cluster to organise and re-assess ideas and recommendations collected from CSOs against the advancements and development of policies on Digital Transformation at EU level to compile and publish 84 recommendations in Chapter 5, *"A digital transformation that leaves no one behind in the EU"*, of the Civil Society State of the Union Report, coordinated by Civil Society Europe.





## 4. ECAS MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH

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### ECAS Membership

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

At the end of 2023, [ECAS Membership](#) consisted of 157 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's Network of Members covered 42 countries (27 EU Member States and 15 non-EU Member States) and included:

- 97 Member Organisations (27 of which are network organisations) and 60 Individuals.

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 democratic participation of citizens and citizen organisations in and with the EU.

### ECAS Grant-making to its Members in the EU

In 2023, ECAS launched the first edition of the regranting scheme for its member organisations based in the EU, which is part of the [EURECA \(European Citizenship Accelerator\)](#) framework partnership, co-funded by the Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme of the European Union.

After a [2-month call for proposals](#) launched in February 2023 and the assessment of project applications, twelve member organisations were awarded the ECAS grant to implement six-month projects contributing to the achievement of the EURECA 2023 objectives, in the areas of Citizenship Rights and European Democracy, namely:

- strengthened capacity to protect and promote EU rights and values;
- more supportive environment for CSOs and rights defenders such as national human rights institutions;
- better developed advocacy and watchdog role of CSOs;
- increased involvement of CSOs in policy- and decision-making processes with local, regional and national governments;
- increased citizen awareness of EU rights and values;
- strengthened regional cooperation within civil society.

ECAS members' projects covered diverse topics including empowering youth, local communities, second-generation migrants, mobile artists and cultural professionals. The projects also covered communities of practice on digital transformation and digital democracy, as well as tackling disinformation, hate speech and strengthening cybersecurity for democracy. Further information is available on the following webpage: <https://ecas.org/results-ecas-grant-making-to-its-members-in-the-eu/>.

A kick-off meeting of the grantees' projects took place on 19 June in Brussels and projects were implemented until 15 December.



# ECAS Outreach

ECAS continued to expand its outreach in 2023 through its website, social media communication channels and newsletter.

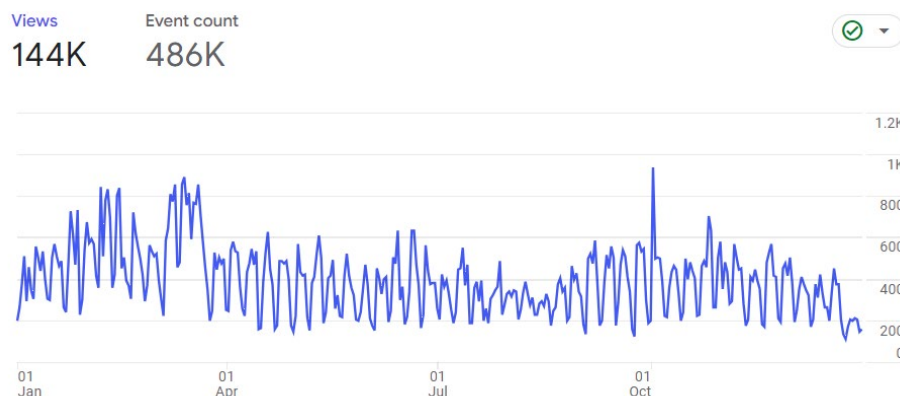
In 2023, the ECAS website ([www.ecas.org](http://www.ecas.org)) received a total of 144,262 page views for the year. This constitutes an increase of **+56,74%** compared with 2022 (92,039 views).

Day-to-day activities and ECAS updates were also widely publicised via Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. In 2023, ECAS recorded a noticeable increase in followers on all platforms, as well as in audience engagement with ECAS posts.

## Website activity

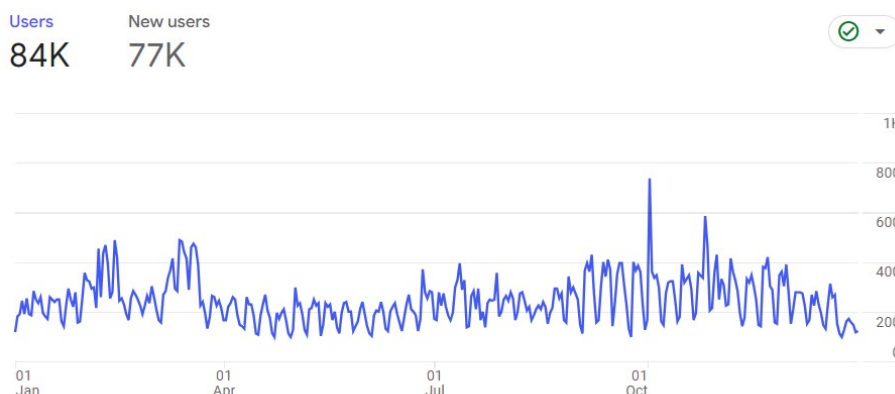
### Pageviews

In 2023, the ECAS website continued to generate a steady flow of pageviews, recording a monthly high of 17,805 (March) and 15,179 (February) and a monthly low of 8,450 (December, due to the number of events and activities during that month), resulting in an annual total of 144,262 pageviews.



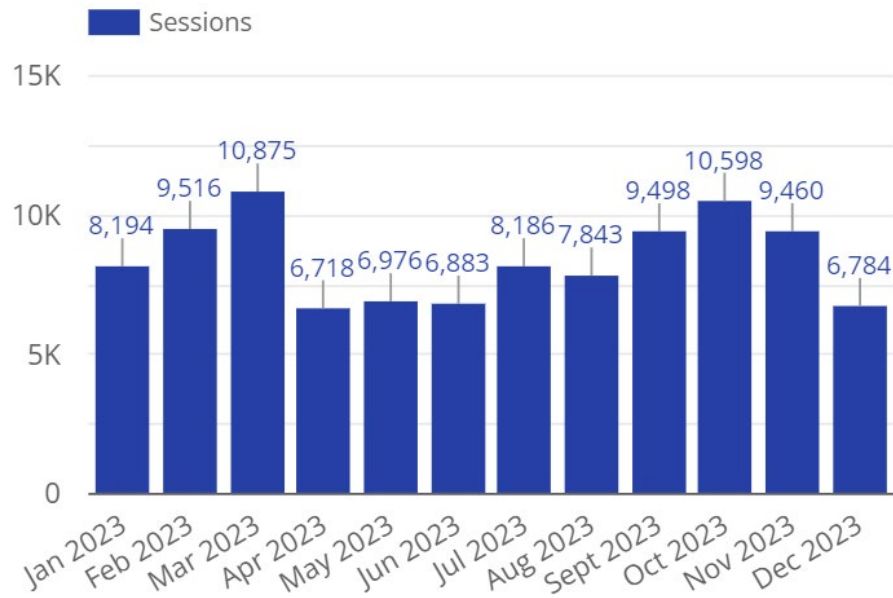
### Users

In **March** 2023, we saw our highest user count of the year with **9,881**, while **April** came in lowest with **5,049**.



## Sessions

The number of sessions registered a record high of **10,875** in March and a low of **6,718** in April, with an annual total of **102,291 sessions** for 2023.



## Social Media

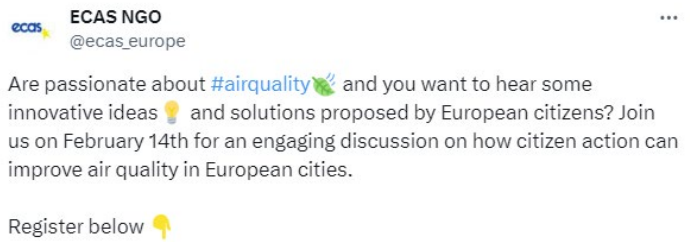
ECAS manages five social media platforms – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.

### X (Twitter)

By the end of 2023, ECAS had a total of 5,234 followers, which represents a net increase of 79 from the previous year. ECAS posts have been retweeted 247 times. The posts have received 757 likes. ECAS posted 491 tweets, generating 721,551 impressions (e.g., the number of times a user sees a Tweet on their timeline or in their search results), which constitutes a decrease of 7,02 % compared to 2022.



The top 3 tweets were:





## Facebook

In 2023, the ECAS Facebook page reached a total of 6,119 followers, a net annual gain of 138. The 388 Facebook posts published by ECAS, reached 2,809 unique users, with 3,707 page and post engagements.

## LinkedIn

By the end of 2023, ECAS had a total of 3,291 followers, achieving a net gain of 681 from the previous year. The number of posts was 303 with an **increase of 45 % by comparison with 2022**, which generated **84,042 impressions**. The average engagement rate was 5,73 %.

## Instagram

In 2023, ECAS started developing its Instagram account **gaining 120 followers**. The slow, but steady growth of the channel was due to 58 posts throughout the year, generating 290 likes, 8,665 impressions and 6,172 post reach.

## YouTube

The ECAS YouTube channel is also growing, with 13 published videos in 2023 generating a total number of 54,353 total views, 714.4 hours of watch time (estimated total hours of viewing time) and **23K impressions**.

## Monthly Newsletter

The ECAS Newsletter was first published in January 2016. It 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 ECAS, areas of work while facilitating discussions on these subjects.

In 2023, 16 editions were published and disseminated to 3,713 subscribers (**249 more than in 2022**), comprising EU decision-makers, experts in the fields of European democracy and EU rights, civil society organisations, citizens and other stakeholders. On average, 27% of 51,653 delivered emails were opened and 3.4% of openers interacted with the emails.

## 5. ANNEXES

### Annex 1: YEA testimonials

In 2023 Your Europe Advice received more than 200 "Thank You" emails.

*"Thank you - this is absolutely incredible. I did not expect such a valuable answer - please if I can fill out any type of feedback form to give you a million stars, I will do so! This is really very helpful for confirming what documents we need, where we can pass, etc. Thank you!. A."*

*"Thank you for your comprehensive reply. I found so much conflicting information online, as you can imagine. Once again thank you for the clarity. Regards G."*

*"Dear Your Europe Advice Team, Thank you very much for your answer, really appreciated. Clear and summarised answer (including my description), with very important and detailed information. Thank you very much again! The Dutch platform has refunded me. The hotel I had been told me they informed the Dutch platform about the situation, I also provided details about the two charges/payments (without sending bank statements). Congratulations for the excellent support you provide, thanks a lot for your time!. C."*

*"Dear Sir/Madam, Thank you very much for this response to my concerns. I sent it to the French CAF and, it has taken 3 months but, they have just paid us child benefit and backdated it. So we are very grateful for your help, Best wishes, B."*

*"I don't know if you'll see this or not, but I just wanted to say thank you so much, your response was incredibly helpful. All the best, D."*

*"Wow, amazingly detailed and fast information. Very helpful, thank you very much. Kind regards M."*

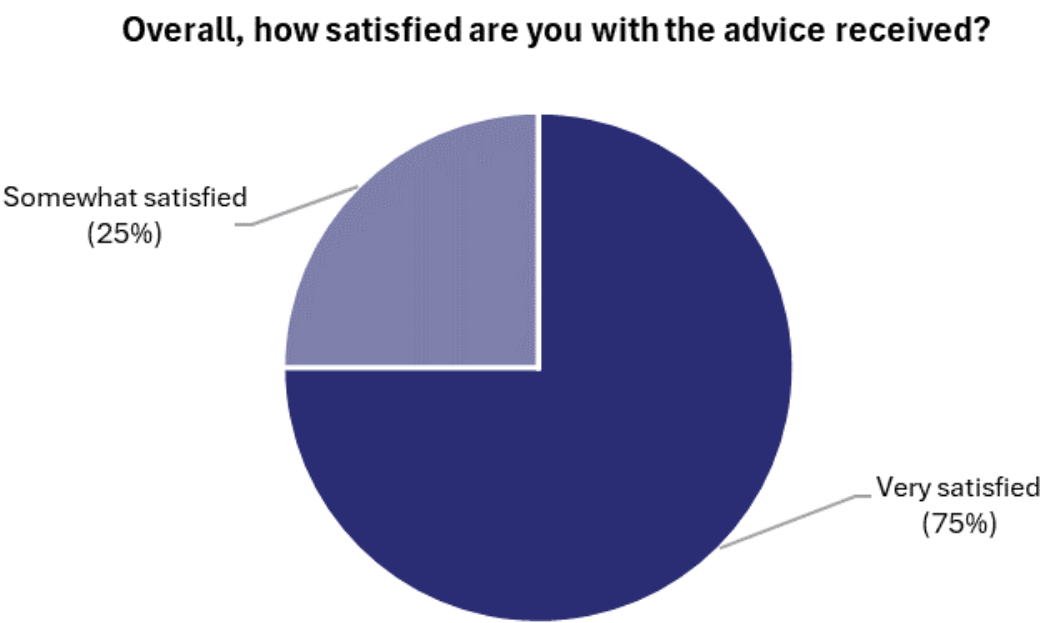
*"Dear Sir/Madam, Thank you very much - this is very useful information to me and thank you for explaining and supporting it so well. Very best wishes. T."*

*"Dear Sir/Madam, Thank you so much for the detailed information and advice, I'll proceed accordingly. I had no luck in agreeing with the seller about my wish and right (thank you for confirming my hypothesis that I own such a right) to withdraw from the purchase in the email communication. I will take your advice and contact ECC in Lithuania. I hope that having their mediation will solve the problem. Thank you once again for the detailed information, it's much appreciated and very helpful. Kind regards, S."*

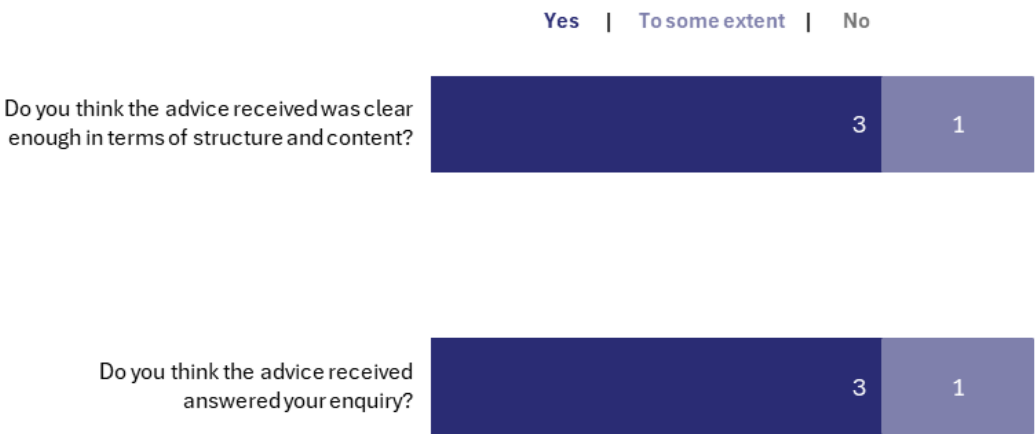
*"Thanks a million for your assistance, you're the only one who got back to me with a positive email and who cares about the trouble we are going through. We truly truly appreciate it"*

## Annex 2: ECI Forum Feedback

Of the 36 enquiries, within the timeframe of the new contract (2022-2025), four users used the available feedback form to provide feedback on the advice received. Of these, three users expressed their complete satisfaction with the response received.



**All users who provided feedback on the advice received expressed satisfaction with the clarity of the feedback and the extent it answered their enquiry.**





# ACTIVITY REPORT 2023

ECAS BRUSSELS

EUROPEAN CITIZEN ACTION SERVICE

HEADQUARTERS:

BRUSSELS  
EUROPEAN CITIZEN ACTION SERVICE  
12 CANTERSTEEN  
BECENTRAL  
1000 BRUSSELS  
BELGIUM

BRANCH OFFICE:

SOFIA  
EUROPEAN CITIZEN ACTION SERVICE  
BRANCH BULGARIA  
65 EVLOGI I HRISTO GEORGIEV BLVD  
1142 SOFIA  
BULGARIA

ECAS.ORG

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TWITTER: @ECAS\_EUROPE

FACEBOOK: ECAS.EUROPE

LINKEDIN: ECAS – EUROPEAN CITIZEN  
ACTION SERVICE

