7.2 EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVES AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS (2016.14)

7.2.1 IDENTIFICATION OF THE ACTION

Type of Activity	Reusable generic tools
Service in charge	DIGIT B.2
Associated Services	SG C.4 JUST C.2

7.2.2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This action is in the context of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), a right given by the European Union Lisbon Treaty, Art 11.4 and European Parliament Elections.

The objectives of this ISA² action are to continue the efforts for improving the tools provided; and to propose, study, assess and develop new solutions in order to improve the whole process.

Under the first ISA programme action 1.12, several goals were achieved including:

- The Online Collection Software (OCS) was developed. The tool helps the ECI organisers collect online statements of support necessary to submit the initiative to the European Commission.
- A Validation Tool, a re-usable tool by the Member States helping them validate the signatures collected by ECI organisers.
- Tools to improve the mechanism preventing double voting in European Parliament elections (Directive 93/109/EC - participation of EU citizens in EP elections) were developed and offered to Member States
- A helpdesk for assisting the users of these tools was established.

In the scope of the ISA^2 programme, subject to the outcome of an ongoing study, in 2016 the action aims at enhancing the above tools in the following areas:

- Improvements for European citizens, users of the Online Collection Software (e.g. OCS for mobile, better user interface, accessibility improvements)
- Improvements for ECI Organisers (e.g. ISO 27K compliance, OCS Administration Interface improvements, better analytical and statistical tools, more integration with social media platforms, more support)
- Interoperability improvements (better interconnection between the ECI Register, OCS and the Validation Tool)
- Technical advice in relation to development of legislative framework (risk analysis, impact assessment)

7.2.3 OBJECTIVES

The high level objective is to improve the ECI and EP elections processes by enhancing the tools already provided, research and develop new solutions.

As the ECI instrument is currently subject to a review, the outcome of this process may require an adaptation of the objectives in the course of the action.

7.2.4 SCOPE

The scope of this action covers the study, analysis, assessment and supply of tools and documentation directly related to the European Citizens' Initiative and European Parliament Elections software (Online Collection Software, Validation Tool, Crypto Tool) and their interoperability with tools directly related to them.
This action does not cover the development of a campaigning platform for the ECI organisers.
This action does not cover the development of the ECI Register legal content and administration interface.

7.2.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT

7.2.5.1 European Citizens Initiatives

The Lisbon Treaty introduced in the EU Treaties the European Citizens' Initiative instrument (enshrined in Article 11(4) of the TEU), enabling one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States to take the initiative of inviting the Commission to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties. The instrument has been implemented by Regulation (EU) 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative (ECI Regulation).

The ECI Regulation provides that statements of support for citizens' initiatives can be collected by organisers both on paper or electronically.

If the organisers of an ECI wish to collect statements of support for their initiative online, they must build an online collection system complying with the rules of the ECI Regulation and with the technical specifications set out in Commission Implementing Regulation No 1179/2011[67] (ECI Implementing Regulation). This means, in particular, that ECI organisers need to choose online collection software incorporating the relevant technical and security features and to find a hosting provider ensuring that the data collected can be stored in the territory of a Member State (Art. 6 of the ECI Regulation). Organisers must then obtain the certification of their system by the competent authority in the Member

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[67] Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1179/2011 laying down technical specifications for online collection systems pursuant to Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the citizens' initiative, OJ L 301/3, 18.11.2011

State where the data will be stored. Only one Member State would need to certify an online collection system used for an initiative across several Member States.

In order to facilitate on the one hand compliance with these requirements by organisers of initiatives and on the other hand certification of online collection systems by the relevant Member State authorities, the Regulation (Article 6(2)) requires that the Commission develops and maintains an open source software for online collection (the OCS) which would satisfy the requirements of the regulation and could be freely downloaded by anyone.

The OCS has to allow the collection of the data necessary to support a citizens' initiative and has to comply with the security and technical requirements for online collection systems as set out in the ECI Regulation and in the technical specifications set out in the ECI Implementing Regulation.

The OCS has been developed under ISA Programme together with the Validation Tool helping the Member State authorities validating the collected statements of support submitted by the ECI organisers. To date, it has been used by all but one initiative collecting online.

The experience of the first three years of operation of the ECI instrument put into evidence different issues relating to the online collection process as established in the Regulation. Some of the issues reported by the organisers and Member States authorities concerned directly the Commission Online Collection Software and resulted in requests to have an Online Collection Software easier to set up, to use and having more features, for example to sign up using electronic ID cards. Several ones among them have already been satisfactorily solved while the others are still pending.

The Commission 2015 report on the implementation of the ECI Regulation[68], which is the first step of the review process, emphasises the importance of technical aspects for the effective implementation of the ECI and the need for further development and improvement thereof to meet the policy objective of enhanced use by ECI organisers and citizens. The report highlights that stakeholders are not fully satisfied with the features offered by the Commission software and that ECI organisers strongly call for improvements in order to better meet their needs.

A study under the ISA programme[69] concerning specifically the "Assessment of ICT impacts of the Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative"[70] was carried out by the Commission in parallel with the preparation of the report and finalised in June 2015. It provides valuable input as regards possible options for further development of the OCS. The study also concludes that there is a need for more substantial changes as regards the way the online collection process is organised (for instance to build a central platform under the direct responsibility of the Commission instead of decentralised systems run by the organisers). Such changes, however, would not be feasible without the revision of the ECI Regulation. Whereas no decision as regards the possible revision of the ECI Regulation has been yet taken at the time of drafting the present work programme, the reflection on the subject is ongoing.

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[68] COM(2015)145

[69] ISA Action 3.1 – Assessment of ICT implications of EU legislation,;

[70] http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/files/ECI-expert-group-meeting-15-06-2015-Presentation-study.pdf

In the light of the above, it can already be envisaged that these aspects will have to be further considered in the review process for the ECI and that further technical analysis, studies, and evaluation may be needed as regards the technical aspects under the current instrument and potential changes to the legislative framework. The more detailed set of actions to be carried out in this context will be determined and updated in the light of the progress and outcome of the review process.

The ISA² action will thus focus at first at improving the software under the current legislative framework, while it may also serve to provide further analysis and studies in preparation of a possible revision of the ECI Regulation in order to provide solutions to the problems raised. Further on, this ISA² action could also allow adapting the existing tools to a revised ECI Regulation.

The technical assistance and support to ECI organisers will also continue to require action from the Commission. As outlined in the Commission's first triannual report on the application of the ECI Regulation, technical support as regards the Commission's online collection software and the hosting of online collection systems has been provided by email (almost 300 requests) and via the Joinup platform[71]. Support has also been provided by dedicated meetings, phone and videoconference whenever necessary to meet the demands from stakeholders.

7.2.5.2 European Parliament Elections

Regarding Member States exchange of data on EU citizens who register to vote in the Member State where they reside, in the 2010 EU citizenship report the Commission announced that it would take action to improve the mechanism for preventing double voting in European Parliament elections which is laid down in Directive 93/109/EC (participation of EU citizens in EP elections). These efforts were necessary to alleviate the administrative burden on the Member States by increasing the efficiency of the mechanism. Recommendations for this purpose were addressed to the Member States in 2013[72], including recommendations for using common IT tools when implementing the data exchange mechanism. A Crypto Tool was developed by the Commission to help Member States in implementing this recommendation. Ahead of the 2014 EP elections the Commission worked together with the Member States to prepare the implementation of the Crypto Tool.

It was highlighted in the Report on the 2014 European Parliament elections73 that the vast majority of Member States welcomed the recommendations and reported that the measures had a significant positive impact in terms of cutting red tape. The report concluded that the Commission will continue, together with the Member States, to explore ways of further improving the efficiency of the mechanisms preventing double voting. The meeting of the Electoral Expert Group held on 12th June 2015 discussed about the need, and possible ways to achieve this objective.

This ISA² action will focus mainly in addressing the above needs, in order to the prepare the election of the European Parliament for 2019.

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[71] https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/software/ocs/home

[72] Recommendation 2013/142/EU on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament.

[73] COM(2015) 206 final.

7.2.6 EXPECTED BENEFICIARIES AND ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

Beneficiaries	Anticipated benefits
Signatories of citizens' initiatives	Improvements in the different software will help the signatories supporting more easily the European Citizens' Initiatives.
Organisers of citizens' initiatives	The enhanced OCS will help organisers (users of the OCS) to build their online collection systems and ease the online collection system certification process. As the OCS is offered free of cost, they will financially benefit as they don't have to invest into an alternative, potentially costly, software (see also study on OCS).
Member States competent authorities	Easier and quicker processes for verifying Online Collection Software instances and validate the signatures collected by the OCS
Member States' Electoral authorities	More efficient, standard and secure process to exchange data on EU voters and candidates participating in European Parliament elections.

7.2.7 RELATED EU ACTIONS / POLICIES

Action / Policy	Description of relation, inputs / outputs
European citizens' initiative	Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative: Article 6(2): *By 1 January 2012, the Commission shall set up and thereafter shall maintain open-source software incorporating the relevant technical and security features for compliance with the provisions of this Regulation regarding the online collection systems. The software shall be made available free of charge.* The action will maintain and further develop OCS to comply with this legal obligation.
Online Collection System	Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1179/2011 of 17 November 2011 on the Online Collection System: *laying down technical specifications for online collection systems pursuant to Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the citizens' initiative*
ISA action 1.12	Open Source Software for online collection of statements of support for European citizens' initiatives.
EU Treaty – Elections to European parliament	Council Directive 93/109/EC of 6 December 1993 *Article 13* *Member States shall exchange information required for the implementation of Article 4 (…)*
Recommendation on EP elections	Recommendation 2013/142/EU on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament:

	"Technical means for safe and efficient transmission of data
	8. For exchanging the data as provided in Article 13 of Directive 93/109/EC the Member States should use a uniform and secure electronic means, as set out in the Annex ..."
	"ANNEX 1. For exchanging the data as provided in Article 13 of Directive 93/109/EC the Member States should use files following the Extensible Markup Language format ("XML"). These XML files should be transmitted exclusively via electronic means in a secure way. [...] 3. The Member States should use the W3C XML Encryption Syntax and Processing recommendation, [...]"

7.2.8 REUSE OF SOLUTIONS DEVELOPED BY ISA, ISA[2] OR OTHER EU / NATIONAL INITIATIVES

7.2.8.1 ECAS-STORK

If possible, a common solution will be defined between the OCS and ECAS software for the graphical and audio Captcha solutions.

7.2.9 EXPECTED RE-USABLE OUTPUTS (solutions and instruments)

Output name	Online Collection Software
Description	The Online Collection Software will be published on JoinUp with its source code and documentation freely available.
Reference	
Target release date / Status	Twice per year approach

Output name	Validation Tool
Description	The Validation Tool will be published on JoinUp with its source code and documentation freely available.
Reference	
Target release date / Status	Twice per year approach

Output name	Crypto Tool
Description	The Crypto Tool will be published on JoinUp with its source code and documentation freely available.
Reference	

Target release date / Status	Twice per year approach

7.2.10 ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH

7.2.10.1 Expected stakeholders and their representatives

Stakeholders	Representatives
Member States	ISA Coordination Group
Member States competent authorities	Expert group on the citizens' initiative
SG – Secretariat-General of the European Commission	SG.C.4. – Work Programme and Stakeholder Consultation
DIGIT – Directorate General of Informatics of the European Commission	DIGIT.B.2. – Corporate Knowledge and Decision making Solutions
JUST – Directorate Justice and Consumers	JUST C.2. – Union citizenship rights and Free movement
Member States' competent authorities	Expert group on electoral matters

7.2.10.2 Communication plan

European Citizens' Initiatives:
The representatives of SG and DIGIT will meet twice per year to agree on the mid- and long-term developments and, on working level, on a weekly basis to discuss short- and mid-term developments. The expert group on the citizens' initiative meets twice per year in the European Commission premises. The members of the expert group can also be contacted or discuss topics in an online forum.

European Parliament elections:
*Ex*pert group on electoral matters meets yearly (or more often if required) in the European Commission premises. The members of the expert group can also be contacted or share information on an online forum. DG JUST and DIGIT will meet regularly, according to the actual needs.

7.2.10.3 Governance approach

The project steering committee, comprised of the head of units of the concerned services, meets twice per year to provide overall guidance and steer the direction of the project. The working level representatives of the services meet weekly to organise and manage the daily work.

The expert groups on the Citizens' Initiative and Electoral Matters provide expert knowledge. With regard to the ECI, this will cover and especially on questions of interoperability and concepts of e-Identification and e-signatures, during the expert group meetings and online and, if appropriate, in workshops. With regard to EP elections, this will cover especially questions related to the management of electoral rolls by the national authorities.

7.2.11 TECHNICAL APPROACH

The software components developed under this action will be implemented based on an agile, efficient and pragmatic technical approach. This approach will combine established and emerging standards, industry best practices and state of the art technologies to empower the delivery of high quality and reusable software components.
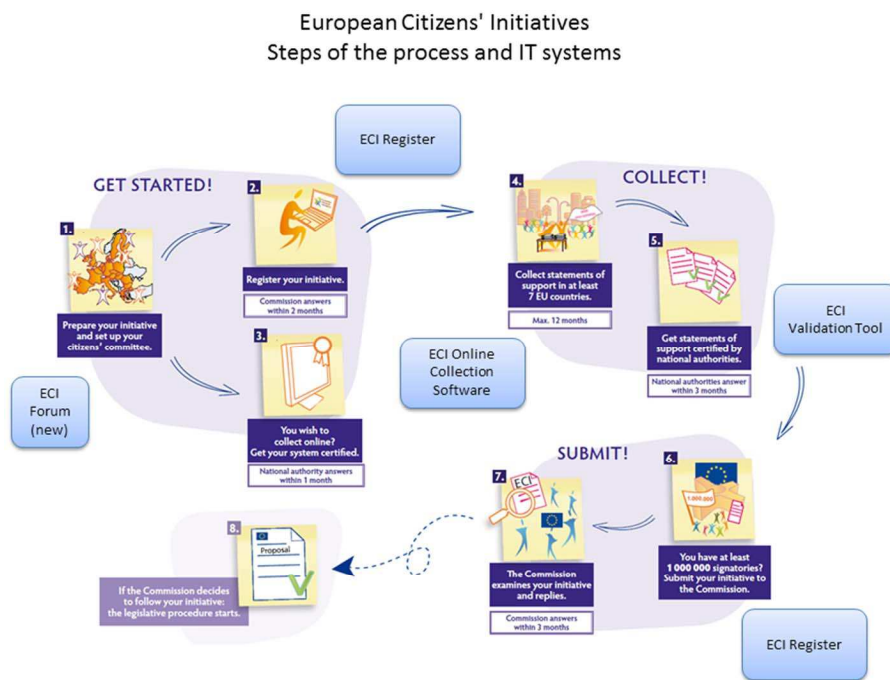
The delivery of the new or improved functionalities will be grouped in bi-annual releases. The scope and timing of the releases will be defined based on the priority and value of the proposed implementations as agreed with the main stakeholders, and can evolve depending on the impact of possible legislative changes. If needed due to legal or technical constraints the releases can be further split or combined. When needed, a feasibility study will be conducted to assess the value of the different implementation options prior to committing the actual implementation. For urgent changes to the software components, two patches (or mini-release) can be added on top of the standard bi-annual releases.

In the scope of this ISA² programme the action aims to enhance in particular the following aspects of the tools concerned:

- Improvements for European citizens, users of the Online Collection Software
    - OCS for mobile (smartphone, tablets, …)
    - OCS: Better user interface for classic / desktop version of the User Interface
    - OCS: Accessibility improvements, example: Audio Captcha in all the European Union languages as an alternative of the text Captcha for the blind and visually impaired people
    - OCS: Integration of the e-signature and/or e-ID solutions
    - ECI Register: Enhancements for the citizens to have a better "user experience"
- Improvements for ECI Organisers
    - Facilitate the OCS instance ISO 27K compliance
    - OCS Administration Interface improvements
        - Web analytics
        - Statistics, reports
    - OCS: Tracking of successful/failed visits (visits transformed or not into a signature) in order to try to identify the reasons behind
    - OCS: More integration with social media platforms
    - ECI Register: Improvements of the Organisers' Account user interface
    - ECI Forum: Help ECI organisers during the preparation process and the lifecycle of their initiative.

- Interoperability improvements
  - o More integration between the ECI Register, OCS and the Validation Tool
  - o Enhancements of the Crypto Tool and the Live DVD
- Technical advice in relation to development of legislative framework (risk analysis, studies, ICT impacts assessment)
- Improvements of the tools for the national electoral authorities, to enhance the efficiency of the data exchange mechanism under Directive 93/109/EC – EP elections, and alleviate the burden on these authorities.
- Improvements of the tools on overall, and in particular, to cover candidates standing in EP elections , given that the tools currently only cover EU voters.
- Technical advice in relation to the implementation and the use of the IT tools developed under this project to exchange data under Directive 93/109/EC.

The list above is non-exhaustive and may evolve depending on the outcome of the ongoing ECI review process and the assessment of the value of each of the proposed implementations and the decisions taken by the steering committee.

European Citizens' Initiatives
Steps of the process and IT systems

7.2.12 COSTS AND MILESTONES

7.2.12.1 Breakdown of anticipated costs and related milestones

Phase: Inception Execution Operational	Description of milestones reached or to be reached	Anticipated Allocations	Budget line ISA/ others (specify)	Start date (QX/YYYY)	End date (QX/YYYY)

		(KEUR)			
Inception	Studies/Impact assessments	200	ISA	Q3/2016	Q4/2016
Execution	Release December 2016	300	ISA	Q3/2016	Q4/2016
Execution	Release June 2017	250	ISA	Q1/2017	Q2/2017
Execution	Release December 2017	300	ISA	Q3/2017	Q4/2017
Execution	Release June 2018	250	ISA	Q1/2018	Q2/2018
Execution	Release December 2018	250	ISA	Q3/2018	Q4/2018
Execution	Release June 2019	250	ISA	Q1/2019	Q2/2019
Execution	Release December 2019	250	ISA	Q3/2019	Q4/2019
Operation	Support	360	ISA	Q3/2016	Q4/2019

7.2.12.2 Breakdown of ISA funding per budget year

Budget Year	Phase	Anticipated allocations (in KEUR)	Executed budget (in KEUR)
2016	Inception + execution + support	500	
2017	Execution + support	670	
2018	Execution + support	620	
2019	Execution + support	620	

7.2.13   ANNEX AND REFERENCES

Description	Reference link	Attached document
Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative	http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02011R0211-20131008&from=EN	
Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1179/2011 of 17 November 2011 laying down technical specifications for online collection systems pursuant	http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:301:0003:0009:EN:PDF	

to Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the citizens' initiative		
Minutes of the meeting of the ECI Expert Group held on 15th June 2015	http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/legislative-framework	
Directive 93/109/EC – Participation of EU citizens in EP elections	http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:31993L0109	
Recommendation 2013/142/EU on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament	http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/c_2013_1303_en.pdf	
Minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Expert Group held on 12th June 2015	https://circabc.europa.eu/ Interest group: European Parliament Election Data exchange (category: Justice and Consumers).	