

Rules, procedures and practices of the right to petition parliaments

A fundamental right to a process



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Abstract

This study, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the Committee on Petitions (PETI), provides an overview of the right to petition and the rules, procedures and practices used by parliaments for handling petitions, notably in terms of the submission of petitions, admissibility criteria, powers of consideration and criteria for closing petitions. The study also discusses publicity and feedback provided by petitions systems and the relationship between petitions systems and ombudsmen.

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF BOXES	5
LIST OF FIGURES	5
LIST OF TABLES	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
1. INTRODUCTION	9
2. PETITIONS AND PARLIAMENTS	11
2.1. Framework	11
2.2. Parliaments as recipients of petitions	11
2.2.1. Routine powers of parliaments (legislative and oversight powers)	11
2.2.2. Considering petitions	12
3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE (BRIEF OVERVIEW)	13
4. RIGHT TO PETITION	14
4.1. Countries with a right to petition	14
4.2. Who holds the right to petition	14
5. BODIES RESPONSIBLE FOR HANDLING THE PETITIONS PROCESS	17
6. CRITERIA, RULES, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES	20
6.1. Typical stages of the petitions process	20
6.2. Form of submission of petitions	21
6.3. Admissibility of petitions	22
6.3.1. Admissibility of petitions in terms of substance	24
6.3.2. Inadmissible petitions	27
6.3.3. Supporting signatures	28
6.4. Consideration of petitions	31
6.4.1. Powers of consideration and assessment	31
6.5. Outcomes	37
6.6. Closure of petitions	42
6.6.1. Criteria	42
6.6.2. Time is of the essence	48
6.7. Publicity and feedback	49
6.8. Ombudsman	56
7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	59
REFERENCES	62

ANNEX - QUESTIONNAIRE

LIST OF BOXES

Box 1: Sanction in case of no response from the Government	34
Box 2: Interaction with all petitioners, including supporters	39
Box 3: Different types of referrals to third-party entities in the Bundestag	40
Box 4: Enhancing the discussion of petitions in plenary	41
Box 5: Petitions that lapse at the end of the parliamentary term (France)	44
Box 6: Different types of criteria with different consequences	48
Box 7: Information on petitions provided by websites on political initiative	54

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Parliaments with a Right to Petition	14
Figure 2: Foreign citizens allowed to petition	15
Figure 3: Committee responsible for considering petitions	17
Figure 4: Main stages in the petition process	20
Figure 5: How petitions can be submitted	21
Figure 6: Parliaments with an admission threshold	22
Figure 7: Parliaments that anonymize petitions	24
Figure 8: Petitions considered inadmissible (average 2019-2021)	28
Figure 9: Parliaments where citizens can join (sign) an admitted petition	30
Figure 10: Most frequent powers of consideration	31
Figure 11: Right to add information during the petitions process	35
Figure 12: Parliaments that invite petitioner(s) to provide additional information	35
Figure 13: Main outcomes	42
Figure 14: Parliaments where petitions which are not considered lapse within the parliamentary term	45
Figure 15: Petitions kept open while waiting for a contribution of another body	45
Figure 16: Parliaments where the decision to close a petition is subject to a vote in committee	46
Figure 17: Parliaments where petitioners have the possibility to appeal the decision to close their petition	47
Figure 18: Parliaments with a petitions website/webpage	50
Figure 19: Countries with a national ombudsman*	57
Figure 20: Overlap of powers (petitions committee and ombudsman)	57
Figure 21: Interaction between ombudsman and petitions committee	58

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Parliamentary chambers that responded to the questionnaire	13
Table 2: Composition of the relevant committees in the current term (2023)	18
Table 3: Admission threshold (minimum number of signatures)	22
Table 4: Substantive criteria for non-admission of petitions (examples)	24
Table 5: Proportion of petitions considered inadmissible	27
Table 6: Thresholds for a hearing	29
Table 7: Thresholds for a debate	30
Table 8: Deadlines to external bodies to give a reply	32
Table 9: Types of outcomes	38
Table 10: Criteria to close petitions	43
Table 11: Typical life-cycle of a petition from its receipt to its closure	49
Table 12: Characterisation of the right to petition as a form of political participation	56

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The scope of this study is to give a clear overview of the right to petition and the rules, procedures and practices used by parliaments when dealing with petitions.

For the purpose of gathering relevant data, the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions prepared a list of questions which was channelled to other parliaments through the ECPRD¹ Network. The replies received underpin a large part of the analysis conducted in this study.

Digital means are considered to be a cornerstone in the modernisation of the right to petition and this is, to some extent, true. However, the replies to the questionnaire suggest that this age-old right maybe relies less on this kind of modernisation than we might have supposed.

The questionnaire contained 59 questions. However, the majority of these questions fall within the scope of conventional petition rights. In fact, the significant contribution that electronic modernisation has brought to petitions systems is related to publicity, which largely depends on these electronic means.

There exists a limited yet well-established set of instruments to address citizens' requests, with the questioning of the government standing out as a widespread and frequently used practice. This involves challenging the executive to take a position on the specific issue raised in a petition, making it one of the main ways to gather information for the petition process. From the parliament's side, it is important to emphasise the significance of providing a timely response to petitioners, which may occur according to legal deadlines - and perhaps on average such deadlines are met - but does not appear to be guaranteed in practice for the majority of petitions and in most parliaments.

The hearing of petitioners and the opportunity to engage in direct dialogue with members of parliament, as well as the debate on petitions in committees or, especially, in plenary sessions, represent two other significant powers. While the frequency of these may vary, they gain particular importance when ensured by law (becoming a right for petitioners), even if - under certain circumstances - they are subject to a specific threshold of signatures.

The existence of electronic functionalities in support of petitions represents a tremendous amplifier of the voice of citizens using their right to petition, particularly through the online publication of the petitions process. Electronic functionalities enhance the effectiveness of the petitions systems if there is a significant set of key characteristics of a more, "analog" nature underlying them. These can include the most relevant moments/documents generated throughout the process (e.g. questions to the government, responses, as well as hearings and debates), until the completion of the assessment.

In large part, what petitions systems can offer to citizens who submit petitions, is a right to a process. The main outcomes, as demonstrated by a significant proportion of the responses to the questionnaire, highlight in particular the procedural aspects of the right to petition.

When properly framed, this right is more about ensuring a process and ensuring that the parliament fully examines the matter brought forth by citizens than about guaranteeing satisfaction on the issue raised in a petition, as this often falls within the realm of freedom for political actors. It is through the powers of consideration that petitioners typically derive the greatest benefit from exercising their right.

This conclusion may appear relatively modest, but it is the logical counterpart to the ease with which the right to petition can be exercised, the minimal constraints on its exercise, and the wide range of

¹ European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation.

topics that can be addressed. Compared to other conventional rights of this kind, such as the citizen's legislative initiative, petitions are subject to much less stringent regulation.

This study also intends to obtain an insight into closure criteria used by parliaments. This task proved challenging because, given the procedural nature of the right to petition, there is some confusion between the stages of a petition's consideration and the criteria that determine or enable the closure of it. Nevertheless, based on the responses, we identified four fundamental types of closure criteria that could prove useful in potential procedural changes in this context. In this regard, we express some reservations concerning criteria that depend on events of uncertain verification (such as waiting for responses from external entities, some decision that addresses the petition's issue, or political initiatives from political groups). This is because it means that parliament finds itself in a situation where it has to wait for an action it does not control, which can unduly prolong the time of the consideration of a petition². Thus, criteria that involve actions within the parliament's control are valued, allowing for better control of the timing of the evaluation of a petition.

This study has also served to identify best practices, which ultimately inspired a set of conclusions and recommendations.

² This waiting period for the government's response had significant importance in the delay that characterized the response time of the Portuguese parliament in the 1990s (an average of about 3 years), contributing to some discredit of this instrument (Tibúrcio, 2010).

1. INTRODUCTION

Every year the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions (PETI Committee) receives hundreds of petitions. In order to effectively manage and process these petitions, the PETI Committee has - over the years - developed various rules, procedures and practices which together give full effect to the rights conferred on all EU citizens and residents contained in Article 227 TEU. These rules are laid down in official documents, such as Parliament's Rules of Procedure and the Committee on Petition's own Guidelines. For a large part they are the logical consequences of practical working methods and logistical, technical or planning requirements.

The Committee on Petitions requested a comparative study on the right to petition and the rules, procedures and practices that are used by petition committees or similar bodies competent for dealing with citizens' petitions in other parliaments.

This study therefore results from this request and shows how the right to petition is organised and operationalised (both in law and in practice) in various countries, at least as regards some of its most practical dimensions.

As the right to petition is fundamentally a right to a process³, this request is therefore very pertinent, as it delves into the core functions of this instrument of participation in its modern sense. Modern, because the proceduralisation of the right to petition - which consists in this right not only being granted but also largely regulated (particularly regarding the procedure) either by law or by parliamentary rules of procedure - constitutes one of the aspects that distinguishes it from the right to petition in previous centuries.

This study is primarily based on the data obtained from the responses received to an ECPRD (European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation) questionnaire on the subject, submitted by the European Parliament, as well as relevant studies and analyses taken from various sources, and documents from national and international institutions. This allows for a fresh look at the study conducted in 2015 on this topic⁴, updating it as necessary.

The study begins with a brief overview of petitioning, particularly within a parliamentary framework, situating it within the scope of the regular powers of parliaments, essentially their legislative and oversight powers over the executive.

Considering the legal regime established in often different legal systems, as well as its practice, it is evident that the right to petition is to a very wide extent a right to a process. Therefore, an understanding of the procedural rules is essential to fully comprehend this right and its potential development.

We start by identifying in which countries the right to petition exists and, where it exists, we identify the core form in which it is organised: is it addressed, for example, by a specific dedicated committee (e.g. a committee on petitions) or by a standing committee based on the subject matter of a petition?

The next chapter is dedicated to the criteria and procedural rules. It discusses the typical process of petitions, the submission of petitions, the admissibility phase, the investigation, the consideration phase and other respective powers. The chapter concludes with the outcomes and the various means

³ As we will have the opportunity to develop throughout this paper.

⁴ The Right to Petition, 2015, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs (Henceforth, Tibúrcio, 2015).

and criteria for closing petitions. There is also a section on the publicity and feedback provided by these petitions systems.

After a brief chapter about the ombudsman, we provide some conclusions and recommendations.

2. PETITIONS AND PARLIAMENTS

2.1. Framework

Contemporary representative democracies are now perhaps more than ever, being criticised by citizens who demonstrate a growing dissatisfaction and demand for greater accountability regarding the performance of their democratic institutions and their members' activity (Norris, 2002, 2011; Fung and Wright, 2003; Smith, 2009).

In this context, parliaments as representative assemblies of the citizens, have been increasingly taking their own initiatives to make their institution more inclusive, transparent and accountable.

With varying levels of development, parliaments worldwide have been investing in enhancing opportunities for citizen engagement with the parliamentary institution (IPU, 2022). This tendency has become one of the most significant and, in many cases, most innovative operational functions performed by parliaments, in addition to their traditional responsibilities of legislation and oversight.

Examples of such activities range from the provision of information on parliamentary websites to potential participation in legislative initiatives. This spectrum includes activities ranging from simply making information available, to active participation in parliamentary activities. In addition, educational initiatives like the "youth parliaments" programs have been notably successful in several parliaments.

Among the forms that enable citizen participation in parliamentary activities, notable ones include citizens' legislative initiatives, referendums and, in particular, petitions.

Petitions arguably constitute the most deeply rooted and consolidated tool for citizen participation, with an overwhelming majority of parliaments offering a system of parliamentary petitions, albeit with varying levels of practical implementation.

Despite some signs of decline in the use of this instrument (for example only one petition was submitted to the Belgian Senate between 2019 and 2021), many European parliaments have shown modernising impulses towards petitions over the last two decades, as can be seen in the cases of Germany, Portugal, Luxembourg, the European Parliament⁵ and, more recently, the United Kingdom, Belgium and France.

Through these and other means, parliaments continue to seek ways to engage and involve citizens, particularly by harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies (Serra da Silva, 2020).

2.2. Parliaments as recipients of petitions

2.2.1. Routine powers of parliaments (legislative and oversight powers)

Parliaments have important powers, most of which depend on the impulse of political groups. These powers can be traditionally divided into legislative and oversight powers by means of which the government and its administration are held to account.

The routine powers of parliaments serve to monitor and scrutinise various issues, and parliaments fulfil their democratic role when they use, or activate, these legislative or oversight instruments

⁵ Tibúrcio (2015).

Both within the scope of common legislative initiatives and when promoting debates, the success of these powers is not so much measured by the adoption of policies as by the actual occurrence of debates or legislative impulses (such as proposals or amendments)⁶.

Through legislative initiatives, Members of Parliament bring certain topics to the political agenda of the parliament and, consequently, the national agenda, reflecting various interests of civil society. Members from different political parties may choose different topics or approach the same topics from different perspectives, representing diverse societal interests. Only a few of these proposals may ultimately successfully pass through the parliamentary majority's scrutiny, while most of them, as is the case in any parliament, will probably face rejection (typically, only a small portion of legislative initiatives is approved by parliaments⁷), but this does not diminish their value as mechanisms of representation.

The same applies to the most relevant oversight powers available to Members of Parliament, such as debates and instruments, to demand accountability or specific responses from governments through written or oral questions. Most of these routine instruments do not have any legal effects (unlike, for example, a motion of no confidence in the government), and it is reasonable to assume that their political objective is to bring a certain issue to the agenda in order to give visibility to specific facts and arguments. It is even perhaps unusual for the majority or the opposition to change their opinions as a result of these debates and questions.

2.2.2. Considering petitions

A similar logic applies to the right to petition, as the majority of those traditional powers of parliaments are the ones that are invoked through petitions. However, in the media, on social networks, and even among parliamentarians, it is common to associate the (un)successfulness of the right of petition with the "results", understood simplistically as the acceptance or rejection of the petitioners' demands.

It is natural for petitioners to aspire to influence policies, as in the case of legislative initiatives. However, at the core of the right to petition is the right to have one's voice heard. In this light, the core of the right to petition lies in the process, and the way it is organised by parliaments.

Petitioners seem to be aware of this and they value the experience more based on how the petition was treated throughout the process, than on the eventual acceptance of their request (see Carman, 2010; Riehm, Böhle, & Lindner, 2014; Tibúrcio, 2017).

The modern right to petition therefore consists of the right to a process.

An initial manifestation of this right to a process emerged with the right to a response, distinguishing it from the mere right of citizens to address letters to their representatives.

This right to a response is a fundamental part of the right to petition as it is understood today. But it goes far beyond that.

As can be seen in the responses to the questionnaire, there is a wide set of powers that parliaments can and do provide for the consideration of petitions, and the use of these powers is a significant part of what parliaments can offer to petitioners.

⁶ In similar terms, see Bochel, 2012.

⁷ Ilonszki *et al*, 2021.

3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE (BRIEF OVERVIEW)

The responses sought by the ECPRD request⁸ concern criteria for admissibility of petitions, applicable rules and procedures, the details of the consideration/deliberation process, possible decisions/outcomes, inquiries, referrals, and criteria for the closure of petitions.

This study gives a comparative overview of the right to petition and the rules, procedures and practices used by the responding parliaments for dealing with petitions.

The following 44 parliamentary chambers responded to the questionnaire. In this study, whenever we refer to the parliament of a specific country, we are referring to the lower house. References to upper houses are explicitly stated.

Table 1: Parliamentary chambers that responded to the questionnaire

Parliamentary chambers that responded to the questionnaire
<p>Albania – kuvendi; Armenia - national assembly; Austria - parlament – bundesrat; Austria - parlament – nationalrat; Belgium - chambre des representants; Belgium – senat; Bulgaria - national assembly; Canada - library of parliament; Croatia - hrvatski sabor; Cyprus - house of representatives; Czechia - chancellory of the chamber of deputies; European parliament; Estonia – riigikogu; Finland – eduskunta; France - assemblee nationale; France – senat; Georgia – parliament; Germany – bundesrat; Germany - deutscher bundestag; Hungary - national assembly; Italy - camera dei deputati; Latvia - latvijas republikas saeima; Lithuania – seimas; Luxembourg - chambre des deputes; Netherlands - tweede kamer der staten-generaal; Norway – stortinget; Poland – sejm; Poland – senat; Portugal - assembleia da republica; Romania - camera deputatilor; Romania – senat; San marino - consiglio grande e gnerale; Slovakia - national council; Slovenia - drzavni svet (national council); Slovenia - drzavni zbor (national assembly); Spain - congreso de los diputados; Spain – senado; Sweden – riksdag; Switzerland – nationalrat; Switzerland – ständerat; Türkiye - republic of türkiye - the grand national assembly; Ukraine - verkhovna rada; United kingdom - uk parliament - house of commons; United kingdom - uk parliament - house of lords.</p>

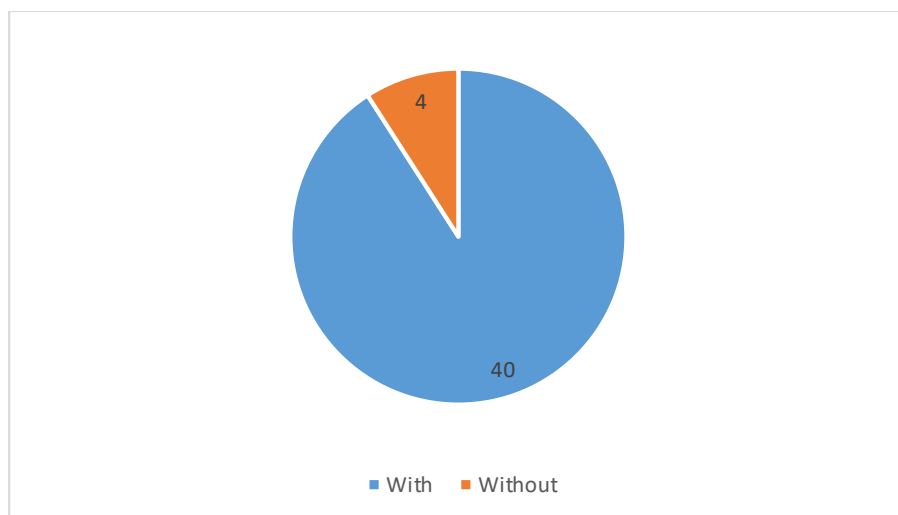
⁸ Request #5307, Annex 1.

4. RIGHT TO PETITION

4.1. Countries with a right to petition

According to the information provided, the right to petition is enshrined in all countries that responded to the survey, with the exception of four countries: Cyprus, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Figure 1: Parliaments with a Right to Petition



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

The absence of the right to petition in these four countries can be largely explained by the influence in those countries of the institution of the ombudsman, a figure that originated in the early 19th century in Sweden and spread in the 20th century to other countries based on examples from Scandinavia.

The ombudsman institution acts in defence of and promotes citizens' rights and freedoms, and it guarantees and seeks to ensure the justice and legality of the activities of public authorities. The ombudsman does not itself make decisions, nor is its opinion binding, but it does exert strong moral influence based on its authority and acknowledged role⁹.

The relevant role of the ombudsman in these four countries as a guardian of citizens' rights, to whom people can complain against administrative actions, and its extensive presence and historical background is to a certain extent comparable to parliamentary petitions. This is, in fact, one of the reasons for some overlapping of roles mentioned in section 6.8.

Riehm, Böhle, and Lindner (2014, pp. 207) also propose an additional explanation for the fact that these countries have not enshrined the right of petition. This is related to the fact that they are considered to be predominantly democracies with a high level of negotiation, often with minority governments that require compromises with various political forces. As a result, a greater plurality of interests is represented in power, particularly in parliament.

4.2. Who holds the right to petition

Another relevant criterion regarding involvement in the petitions process is related to who can actually exercise the right to petition and how accessible the different petitions systems are. In this dimension,

⁹ More on the ombudsman's role below (section 6.8).

there are different possibilities within the various institutional architectures, particularly regarding requirements such as nationality, residency or age.

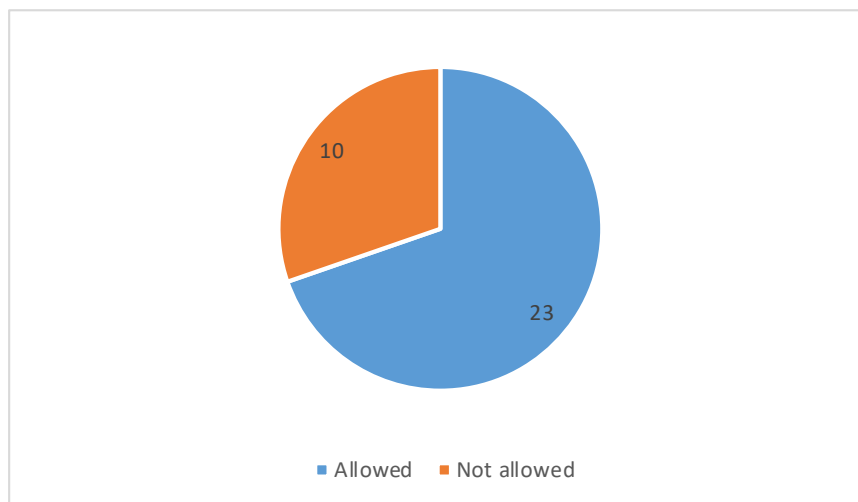
Some petitions systems require a minimum age, others have no age barrier. Some restrict the right to eligible voters who are on the electoral register. Some systems allow collective entities and legal personalities to submit petitions, while others do not.

Most parliaments that responded to the questionnaire require a minimum age to exercise the right of petition, which is also the case in most conventional forms of political participation in Europe such as, in particular, the right to vote in elections or referenda, or the right to support a citizens' legislative initiative.

The actual requirement for a minimum age varies. For example, in Armenia it is 14 years (with minors being able to participate if properly represented); 15 years in Luxembourg; 16 years in Austria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; and 18 years in San Marino. Belgium¹⁰, France, Germany and Portugal do not define a minimum age at all.

Although there is no data available on the practice and numbers of petitions submitted in relation to age, it is suspected that the participation of minors is quite rare.

Figure 2: Foreign citizens allowed to petition



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

A large majority of parliaments welcome petitions submitted by foreign citizens.

There are no significant differences compared to the situation outlined in the study of 2015¹¹, with the same countries not permitting the participation of foreign citizens. The United Kingdom is the exception to this as it has since begun allowing it.

In eight of the parliaments that allow participation of non-nationals in the petitions process, legal residency is required. This applies to Canada, Estonia, the European Parliament, France (both chambers), Lithuania, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

¹⁰ However, to be heard by the House of Representatives, as provided for in Article 4 of the federal Law of 2 May 2019, the petition must have been signed by at least 25,000 natural persons who have their place of residence in Belgium and who have reached the full age of 16 (among other requirements concerning regional residency).

¹¹ Study for the EP, Tibúrcio, 2015.

Portugal¹² and Turkey also require a reciprocity criterion. Turkey and Switzerland mention that the petition must be submitted in one of the official languages of the country. The European Parliament (EP) also has the official language requirement but offers a wide range of languages for petitioners (all official languages of EU countries).

The absence of a minimum age in several countries, as well as the openness to foreign citizens, enhances the right to petition and fulfils one of its historical functions, namely inclusiveness, by establishing points of contact between the political authority and citizens who are distant or unable to participate in other more regular instances of participation, such as the right to vote.

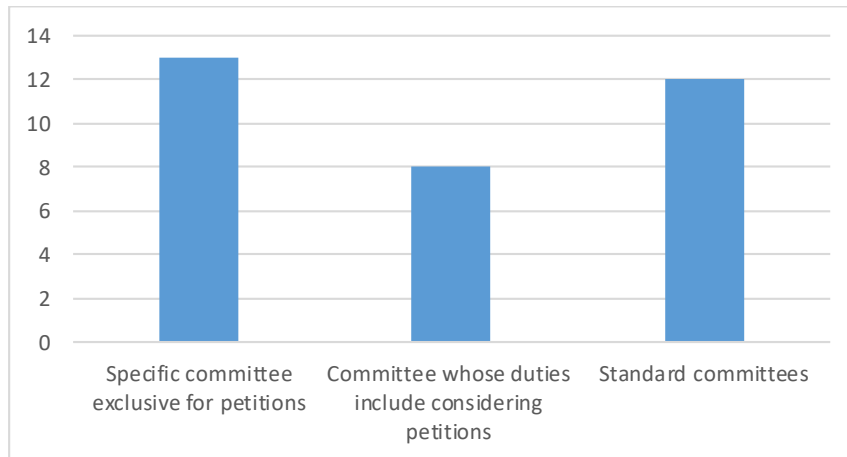
All the surveyed parliaments accept petitions signed by a group of citizens. The majority also accept petitions submitted by legal persons, except for Bulgaria¹³ and the two chambers of France.

¹² For petitions that pursue the "general interest". For those of "particular interest", there is no such requirement.

¹³ *It is important to note that there is no prohibition anywhere in the Bulgarian legislation for legal entities to initiate and submit petitions, but in practice it is unenforceable, since the signatures are collected by individuals* (reply to Request #5307).

5. BODIES RESPONSIBLE FOR HANDLING THE PETITIONS PROCESS

Figure 3: Committee responsible for considering petitions



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

Parliaments are organised in three essential ways to respond to the petitions submitted to them: i) through a specific committee dedicated exclusively to petitions; ii) through a committee with the competence, among other matters, to handle petitions; or iii) by having petitions processed by any of the standing committees, based on the subject matter.

The existence of a committee exclusively dedicated to petitions is commonly associated with all the advantages related to providing an institutional focus for the handling of petitions, demonstrating the symbolic importance given to this participatory tool, as well as providing specialised staff to deal with them (Tibúrcio, 2017). A dedicated committee, and members with a clear responsibility in this respect, can provide a visible face to the public and prioritise petitions, which often struggle for attention compared to the political agenda of political groups.

However, dedicated committees also come with certain potential disadvantages. For instance, they may have less frequent meetings in comparison to other permanent parliamentary committees¹⁴, and they may struggle to attract the most prominent and well-known politicians, as they face competition from other parliamentary committees that hold a higher political status (Tibúrcio, 2017; Alemanno, 2021; Hierlemann *et al*, 2022).

However, the perceived disadvantages of having specific committees for petitions can potentially be advantages when petitions are handled by the relevant parliamentary committees, which may have more expertise in terms of the specific subject matter. Nevertheless, the main disadvantage remains the risk of petitions being relegated to low priority status in favour of current legislative or topical issues. This can lead to considerable delays and a more cursory consideration of petitions.

The size of specialised committees varies from parliament to parliament, but typically resembles that of standard committees. Comparing the level of administrative support enjoyed by these committees is not straightforward, as it varies according to the type of support in question (e.g. whether it is more administrative or specialised; whether it is shared with other committees or functions or not). In

¹⁴ Regarding the petitions committees of the European Parliament and Germany, which meet on average once a month, see Bundestag Scientific Services (2022).

particular cases, such as in Germany, the specific nature of the committee must be taken into account¹⁵.

Table 2: Composition of the relevant committees in the current term (2023)

Country	Type of body responsible for handling the petitions' process		N. of members	Sit on other committees	Administrative support
	Specific committee	Committee whose duties include petitions			
Poland (Senate)		X	9		2 committee secretaries
Spain	X		10		
United kingdom	X		11	Yes	Head of Unit (Clerk) and Second Clerk, 4 specialists three of whom act as public engagement officers, and 3 administrators (operations staff). All staff deal with petitions only
Turkey	X		12	Yes	7 legislative experts and 6 civil servants with university degree (experts are involved in the examination and evaluation of petitions, while other civil servants are involved in processes such as registration and mailing)
Luxembourg	X		15		1 Person which works fulltime for the committee
Slovenia		X	15	Yes	3 staff members, namely the Secretary of the Commission with university degree and two administrative assistants
Poland	X		16		2 persons working in the secretariat for 16 Deputies
Belgium	X		17	Yes	6 staff members: 1 Head of Unit, 2 higher-skilled case handlers, 1 assistant and 2 secretaries
Bulgaria		X	17		4 employees - chief expert associates (university degree)
Czechia		X	10 to 20		3 employees
Austria	X		23		There are no committee secretariats. Each committee is supervised by two civil servants of the Austrian Parliamentary Administration who have graduated in law or political science
Germany	X		30	Yes	80 staff members. The Directorate for Petitions and Submissions (Directorate Pet) forms part of the German Bundestag's administration
Spain (Senate)	X		30	Yes	

¹⁵ The disproportion of the support team for the Petitions Committee in Germany is due, at least in large part, to the absence of a national ombudsman in Germany, a role that is somewhat fulfilled by that committee.

European Parliament	X		35	Yes	1 Head of Unit, 9 administrators (university grade case handlers), and 7 assistants (clerical officers). All staff deal with petitions only
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Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

When there is no specific committee dedicated to petitions, they are typically addressed to the Chamber or, more commonly, to its President, who then distributes the petition to the relevant parliamentary committee based on the subject matter.

6. CRITERIA, RULES, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

In this chapter we provide an analysis of the comparative available data as regards: the submission of petitions, the criteria applied to establish admissibility of petitions, the various stages that can be identified in the petitions processes in the responding parliaments and assemblies, the powers detained by parliaments in considering petitions, what can be considered outcomes to petitions, and criteria for closing petitions. We also analyse data on publicity and feedback provided by petitions websites.

6.1. Typical stages of the petitions process

The main stages in the petitions process in the considered parliaments have some specific differences and details. However, they can be easily categorised into the following main 4 stages: Submission, Admissibility, Consideration, and Closure.

Figure 4: Main stages in the petition process

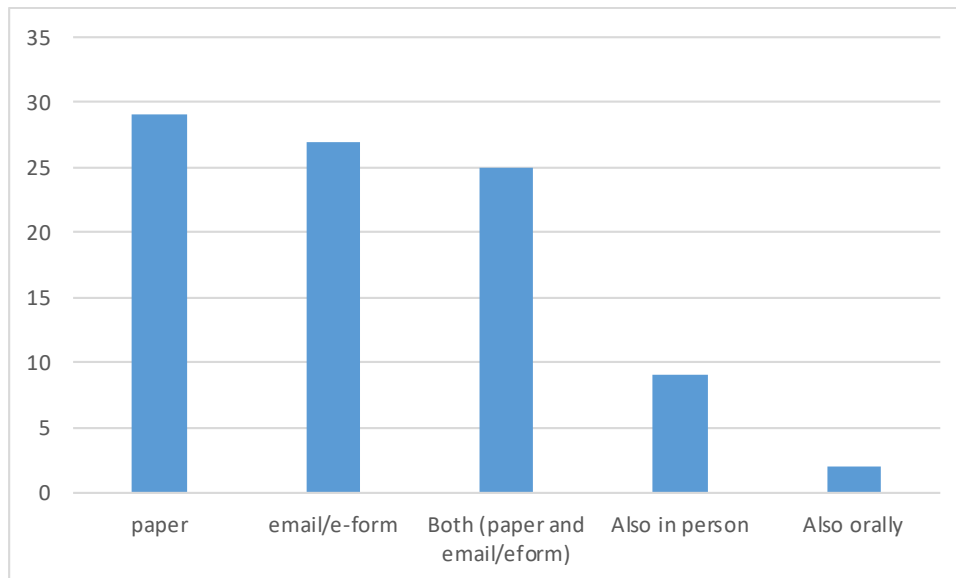


Before these stages, there may be a phase of signature collection, which is optional in most cases. However, it is mandatory, for example, in Luxembourg and Germany if the submission is intended to be treated as a "public petition." In the case of the European Parliament, it is optional. It can take place before or possibly simultaneously with the submission. In some cases, the collection of signatures can continue even after the petition has been submitted and it may or may not have effects on the petition's consideration process, especially when there are thresholds that determine, for example, whether a hearing of the petitioners or a debate on the petition is organised.

Within each of the main stages there are some differences, some of which are more significant than others. These mainly affect the "consideration" and "closure" phases of the petitions and they are, for the most part, the issues that will be addressed in the following chapters.

6.2. Form of submission of petitions

Figure 5: How petitions can be submitted



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

The submission of paper petitions remains a feature of the petitions process in almost all parliaments, ensuring a connection with citizens who possibly may not be familiar with, or have access to, modern technologies - still referred to as "new technologies" - or who quite simply prefer to submit a petition and its supporting signatures on paper. Moreover, petitioning citizens may feel that personal contact and interaction with petition supporters provides them with an advantage for campaigning and publicity purposes.

Among the parliaments that accept electronically submitted petitions, 18 allow submission via email, while the remaining ones require the use of a specific form available on the parliament's website, as is the case with the European Parliament and France¹⁶. The latter and Ukraine only accept submissions through e-form.

The requirement to fill out an electronic form is often associated with a personalised registration (such as with the European Parliament and the British Parliament in Westminster). This may seem like a more burdensome way to participate for a potential petitioner or supporter, compared to simply sending an email, but it may better reflect the willingness of the citizen to participate. Besides, it allows for the collection of important information¹⁷ about the profile of petitioners (age, gender, geographical location), which could potentially be used to reach new audiences and which is also used for the compilation of annual reports on petitions activity.

In addition to the aforementioned more common submission methods, nine countries explicitly mention accepting petitions delivered in person by the petitioners themselves (e.g. Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey), with Austria only accepting petitions submitted in this manner.

¹⁶ In the previous study (Tibúrcio, 2015), France was one of the few countries that did not accept petitions submitted electronically.

¹⁷ For internal reporting purposes.

In Portugal, petitions with sufficient signatures to be debated in plenary (7,500 signatures) are usually received in person by the President of the Parliament or one of the Vice-Presidents. This symbolic gesture highlights the importance attributed by the parliament to the exercise of this right¹⁸.

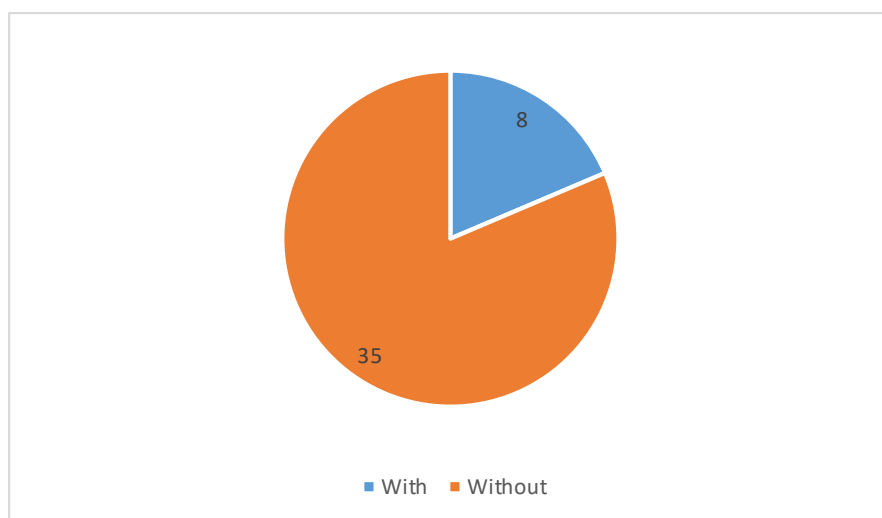
Two parliaments indicate that they accept orally presented petitions (as is often the case with complaints to the ombudsman). In the case of Croatia, this can be done by phone, through direct contact with the head of delegation, or by admission at the office of the committee's chairperson. In Latvia, the staff of the Visitor and Information Centre can assist in converting an oral submission into a written format by appointment. The submission must be signed in person at the Visitor and Information Centre.

6.3. Admissibility of petitions

The formal requirements for the admissibility of petitions are quite similar among parliaments. In addition to the written form required by all¹⁹, petitions typically need to include the name, address, and signature of the petitioner(s).

A fundamental requirement imposed by some (few) parliaments is a minimum number of signatures for a petition to be admitted.

Figure 6: Parliaments with an admission threshold



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

This requirement exists in the following cases:

Table 3: Admission threshold (minimum number of signatures)

Parliaments	Number
United Kingdom	5
Canada (paper petitions)	30

¹⁸ Assembleia da República, 2020.

¹⁹ Those that are submitted orally are transcribed into writing with the assistance of parliamentary services.

Georgia	300
Canada (e-petitions)	500
Austria	500
Estonia	1.000
Latvia	10.000
Ukraine (e-petitions)	25.000

Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

If we exclude the cases where the requirement for more than one signature is of a more symbolic nature (United Kingdom and, perhaps, Canada), in the remaining cases this requirement may compromise (as the threshold increases) the idea that the right to petition is a right of every citizen, in line with its historical origin.

It is noted that there are other types of thresholds for certain types of petitions (such as "public petitions") which, however, if not met, do not hinder the exercise of the right to petition. The petitioner can always resort to an ordinary petition (e.g. Luxembourg).

Parliaments that allow petitions with just one signature often see a significant percentage of petitions submitted under those conditions. This is the case with the European Parliament, where many petitions have been submitted by single citizens over the past decades (Tibúrcio, 2015).

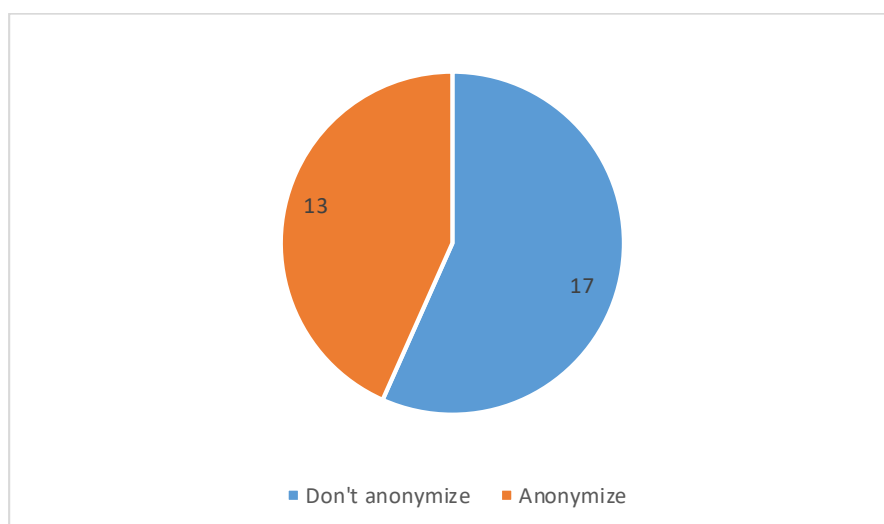
The possibility individual participation offers to any citizen to have a petition considered, ensures that every citizen has an avenue to make certain their voice is heard by their representatives, regardless of their ability to mobilise other members of the community. It serves as a powerful antidote against one of the main risks of these forms of participation, namely the potential for them to be predominantly used by those who are already familiar with such forms of engagement, typically groups that already hold some influence (Dalton, Scarrow & Cain, 2004).

However, petitions with more than one signature still reflect the level of support that the petition has garnered within the community, distinguishing them from individual petitions or those that gather only a small number of signatures. As will be shown later on, parliaments can also create incentives for petitions to seek community support, notably through the establishment of thresholds.

A considerable number of responding parliaments (13) admit to anonymising petitions. In two of them, it is the rule²⁰, while in the remaining cases, it is allowed upon the petitioner's request. Austria allows it upon the petitioner's request but subject to a balancing of interests.

²⁰ Canada and Spanish Senate.

Figure 7: Parliaments that anonymize petitions



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

Although not strictly formal, it is worth noting that many parliaments conduct an initial assessment of the comprehensibility of the petition (which has to be clear and understandable). This is the case in Albania, Belgium, Croatia, the Bundestag, France, Latvia, Portugal, the United Kingdom and San Marino. Among the formal criteria, there is also the requirement of adhering to basic rules, for instance that petitions should not contain offensive (Latvia), inappropriate or disrespectful expressions (Italy).

The formal admissibility conditions are generally determined by the competent administrative services of the parliaments in the initial stage. In some cases, these services may request clarifications from the petitioners if there are doubts (e.g. Czechia, Croatia and Portugal). There is not much information regarding “submissions” to parliament that are “clearly not intended to be a petition,” but it is known that such submissions are not registered as petitions in parliaments such as Belgium (Senate), the European Parliament and Portugal.

6.3.1. Admissibility of petitions in terms of substance

In terms of substance, the responses generally refer to a criterion of competence of the parliament and the scope within which they can act. Some parliaments only admit petitions of general interest (e.g. Czechia), while others also accept petitions concerning private interests²¹.

More details on substantive criteria are listed in the table below.

Table 4: Substantive criteria for non-admission of petitions (examples)

Criteria	Parliaments
Are substantially identical to another recent proposal	Estonia, Latvia, Portugal
Are clearly incompatible with the basic principles of the Constitution	Estonia, Czechia, Georgia, Germany, Slovakia, Ukraine

²¹ A still up-to-date list of petitions systems that only admit petitions that pursue the general interest and those that also accept petitions based on individual interests, can be found in Annex I of our 2015 study for the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions (Tibúrcio, 2015).

Contain any demands or threaten the independence, territorial integrity, or constitutional order	Lithuania, Georgia, Ukraine
Clearly incompatible with the international obligations imposed by international treaties	Estonia, Slovakia
Don't comply in content with the relevant laws	Hungary, Slovakia
Are not respectful and moral	Luxembourg
Are defamatory or abusive	France, Latvia, United Kingdom
Contain statements detrimental to the personal sphere and the reputation of identified persons (including those performing public functions, of which certain behaviours are denounced)	Italy
Coercion or blackmail	Germany
Are defamatory, obscene, discriminatory, aggressive, negationist, revisionist, pornographic petitions, inciting to violence or hatred of a person or a group of persons, in particular because of their political opinions, their origin or their true or supposed membership or non-membership of a specific ethnic group, nation, race or religion, or their sexual orientation	France (to a similar extent in Czechia, Georgia and Ukraine)
Offend ethnic, religious, national minorities	France, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, San Marino, Ukraine
Offend the authority of the parliament	Hungary
Contain any demands or proposals the settlement of which would restrict the rights and freedoms of other people	Lithuania, Slovakia
Are likely to be a form of propaganda or proselytism	France
Infringe the intellectual property rights of third parties (trademarks, copyrights, etc.)	France
Infringe the respect due to privacy or the image rights of a third party	France
Undermine the presumption of innocence or the secrecy of the investigation	France
Make an illegal claim	Portugal, Czechia
Contains material that could be confidential or commercially sensitive	United Kingdom

Could cause personal distress or loss. This includes petitions that could intrude into someone's personal grief or shock without their consent	United Kingdom
Accuse an identifiable person or organisation of wrongdoing, such as committing a crime	United Kingdom
Name individual officials of public bodies, unless they are senior managers	United Kingdom
Contain party political material	United Kingdom
Do not concern an issue related to a national and/or social problem	Georgia
Require a new law or an amendment to a law	Turkey
Do not include a copy of the final response provided by the authorised administrative bodies	Turkey

The aforementioned list provides several examples of issues that fall outside the scope of petitions, including offenses against the Constitution, threats to state independence, incitement to violence, and discrimination against minorities.

In terms of specific areas, issues related to justice (albeit with different scopes) are the most commonly excluded areas. This stems from the understanding of the separation of powers and the limitation of parliaments to interfere in judicial cases. Countries that exclude such issues are Belgium, Germany, Canada, the European Parliament, Portugal, Slovakia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

In systems that only consider petitions that pursue the general interest, those limited to a particular interest are excluded.

There are parliaments that offer both types of petitions (particular and public interest), which have different criteria for admissibility. This is the case with the German parliament, where in order to qualify as a "public petition", the subject of the request or complaint must concern a matter of general interest. However, if these criteria are not met, citizens can choose to submit a "regular" petition.

Some admissibility criteria for public petitions in the Bundestag²²

3 Public petitions shall not be permitted if they or the attached justification

(...)

d) infringe the principle of human dignity;

e) contain expressions of opinion which are evidently false, misleading or insulting;

f) are evidently not based on fact or predicated on a false premise;

g) call for criminal offences or breaches of an administrative regulation, or demand measures in contravention of the constitutional order or moral law;

h) contain confidential information or interfere with the right to privacy of individual persons (e.g. by stating names), advertise commercial products or services or contain any other kind of advertising;

i) contain links to other websites;

j) use language not befitting the dignity of Parliament.

6.3.2. Inadmissible petitions

The treatment of petitions that are not admissible varies depending on the parliaments. For example, in Belgium and in the United Kingdom only admitted petitions are published and made available on the website. In Portugal, however, all petitions (except those that are insulting or mere expedients) are published, even those that are not admitted by the committees, including the technical note that justifies the decision (as proposed by the committees services and approved by the committee).

The responses provided to the questionnaire reveal that twelve parliaments state that they file the inadmissible petitions separately.

Table 5: Proportion of petitions considered inadmissible

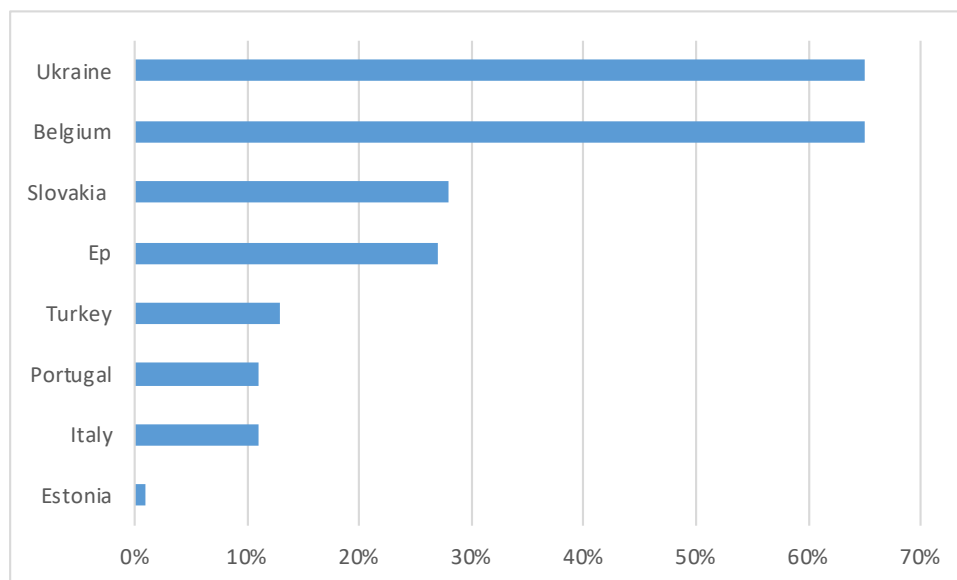
	2019		2020		2021	
	Submitted	Inadmissible %	Submitted	Inadmissible %	Submitted	Inadmissible %
Belgium	143	78	187	65	182	52
EP	1357	30	1573	25	1392	26
Estonia	12	0	20	0	29	3
Italy	145	12	202	8	178	13
Portugal	90	11	167	10	154	12
Slovakia	20	25	6	50	10	10
Turkey	5747	7	6373	5	4464	26
Ukraine	1707	56	1151	69	783	70

Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

²² Guidelines on the Treatment of Public Petitions pursuant to Rule 7.1 (4) of the Procedural Rules Annex to Rule 7.1 (4) of the Procedural Rules.

The table above shows that there is a disparity among countries regarding the rate of petitions considered inadmissible. Some countries have a low rate of inadmissible petitions, around 10%, where most petitions are deemed admissible. On the other hand, there are countries with strict criteria for admission, resulting in high rates of inadmissibility. Belgium and Ukraine fall into this category, with values well above 50%. In a second tier, there are parliaments, such as the European Parliament²³ and Slovakia, with inadmissibility rates of around one-quarter of petitions.

Figure 8: Petitions considered inadmissible (average 2019-2021)



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

6.3.3. Supporting signatures

Most parliaments accept petitions with more than one supporter, without the number of signatures having an impact on the petition process.

As mentioned earlier (table 3), there are a few parliaments that require a minimum number of supporters for the submission of petitions. Others associate certain benefits of the petitions process with a threshold of signatures.

The existence of thresholds associated with the exercise of the right to petition may initially appear as a constraint to citizens, making it more difficult to access the right or to trigger certain stages of the petitions process. This constraint is naturally stronger when the threshold is higher.

This seems to be the case with the minimum threshold of 50,000 signatures required by the Petitions Committee of the German Parliament for organising a public hearing, which as a result occurs only rarely (Saalfeld and Dobmeier, 2012). Between 2005 and 2010, only nine public petitions managed to reach this threshold, which must be achieved within a period of six months (Riehm, Bohle and Lindner, 2014). On average, there have been about four of these hearings per year²⁴.

The introduction of thresholds can indeed pose a risk of inequality among petitioners²⁵. This inequality may arise between those living in areas with larger populations, where gathering signatures is

²³ This percentage is certainly due to the specificities of the EU rules and the petitions admissibility requirement regarding European laws and regulation and in particular their implementation by the Member States (Nielsen et al, 2020).

²⁴ Bundestag Scientific Services, 2022.

²⁵ Tibúrcio, 2015.

generally easier, and residents in rural areas, where this task may prove to be more challenging or even impossible. It is important to consider such disparities and to ensure that access to the petitions process is equitable for all citizens, regardless of their geographic location or other potential obstacles they may face.

There are also positive effects that can be attributed to thresholds, such as security and predictability, meaning that petitioners can be sure that if they reach the required threshold, a hearing or debate must be held, without this being subject to any discretionary decision. For instance, the possibility of conducting public hearings has existed in the German system for decades, but it was only with the introduction of the 50,000 signature threshold in 2005 that such hearings were began to occur with some regularity (although they are still considered rare overall²⁶).

Another potential positive effect is that thresholds serve as an incentive to share the petition with the community in order to gather signatures, thereby mobilising citizens in the “*res publica*” and enhancing the visibility and influence of the petition.

When assessing the reasonableness of a minimum signature threshold account should be taken of a country’s population, as well as the rules regarding the validity of petition signatures (such as name and signature, or other data such as identification numbers), and specifically whether signatures can be collected online and the way this is done. In fact, while some systems require electronic signatures (e.g. Latvia), others demand that signatures must be collected on the parliament’s own platform (e.g. the European Parliament, Germany and Luxembourg). Some accept both paper and online signatures, namely through private platforms dedicated to this purpose on the internet, thereby fostering synergies rather than competition with this medium (as is the case in Portugal).

In general, fewer restrictions on signature collection would imply a potentially greater impact in terms of effectiveness. However, it is essential to ensure that this ease of signature collection does not result in abuse, consuming important parliamentary resources, although this does not seem to be confirmed by practice. Moreover, there are verification procedures that can, for example, prevent duplication or bot activity.

Table 6: Thresholds for a hearing

Parliaments	Threshold (signatures)
Portugal	1,000
Estonia	1,000
Luxembourg	4,500
Czechia	10,000
Belgium	25,000 ²⁷
Germany	50,000

²⁶ In 2021, there were two public sessions (Bundestag Scientific Services, 2022).

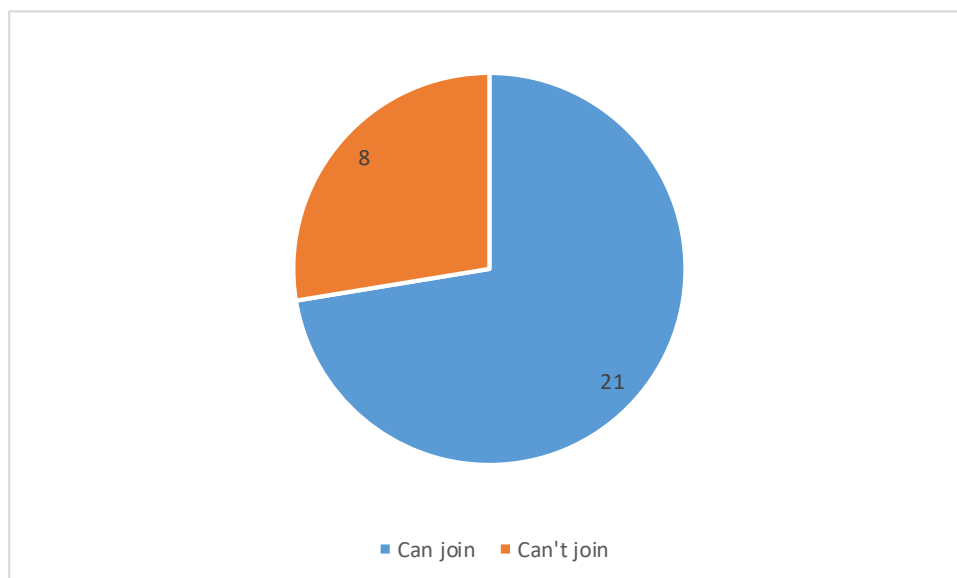
²⁷ Natural persons who have their place of residence in Belgium and who have reached the full age of 16, of whom at least 14,500 have their place of residence in the Flemish Region, 2,500 in the Brussels Capital Region and 8,000 in the Walloon Region (article 4 law of 2 May 2019)

Table 7: Thresholds for a debate

Parliaments	Threshold
Portugal	2,500 (debate in committee)
	7,500 (debate in plenary)
Slovakia	100,000 (debate in plenary)
United Kingdom	100,000 (debate in plenary)
France	500,000 ²⁸ (debate in plenary)

Most parliaments accept the addition of signatures even after the petition has been admitted, although not all of them consider these signatures for procedural purposes.

Figure 9: Parliaments where citizens can join (sign) an admitted petition



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

The conditions for petitioners to join are generally the same as those for original signatories (such as minimum age, as in Austria, or registration on the petitions portal, as in the European Parliament). Some systems limit this option for signature only to electronic petitions (Canada), while others open it to both paper and electronic petitions (e.g. Germany and Portugal). The main distinction among systems lies in the deadline. The European Parliament has no deadline for additional signing of a petition. Germany has a deadline of 4 weeks from publication of the petition. Portugal accepts signature adhesion within 30 days following the admission of the petition by the relevant committee. Georgia also allows the addition of signatures during 30 days following the publication of the petition on the website.

The parliaments that do not accept the addition of signatures after the petition has been admitted are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

²⁸ Residing in at least 30 overseas departments or communities.

6.4. Consideration of petitions

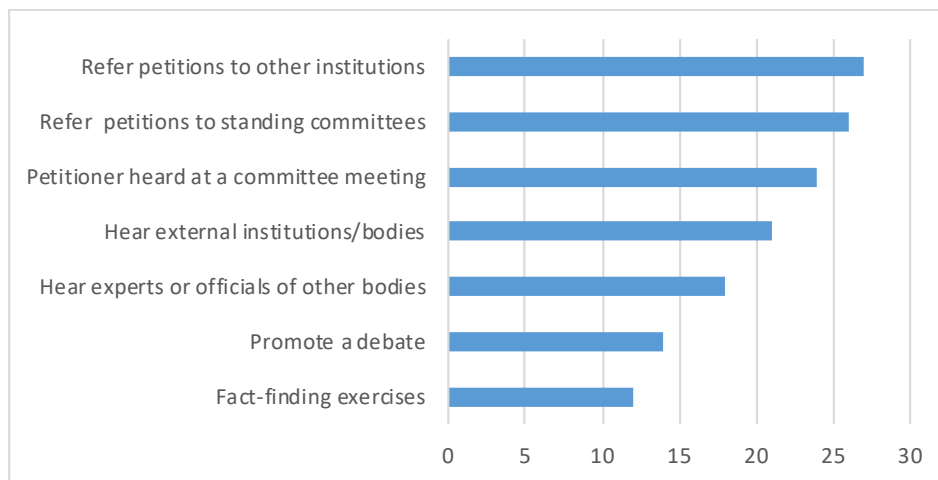
The phase of consideration of petitions refers to the period between the admission of the petition and its conclusion (closure), during which a parliament can avail itself of a set of powers that enable it to review the petition.

6.4.1. Powers of consideration and assessment

The consideration phase of petitions is where the most noticeable differences among parliaments can be observed, although these differences may not, in practice, be very significant.

The figure below shows the most common powers available to parliaments. It is important to note that these powers are not mutually exclusive, as parliaments can utilise several of them simultaneously.

Figure 10: Most frequent powers of consideration



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

These powers are specifically assigned to the committees dedicated to petitions or, in cases where the regular standing committees handle petitions based on their subject matter (as is the case in the parliaments of France, Hungary and Portugal), they are part of the regular powers of the standing committees.

It is important to note that these powers primarily reflect the legal framework of the right to petition and the powers available to parliaments, rather than how they are actually used by the parliaments. For example, in Hungary, while some of these options are available to standing committees, it is stated that using them is not common in the practice of considering parliamentary petitions.

Petitions referred to other institutions (government, ombudsman, regional or local authorities)

Committees may engage with relevant institutions (government, local authorities, etc.) to question them about issues raised by a petition, ask for their input, gather information related to these issues, or just to inform them about a petition's content.

Engagement with other bodies is the most established power. It reflects the nature and purpose of the right to petition, by summoning not only legislative competences but often also oversight powers over the executive, which is often the entity with the power to provide a definitive solution to the issues raised in the petition.

To minimise delays and ensure a response from external entities (such as the government), some parliaments have defined in their laws that these responses are mandatory, and some even provide for sanctions in case of non-compliance.

For example, 17 of the surveyed parliaments responded that the entities being questioned are required to provide a response.

Table 8: Deadlines to external bodies to give a reply

Parliaments	Parliaments with mandatory response (deadlines)
Georgia	15 days
United Kingdom	14-21 days (guidelines)
Portugal	20 days
Romania (Senate)	30 days
Slovakia	30 days
Latvia	30 days
Bulgaria	30 days
Czechia	30 days
Estonia	30 days
Turkey	30 days
Belgium	45 days
Canada	45 days
Croatia	30-60 days

Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

In case the deadline is exceeded, it is common for parliaments, in the absence of a response, to issue one or more follow-up calls (Croatia, Portugal) in order to obtain a response.

In addition to having a deadline for response, parliaments like the Belgian parliament provide that *“If the petition has been sent to the Minister, the latter shall provide written explanations to the Committee for Petitions within six weeks or any other time limit set by the Committee for Petitions. If the Minister has not given his reply to the chairman of the Committee within that period of time, the Committee may require the presence of the Minister, in accordance with the provisions of Rule 26, point 6, and Rule 30.”*

Portugal states that compliance with requests made by the parliamentary committee: *“shall take priority over any other Public Administration services and shall occur within a time limit of at most 20 days”*. Failure to comply with this duty of cooperation constitutes a crime (of disobedience), although there is no record of any penal consequences or reporting to the judicial authorities having occurred.

The European Parliament provides an indicative deadline for the European Commission (which is the principal respondent for most petitions) or Member State authorities to provide a response within three months²⁹, depending on the complexity of the issue. Slovenia also provides an indicative deadline of 60 days, but normally receives replies before the expiry of that period.

Petitions referred to standing committees on the basis of their subject matter

Referral to a standing committee on the basis of the subject matter of a petition is the second most commonly offered procedure.

The figure above (Figure 10, section 6.4.1) includes parliaments with a petitions committee, such as the German Parliament³⁰ and the European Parliament³¹, where these committees seek input from the specialised committee on the matter under consideration. It also encompasses those parliaments that do not have a dedicated petitions committee, and where petitions are assigned, *ab initio*, to the relevant standing committee based on their subject matter.

Even though they possess this power, several parliaments acknowledge that it is rare for them to use it in practice (as in Czechia or Slovenia), advising some caution in interpreting these data.

There are parliaments that claim to have established mechanisms to streamline this cooperation.

In the case of Belgium, *"If the petition has been sent to the responsible House Committee, that Committee shall inform the Committee for Petitions regularly and in writing on its response thereto. By virtue of Article 1.8 of the Rules of Procedure of the Committee for Petitions, when the Committee for Petitions has sent the petition to the standing committee responsible for the matter to which the petition relates and the latter has not or not sufficiently informed the Committee for Petitions, the Committee for Petitions has the right, amongst other things, to seek the advice of persons or institutions that can provide it with further information in accordance with House Rule 28, point 1"*.

Also in Belgium, when the conditions to be heard as a petitioner are met, the Committee on Petitions sends the petition to the standing committee responsible for the matter to which the petition relates³².

In the case of Estonia, *"The committee to which the collective proposal was transmitted by the Board of the Riigikogu is responsible for processing the proposal. However, the committee may ask the opinion of another committee or discuss the proposal at a joint session of several committees on its own initiative."*

Much of this cooperation is done without formalised procedures. As stated by the House of Commons (United Kingdom): *"If the Committee examines a petition in an area covered by another select committee, it will notify and, where appropriate, consult the Chair(s) of the relevant committee(s) before the Petitions Committee proceeds with any evidence, written or oral, regarding the content of a petition."*

Petitioner heard at a committee meeting or by a competent panel

Committees may hold hearings or public sessions to allow the petitioner and other relevant parties to present their case, provide testimony, or engage in discussions with committee members.

²⁹ Paragraph 6 of the Guidelines Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament (2015, updated January 2018).

³⁰ Section 109 Paragraph 1 of the Provisions concerning the right of petition contained in the Rules of Procedure of the German Bundestag.

³¹ Paragraph 8 of the Guidelines Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament (2015, updated January 2018).

³² According to House Rule 143, point 2.

This is the third most common power regarding petitions. Most of these powers are optional (subject to the discretion of the committee). This is the case in Austria, Croatia, Czechia, the European Parliament and France, among others.

Some countries, such as Slovenia, have a system where hearings are held upon request. However, it is important to note that, even though hearings can be requested, petitions submitted by individuals are rarely considered at meetings. The purpose of the meetings is to address petitions that relate to matters of general interest and have a broader impact.

In some chambers that responded to the questionnaire, the hearing of petitioners is associated with a signature threshold, making it more likely to be a right of the petitioners, who know that a hearing will necessarily take place during the process (see table 6). However, even in cases where there is a threshold for signatures, a hearing is not guaranteed in all parliaments, as is the case with Germany's "public petitions", where the Petitions Committee may decide, with a majority of two-thirds of the members present, to forgo this³³.

Despite not having a threshold, Bulgaria states that it hears petitioners on all occasions.

For the European Parliament, *"petitioners have the right to attend the Committee meeting when their petition is being debated. Petitioners are always informed as quickly as possible after the adoption of the meeting agenda if their petition is to be treated as an A point detailed above. The Commission is invited to attend the Committee meeting. The Member State concerned in the petition is notified in advance and is encouraged to attend the Committee meeting and make a statement. Where appropriate, the same principle may be applied to other relevant stakeholders, upon prior agreement of the Coordinators."*³⁴.

Few parliaments say they do not hear petitioners (ever): Germany (Senate), Spain (Senate), the Swiss Nationalrat and the United Kingdom's House of Lords. It is worth noting that these are all upper chambers, which may be less prone to interaction with petitioners.

Hearing of external bodies

Many countries indicate that they can invite and hear representatives of institutions whose decisions are contested by a petition at a committee meeting, or by the competent panel.

In almost all identified situations, this power is at the discretion of the parliament, and petitioners cannot demand it. The identified exceptions are Czechia, where the committee always proceeds to hearing external bodies when the petition is supported by at least 10,000 petitioners, and Germany, in the case of public petitions with more than 50,000 signatures.

Box 1: Sanction in case of no response from the Government

Belgium: When the Committee on Petitions has sent the petition to the responsible Minister for a written explanation, the Committee may, by virtue of House Rule 143, point 3, paragraph 3, request the presence of the Minister if he hasn't provided written explanations to the Committee within the regulatory time limit

Source: Reply to ECPD Request #5307

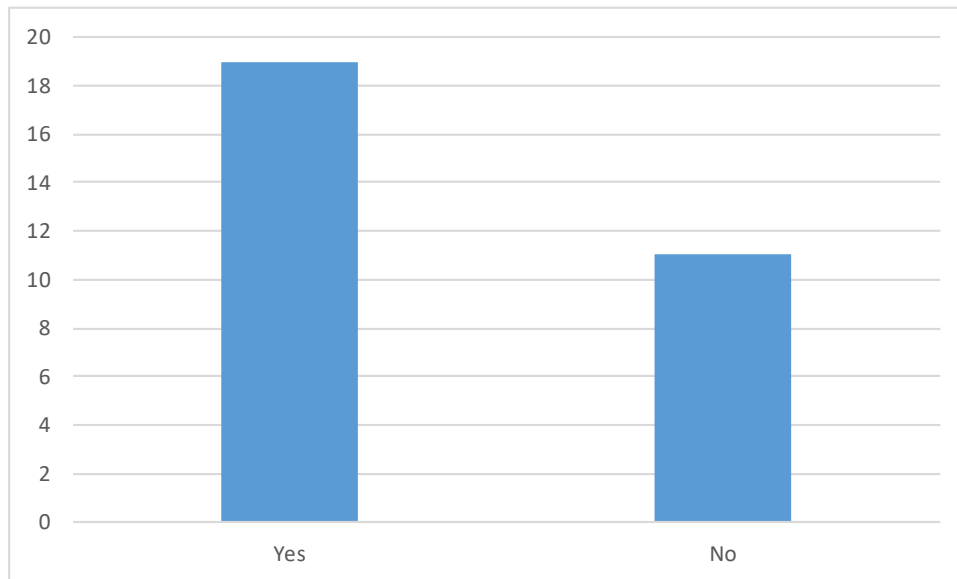
In the consideration of petitions, several parliaments can also consider any additional contributions that petitioners may wish to make by providing further information. Petitioners have the right to add

³³ No. 8.4 (4) of the Principles of the Petitions Committee Governing the Treatment of Requests and Complaints (Procedural Rules)

³⁴ Guidelines Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament (2015, updated January 2018).

information relevant to the petition during the petitions process in Bulgaria, the European Parliament, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey. In the Belgian and the French parliaments this possibility is not provided.

Figure 11: Right to add information during the petitions process

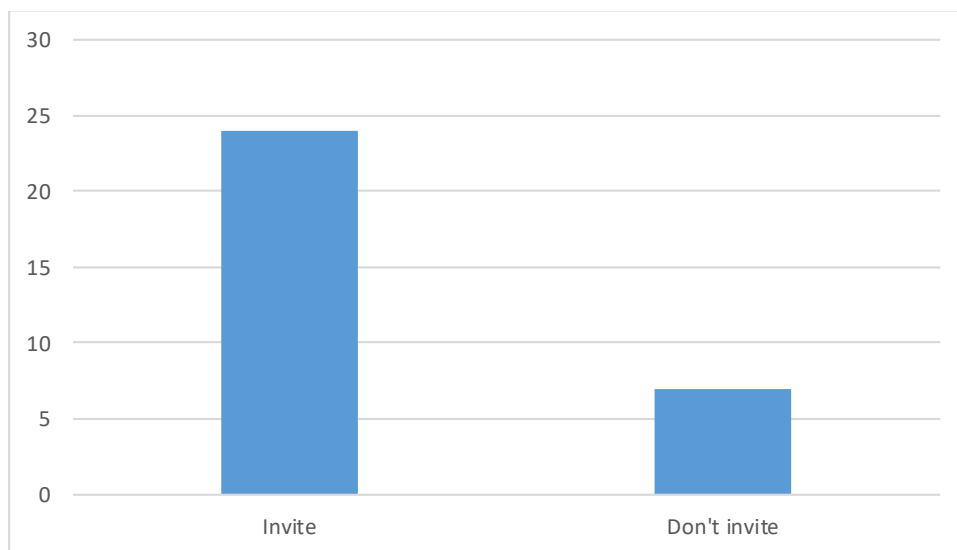


Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

In several parliaments additional information appears to be actively sought by the parliamentary committees, and they can invite petitioners to provide such information if it proves useful during the process. The Austrian parliament clarifies that this information can be provided *“by means of a requested statement or via hearings before the committee”*.

Two of these parliaments (Italy and Portugal) state that this power is rarely used.

Figure 12: Parliaments that invite petitioner(s) to provide additional information



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

Hearing of experts or officials of other bodies/institutions

A considerable number of parliaments (18) state that they have the power to hear experts or officials of other bodies/institutions. Through this power committees may consult external experts or specialists in the relevant field to obtain their insights and opinions on the subject matter of the petition.

Once again, some of these powers are merely a legal possibility and are rarely used, as mentioned by the parliaments of Italy and Hungary.

In the case of Luxembourg, the initiative to bring in experts to be heard seems to come from the petitioners themselves (when they are heard in parliament, i.e. in the case of petitions with more than 4,500 signatures), rather than from the parliament or the members of parliament, as is more commonly seen.

Promote a debate

Among the important moments that shape the consideration of petitions is the debate in parliament, especially – though more rarely – in the plenary session.

This debate, in public, represents a significant opening of parliaments to civil society and to the claims that originate outside the walls of parliaments, allowing citizens to determine the topic to be discussed in the plenary.

It embodies the aspiration of many petitions to set the parliamentary agenda and is likely the most anticipated moment in the process for petitioners (Tibúrcio, 2017; Asher and Leston-Bandeira, 2019, for the United Kingdom), reflecting the importance of debate in most parliaments.

In addition to providing an opportunity for discussion on a petition's topic, the debate also serves as an opportunity to assess whether the responses provided by the entities being questioned (such as the government) have been satisfactory.

When they occur, plenary debates are commonly associated with a signature threshold (Portugal, Slovakia and the United Kingdom)

The possibility of a debate is mentioned in several parliaments, but it can take various forms. It can be held in committee or in the plenary, either individually dedicated to each petition or collectively in relation to a report.

In most cases the decision to have a debate is a discretionary power of the parliament, even when a signature threshold is associated with it. For instance in the United Kingdom, where petitions with over 100,000 signatures may be considered for a debate³⁵, or in France, albeit that there a decision on a debate is conditioned by the demanding requirement of 500,000 signatures (which may explain why, in the three years of the existence of this regime, no petition has reached this threshold and, consequently, no debate has taken place in the Chamber). In Portugal and Slovakia, a debate is mandatory for petitions that reach the defined threshold.

Fact-finding exercises

According to the questionnaire, a fact-finding exercise appears to be the power that is the least available, although 12 parliaments mention providing this possibility, e.g. France, Georgia, Germany, Romania and Slovenia. Even among those that provide for it there are no precedents of its use (Italy), or it is only rarely used (Portugal and Hungary).

³⁵ Interestingly, there has already been a petition aimed at making the debate of petitions that reach this threshold mandatory: <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/104933>

Based on the questionnaire responses, the European Parliament appears to be the parliament where this power is considered to be the most significant, possibly because it is seen as a way to counteract the perception of distance between this institution and its citizens, considering that these visits tend to attract considerable media attention.

6.5. Outcomes

As previously pointed out, the right to petition is primarily a right to a process. This means that it is during this process that a significant part of the petition's outcomes will materialise. This implies that most outcomes are delivered during the consideration of a petition rather than at the conclusion of it. Often, the great value of exercising the right to petition is obtained at some point during the process of its consideration, considering that most petitions will not result in a fulfilment of the petitioner's request.

Outcomes can include the opportunity for petitioners to be directly heard by legislators, to question the executive branch or experts, or to set the plenary agenda with a debate.

This is where the right to petition differs greatly from other conventional citizen-based instruments which necessarily lead to a decision (such as the right to complain to the ombudsman), for which the focus on the final assessment as the main outcome is more appropriate (as seen in Tibúrcio, 2018).

Some outcomes occur as soon as the petition enters the system, others during its consideration, and others at the end of the process. They can also occur after the process is concluded, as some effects of petitions, which often aim to bring a specific issue to the political agenda, are indirect and may materialise in more substantial initiatives months or years later³⁶ (such as the approval of a proposal or mere publicity through the annual statistical report).

Guaranteed and possible outcomes

A part of these outcomes is guaranteed for petitioners, as they are aware that a certain result will necessarily occur when they submit a petition. Depending on the petitions system, this may include aspects such as publicity (with the publication of the petition and its process on the website), interaction with the parliament (through notifications or hearings), debates (in committee or in plenary), or a decision (for example, for petitions systems that end with a mandatory vote on the petition).

However, a substantial portion of the outcomes is merely a possibility, within the discretion of the parliament, reflecting the semi-direct nature of the right to petition (a dialogue between direct and representative democracy). It begins with an impulse from citizen, but it is largely in the hands of the representatives as regards the consideration. Such outcomes include: questions that the parliament may raise regarding the petition, any opinions and recommendations it deems appropriate, non-mandatory hearings and debates, and, most notably, potential legislative initiatives that may arise from petitions.

The guaranteed outcome tends to represent what the parliament as an institution offers to petitioners. It arises from the mere course of the process, naturally relying on the fundamental input of the representatives. The possible outcomes, on the other hand, reflect more what political groups can offer to the petition, depending primarily on their initiative.

Main outcomes

³⁶ IPU, 2022.

In the following table, the main outcomes are organised according to the different types identified in the questionnaire responses.

Table 9: Types of outcomes

Main outcomes	Examples
Publicity	Website; parliamentary channel; statistical reports; Official Journal
Information	Report; replies; visits
Opinion from Parliament actors	Reports; debates
Interaction with petitioners	Notifications; webportal (for interaction with petition supporters); hearings
Forward (most commonly to the competent authority)	Government; Ombudsman; local authorities; judiciary or police (if evidence of a crime)
Questioning	Government; Commission; experts; other committees
Debate	In committee; plenary session; report to the plenary/committee; motions for resolutions
Recommendation	Most commonly to the competent authority
Mediation	Meeting with competent body in view to solve the problem
Decision	Vote about the petition subject
Political initiative	Forwarding to the political groups for possible bill; draft bills

Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

With **publicity**, the petitions system becomes public, helping to disseminate the content of the petition to a broader audience. The petitions and the petitions process, i.e. the treatment given by the parliament to the petitions, is amplified and can now be monitored and scrutinised by any citizen, including the media.

Information represents the various procedural steps taken by the committee to gather information for the process, enriching it with data, facts, or a mere contextualisation of the issue raised in the petition. This allows for a better examination of the merits of the petition.

Information is also the essential foundation for any subsequent actions that may follow.

Not all parliaments seem to provide an **opinion** or position on the subject of the petition. When it does happen, it typically appears in a report that is prepared on the petition, or it is stipulated in the letter addressed to the lead petitioner informing him or her of the conclusions of the process. Opinions,

particularly those of the representatives, often arise during debates, as well as in the dialogue facilitated by hearings.

In the dimension of **interaction with petitioners** are included all interactions where parliaments update petitioners on the progress of their petition. In some cases, parliaments also provide information and clarification, such as explaining the petitioners' rights. As a right to a process, this interaction is a fundamental part of the right to a response that the modern right to petition encompasses.

The potential for direct interaction between parliamentarians and petitioners reaches its most intense expression in hearings between petitioners and members of parliament, particularly if such hearings are mandatory. By speaking in the parliamentary arena, petitioners can usually express their concerns and directly question the members of parliament on a topic chosen by them.

Box 2: Interaction with all petitioners, including supporters

The outcome of **interaction** is amplified when extended to all petitioners (including supporters). Most parliaments only inform the authors of the petition, excluding its supporters, who can be many thousands in many cases. Notification of all petitioners seems to be feasible only when supporting signatures are added through the parliament's portal, and if the portal allows for collecting email addresses. Among the parliaments that inform supporters of petitions about a petition's progress in parliament are the European Parliament, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom and Portugal.

Several parliaments indicate that they **forward** the petitions to relevant external entities, and the questionnaire responses suggest that this may be one of the main outcomes they offer.

Forwarding petitions and querying the government is one of the most practical ways of demonstrating interest in the consideration of a petition. Moreover, it means exercising an inherent oversight competence and engaging with an entity that may have influence over the matter. This makes it plausible and, in some cases, likely to receive a response from the executive that the petitioner would otherwise have had difficulty in obtaining. Thus it enriches the process. This is probably one of the reasons why Germany states that: *"as regards the petitions to be dealt with by the Petitions Committee, the Committee Service shall as a rule request the comments of the Federal Government or of other bodies obliged to provide information"*³⁷.

The mere "forwarding of the petition to the relevant entity for possible action" is different from **questioning** those entities to obtain responses. This **questioning**, aimed at obtaining information for a better assessment of the petition, emerges as the most common outcome immediately following the forwarding process.

The German parliament clearly identifies the different types of referrals to third-party entities³⁸.

³⁷ In its Principles of the Petitions Committee Governing the Treatment of Requests and Complaints (Procedural Rules).

³⁸ The Legal Framework for the Work of the Petitions Committee of the German Bundestag IV. Principles of the Petitions Committee Governing the Treatment of Requests and Complaints (Procedural Rules).

Box 3: Different types of referrals to third-party entities in the Bundestag

7.14.1 Referral to the Federal Government for remedial action

The petition shall be referred to the Federal Government, coupled with the request that it take remedial action,
– because the petitioner's concern is justified and the situation needs to be remedied.

7.14.2 Referral to the Federal Government for re-examination

The petition shall be referred to the Federal Government for it to examine the matter again and consider ways of remedying the situation,
– because the submission makes it appear justified to request the Federal Government to review the matter and seek ways of remedying the situation.

7.14.3 Referral as background material

The petition shall be referred to the Federal Government as background material,
– to ensure, for example, that it is taken into account in the preparation of bills, ordinances or other initiatives or studies.

7.14.4 Simple referral

The petition shall be referred to the Federal Government,
– to point out the reasons for the resolution adopted by the Bundestag
or
– to draw its attention to the matter raised by the petitioner.

7.14.5 Forwarding to the parliamentary groups for their information

The petitions shall be forwarded to the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag
– because, for example, it appears to be a suitable matter for a parliamentary initiative;
– to draw the attention of the parliamentary groups to the matter raised by the petitioner.

7.14.6 Forwarding to the European Parliament

The petition shall be forwarded to the European Parliament
– because its jurisdiction is affected.

Source: The Legal Framework for the Work of the Petitions Committee of the German Bundestag IV. Principles of the Petitions Committee Governing the Treatment of Requests and Complaints (Procedural Rules).

According to the questionnaire replies, another valuable outcome is to trigger a **debate** on the petition. The debate can be the pinnacle of the petitions process, bringing the voice of the petitioners to the most prominent stage of parliaments. A debate can take place in committee or in plenary and, most importantly, it can be focused on a specific petition or a set of petitions (normally in the form of a report, like in Spain). Naturally, these two modalities of debate reflect different levels of parliamentary involvement in the petition, with the debate on a specific petition being highly valued in some systems (e.g. Portugal and the United Kingdom). The discussion on an annual report on petitions is one of the most common forms of petitions debates in plenary sessions, as is the case in the European Parliament and Germany.

Mediation appears to be a rare instrument in the petitions systems under analysis. This is consistent with the nature of the right to petition and the institutions for which it is intended. As we have seen, petitions systems are less geared towards resolving specific cases. Mediation, as provided for in

regulations, can occur in Bulgaria, the European Parliament and Portugal, but its practice is extremely rare.

Decision-making, understood as the resolution of specific cases, although not common, seems to occur in the parliaments of Albania, Slovakia, Turkey and Switzerland. Parliaments such as the European Parliament and Germany also vote, particularly on **recommendations** to the executive. These votes are not legally binding. However, depending on the type of recommendation, they can trigger certain accountability obligations on the part of the executive, such as the duty to provide information.

Political initiative is a typical example of possible outcome action by parliament in the case of a petition calling for legislative intervention, such as the enactment of a new law or an amendment. But it also occurs when a petition, even if not explicitly requested, triggers initiatives within the scope of executive oversight, which can materialise in questions, debate initiatives, inquiries, etc. In general, the main actors in this regard are the members of parliament or political groups, who can exercise the political initiative sought by petitioners.

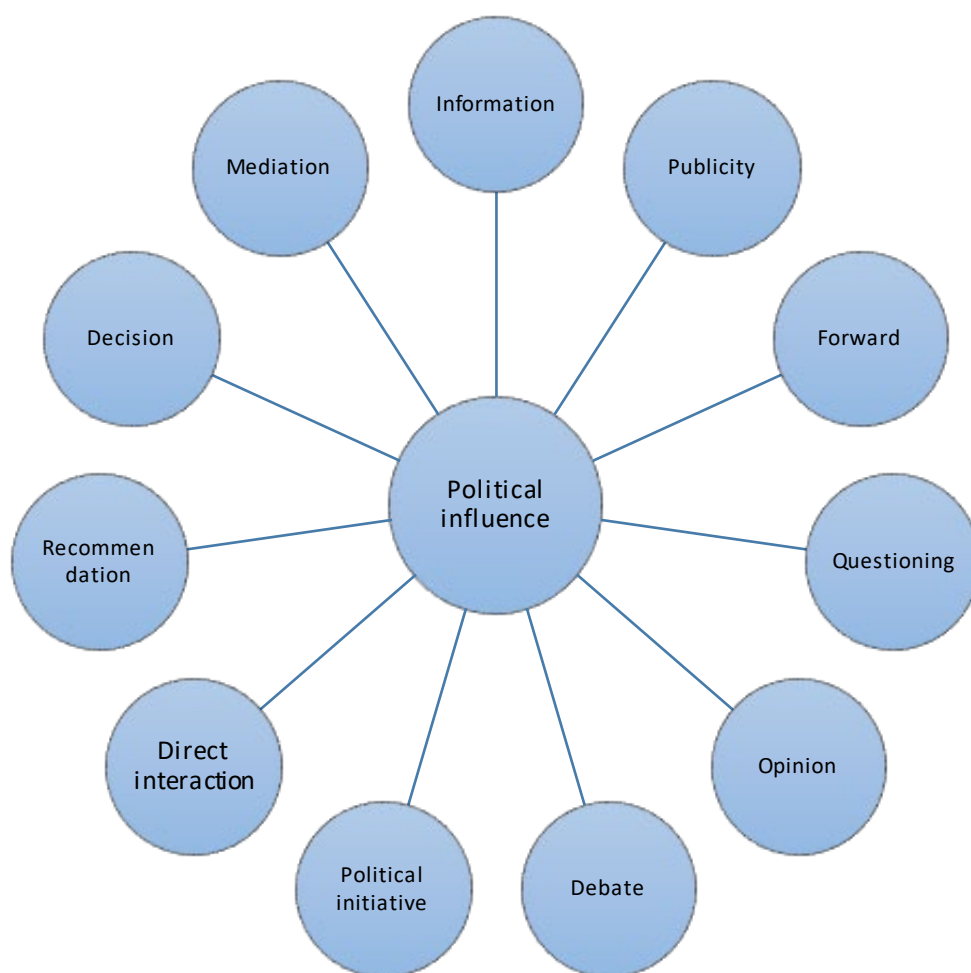
This is one of the primary outcomes usually sought by petitioners. It materialises through the mere initiative and not necessarily through the eventual approval of the initiative (especially if it is of a legislative nature). In the first scenario (the mere Initiative), it usually depends on the impulse of a representative or a political group, whether from the majority or the opposition (e.g. proposing a bill or raising a question). In the second scenario, the approval of the initiative depends on finding consensus with the parliamentary majority, which will naturally be rarer.

Box 4: Enhancing the discussion of petitions in plenary

In the Portuguese system the possibility to discuss legislative initiatives in plenary together with petitions has been enhanced. Article 24 of the Law on Petitions provides that the author of an initiative may request that initiatives submitted based on a petition be scheduled and debated in plenary along with that petition. In addition to this, two other rules promote this association: if the initiative is scheduled for a time prior to the scheduling of the petition, the plenary session takes over the petition for joint consideration; on the other hand, when a plenary debate is scheduled on a subject similar to that of a pending petition that meets the conditions for plenary debate, that petition can also be included, provided that the author of the scheduling and the petitioner(s) express their agreement.

In general, all these outcomes contribute to amplify certain issues on the political agenda, or even bring them to a forum that would have otherwise been avoided or limited. In this way, they serve the overall objective of attempting to attain political influence, or act as a catalyser for changes that can occur in the short, medium or long term, or that may never happen. This, essentially, represents the synthesis of the complementary relationship between direct and representative democracy embodied by the right to petition.

Figure 13: Main outcomes



6.6. Closure of petitions

6.6.1. Criteria

The difficulty in determining criteria for closure is evident in the survey, where it was challenging to obtain clear answers to this question. Often, respondents referred to a description of the petition process and the powers of the committees (hearings, questioning, debates). Once again, in our view, this largely reflects the circumstance that the petitions process typically does not culminate in a decision but instead the focus is shifted to some of the most significant moments of the procedure.

The responses to the survey about closure criteria can be categorised into four main types:

- A. Those that depend on a specific procedural event determined by parliament (not by political groups), which when it occurs leads to the closure of the petition.
- B. Those that depend on an event that will occur for certain, such as the passage of time.
- C. Based on an event of uncertain verification.
- D. Based on a discretionary decision by a committee.

The table below lists the main criteria identified to end the consideration of the petition.

Table 10: Criteria to close petitions

Criteria		Examples
When the petition is referred to another committee	A	Austria
When the petition is forwarded to the competent authority (e.g. the government, the police) for action		Austria, Belgium (Senate), Germany, Portugal
When the petition is forwarded to the Ombudsman for further action		Austria, Belgium (Senate), Portugal
When parliament is requested to deal with the matter by taking note of the committee report		Austria
With a hearing		Luxembourg
With a decision on admissibility		European Parliament, Portugal*
With plenary debate/decision		Portugal, Turkey
With a committee opinion		Spain (Senate)
With a report to the plenary		Spain (Senate), Switzerland
When the threshold is not reached		B
With the end of the parliamentary term	Belgium, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom	
When the competent body provides replies	C	Croatia, Germany**, Slovenia, Spain (Senate), United Kingdom
When a bill is included on the agenda		France (Senate)
With the approval of a resolution		Italy, Poland, Germany***
When a petition is linked to a bill already entered in the agenda		Italy
If the petition has been endorsed		Switzerland
If the government has already taken a decision in the matter		Belgium
When the subject of the petition is no longer topical		D

When it is considered that no other diligences are needed

European Parliament,
Portugal

*for petitions <101 signatures

**if the committee considers the reply to be satisfactory

***if action is expected from government

The criteria of **type A** depend only on parliament and can be controlled by it, thus determining the moment when closure takes place.

These cases include situations where a petition is forwarded to the government, or another authority, for opinion or action, but where a deadline is defined, and where, if there is no response within that time frame, the petition is considered closed (e.g. Germany).

Criteria of **type B** are a clear and predictable way to conclude a petition, namely treating all petitions equally. These are criteria that are often established in the law or in regulations (especially in cases where a threshold is not met). They are objective, without any discretion on the part of parliament, and petitioners know that, once verified, they determine the closure of a petition.

The case of petitions being closed with the conclusion of the legislative term represents a criterion of automatic verification, which occurs in nine parliaments (e.g. Belgium, France, Spain and the United Kingdom) and concerns either received petitions or petitions already under consideration (the countries tend to be the same). In general, this type of closure derives from practice, rather than from a specific rule or guideline. Turkey, Spain and France appear to be the only parliaments providing specifically for this.

Box 5: Petitions that lapse at the end of the parliamentary term (France)

5. La caducité à la fin de chaque législature

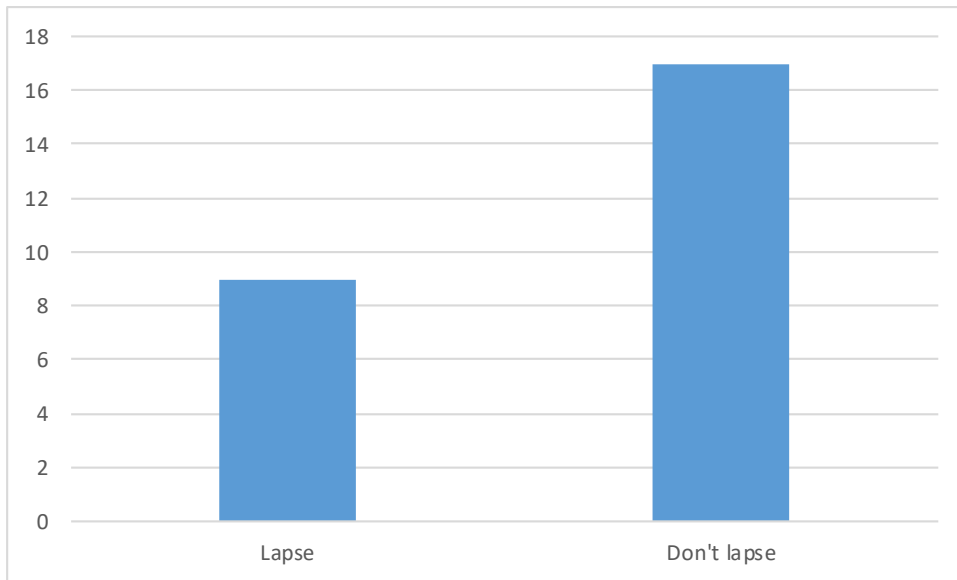
À la fin de chaque législature, tous les cinq ans après les élections législatives, toutes les pétitions deviennent caduques. Elles ne peuvent plus faire l'objet de débats en commission ou en séance publique.

Celles qui étaient encore ouvertes à la signature sont automatiquement fermées. Toutes les pétitions demeurent visibles sur la plateforme, mais sont archivées dans une rubrique dédiée.

Source: Petitions website of the French parliament https://petitions.assemblee-nationale.fr/pages/parcours_petition

However, most parliaments and petitions systems do not embrace this criterion.

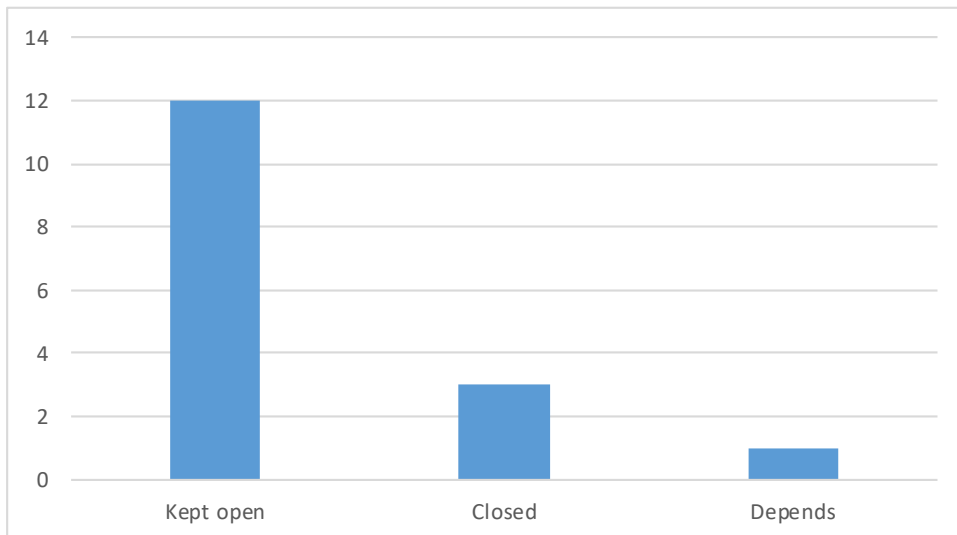
Figure 14: Parliaments where petitions which are not considered lapse within the parliamentary term



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

The criteria of **type C** depend on the actions of third parties. According to the replies to the questionnaire, several parliaments wait for these responses before closing a petition (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Petitions kept open while waiting for a contribution of another body



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

In the case of Austria, the lack of response leads to the postponement of closure (which can happen a maximum of two times). Belgium (Senate) and Slovenia also mention that the process is closed, with the latter doing so after insisting to obtain a response.

Belgium does not have any defined criteria for these cases, so the decision varies according to the specific situation. In Portugal, as a rule, petitions remain open. However, after a reasonable amount of time, they may be closed, and it is the responsibility of the rapporteur to assess whether and when petitions are closed.

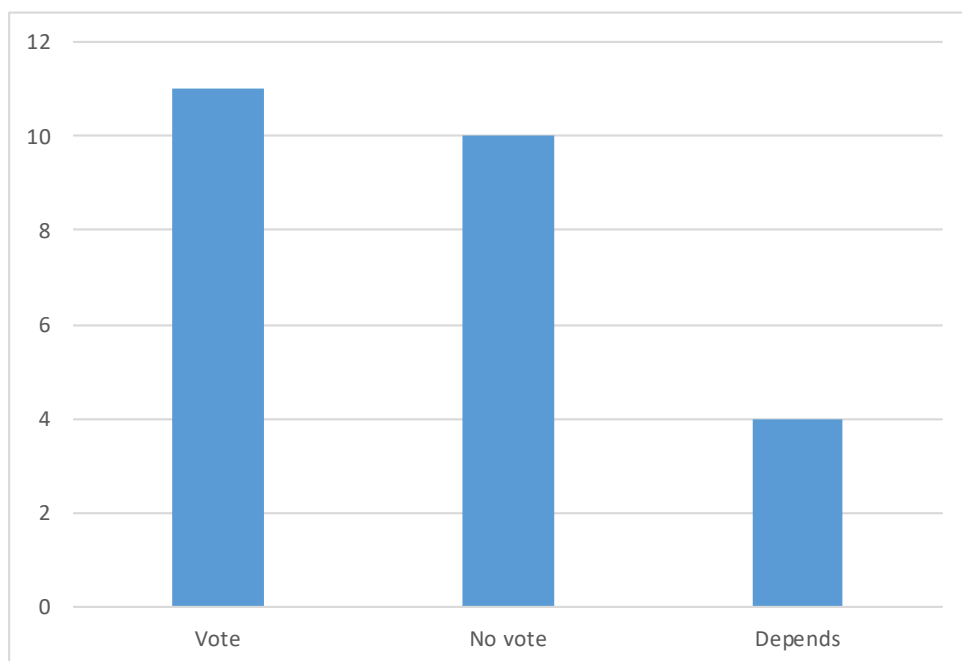
In Spain, in principle, the petition will be kept open until a response is received, in accordance with the regulations governing the right to petition.

Croatia, the European Parliament, France, Latvia, Poland, and Romania also keep the process open in the absence of a response.

The criteria of **type D** allow for an assessment of opportunity by the parliament as to the moment to finalise the consideration of the petition or when it is no longer justified to prolong its examination.

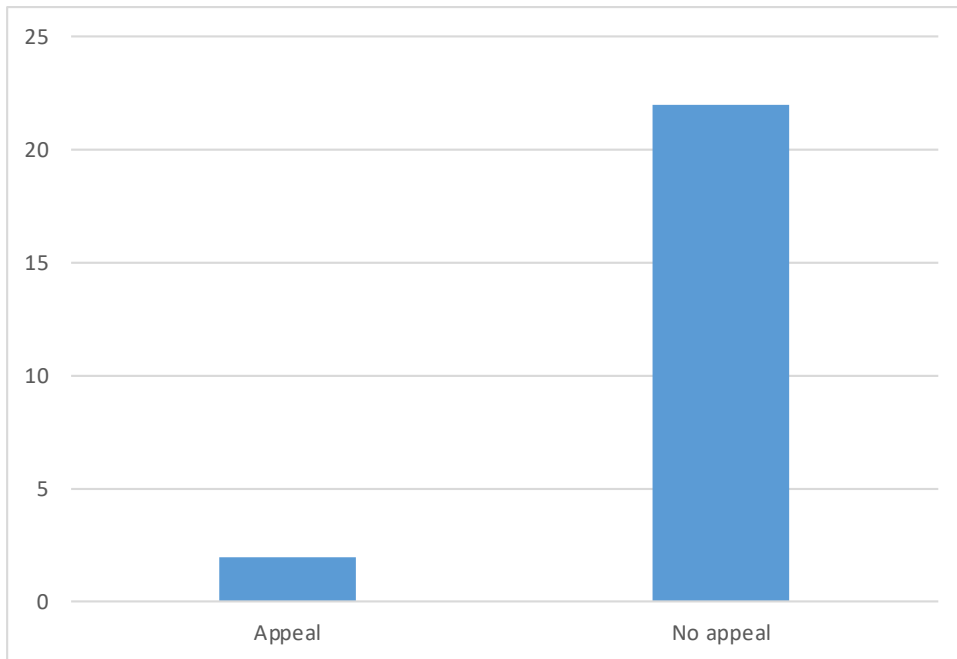
Regardless of the type of closure, it may or may not be subject to a vote in committee.

Figure 16: Parliaments where the decision to close a petition is subject to a vote in committee



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

Figure 17: Parliaments where petitioners have the possibility to appeal the decision to close their petition



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

The almost general absence of the possibility to appeal decisions on petitions highlights the political and non-administrative nature of the right to petition and the way it is designed in the various systems. Spain is one of the few parliaments that admits some kind of appeal (the other is Bulgaria). Petitioners can appeal to the Spanish Administrative Court³⁹ regarding: i) the declaration of inadmissibility of the petition; ii) the omission of the obligation to reply within the established time limit; and iii) the absence in the reply of the minimum requirements established in the regulation.

³⁹ Through the procedure for the jurisdictional protection of the fundamental rights of the person, established in Articles 114 and following of Act 29/1998, of 13 July, regulating the Contentious-Administrative Jurisdiction (the "Act of Contentious-Administrative Jurisdiction").

Box 6: Different types of criteria with different consequences

As they depend solely on the parliament, **type A criteria** appear to be more favourable for a timely performance by parliament. Based on these criteria, the end of the petition's examination and the moment it is closed depend exclusively on parliament's action.

Criteria of type B are a clear and predictable way to conclude a petition, by treating all petitions equally and avoiding that a petition can survive indefinitely. Petitions that lapse within the parliamentary term, for example, allow for the start of a new legislative term without pending petitions. However, this practice does not take account of the specific subject matter of the petitions, or the complexity and duration required for their consideration. Besides, unlike the analogous situation that often applies to legislative initiatives originating from political groups, there is no mandate that expires. Petitioners do not face any vicissitudes with the end of the legislative term, and it might seem unreasonable to ask them to renew the petition (which may involve the collection of hundreds or thousands of signatures). Additionally, this conclusion can reward inaction of parliament or the entities called upon to collaborate in this process.

With **criteria of type C** parliament becomes dependent on actions of entities it does not control, potentially leading to undesirable delays in a petition's consideration process. The criterion is understandable, as these types of responses contribute significantly to the petitions process, being one of its main outcomes. However, it can also be a blocking factor in the consideration of petitions, as it may involve waiting for a response that may be delayed or may not arrive at all.

The **criteria of type D** lack certainty and predictability for petitioners. However, they allow parliament to adapt the decision to be made for each specific petition.

6.6.2. Time is of the essence

Time is of the essence in any petitions system, as it is strongly linked to the right to an answer.

Time is also an important measure of the effectiveness of petitions systems, and an excessively prolonged consideration of a petition can undermine the usefulness of the response to a petition, especially if the facts of the petition are time constrained. With any petition, and especially with more complex ones, parliament must weigh the benefits of a more thorough examination against the need for a timely response, a balance that is not always easy to achieve.

There are constraints that may prevent parliament from providing a timely response, such as waiting for delayed responses from external entities. For this reason, mechanisms to ensure good coordination between these entities and instruments to overcome these impasses are crucial.

The table below gives an idea of the typical life cycle of petitions in some parliaments. The data presented in the table are mostly based on the deadlines provided by law, which helps to better understand the cycle and attempts to give a comparative analysis between different petitions systems. Knowing the actual average time a parliament takes to consider petitions is crucial for an effective monitoring of each petitions system.

Table 11: Typical life-cycle of a petition from its receipt to its closure

Parliaments	Typical life-cycle of a petition from its receipt to its closure (approximately)
Bulgaria	12 months
EP	6 to over 12 months
Portugal	1.5 ⁴⁰ to over 12 months ⁴¹
Estonia	10 months
Spain (Senate)	8 months
France (Senate)	4 to 8 months
Italy	7.4 months
Lithuania	3 months
Poland	3 months
Slovakia	2 to 3 months
Luxembourg	2 months
Slovenia	2 months ⁴²
Turkey	2 months

Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

6.7. Publicity and feedback

Publicity and information provided to petitioners, as well as the public, can be conducted through traditional means or using the internet and digital communication channels.

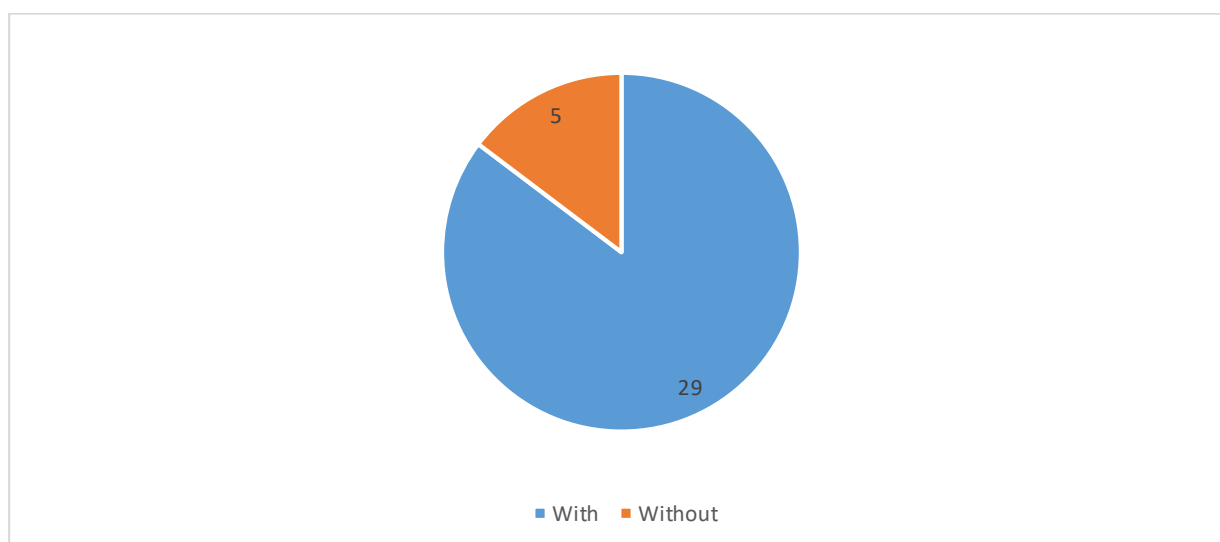
Most parliaments have a petitions website or a dedicated section about petitions on the parliament's website.

⁴⁰ For petitions with less than 101 signatures.

⁴¹ If the petition has more than 7,500 signatures and must be scheduled for plenary.

⁴² The average life-cycle of a petition is around two months. The petitions to which the reply is given by the Commission, are closed earlier, while those considered at meetings, may be closed somewhat later.

Figure 18: Parliaments with a petitions website/webpage



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

The provision of a website or a webpage dedicated to petitions is now a generalised practice, although the prominence given to it and the extent to which it is highlighted is different from parliament to parliament. Only five parliaments seem to provide public information about petitions through a dedicated website or webpage. This applies to three upper houses (Switzerland, Germany and Belgium) and the parliaments of Hungary and Croatia (the latter, however, with some information under the petitions committee tab).

Through their petitions platforms, parliaments perform three main functions: i) providing information about the right to petition and how it works; ii) offering information about submitted petitions, including their status and progress; and iii) facilitating interaction by allowing the submission of petitions and the addition of supporting signatures.

Typically, in coordination with the parliamentary television channel, or through web-streaming, citizens can also watch (some of) the most important moments of the petition process, such as hearings or debates⁴³, greatly amplifying their reach. It should be noted that committee meetings are not always public, as is the case in Germany. They are public, for example, in the European Parliament, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

Most of the information regarding the right to petition and the petitions process is provided on a website or webpage, with limited use of traditional media or social media platforms, especially when compared to Ombudsman institutions (Tibúrcio, 2018).

Awareness campaigns, information available in public buildings, and other forms of communication with the public were not mentioned by the respondents in the survey, though it would be wrong to dismiss the existence of such activity by parliaments, as, for example, in fairs and public events, such as the participation of the Petitions Committee of the Bundestag in the *"Tag der Ein- und Ausblicke"*⁴⁴ and the EP's Committee on Petitions in the Open Days of the European institutions.

⁴³ As in the European Parliament.

⁴⁴ Bundestag Scientific Services, 2022. The *Tag der Ein- und Ausblicke* ("Day of Insights and Perspectives") is a day where the Bundestag opens its doors for visitors to have the opportunity to look behind the scenes of the Bundestag and politics at numerous locations in the parliament buildings.

Many parliaments inform the public about the progress and outcomes of petitions. This is also primarily done through their websites, either through a dedicated page for each petition (as in Austria, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom), in an annual⁴⁵ report, or both.

In Germany, only "public petitions" benefit from publicity on the petitions website. This is also justified by the need to protect the individualised nature of other petitions, which are more akin to complaints addressed to ombudsmen.

The petitions systems that provide the most information on the petition process include the full petition text (not just a summary), the number of supporters, and all relevant dates and actions taken by the parliament (such as admission decision, questions to the executive, responses, visits, referrals, etc.), including the final response from the parliament (report, decision, letter to petitioner, etc.).

In terms of important moments for petitioners, such as hearings and debates, it is noteworthy that these can be followed online by any citizen in the parliaments of Luxembourg, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the European Parliament.

The dates of key events, such as the submission date of the petition, available on the websites, enable monitoring of the timeliness of responses from the parliament and other involved entities. This, in turn, puts pressure on parliaments to perform effectively and promptly.

All the aforementioned outcomes should be available on the website, including the final outcome, which is understood as the concluding act of the process. It is preferable to have this information displayed on the petition's dedicated page rather than requiring interested citizens to navigate through other pages that may require unnecessary research skills.

Examples of petitions sites are as follows:

Belgium

The response from external entities is immediately replicated on the page without the need to search or open any documents⁴⁶. Additionally, it allows people to request notifications by clicking the bell button next to a petition:

The screenshot displays a petition page with the following elements:

- Petition Title:** 55_2020-2021/43 - Suppression discrimination date de paiement des allocations d'invalidité vs allocations d'invalidité avec travail autorisé
- Signature Collection:** A box indicates the current status: 4 / 25.000 TOTAL SIGNATURES EN LIGNE. It also shows regional breakdowns: 3 / 14.500 RÉGION FLAMANDE, 1 / 8.000 RÉGION WALLONNE, and 0 / 2.500 RÉGION DE BRUXELLES-CAPITALE.
- Response:** A section titled 'Réponse de la secrétaire d'État à l'Asile et la Migration, adjointe à la ministre de l'intérieur, des Réformes institutionnelles et du Renouveau démocratique' provides an official reply to the petition.
- Additional Information:** A section titled 'Lors de sa réunion du 7 juin 2022, la commission des Pétitions a transmis cette pétition à la commission de l'intérieur, de la Sécurité, de la Migration et des Matières administratives et au secrétaire d'État à l'Asile et la Migration...' provides context on the petition's handling.

⁴⁵ Only Bulgaria mentioned producing a report every three months, which is presented in the plenary hall of the National Assembly after being voted on by the deputies in the Committee.

⁴⁶ Example taken from the petition 55_2021-2022/58 - Residence Permit Authorization Procedure webpage.

The same functionality (with a summary of the response) can be found on the **United Kingdom** petitions website⁴⁷:

 **Government responded**

This response was given on 11 October 2022

“ 6 million people in receipt of a qualifying disability benefit will receive a £150 payment in September. If they are in receipt of a qualifying benefit, they will also receive the £650 payment.

[Read the response in full](#)

The **United Kingdom** and **Portugal** provide on their respective petition pages the videos of hearings and the debates.

24,649 signatures

[Show on a map](#)

100,000

 **Parliament debated this topic**

This topic was debated on 22 May 2023



[Watch the debate](#) • [Read the transcript](#) • [Read the research](#)

XV - Commission for Public Administration, Spatial Planning and Local Government

Hearing on 2022-06-08 with Hearing to the petitioners of petition n.º 310/XIV/3rd

Date of Dismissal to the Commission:
2022.04.13

Filed under:
2022.07.13

Status in the Commission: Completed

Austria provides a list of submitted petitions featuring an image that allows for easy visibility of the status of each petition.

data	tipo	A respeito de	número	status
1/05/2023	BI	Inclusão dos paramédicos/paramédicos de emergência das organizações de resgate no NS-chG análoga à exceção para brigadas de incêndio.	58/BI	● ● ● ○ ○
9/02/2022	BI	Fornecimento de uma opção de alimentação opcional puramente vegetal no Ministério Federal da Defesa	46/BI	● ● ● ○ ○

⁴⁷ Example taken for example from the petition titled "Make people on disability benefits eligible for the £650 one-off payment".

Germany displays the decision and its justification.

The screenshot shows the German Bundestag's Petition website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Petition einreichen', 'Petitions-Forum', and 'Service und Information'. The main content area displays the title of the petition: 'Gesetzliche Krankenversicherung - Beiträge' and 'Einstellung der Finanzierung der Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (BZgA) aus GKV-Beitragsmitteln vom 19.11.2021'. Below this, there are sections for 'Text der Petition', 'Begründung', and 'Detailübersicht'. The 'Detailübersicht' section includes fields for 'Id.Nr.', 'Hauptpetent', 'Status', 'Download der Petition', 'Erstellungsdatum', and 'Votum und Begründung'. The 'Votum und Begründung' section has a dropdown menu with options 'A2b' and 'Begründung (pdf)'. There is also a 'Petition teilen' button at the bottom left.

The revamped petition website⁴⁸ of the **Luxembourg** Parliament features one of the most informative and clear petition websites, providing a breakdown of the stages through which the petition has gone through (below, on the right).

As well a summary of the main outcomes following the debate (on the left):

Suite au débat, les conclusions suivantes ont été retenues par les députés et la Ministre : endéans les deux mois à venir, Paulette Lenert informera les députés membres des commissions parlementaires (Pétitions, Santé et Éducation) d'un plan visant à lutter contre cette pénurie des professionnels de santé. Il s'agira entre autres d'un plan promouvant la formation.

- Lors de la même réunion, la Ministre devrait présenter un bilan intermédiaire des solutions mises en place au printemps dernier pour éviter une nouvelle fermeture de la maternité d'Ettelbruck.
- En outre, les députés s'informeront sur le déroulement concret de la prise en charge néonatale à Ettelbruck et sur l'information du grand public sur les procédures en place.

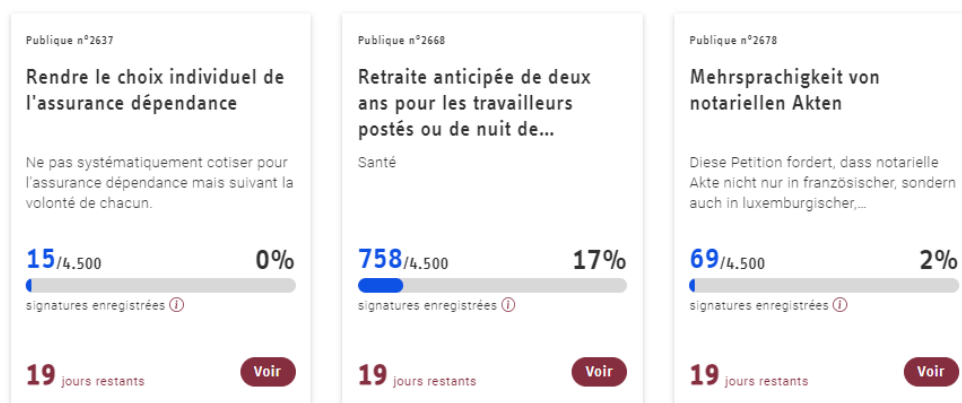
The screenshot shows the Luxembourg Parliament's petition website. It features a section titled 'Les étapes de cette pétition' with a list of stages:

- 21.09.2022: Un débat public en commission a eu lieu le 21-09-2022 au sujet de la pétition publique n°2301
- 29.07.2022: Le seuil des 4500 signatures est atteint pour la pétition publique n°2301, le 29-07-2022
- 29.07.2022: Signatures électroniques validées: 4657
- 10.06.2022: La période de signature de la pétition publique n°2301 est clôturée, le 10-06-2022 - Nombre de signatures électroniques avant validation: 4739
- 02.05.2022: Déclaration de recevabilité
- 29.04.2022: [Information partially obscured]

And a highlight of the petitions that are expiring soon, along with the number of signatures remaining (to reach the threshold of 4,500 signatures for public petitions).

⁴⁸ In 2021.

Pétitions expirant bientôt



[Toutes les pétitions récentes](#)

Box 7: Information on petitions provided by websites on political initiative

The website of the *Portuguese Parliament* provides information about the legislative initiatives that originated from that petition and were debated together with the petition in plenary. This is an innovative dimension that allows for a snapshot of the outcome at this level, something that sometimes only occurs months or even years later (when it happens, of course).

Discussion held at:
2023.02.03
Originated initiatives

Type
bill

WOMEN
496/XV/1

Title
Creation of a risk and painful status for health professionals

Type
bill

WOMEN
501/XV/1

Title
Recognizes the profession of nursing as a quick wear and tear and anticipates the retirement age

Type
Draft Resolution

WOMEN
323/XV/1

Title
Recommends the Government to create a Working Group to change the legal framework of fast-wearing professions, to define criteria for attributing this qualification and identify an illustrative list of such professions

Type
Draft Resolution

WOMEN
396/XV/1

Title
Definition and regulation of a specific labor and retirement regime for nurses
Joint Initiatives

Note: Automatic translation by Google Translate from Portuguese to English of petition no. 310/XIV/3

European Parliament

In addition to traditional information about the right to petition, the European Parliament provides on its PETI portal a chatbot called PETIbot, which invites any citizen to ask questions about petitions at the European Parliament or about the petitions web portal.

The screenshot shows the 'Petitions' section of the European Parliament website. It includes a search bar at the top right and a navigation menu. Below the menu are several content tiles:

- Submitting a petition at the European Parliament:** Accompanied by an icon of a laptop displaying 'PETITION'. Below the icon is the text: 'The right to petition: Fact Sheets on the European Union and Guidelines of the Committee on petitions'.
- European Union alternatives to petitions:** Accompanied by an icon of a woman and four arrows labeled 'Option 1' through 'Option 4'. Below the icon is the text: 'European Union alternatives to protect your rights and find answers when not lodging a petition at the European Parliament'.
- I want to submit a petition!:** Accompanied by an icon of a hand holding a smartphone with a 'SUBMIT' button. Below the icon is the text: '5 Things to be known before you submit a petition to the European Parliament:'.
- How do I submit a petition?:** Accompanied by an icon of a question mark surrounded by words like 'How', 'Where', 'Who', 'When'. Below the icon is the text: 'Quick Start Guide on how to submit petitions via the Petitions web portal'.
- Chatbot promotion:** A dark banner with the text 'Check out our chatbot: how can PETITIONS Chatbot (PETIbot) help you?' and a small robot icon.

Only **Canada** replied that it does not inform the public of the outcomes of the petitions process. **Slovenia** generally does not inform, except in the case of petitions of general significance submitted by a large number of signatories and, particularly, petitions that are considered at commission meetings. Such meetings are public and broadcast on television.

Indeed, publicising and providing feedback on petitions are practices that existed even before the advent of websites and electronic means. Some parliaments continue to maintain these traditional practices, such as publishing information on petitions in official journals or sending notifications via postal mail. These methods ensure that information reaches a wider audience, including those who may not have access to digital platforms. While websites and electronic communication have become prevalent, it is important to recognise that different channels are still used to ensure effective communication and engagement with the public.

The replies to the questionnaire suggest there has been an important evolution in the dissemination of information about submitted petitions.

In our 2015 study, it was identified that many parliaments did not have a website for the dissemination of petitions, and that they relied only on a conventional petitions system. Only the petitioner and the petitioned parliament had the ability to track and verify the status of a petition. Similarly, the various actions and developments that the petition undergoes, from its submission to the final report (including any questions to the government, corresponding responses, debates, or potential hearings), were typically only known and accessible to the petitioner, members of parliament, and the parliamentary staff involved. These petitions systems were not available for the community to be

tracked and scrutinised, except through occasional interventions of the media, which petitioners cannot rely on as a guarantee.

Examples of petitions systems without a website and with the above-mentioned characteristics are becoming increasingly rare, as parliaments, such as those of Belgium and France, are modernising (both in 2020⁴⁹), following the trend that started in the past decade (2000) to revitalise the right to petition through the use of information technologies. These technologies play an increasingly important role in communication and in shaping public opinion, and are becoming fundamental tools in the relationship between political institutions and the public (Leston-Bandeira, 2009; Serra da Silva, 2020).

Indeed, the majority of parliaments seem to have adopted not only the more modest version of electronic functionalities, accepting that petitions are submitted by email or other electronic means (such as an e-form), but above all, they have transformed the right to petition into a true public system, helping to disseminate the content and the consideration process of petitions to a wider audience through the internet.

6.8. Ombudsman

The right to petition and the right to submit a complain to an ombudsman institution resemble in various dimensions, as summarised in the table below⁵⁰.

Table 12: Characterisation of the right to petition as a form of political participation

Form of political participation	Right to petition	Ombudsman
Conventional / non-conventional	Conventional	Conventional
Direct / indirect	Direct	Indirect
Legal / illegal	Legal	Legal
Mode of action	Individual or a group of individuals	Individual or a group of individuals
Scope of results	General and (in some cases) particular	Particular and (in some cases) general
Scope of action	Diversified	Diversified
Degree of effort	Reduced	Reduced
Initiative	Impulse, timing and object depend on the petitioner	Impulse, timing and object depend on the complainant
Frequency of use	Without limitations	Without limitations

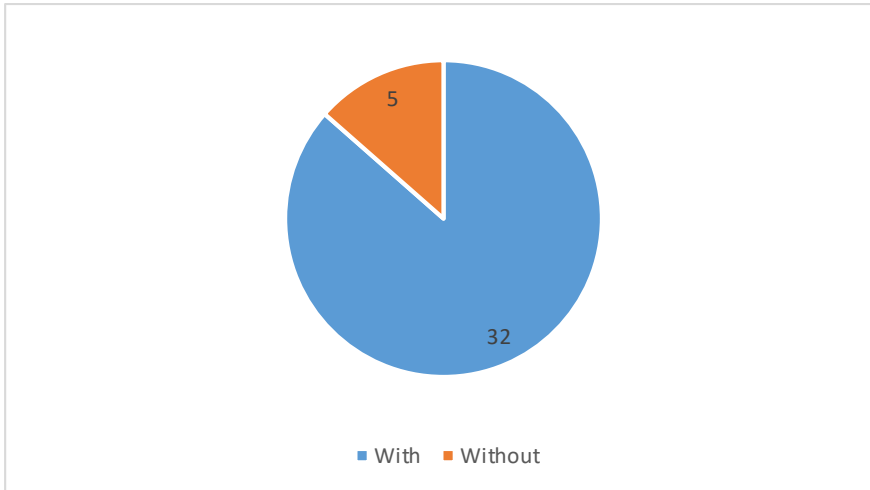
⁴⁹ The modernisation of the right to petition through these means continues to proliferate all over the world, as shown by the example, in the same year 2020 in South Korea, of the creation of an e-petitions website, named Sinmungo (IPU, 2022).

⁵⁰ For further elaboration, refer to Tibúrcio, 2018.

Therefore, it is natural that there is some overlap in how these rights are operationalised.

Most of the surveyed countries provide for an ombudsman as well as the right of petition before parliament.

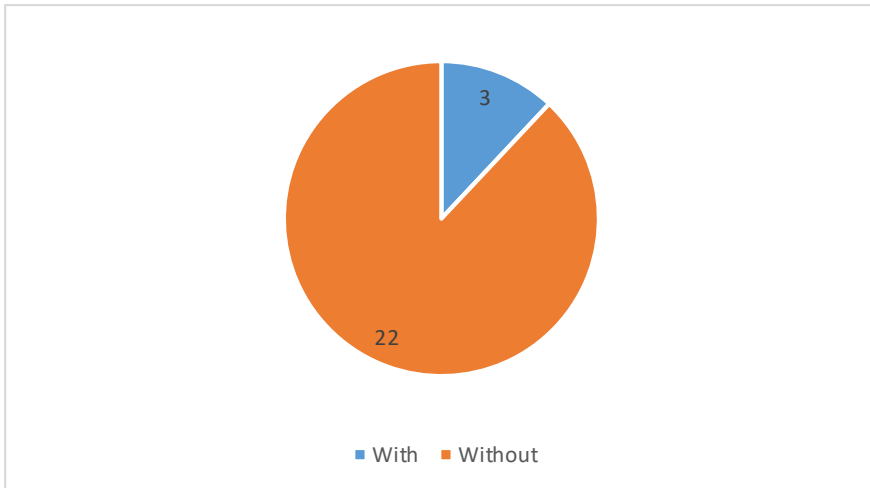
Figure 19: Countries with a national ombudsman*



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

* In countries where both chambers responded to the questionnaire, only one of the responses was considered.

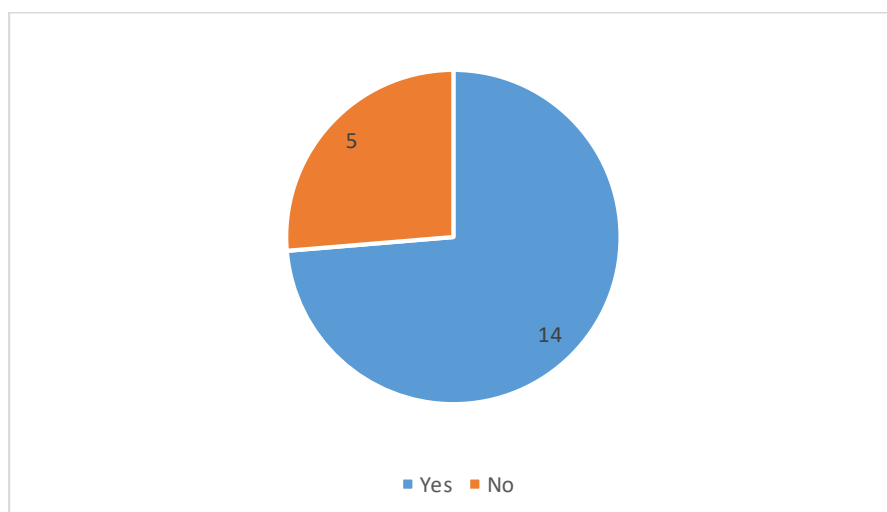
Figure 20: Overlap of powers (petitions committee and ombudsman)



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

Portugal and Slovenia do not consider there is an overlap of powers and/or responsibilities between the petitions committee and the national ombudsman. However, they admit that, in practice, people who address the parliament with petitions often also write to the ombudsman. Slovenia specifies that, even if this happens often, in such cases the matter is dealt with by both bodies, each in accordance with their respective competences.

Figure 21: Interaction between ombudsman and petitions committee



Source: Replies to ECPRD Request #5307

Parliaments like those of Belgium, Georgia and Poland mention the possibility for the ombudsman, or a representative, to be heard by parliament in the context of the examination of a petition.

Portugal and Slovenia, for example, also emphasise the role of the parliament in evaluating the annual report of the ombudsman.

Ten countries state that it is possible to refer petitions to the national ombudsman, as is the case with Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Portugal and Spain. Albania and Belgium indicate that this sometimes happens, but not the other way around. Slovenia also acknowledges this possibility, but it rarely occurs. Other parliaments, including Armenia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Romania, deny this possibility.

Since the ombudsman is an independent body, its statutes are designed to guarantee its impartiality, shielding it from political influence. As a result, the only powers that parliaments typically possess over ombudsmen are related to approving budgetary resources and participating in its election.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The vocation of parliamentary petitions systems for petitions that address the general interest suggests that parliaments which allow both types of petitions - private and general - should prioritise the latter. General interest petitions are more likely to receive a thorough response from parliament, as they engage its key functions, such as legislation and oversight.

It is no coincidence that the petitions systems that have modernised and strengthened significantly in recent decades are primarily focused on petitions of general interest. From the pioneering Scottish petitions system to the "public petitions" in the German and Luxembourgish parliaments, as well as in the UK and Portugal (where around 90% of the petitions are aimed at matters of general interest).

Enhancing the powers of mandatory realisation may ensure that citizens have a clearer understanding of what to expect from petitions, and enhance the value of the outcomes obtained throughout the petition process. Hearings and debates (in committee or in plenary) are particularly suitable for this purpose, and their realisation can be conditioned, for instance, on certain signature thresholds. As long as they are not disproportionate, such thresholds can encourage more citizen involvement and consequently increase the visibility of parliaments.

It is important to highlight that the association of mandatory actions/powers can facilitate the procedure, making it less dependent on consensus, which is not always easy to achieve. This contributes to the establishment of clear, fair and transparent rules so everybody - both members of parliaments and petitioners - understand the procedures and their limits.

The incentive produced by thresholds can also have a positive impact in that they increase the weight of petitions that are signed by groups of citizens, inviting petitioners to share their concerns with the community.

Having a reasonable threshold can also have a positive effect on rationalising parliamentary work, such as reducing the number of hearings held in committee⁵¹ (if that should be an objective), without prejudice to the possibility of continuing to hold hearings and debates when it is deemed relevant.

In determining the criteria for the closure of petitions, aspects that are within parliament's control should be prioritised, such as analysing, debating, questioning and, potentially, initiating a resolution.

Waiting for pending legislation, responses from other entities (e.g. the European Commission in the case of the EP) or the conclusion of a process due to a violation of the law puts parliament in a position where it is delayed in providing a response to the citizen, without having any responsibility for the delay. Essentially, and as much as possible, the parliamentary process should only take the time that depends on its own actions.

When a petition is sent to external entities, this should be done in the context of the conclusion of the petition. If a response is desired, a deadline can be set, and if no response is received within that timeframe (even if after one or more insistences), the petition could be considered closed.

In such cases, despite the advantage of a response, significant delays can compromise the petitioners' right to a timely response. As a result, these situations should be assessed individually by the parliament in order to ascertain whether the decision to wait is warranted. Concluding a petition does not preclude parliament from monitoring the outcomes of specific petitions, based on predefined

⁵¹ Which can reach hundreds per year (cf. Lowe, 2016).

criteria or at the parliament's discretion. In these cases, there may be an ongoing obligation to report to parliament, and the petitioner would be notified accordingly. However, regardless of the monitoring process, the petition would still be considered officially closed.

If the process of consideration of a petition ends with a decision on the request made in a petition, it is natural for that to be the moment of the petition closure. However, this is not always the case, and, in these cases, the closure should be associated with one of the stages of the consideration process. In some legal systems, petition closure corresponds to the most important and solemn stage, such as a plenary debate, which is likely to be the most anticipated moment for the petitioners.

It is important to accurately distinguish, possibly in rules or guidelines, between the actions that arise from the mere course of the procedure or from a decision of parliament (possibly through its petitions committee) and those that depend on political initiative or the initiative of other entities.

This can also have an influence in terms of how the right to petition is projected in the public sphere and what petitioners can aspire to when exercising it.

Such a distinction allows parliaments to clearly communicate to petitioners the two types of outcomes that the system can offer: a guaranteed one and a possible one. The *guaranteed* outcome tends to represent what parliament as an institution can offer to petitioners (e.g. publication of the petition on the website, processing the petition, holding a hearing or a debate on it, or submitting a report on it). These actions arise from the mere course of the process, naturally relying on the fundamental input of the representatives. The *possible* outcome, on the other hand, represents what political groups can offer to the petition(er), and depends primarily on their willingness to take action (e.g. in the form of questions, an on-site visit, a bill or other political initiatives).

Adequate and full information on a petitions portal is needed. This should include relevant elements such as the submission date and documents generated throughout the process (such as questions to the government, or to the European Commission in the case of the European Parliament, and their respective answers) should be available. Access to all available information through a petitions portal allows for external monitoring and evaluation of the performance of a petitions system, for instance by tracking the time it takes to process petitions. Transparency in this domain can even serve as an important incentive for a better performance of parliament (e.g. faster consideration).

Petition websites and new technologies have brought enormous potential, particularly for the promotion of the right to petition. However, some of this potential is still untapped.

One successful approach could be to provide specific content on the right to petition (where needed in various languages) for schools and teachers to use in their curriculum.

In addition to this, targeted campaigns could be a way to reach out to audiences that are more distant and underrepresented, such as women, the least educated, the youth, the rural population, etc.)⁵².

To improve the performance of a petitions system, it is necessary to have information that allows for an accurate diagnosis. Parliaments and committees on petitions should monitor key indicators, including those that track the time it takes to process petitions and determine at which stages of the process petitions generally encounter delays.

Another crucial piece of information for evaluating the performance of a petitions system is understanding the profile of the petitioners themselves. This includes gathering data on their

⁵² In our briefing from 2018, we provided some clues regarding this matter.

demographics, motivations, and interests. By analysing this information, strategies can be developed to expand the range of petitioners and engage a broader audience in the process (Tibúrcio, 2015; also, Alemanno, 2021).

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ANNEX - QUESTIONNAIRE

Justification

The Committee on Petitions (PETI) of the European Parliament wishes to carry out an inquiry into the right to petition and into the rules, procedures and practices that are being used by the petition committees or similar bodies competent for dealing with citizens' petitions in the participating parliaments. The PETI Committee is interested *inter alia* in admissibility criteria, applicable rules and procedures, the consideration process, decisions/outcomes, inquiries, referrals, closure, etc.

1. Right to petition

1.1 Is there a right of petition in your country? **Yes** **No**

If **yes**, what is its legal basis (e.g. constitutional provisions, provisions of the rules of procedure governing your parliament, a specific law)?

1.2 Who holds the right of petition (e.g. individuals, a group of citizens, legal persons)?

1.3 Do foreign nationals have the right to petition in your country? **Yes** **No**

If **yes**, are there specific conditions attached to this right (e.g. certain conditions, such as a minimum period of residence in the country, a specific legal status as a resident)?

2. Bodies responsible for handling the petitions' process

2.1 Does your parliament have a committee responsible for considering petitions (either a committee responsible solely for considering petitions or a committee whose duties include considering petitions)? **A specific petition committee** **A committee whose duties include considering petitions**

2.2 What are the criteria for the composition of the relevant committee (e.g. number of members, possibility for members to also sit on other committees, etc.)?

2.3 How is this committee's secretariat or administrative support unit organised (number of staff, breakdown by grade or required training)? How many and which staff deal with petitions only?

2.4 If there is no committee responsible for dealing with citizens' petitions, to whom (or to what body) should a petition be addressed (e.g. the Speaker or President of the parliament, a standing committee competent for the subject matter of a petition, a Member of Parliament, a particular administrative department)?

2.5 Does the committee (or the other responsible body) have a public website to inform and explain the petitions process to the public? **Yes** **No**

If **yes**, can it also be used to submit petitions? **Yes** **No**

If **no**, is the public informed about the right to petition in other ways (e.g. through awareness campaigns, information available in government buildings, etc.)?

3. Form of submission of petitions

How can petitions be submitted (online through a website or via email/letters/fax etc.)?

4. Admissibility of petitions

4.1 What are the formal criteria for admissibility of petitions (e.g. petition must be presented in writing, petition must be signed by the petitioner, minimum age for petitioner, minimum number of petitioners, minimum number of signatories or supporters etc.)? Who verifies these criteria?

4.2 What are the criteria for admissibility of petitions in terms of substance (e.g. subjects or policy areas which are admitted or excluded, matters *sub judice*, etc.)? Who verifies these criteria? Is the verification of the admissibility criteria carried out at political or administrative level?

4.3 Once a petition is declared inadmissible, is it filed separately? Are petitioners informed of the decision on inadmissibility?

4.4 Can other citizens join (sign) a petition once it has been declared admissible? **Yes** **No**

If **yes**, are there conditions for co-signatories (e.g. a time limit, minimum age, minimum period of residence in the country, a specific legal status as a resident)?

5. Consideration of petitions

5.1 What are the main stages in the petitions process in your parliament (e.g. receipt, check on formal criteria, check on substantial criteria, decision on admissibility, consideration, referral to competent committee or department, decision on follow-up, decision on closure, etc.)?

5.2 Are petitions anonymised? **Never** **At the request of the petitioner** **Always**

5.3 Are petitioners informed about the progress of their petition? **Yes** **No**

If **yes**, at what stage(s) and how?

5.4 Is the public informed about the progress of petitions (e.g. through a website, social media, traditional media, etc.)? **Yes** **No**

If **yes**, what information is provided (e.g. date of submission, summary of the petition/petition in full, outcome of stages in the process, final outcome only, etc.)?

5.5 What **powers of investigation** does your petitions committee (or other body competent for petitions) have (e.g. powers to request documents from authorities, hear petitioners, experts or officials of other bodies/institutions, carry out on-the-spot fact-finding exercises, investigations, etc.)?

5.6 Are admissible petitions referred to standing committees on the basis of their subject matter? **Yes**
 No

If **yes**, are there procedures or practices in place to facilitate cooperation between the committees and to ensure that progress is duly monitored by the committee responsible for petitions? **Yes** **No**

If **yes**, please describe such procedures and practices (e.g. regular meetings at staff or political level, specific forms to be filled in, etc.), including if any deadlines apply.

5.7 Are admissible petitions referred to other institutions (government, ombudsman, regional or local authorities)? **Yes** **No**

5.8 Are the standing committees, other bodies or institutions to which a petition is referred required to give a reply? **Yes** **No**

5.9 Is there a deadline for replies? **Yes** **No** If **yes**, what are the applicable deadlines?

5.10 Is the petitioner heard at a committee meeting or by a competent panel? **Never** **In specific cases (please specify)** **At the petitioner's request** **At the request of an MP** **Always** **Other (please specify)**

5.11 In the case of a petition directed against a decision of a national, regional or other institution/body, are representatives of such institutions/bodies invited and heard at the committee meeting or by the competent panel? **Never** **In specific cases (please specify)** **At the petitioner's request** **At the request of an MP** **Always** **Other (please specify)**

5.12 Does the petitioner have the right to add information relevant to his petition during the course of the petitions process? **Yes** **No**

5.13 Is the petitioner invited to provide additional information if during the process such information is considered useful? **Yes** **No**

5.14 What are the possible outcomes of the consideration of a petition by the petitions committee or the competent committee (e.g. a report to the plenary of the parliament, submission of a recommendation to the competent minister/authority, mediation, etc.)?

5.15 Are petitioners informed about the possible outcomes of the petitions process (e.g. on the petitions committee's website or in the letter of receipt the petitioner receives)? **Yes** **No**

6. Closure of petitions

6.1 What are the **criteria for closing** a petition after the consideration of the petition has finished (e.g. a report to the plenary has been submitted, a reply - or no reply - has been received from the authority involved, the petition has become obsolete as a result of a new decision or law, etc.)?

6.2 Are the criteria for closing a petition established in binding rules or consolidated practice?

6.3 Can you please provide the list of the criteria for closing admissible petitions?

6.4 If a contribution on a petition requested from another parliamentary committee, or an institution or body is not submitted, is the petition closed or kept open?

6.5 Is the decision to close a petition subject to a vote in committee? **Yes** **No** **In specific cases (please specify)**

6.6 Do petitioners have the possibility to object/appeal the decision to close their petition?

6.7 Do petitions which have been received and which have not been considered within the parliamentary term lapse? **Yes** **No** **In specific cases (please specify)**

6.8 Is there a specific rule or guideline in place which stipulates if and when such petitions shall, shall not or may lapse? **Yes** **No**

6.9 Can this rule or guideline be overruled by a decision/vote in committee? **Yes** **No** **In specific cases (please specify)** In a vote, is a simple majority sufficient to overrule? **Yes** **No**

6.10 Are petitions which are still under consideration at the end of the parliamentary term closed? **Yes** **No** **In specific cases (please specify)**

6.11 Is there a specific rule or guideline in place which stipulates if and when such petitions shall, shall not or may be closed? **Yes** **No**

6.12 Can this rule or guideline be overruled by a decision/vote in committee? **Yes** **No** **In specific cases (please specify)** In a vote, is a simple majority sufficient to overrule? **Yes** **No**

6.13 Is an end-of-term inventory produced to show which petitions have not been considered and which ones are still ongoing? **Yes** **No**

6.14 Is the public informed of the outcomes of the petitions process (e.g. by means of a yearly/end of term report on the activities of the petitions committee, social media publication, online/paper periodical publication of outcomes, etc.)?

7. Statistics

7.1 Does your parliament keep a register of petitions? **Yes** **No**

7.2 If **yes**, what kind of information does the register contain (e.g. date of submission, subject/summary, stages and results during the process, outcome, etc.)? Is the register available to the public? **Yes** **No**

7.3 Can you provide statistical data for the last three years (2019, 2020, 2021) on:

- the number of petitions received and the number of petitions considered admissible;
- the number of petitions treated and kept open;
- the number of petitions treated and closed;
- the main issues addressed in petitions received in this period (e.g. environment, social affairs, human rights, animal welfare, personal matters, etc.), including percentages;
- the action taken on these petitions (e.g. petitions referred to another authority, successful mediation, legislative initiative, report to plenary, etc.), including percentages?

7.4 What is the average life-cycle of a petition from its receipt to its closure?

8. Ombudsman

8.1 Does your country have a national ombudsman? **Yes** **No**

8.2 Is there any overlap of powers and/or responsibilities between the petitions committee and the national ombudsman? **Yes** **No** If **yes**, where?

8.3 Is there interaction between the ombudsman and the petitions committee (e.g. at staff level or at the political level)? Is this interaction *ad hoc* or regulated?

8.4 Does the petitions committee refer petitioners/petitions to the national ombudsman and vice versa?

8.5 Does the petitions committee have any political power with regard to the ombudsman (e.g. as regards the ombudsman's budget or mandate)?

This study, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the Committee on Petitions (PETI), provides an overview of the right to petition and the rules, procedures and practices used by parliaments for handling petitions, notably in terms of the submission of petitions, admissibility criteria, powers of consideration and criteria for closing petitions. The study also discusses publicity and feedback provided by petitions systems and the relationship between petitions systems and ombudsmen.

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