

The European Citizen Initiative (ECI)
“We Are a Welcoming Europe –
Let Us Help!”
– a Tool for Civic Mobilization

Radostina Pavlova
Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria
European Civic Days, 30.05.2018, Sofia

About the CLA

- ▶ Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria (CLA)
– Sofia-based NGO founded in 2009
- ▶ Mission: to promote the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants on the territory of R. Bulgaria
- ▶ Activities: legal aid (consultations, court representation); communications and community outreach; **advocacy** at national and EU level

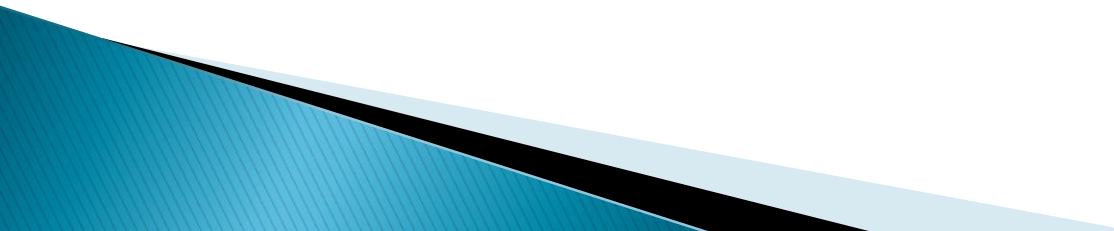


“We Are a Welcoming Europe – Let Us Help!” ECI

- ▶ Open for signatures since February 2018
 - ▶ Overall coordinator: Migration Policy Group (MPG) – Brussels-based
 - ▶ Over 80 partner organizations in 20+ countries (e.g., Greece, Hungary, Italy, France, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg)
 - ▶ Support by international org–s and networks (Oxfam, Amnesty International, PICUM, WeMove)
- 

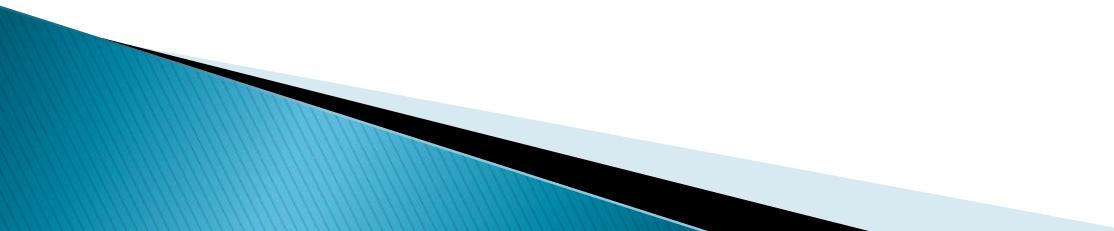
“We Are a Welcoming Europe – Let Us Help!” ECI

Demands:

- 1) No one should be prosecuted or fined for offering humanitarian **help** and shelter. We want the European Commission to stop those governments that are punishing volunteers.
- 

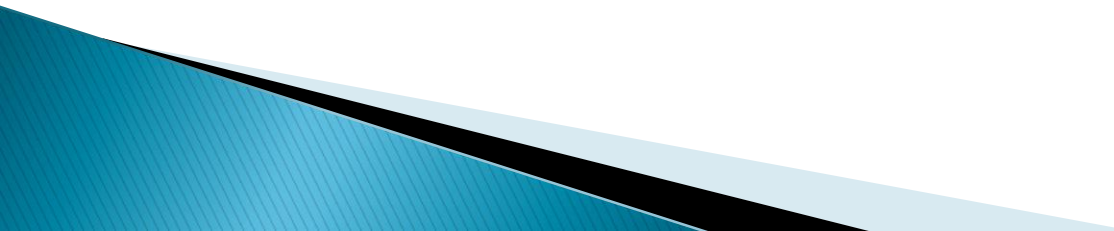
“We Are a Welcoming Europe – Let Us Help!” ECI

Demands:

- 2) Citizens across Europe should have the chance to **sponsor** refugees. We want the Commission to directly support local groups that provide refugees with life-saving visas, safe homes and a new life.
- 

“We Are a Welcoming Europe – Let Us Help!” ECI

Demands:

- 3) Everyone in Europe – whatever their situation – has the right to seek **justice**. We want the Commission to guarantee more effective ways to defend victims of labour exploitation, crime and human rights abuses.
- 

“We Are a Welcoming Europe – Let Us Help!” ECI

- ▶ Key message: empowerment
- ▶ Values: Solidarity, Justice, Safety

We are
a welcoming
Europe



**LET US
HELP!**

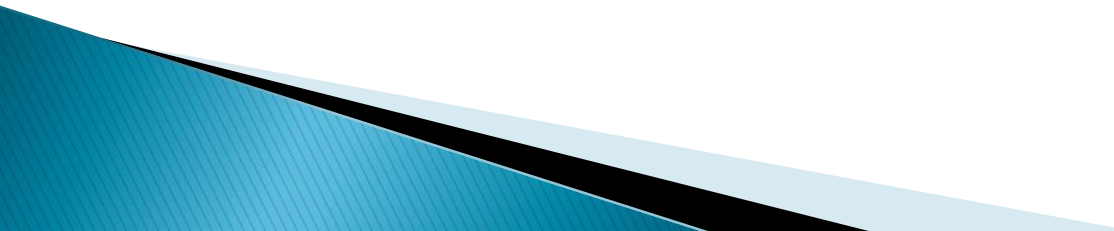
Implementation in Bulgaria

Adapting the language & priority of the demands:

- ▶ *To allow and support the sponsoring of refugee families by local groups of EU citizens*
- ▶ *To end the criminalization in some EU countries of saving and helping refugees*
- ▶ *To ensure effective access to justice for all victims of exploitation in Europe and rights violations at its borders*

Implementation in Bulgaria

Broader goals / messages:

- ▶ Show that participation in EU decision-making can be meaningful and easy; build European citizenship values
 - ▶ Build sense of solidarity and foster coalition-building in civil sector in times of shrinking space for civil society
- 

Implementation in Bulgaria

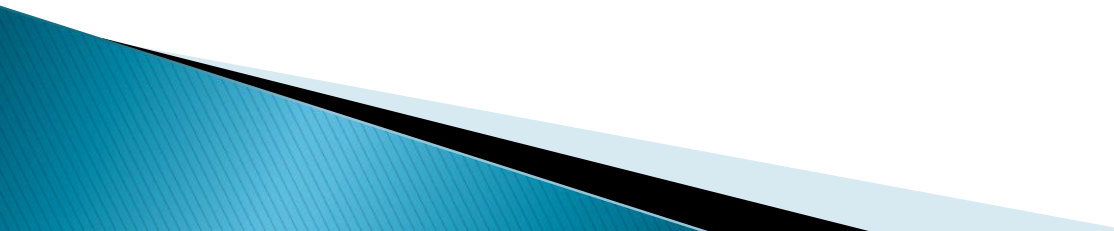
Reach out to partners outside of refugee-serving sector

- ▶ Look for broad membership base in partner organizations; diverse areas of work/causes
- ▶ Mitigate apparent advocacy fatigue/service-orientation in refugee sector
- ▶ Create partnerships/coalitions to last beyond the ECI's lifetime

**Civil Society Brunch* (April 2018)*

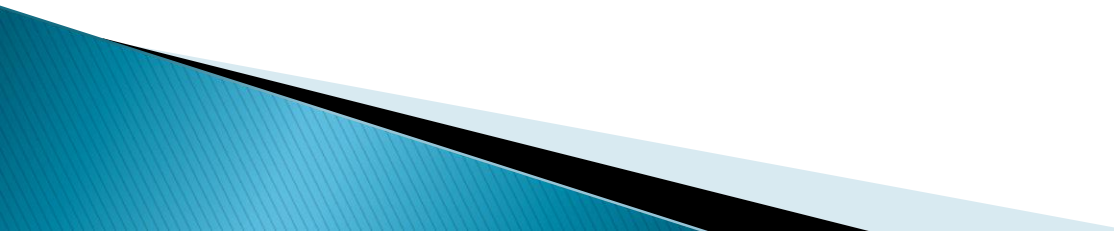
Implementation in Bulgaria

Motivate progressive-thinking, but passive citizens to take first step towards activism

- ▶ Emphasis on face-to-face engagement
 - ▶ Media appearances (TV talk shows), lectures before students, collection at events on related themes
- 

Implementation in Bulgaria

Challenges

- ▶ Complexity – of both ECI mechanism and the subject matter
 - ▶ Capacity to conduct campaign (human, material)
 - ▶ Lack of strong civic activism tradition; fragmented civil sector
- 

THANK YOU!

voiceinbulgaria@gmail.com

