



**Joint Transparency
Register Secretariat**



**Annual report on the operations
of the Transparency Register
2020**

**Presented by the Secretaries-General
of the European Parliament and the European Commission**

to

**Ms Katarina Barley, Vice-President of the European Parliament
and
Ms Věra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission**

An annual report on the operations of the Transparency Register is to be submitted to the relevant Vice-Presidents of the European Parliament and the European Commission, in line with paragraph 28 of the Interinstitutional Agreement on the Transparency Register signed on 16 April 2014.

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Joint Transparency Register Secretariat, in particular with regard to data quality, monitoring compliance with the code of conduct and raising awareness of the register and presents statistics on the Transparency Register from 1 January to 31 December 2020.

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I Introduction

The Transparency Register is a public database jointly operated by the European Parliament and the European Commission. It was first set up in 2011 in order to facilitate the transparency of relations between the two institutions and interest representatives. It is governed by the relevant Interinstitutional Agreement¹ between the European Parliament and the European Commission (the 'IIA') and, as a key transparency tool of the two institutions, it enhances the transparency of interest representation and makes stakeholders' and civil society's participation in the democratic decision-making process of the Union institutions more visible.

The Transparency Register gives citizens, the media and stakeholders the possibility to see which interests are being represented at the Union level, who is representing these interests on whose behalf, as well as the resources devoted to the related lobbying activities and efforts, thereby improving the transparency and openness of the EU decision-making process.

Registration is voluntary. All organisations and self-employed individuals engaging in activities, carried out with the objective of influencing the decision-making and policy implementation processes of the Union institutions, can register and, by doing so, sign up to a common code of conduct with regard to how they perform these activities.

This report describes the operations related to the management of the Transparency Register, in particular with regard to data quality, monitoring compliance with the code of conduct and related activities, and presents statistics for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020.

¹ Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission on the transparency register for organisations and self-employed individuals engaged in EU policy-making and policy implementation, OJ L 277, 19.9.2014, p. 11.

II Activities of the joint secretariat

The European Parliament and the European Commission maintain a joint operational structure, the ‘Joint Transparency Register Secretariat’ (hereinafter: the joint secretariat), to manage the Transparency Register. The joint secretariat is made up of staff from the two institutions, amounting to the equivalent of approximately eight fulltime employees.

The joint secretariat is in charge of the day-to-day management of the Transparency Register, and in particular it:

- provides helpdesk service to both interest representatives and the public;
- issues guidelines with practical information for registrants;
- monitors the quality of the content of the register;
- carries out investigations about the compliance of registered interest representatives with the code of conduct;
- coordinates the IT development of the register database; and
- undertakes awareness raising and other communication activities.

The joint secretariat operates under the coordination of the Head of the Transparency, Document Management & Access to Documents Unit in the Secretariat General of the Commission.

1 Helpdesk service

The joint secretariat provides a helpdesk service to answer questions about the Transparency Register that anyone can submit via the multilingual register website. Typically, such enquiries are requests for information about the Transparency Register from prospective registrants, the public or researchers, as well as requests for support and guidance from interest representatives during the registration process, when they update or are asked to clarify information they have provided, or regarding login credentials. In 2020, the joint secretariat responded to 1 117 queries by individuals compared to just over 1 000 in the preceding year.

2 Quality of data

The Transparency Register offers a snapshot of the lobbying activities of interest representatives associated with the formulation or implementation of (a) policy cycle(s) and the related decision-making processes of the Union institutions, including specific details on the main legislative proposals or policies targeted by activities of registrants covered by the IIA. This explains why some interest representatives are only registered for a given or limited period of time, while others may remain in the database on a longstanding basis. Registrants who fail to update their registration once a year are automatically removed from the database. Registrants can also be removed as a result of the joint secretariat’s monitoring activities, on the understanding that interest representatives can re-register when they (again) pursue relevant interest representation activities. In that case, any new registration will once again be subject to the joint secretariat’s monitoring (see 2.1 Data quality monitoring).

By registering, interest representatives sign up to the code of conduct for registrants that is annexed to the IIA. This means that they commit to ethical lobbying practices as well as to providing information upon registration, and subsequently in the framework of their activities covered by the IIA, that is complete, up-to-date and not misleading. To this end, registrants are encouraged to review the information they have submitted regularly and update it at least once a year in order to remain on the database and on the understanding that they remain responsible for the accuracy of their registration data.

2.1 Data quality monitoring

The joint secretariat is tasked with ensuring the best possible quality of data in the Transparency Register and therefore regularly reviews the information provided by registrants. It monitors all new registrations on a daily basis, as well as those registrations that remain in the database for over a certain time period, and performs other targeted checks on an ad hoc basis. In an effort to increase the reliability of the database as a reference tool, the joint secretariat contacts the registrants on a case by case basis, in order to verify the accuracy of the information they have provided, ask for the correction of any inconsistencies and ensure that the necessary information is published in line with the guidelines for registrants.

In the context of its monitoring activities in 2020, the joint secretariat carried out quality checks on 4 973 registrations. This figure covers:

- An examination of the data of new interest representatives that registered in 2020² (2 843 checks);
- A targeted review of the data of interest representatives that have been registered since before 2016, in order to ensure they are in line with the current guidance (1 748 checks)³;
- Random quality checks (382 checks).

These monitoring activities resulted in a significant increase in the quality of the Transparency Register's content. Indeed, in each case where the joint secretariat found the quality of data provided to contain inconsistencies, the joint secretariat contacted the individual registrant with a request to update its entry in line with the published guidance. As a result of the monitoring of 4 973 registrations over the course of 2020:

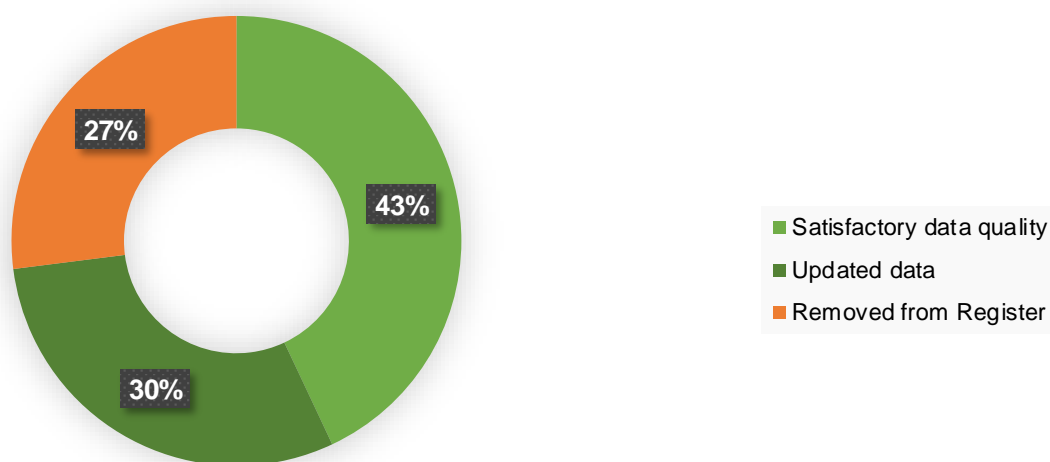
- 43 % of registrants checked provided satisfactory data quality;
- 30 % of contacted registrants updated their entries in line with the guidelines;
- 27 % were removed from the register following the check, for ineligibility or failure to update.

Nevertheless, registrants remain responsible for the accuracy of their registration data, therefore the efforts of the secretariat can only result in optimal quality of data of those registrants checked and cannot prevent future errors when the registrants next update their registrations.

² Registrations activated between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2020.

³This resulted in the removal of 407 registrations that did not declare any relevant interest representation activities.

Result of monitoring activities



3 Investigations

In addition to monitoring the quality of data on the Transparency Register, the joint secretariat investigates incoming alerts and complaints, and carries out own-initiative investigations, in accordance with the procedures laid down in Annex IV to the IIA, having due regard to the principles of proportionality and good administration.

Any person may submit an alert or a complaint about an alleged non-compliance with the code of conduct by entering the relevant information on the register website.

By registering, the interest representatives accept that any alert or complaint concerning them will be handled on the basis of the code of conduct they have agreed to, and acknowledge that the measures provided for in Annex IV to the IIA may be applied to them, in the event of non-compliance with the code.

‘Alert’ is a mechanism that concerns only point (d)⁴ of the code of conduct. It allows third parties to inform the joint secretariat about factual errors contained in the register.

In 2020, the joint secretariat handled 19 alerts (6 were initially received as complaints) submitted by 15 different organisations or individuals pointing out potential errors contained in 23 registrations. These alerts concerned the accuracy of the registrants’ financial declarations, clients listed, the appropriate section they registered in or their membership information. Almost all registrants contacted by the joint secretariat updated their data in a satisfactory manner, with the exception of four, which were removed from the register accordingly.

‘Complaint’ refers to a procedure that concerns allegations by third parties about a registrant’s alleged non-compliance with the code of conduct, with the exception of allegations concerning only factual errors which are dealt with as ‘alerts’ (see above).

⁴ [interest representatives shall] ensure that, to the best of their knowledge, information, which they provide upon registration, and subsequently in the framework of their activities covered by the register, is complete, up-to-date and not misleading; accept that all information provided is subject to review and agree to co-operate with administrative requests for complementary information and updates’.

In 2020, the joint secretariat successfully closed three complaints pending from the previous year, after the respective registrants updated their registration, as requested by the joint secretariat, or otherwise provided satisfactory explanations.

Moreover, the joint secretariat received 15 new complaints, of which six were dealt with as ‘alerts’ since they concerned only data quality issues. Of the nine remaining complaints, five were deemed inadmissible, as they did not concern matters falling within the scope of the register. Investigations into the four admissible complaints - three of which concerned the same entity - were still ongoing at the end of 2020 and were closed in early 2021, following the satisfactory cooperation of the registrants.

Finally, in 2020 the joint secretariat closed an ‘*own-initiative investigation*’ into suspected breaches of the code of conduct pending from the previous year and it carried out a new one against Euro Guarantees Group Ltd, engaged in serious non-compliance with the code of conduct. This investigation led to the application, for the first time, of the measure of removal from the register for a period of two years, and to publication of that measure on the Transparency Register website⁵.

Having due regard to the principles of proportionality and good administration, when handling an investigation, the joint secretariat seeks to ensure that a constructive dialogue is held with the registrant(s) concerned, in order to clarify and resolve the identified issues, as far as possible, prior to taking any measures against the registrant.

Examples of the issues addressed in the framework of the complaints and own-initiative procedures in the period covered by the report:

- Using the registration with the aim of giving an appearance of a formal relationship with the EU institutions;
- Carrying out interest representation activities on the premises of the European Parliament without appropriate accreditation;
- Underreporting lobbying expenditure;
- Failing to declare all clients to which services are provided with the aim to conceal contractual relationships;
- Performing interest representation activities without respecting the Institutions’ security rules;
- Failing to declare all relevant interest representation activities directed towards the EU institutions.

4 Guidance and awareness raising

The joint secretariat issues implementation guidelines and other guidance with practical information for registrants in order to clarify and explain in more detail certain provisions of the IIA. Such guidance is the result of regular exchanges with stakeholders and aims at supporting registrants in their efforts to provide accurate information and avoid common mistakes. Following a slight adjustment of the online registration form, the joint secretariat took the opportunity to update the multilingual guidelines in line with the revised⁶ registration form, while also making the guidance visually easier to follow.

In the Parliament, members of the joint secretariat provided a briefing on the Transparency Register to Members and staff of two delegations of a political group and an *ad hoc* training to an

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/staticPage/displayStaticPage.do?locale=en&reference=NEWS>

⁶ see also chapter III.3 Technical improvements

individual MEP. In addition, in 2020 the Parliament's team offered eight information sessions for staff on the Transparency Register and raised awareness of the register through three training courses on ethics and on how to deal with lobbyists provided to Parliament's staff. All sessions either took place in person or online, in full respect of the safety and security measures related to the Covid-19 sanitary crisis, put in place by the Parliament.

The Parliament's team also provided information on the Transparency Register as part of exchanges with student groups, academics, or staff of national parliamentary bodies, such as Germany's Bundestag or the United States of America's Senate.

In the European Commission, members of the joint secretariat offered eight half-day remote live trainings throughout 2020 on how to deal with lobbyists (courses requiring physical presence being suspended due to the Covid-19 crisis). The Commission's team also delivered one face-to-face presentation to members of cabinets of the Members of the Commission.

With regard to the awareness raising activities addressed to external stakeholders, the Coordinator of the joint secretariat provided a presentation to the Master of Political Communication and Electoral Marketing of the University of Alcalá de Henares.

In addition, the joint secretariat participated in an online conference of the European Lobbying Registrars' Network dedicated to the exchange of best practices in managing operations during a sanitary crisis.

III Statistics

The Transparency Register has grown considerably since its inception and today includes over 12 000 entities. The following statistical information represents the situation on 31 December 2020.

1 Types of registrants

The Transparency Register is composed of interest representatives, which pursue activities targeting the Union institutions. These can be classified to fall into six sections and 14 subsections, pre-defined in Annex I to the IIA. It is up to the interest representative to choose, at the time of the registration, which section and subsection best represents them.

On 31 December 2020, the total number of registrants on the public database was 12 187. Compared to the previous year, this marks a slight overall increase in registrants, with the proportion of registrants in each of the six sections remaining relatively stable.

As regards the public affairs professionals who engage in paid interest representation activities, section I, which covers professional consultancies, law firms or self-employed consultants, saw a slight decrease from nine percent to seven percent of the register.

Traditionally, the largest section of the register, grouping in-house lobbyists together with trade, business or professional associations in section II, continued to cover just over half of all the registrants. Of these, the subsection 'Trade and business associations' was usually the largest, but the subsection 'Companies and groups' has drawn level in 2020, with both types of interest representatives, together making up 80 % of registrants in section II.

Typically, the other half of the register, representing mostly civil society groups, sees section III 'Non-governmental organisations' once again as the largest element, even noting a one percent increase compared to the year before.

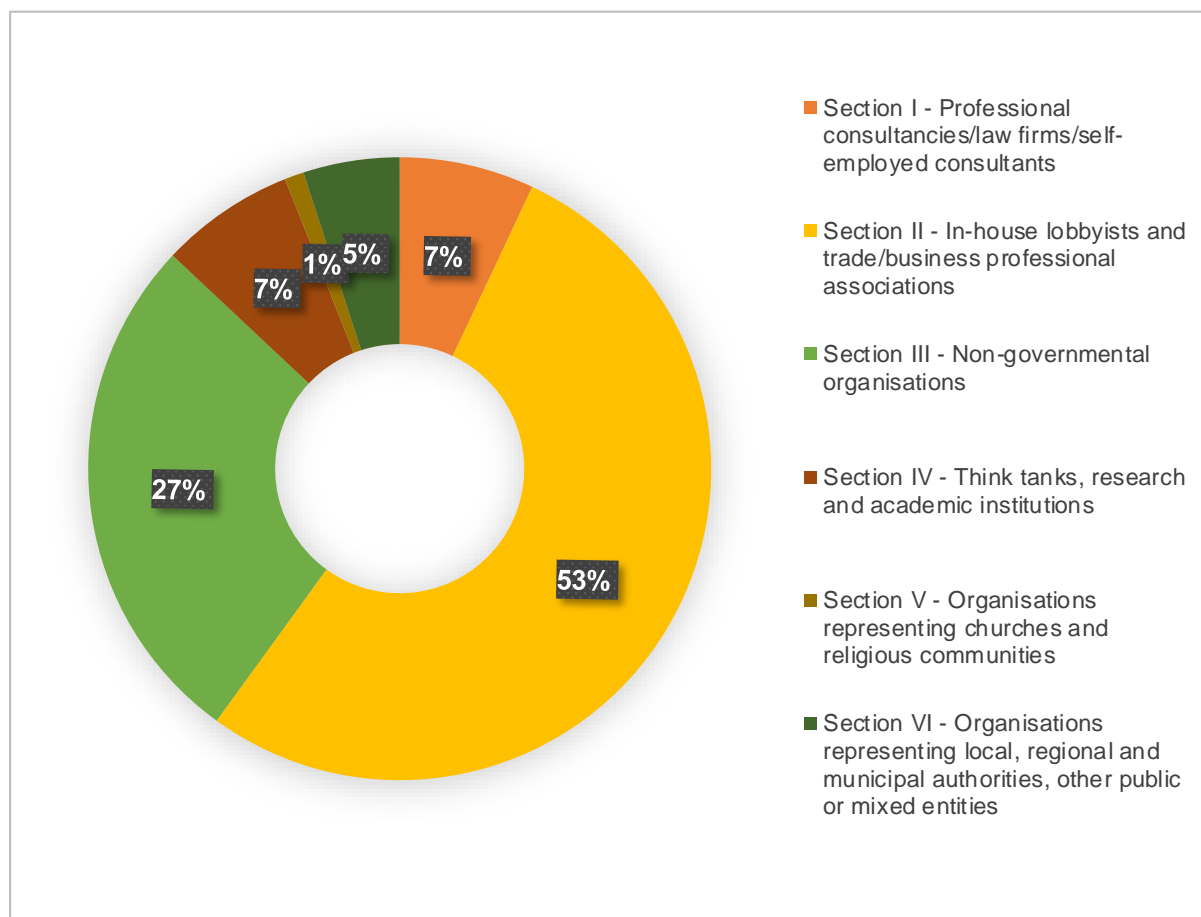
1.1 Distribution of registrants across sections

The abovementioned breakdown can be visualised according to absolute numbers of registrants in each of the sections and subsections of the register.

On 31 December 2020, there were 12 187 registrants in the Transparency Register spread across the following sections and subsections:	
I - Professional consultancies/law firms/self-employed consultants	859
Professional consultancies	558
Law firms	88
Self-employed consultants	213
II - In-house lobbyists and trade/business professional associations	6 487
Companies & groups	2 622
Trade and business associations	2 578
Trade unions and professional associations	956
Other organisations	331
III - Non-governmental organisations	3 306
Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and similar	3 306
IV - Think tanks, research and academic institutions	921
Think tanks and research institutions	580
Academic institutions	341
V - Organisations representing churches and religious communities	59
VI - Organisations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.	555
Regional structures	113
Other sub-national public authorities	95
Transnational associations and networks of public regional or other sub-national authorities	76
Other public or mixed entities, created by law whose purpose is to act in the public interest	271

1.2 Distribution of registrants per section

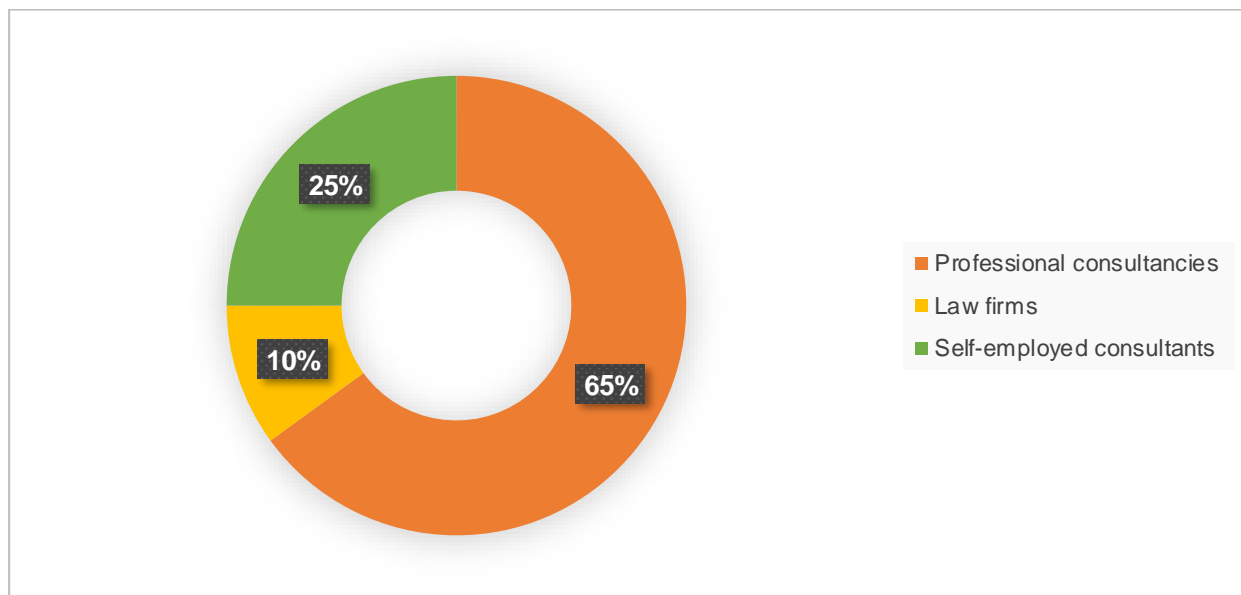
In order to better illustrate the statistical information, the following chart breaks down the distribution of registrants according to the section they chose to register in.



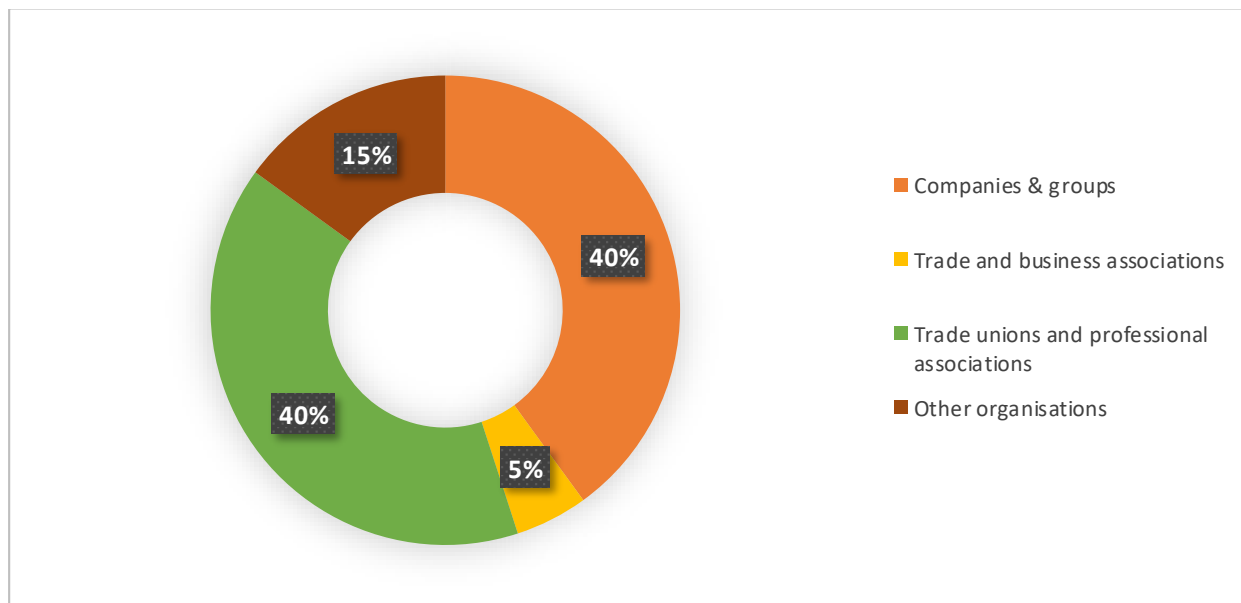
1.3 Distribution of registrants per subsection

The following charts show types of registrants according to the subsections⁷ under which they have chosen to register.

Section I - Professional consultancies/law firms/self-employed consultants

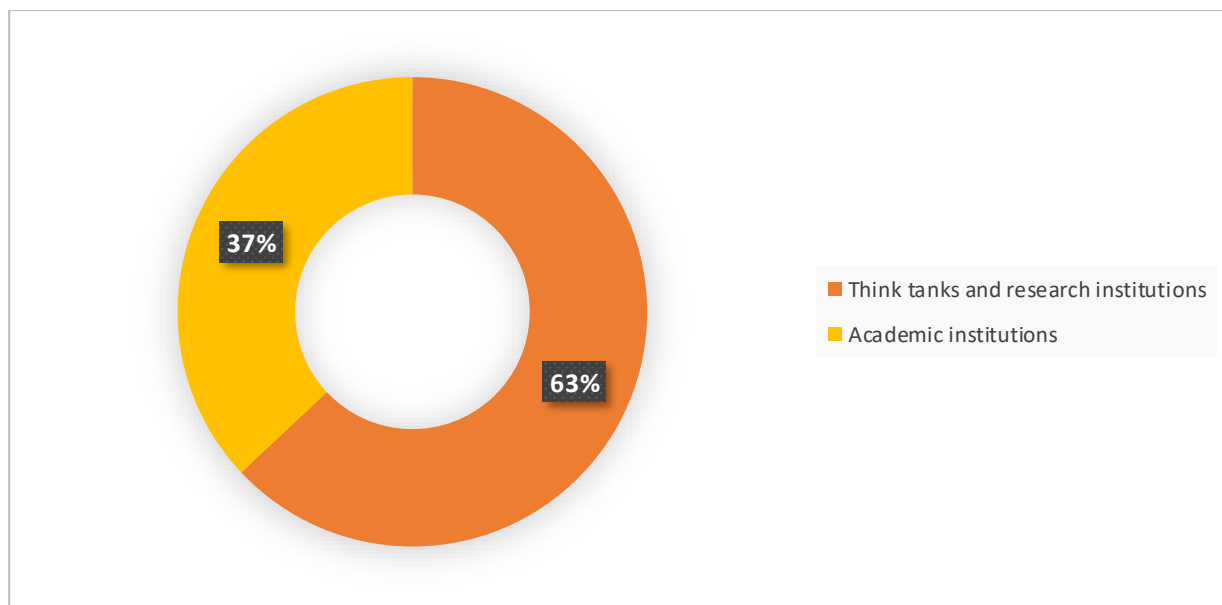


Section II: In-house lobbyists and trade/business/professional associations

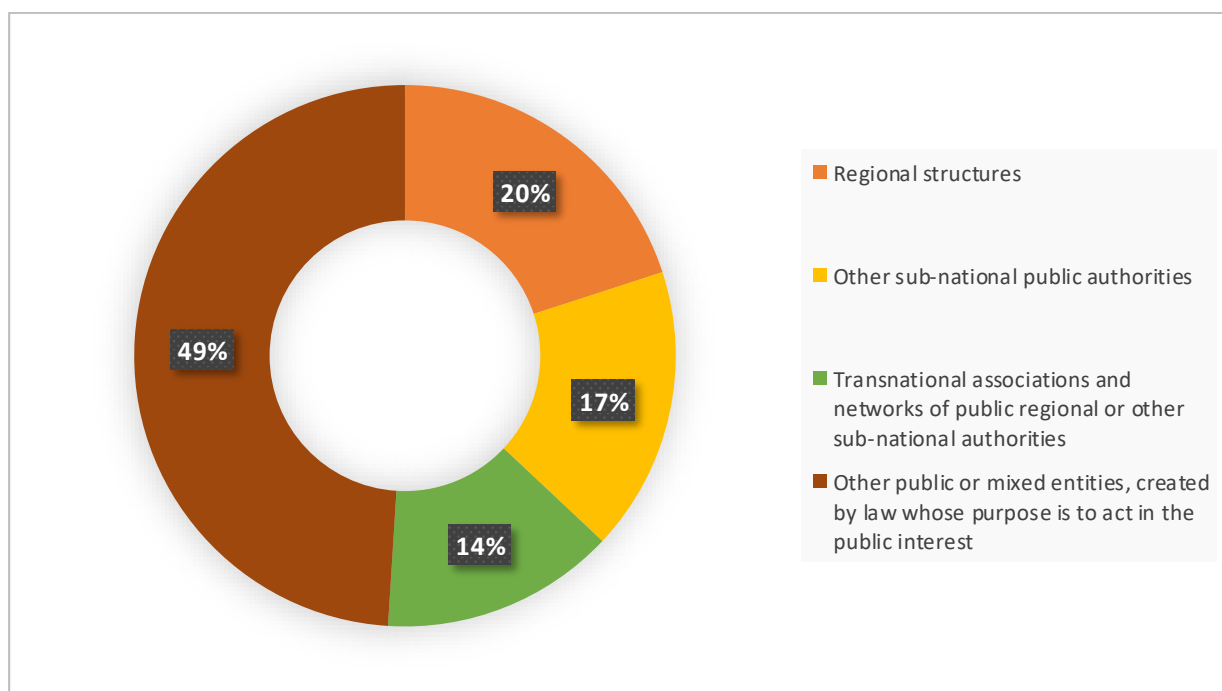


⁷ Sections III and V do not have subsections; therefore they are not included in the breakdown.

Section IV: Think tanks, research and academic institutions

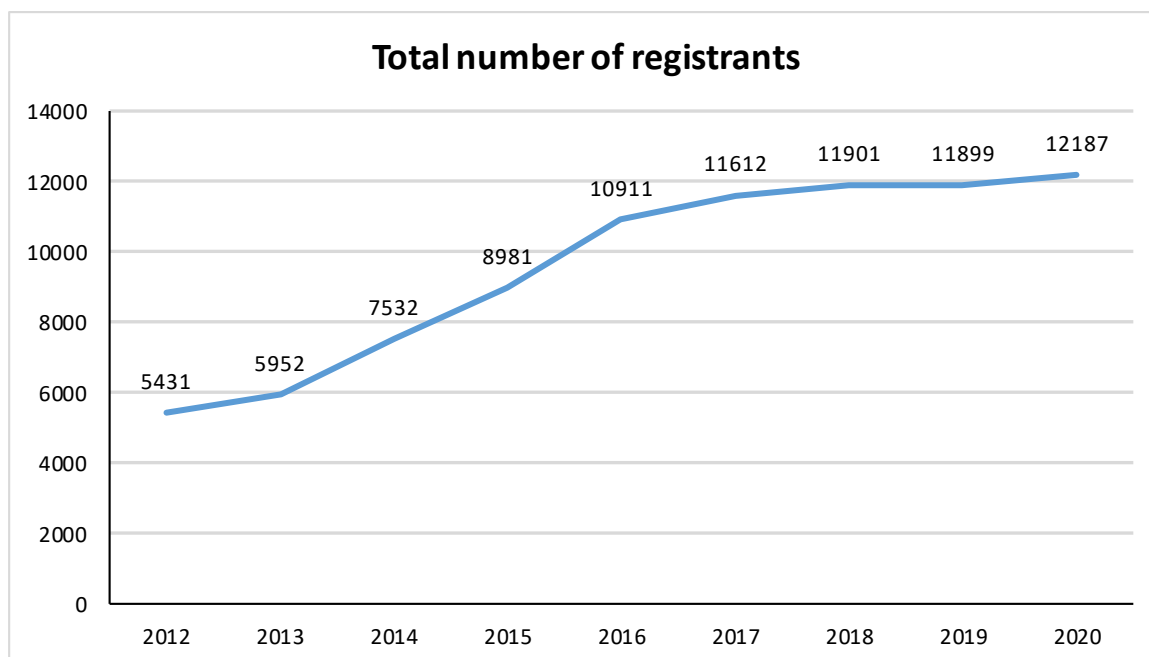


Section VI: Organisations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.



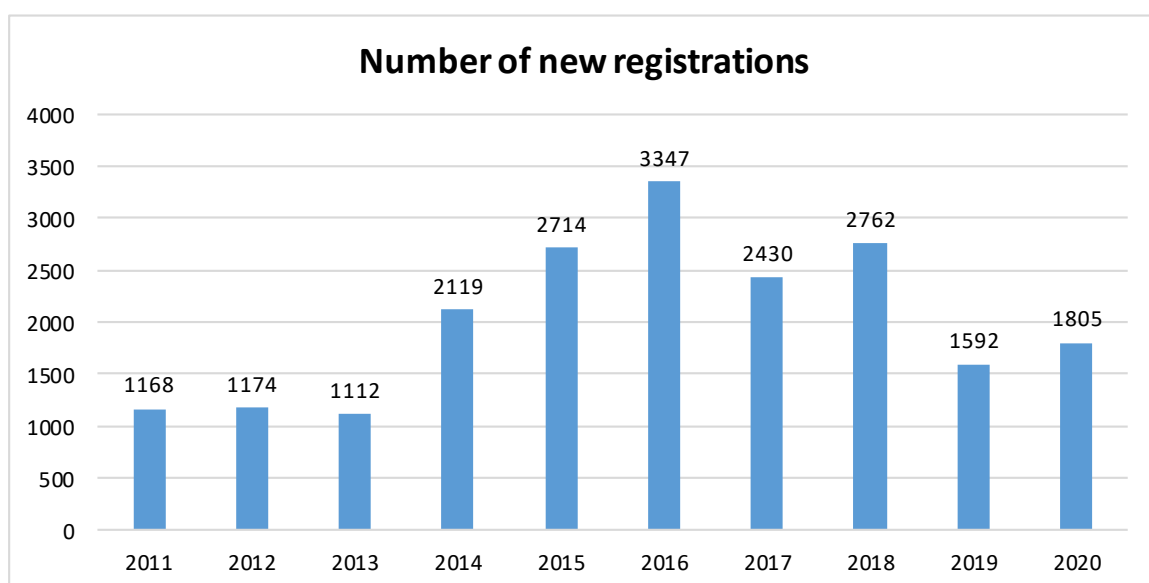
1.4 Evolution of the Transparency Register

Since its inception as a joint public database of the European Parliament and the European Commission, the Transparency Register has grown steadily to its current size, numbering 12 187 registrants on 31 December 2020. While this evolution shows an increase in absolute terms, the database changes on a daily basis, as interest representatives register, de-register, re-register or are removed, depending on their lobbying activities at any one time.



1.5 New registrations

The following chart shows the evolution of new registrations. Only those interest representatives, which registered over a period over 12 months, between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2020, and were still active by the end of that period, were counted⁸.

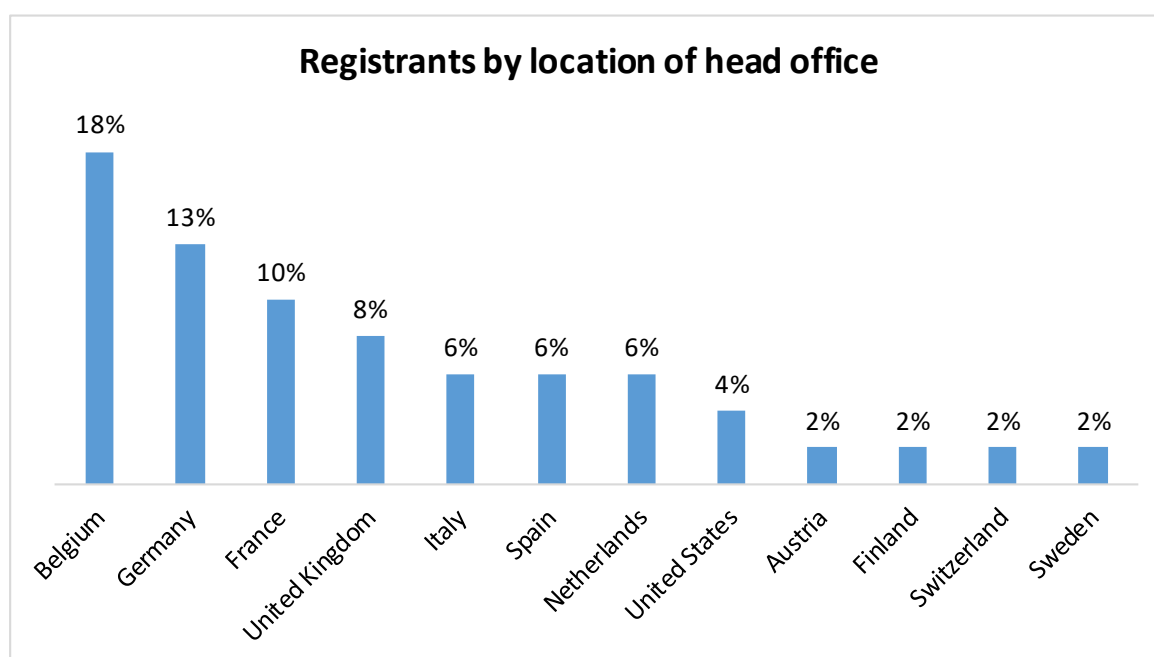


⁸ In total, 2843 entities attempted to register.

Of the new registrants in 2020, the largest increase fell to section II, with over 900 new registrations and more than half of these covering companies and groups. This mirrors the trend observed in the overall evolution of the register in terms of the types of interest representatives mentioned above. Similarly, over 500 new registrations represent non-governmental organisations, with much smaller numbers of new registrants having chosen to register in the remaining sections.

1.6 Geographical data

Registration on the Transparency Register is not limited to interest representatives established in the Union, although the largest group of interest representatives do carry out their activities from an establishment in Belgium, due to the key Union institutions being located in Brussels. Nevertheless, as the scope of Union legislation and policy potentially affects also non-EU citizens and can have an impact on trade and other external relations beyond the borders of the 27 Member States, this global reach is also reflected in the Transparency Register.



Upon registration, all interest representatives provide their head office's location as well as information on any additional office in Belgium they maintain.

2 Incentives for registration

Registration in the Transparency Register is voluntary. Nevertheless, the Parliament and the Commission offer certain advantages that are only available to registered interest representatives. Access for interest representatives to decision-makers, premises and certain fora in the Parliament and the Commission are subject to registration, according to the internal rules and decisions of each institution.

For the Parliament advantages linked to registration include:

- *Long-term access to its premises* may only be granted to individuals working for registered interest representatives, after validation by its security service. The validation and renewal procedures all take place online and are usually processed within three working days by Parliament's accreditation service;
- To be eligible as a *speaker at public hearings* held by parliamentary committees, interest representatives must be registered;
- Registrants can *subscribe to email notifications* on the activities of the European Parliament's committees via their registration;
- Only registered interest representatives may support or participate in *activities of Parliament's intergroups or unofficial groupings*;
- When co-organising *events* of political groups on the European Parliament premises, relevant interest representatives may be requested to provide registration information;
- Relevant interest representatives requesting *patronage* by the President of the European Parliament will be requested to provide proof they have registered.

Long-term access authorisation to the European Parliament's premises:

Accreditation to Parliament's premises for individuals working for registered interest representatives can be granted for a period of up to one year. In 2020 the European Parliament approved over 3 600 requests for long-term access to its premises (either as a new request or a renewal) from almost 1 500 registered interest representatives. This represents a decrease of about 40 % compared with 2019, most likely due to physical access restrictions to Parliament's premises as part of the Institution's measures intended to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

For the Commission, the advantages linked to registration include:

- *Meetings with Members of the Commission, Cabinet members, Directors-General and Heads of Service*: interest representatives must be registered in order to obtain such meetings;
- *Public consultations and roadmaps*: registered interest representatives may choose to be automatically notified about consultations and roadmaps in their areas of interest. The contributions made to the public consultations and roadmaps are integrated in the profile of the registrant.
- *Expert groups*: registration is required to be appointed as certain types of expert group members;
- *Patronage*: the European Commission grants its patronage to registered interest representatives only;
- *Contacts with civil servants*: officials are advised to check whether interest representatives are registered before accepting an invitation to a meeting or to an event. Contacts with non-registered organisations may be restricted.

3 Technical improvements

The joint secretariat coordinates the development of IT solutions to improve the Transparency Register.

In an effort to ensure that registrants are able to provide relevant and concise information on their registrations for the benefit of the public, the online registration form was adjusted slightly in 2020, reducing the number of possible characters in certain free text fields. With the aim of encouraging registrants to maintain updated registrations and to avoid including information unrelated to their interest representation activities at the Union level, registrants are now urged in the online form to describe their goals and remit as well as to name the Union policies and initiatives they target in their interest representation activities more concisely.

In the same vein, the part of the registration form dedicated to the financial information provided by registrants was streamlined so that all cost estimates related to registrants' efforts over a 12-month period could be declared as a range, rather than in absolute amounts.

The revamped registration form includes a list of European Parliament intergroups and the option to name other unofficial groupings, so that registrants can declare whether they offer support or participate in the activities of such groupings. This information was incorporated in the datasets published on the Open Data Portal⁹. In addition, the option to perform a targeted search on registrants involved in activities of intergroups and unofficial groupings has been made available to the public on the Transparency Register website.

These changes are reflected in the revision of the implementing guidelines¹⁰ for registrants. The revision aims at better assisting registrants to submit and maintain a relevant entry. To facilitate this, the updated guidelines feature excerpts from the online registration form along with detailed explanations regarding the type of information required in a systematic manner. This guidance is published on the Transparency Register website in all official Union languages.

In addition to the already existing import of information regarding registrants' contributions to public consultations of the Commission, the contributions registrants made to roadmaps since July 2018 were also linked to the relevant registrations. This type of information, shown on the registrants' profile page allows for a better overview of which registered interest representatives are actively engaging with the Commission at the beginning of a legislative cycle.

Other technical improvements in 2020 include the implementation of the conclusions of an IT security study, an array of technical improvements and update of the back-office environment to facilitate the joint secretariat's management of alerts and complaints received from third parties.

⁹ <https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/transparency-register>

¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/staticPage/displayStaticPage.do?locale=en&reference=GUIDELINES>

3.1 Visits to the website

In 2020, the Transparency Register website received well over 366 400 visits. For the purposes of this statistical overview, a 'visit' is defined as a visitor accessing the website for the first time. If the same visitor remains on a single page more than 30 minutes after their last page view, this counts as a new visit. On average, this breaks down as ca. 30 500 visits per month and amounts to slightly more website traffic than in the previous year.

An approximate 36 % of website visitors used the search function in English, while the homepage is most frequently visited in English, followed, in declining order, by French, German, Italian, Spanish and Dutch.

Almost 80 % of visits come from users in Europe, followed by almost 16 % of visits originating in North America. Within Europe, 21 % of visits to the website originated in Belgium, followed by those originating in Ireland, France or Germany (all at around 8 %).

Compared to the previous year, it appears that the Transparency Register has become more visible and well known showing a slight increase in direct visits from 74 % in 2019 to 76 % in 2020, while 17 % reached the website via search engines.

In 2020, the Transparency Register dataset transferred to the Open Data Portal was the tenth most viewed dataset amongst more than 15 000 other datasets published there. The datasets allow users to download (in XML or Excel format) the list of persons accredited for access to the European Parliament' premises and the list of organisations featuring on the Transparency Register going back several years.

IV Conclusions

The year 2020 proved to be extraordinary in many ways, with much of the prevalent lobbying activities going digital and the usual networking, events and face-to-face meetings taking place primarily in a virtual setting or postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Interest representatives may not have been able to shake hands with decision-makers for much of the year; nevertheless, registrations continued to rise as lobbying activities shifted to video conferences and public online events.

Since the Transparency Register is an online database, the pandemic had no direct impact on the operations of the database itself. Indeed, interest representatives continued to be able to register or update their registration online at any time. Similarly, the joint secretariat experienced no adverse impact on its digital management operations of the register and on its ability to perform its day-to-day tasks.

Improving the overall data quality in the Transparency Register remained a key priority, with the public, journalists, academics and stakeholders continuing to use and scrutinise the database on a daily basis. Indeed, the joint secretariat engaged in an ever-increased effort to improve the content of the register. This includes checks on new and existing registrations, and to update the guidance with practical information for registrants, allowing them to further ameliorate the quality of the information they provide.

Although it is not feasible to monitor and verify over 12 000 registrations on an everyday basis, the joint secretariat managed to successfully monitor the quality of 40 % of the register in 2020 as well as to handle all alerts and complaints received from third parties over the year and to conclude two own-initiative investigations. The joint secretariat remains committed to improve the reliability and quality of the content of the register, given its central positioning in the overall transparency policy of the Parliament and of the Commission, and the commitment of the two institutions to lead by example on lobbying transparency at the Union level.

V New Interinstitutional Agreement

The year 2020 also brought about an important development that will have a major impact on the future of the Transparency Register. On 15 December 2020, a political agreement was reached between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a new Interinstitutional Agreement on a mandatory Transparency Register, so concluding a negotiation process started already in 2016 with the adoption of the relevant Commission proposal¹¹.

The agreed package, as provisionally endorsed by the College, the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament¹² and the COREPER¹³, consists of a new interinstitutional agreement and a joint political statement of the three institutions. Before the new interinstitutional agreement can enter into force, each institution must approve it. While the agreement cannot place a legal obligation on interest representatives to register, the institutions have agreed to lay down the framework and operating principles for their coordinated approach, and further make registration a precondition for interest representatives to be able to carry out certain covered activities. To this end, the framework established under the new agreement includes internal decisions on how each institution will implement the agreement.

The institutions may also put in place complementary transparency measures to encourage registration, such as for example the online publication of information on meetings, ensuring that such measures are consistent with the agreement and contribute to a high standard of transparent and ethical interest representation. The full list of ‘conditionality measures’, i.e. types of lobbying activities which interest groups may not carry out unless registered, and the complementary transparency measures, will be published on the Transparency Register website.

In December 2020, the three institutions held at technical level a roundtable of representatives of various types of registrants (think tanks, non-governmental organisations, trade associations, etc.) in order to gather their views, opinions and expectations in view of the implementation of the new IIA.

Once adopted by the three signatory institutions, the new Interinstitutional Agreement will replace the current bilateral agreement between the Parliament and the Commission, integrating, for the first time, the Council of the Union in a tripartite agreement of binding nature.

¹¹ COM(2016) 627 final

¹² CPG 09.12.2020

¹³ 09.12.2020