

Deliverable 6.4: 1st Policy Briefing

Issue date: 06/2026

Work Package Leader: VILNIUS GEDIMINAS TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

**Project Title: Towards a pan-European Research Infrastructure
for Excellent Citizen Science**

Project Acronym: RIECS-Concept

Contract N°. 101188210

Programme: Horizon Europe (HORIZON)

Topic: Research infrastructure concept development HORIZON-INFRA-2024-DEV-01-01

Project start date: 01 January 2025

End date: 31 December 2027

Deliverable title	1st Policy Briefing
Deliverable number	6.4
Deliverable version	1.0
Contractual date of delivery	30/06/2026
Actual date of delivery	30/06/2026
Nature of deliverable	R
Dissemination level	PU
Work Package	6
Task(s)	6.1
Partner(s) responsible(s)	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VT)
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Description	D6.4 is the first of two policy briefings produced by RIECS-Concept. It compiles the project's key advancements from the first 18 months. It addresses European policymakers with three actions: recognise citizen science as a horizontal research capacity, sustain investment from design through implementation, and federate existing platforms on open standards. The deliverable consists of the main process document, a universal policy brief edition (Annex 1) and country-specific national policy alignment text blocks for the eight consortium countries (Annex 2).
Keywords	Policy brief, citizen science, research infrastructure, European Open Science Cloud, ESFRI, federated infrastructure, European Research Area

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Version History

Version	Date	Comments
0.1	23/05/2026	First draft, structure and framing aligned with the coordinator
0.2	21/06/2026	Draft after internal consortium review
1.01.0	30/06/2026	Submitted to EC

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Acronym	Open form
EC	European Commission
HE	Horizon Europe
GA	Grant Agreement
CA	Consortium Agreement
PO	Project Officer
PC	Project Coordinator
WP	Work Package
WPL	Work Package Leader
PR	Periodic Reporting
CS	Citizen Science
PMO	Project Management Office
KIP	Key Impact Pathways
DECP	Dissemination, Exploitation and Communication Plan



Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	5
Executive summary.....	6
1. Introduction.....	7
1.1. About this Deliverable.....	7
1.2. Context within RIECS-Concept.....	7
1.3. Structure of the Document.....	7
2. Process of Preparation	8
2.1. Approach.....	8
2.2. Evidence Base and Inputs	8
2.3. Coordination with the Consortium.....	9
2.4. Alignment with European Commission Guidance for Reaching Policymakers	9
2.5. Internal Review Process	10
3. Policy Brief Design.....	11
3.1. Format.....	11
3.2. Structure and Flow	11
3.3. Key Messages.....	11
3.4. Target Audiences	12
4. Dissemination Strategy	13
4.1. Universal Edition.....	13
4.2. Country-specific Editions	13
4.3. Channels and Timing.....	13
4.4. Forward Link to the Second Policy Briefing.....	13
5. Conclusions	14
Annex 1. Universal policy brief.....	15
Annex 2. Country-specific National Policy Alignment Boxes	19
5.1.1. For Policy Makers in AUSTRIA	19
5.1.2. For Policy Makers in GERMANY.....	19
5.1.3. For Policy Makers in ITALY.....	19
5.1.4. For Policy Makers in LITHUANIA.....	19
5.1.5. For Policy Makers in SERBIA	20
5.1.6. For Policy Makers in SPAIN.....	20
5.1.7. For Policy Makers in SWEDEN	20
5.1.8. For Policy Makers in SWITZERLAND	20
5.1.9. Sample policy brief (Spain edition).....	21
References	25



Executive summary

Deliverable 6.4 is the first of two policy briefings produced by RIECS-Concept, a Horizon Europe project (January 2025 to December 2027) conceptualising a pan-European Research Infrastructure for citizen science. Vilnius Gediminas Technical University leads it as part of Work Package 6 (Dissemination, Exploitation and Communication, phase I). It serves as the public policy-facing communication output of the project's first 18 months.

The deliverable consists of two parts. The main document presented here briefly outlines the process by which the policy brief was prepared: its evidence base, coordination across the consortium, alignment with European Commission guidance for reaching policymakers, and the rationale for its format and structure. The annexes contain the policy briefing materials themselves: a universal edition addressed to European institutions and Member States (Annex 1) and country-specific national policy alignment text blocks for each of the eight consortium countries (Annex 2), to be inserted into the national editions distributed by consortium partners.

The policy brief sets out three actions for European policymakers: recognise citizen science as a horizontal research capacity within the European Research Area and the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures roadmap; sustain investment from design through to operational implementation; and federate existing platforms rather than replace them, building shared infrastructure on open standards and on the principles of findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data.

The brief is the project's first formal call to action to European policymakers. The second policy briefing (D7.2, due December 2027) will consolidate findings from the full project lifecycle and will be accompanied by the project's final policy event in Brussels.



1. Introduction

1.1. About this Deliverable

Deliverable 6.4, the 1st Policy Briefing, is described in the RIECS-Concept Grant Agreement as a "compilation of key advancements of RIECS-Concept specifically addressing policy makers to support and deploy strategic policy interventions as well as to support complementarity and learnings with other projects."

In line with the European Commission's guidance to research projects on reaching and informing policymakers, the brief is designed as a public-facing, scannable artefact that puts the project's call to action at the top, supports it with evidence from the first 18 months of work, and closes with concrete recommendations and ways to engage. It is intended for distribution to European institutions, Member State ministries, national research funders and research infrastructure delegates, as well as by consortium partners as a reference when introducing RIECS-Concept to national policymakers and stakeholders.

1.2. Context within RIECS-Concept

The deliverable is the first of two policy briefings foreseen in the project. The second policy briefing (D7.2, due December 2027) will present the consolidated implementation roadmap and the full evidence base from the project's second phase, including the outputs of WP3 (sustainability roadmap, impact assessment framework, technical feasibility study). The two briefings are designed as a pair: D6.4 carries the problem statement, the early evidence and the broad direction of travel; D7.2 carries the concrete solution architecture and detailed recommendations.

D6.4 is also coordinated with two sister outputs at M18: D4.4 (Global policy organisations report, led by Citizen Science Center Zurich) and D6.3 (Interim report on dissemination, exploitation and communication, also led by VT). The three outputs together provide the project's full M18 policy and communication picture.

1.3. Structure of the Document

The deliverable is organised in five sections and two annexes. Section 2 describes the preparation process, including the evidence base, coordination with the consortium, alignment with European Commission guidance, and internal review. Section 3 explains the design choices behind the brief: format, structure, key messages and target audiences. Section 4 sets out the dissemination strategy across the universal and country-specific editions. Section 5 concludes. Annex 1 contains the full text of the universal policy brief edition. Annex 2 contains the national policy alignment text blocks for the eight consortium countries.



2. Process of Preparation

2.1. Approach

The brief was prepared between May and June 2026, immediately following completion of the project's first 18 months of co-design and engagement work. The approach was to anchor the brief on the most stable Phase 1 outputs of the project (the technical challenges assessment, the engagement methodology framework, and the preliminary infrastructure design at the level of principles only), supplemented by recent stakeholder engagement evidence and a parallel mapping of national policy frameworks in the eight consortium countries. Three guiding choices shaped the brief from the outset:

- The brief carries the problem statement and the proposed direction, not the full architecture. Concrete solution components are reserved for the second policy briefing (D7.2, M36), when the work packages on sustainability, governance, impact assessment and technical feasibility have matured.
- The brief is written in public language, free of project-internal terminology (deliverable codes, work package numbers, internal acronyms). European Union policy bodies are spelt out on first use.
- The brief is designed in two editions: a universal version for European institutions and Member States, and country-specific versions for each consortium country, with a national policy alignment box inserted into the universal layout.

2.2. Evidence Base and Inputs

The brief draws on the following inputs from the project's first 18 months:

- The technical challenges assessment, a peer-reviewed analysis of European citizen science platforms, tools and services, identifying fragmentation across five interconnected dimensions (technological, data, standards, resources, community).
- The engagement methodology framework, defining the ten stakeholder groups and the two-phase participatory engagement strategy applied across the eight consortium countries (Austria, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland), with additional international engagements in Bangkok, Geneva, Dar es Salaam and a global online course.
- The preliminary infrastructure design, articulating a federated, three-layer model (resources, services, functionalities) built on open standards and connecting existing citizen science platforms as nodes rather than replacing them.
- The interim communication and dissemination report, providing verified figures for the project's first 18 months: 5,059 participants reached at events, 35 in-person events, 18 co-design workshops, 8,138 website visits, 4 peer-reviewed publications, presence in 8 European countries with 10 stakeholder groups engaged.
- Recent policy engagement activities, including a session with national and United Nations level policymakers in Bangkok (November 2025), a workshop with research infrastructure funders at



the European Citizen Science Association Conference in Oulu (March 2026), an online workshop with European citizen science networks (April 2026), and the naming of RIECS-Concept in the Spanish Congress of Deputies during a debate on a Non-Legislative Proposal on citizen science (May 2026).

- National policy framework mapping for each of the eight consortium countries, drawing on public laws, open science strategies and national citizen science initiatives.
- Five prior European policy reports on citizen science: the European Citizen Science White Paper (2014), the Mutual Learning Exercise on citizen science (2023), the REINFORCE Policy Roadmap on Research Infrastructures for Citizen Science (2023), the TIME4CS Final Policy Brief (2023), and the INCENTIVE Policy Recommendations (2024).

2.3. Coordination with the Consortium

Drafting was led by Vilnius Gediminas Technical University as the work package lead, with substantive input from the project coordinator (Ibercivis Foundation) and the scientific coordinator (European Citizen Science Association). Coordination meetings were held in May and June 2026 to confirm scope, framing and content.

The structure of the recommendations (Recognise, Sustain, Federate) and the prominence of the Citizen Science Node within the European Open Science Cloud, as the immediate integration pathway, were agreed with the project coordinator. The national policy alignment text for each country was drafted by VT and circulated to national partners for verification.

Coordination was also established with the Citizen Science Centre Zurich, the lead for the parallel deliverable D4.4 (Global policy organisations report), to ensure complementarity rather than overlap between the two M18 policy outputs: D6.4 addresses European Union institutions, Member States, and consortium countries; D4.4 addresses the international and United Nations levels.

2.4. Alignment with European Commission Guidance for Reaching Policymakers

The brief follows the European Commission's 10-step guidance on reaching and informing policymakers, in particular:

- The inverted pyramid structure, placing the call to action at the top of the brief.
- Plain, accessible language with technical and project-internal terminology removed.
- A scannable visual format with a problem callout, a numbered visual of the fragmentation dimensions, a costed callout for the price of inaction, and clearly labelled recommendations.
- Concrete engagement asks tied to specific policy windows (the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2027 and the final project policy event in Brussels in late 2027).
- Multiple credible sources cited inline, including the European Commission's own 2018 estimate of the annual European cost of non-FAIR research data.



2.5. Internal Review Process

The brief was internally reviewed in two rounds in June 2026. The first round, between Vilnius Gediminas Technical University and the project coordinator, confirmed the scope, recommendations and the country-specific approach. The second round, with the scientific coordinator and the lead of the parallel D4.4 deliverable, ensured factual accuracy of stakeholder engagement claims and complementarity with the global policy engagement report.

A final design pass was completed by the project's communications and design support before publication. National partners verified the national policy alignment text for their respective countries.

PRE-APPROVAL



3. Policy Brief Design

3.1. Format

The brief is designed as a three-page public-facing factsheet rather than a long-form policy paper. The factsheet format was chosen for scannability, suitability for both print and digital distribution, and consistency with the format expectations of European Commission policy audiences. Country-specific editions follow the same three-page structure with the addition of a national policy alignment box on page three.

3.2. Structure and Flow

The brief is organised as a narrative arc from problem to ask:

- Page 1 establishes the problem (five-dimensional fragmentation of European citizen science), introduces the project briefly, defines citizen science for readers new to the topic, and presents the cost of inaction (the annual European cost of non-FAIR research data).
- Page 2 presents the project's response: the federated, three-layer design; the eighteen months of co-design activities across eight countries; and the six concrete outputs produced in the first phase (landscape mapping, engagement framework, preliminary infrastructure design, the Citizen Science Node within the European Open Science Cloud, national recognition in the Spanish Parliament, and scientific and outreach outputs).
- Page 3 presents the three recommendations (Recognise, Sustain, Federate), the national policy alignment box for country-specific editions, the engagement asks, and the project contacts.

3.3. Key Messages

The brief makes three key messages addressed to European policymakers:

Recognise.

Citizen science is a horizontal research capacity already informing one in four European Research Council projects and contributing to policy in environmental monitoring, public health, climate adaptation and biodiversity. It should be reflected as such in the next update of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures roadmap and in the structural priorities of the European Research Area.

Sustain.

Investment in shared citizen science infrastructure should be programmed beyond the conceptualisation phase. Member State co-investment commitments should be aligned with the European research infrastructure pipeline to ensure the next phases of infrastructure development have the funding they require.

Federate.



Shared infrastructures should be designed on the principle of federation rather than replacement: existing citizen science platforms join as connected nodes via open standards, preserving their identities while gaining access to shared services. Findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data practices should be required in publicly funded citizen science projects.

3.4. Target Audiences

The brief addresses three primary audiences:

- European institutions, in particular the European Commission, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures, the European Open Science Cloud governance, and Horizon Europe programme managers.
- Member State governments, research funders and national delegates to the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures.
- Consortium country policymakers (Austria, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland) reached through the country-specific editions, including science and innovation ministries, national research councils and research infrastructure coordination bodies.



4. Dissemination Strategy

4.1. Universal Edition

The universal edition is the master version of the brief, addressed to European institutions and Member States. It will be published on the project website (concept.riecs.eu), submitted to the Horizon Europe Results Platform, deposited in the project's Zenodo community, and distributed through the project's LinkedIn channel and newsletter. The European Citizen Science Association will additionally circulate the brief through its network of more than 350 organisations across more than 40 countries.

4.2. Country-specific Editions

The eight country-specific editions follow the universal layout with the addition of a "For policy makers in [country]" box on page three. The box contains a short paragraph summarising how the project connects to that country's relevant national laws, open science strategies and citizen science initiatives, followed by a national contact line. Country editions are distributed by the consortium partner based in that country, who is best placed to identify national policymakers, plan local engagement actions, and follow up directly. The full list of national alignment text blocks is provided in Annex 2 of this deliverable as an indicative starting point; partners adapt the text to reflect the most current national policy context at the time of their distribution.

4.3. Channels and Timing

Publication is timed to coincide with the project's mid-point. Distribution begins in July 2026 and continues through the project's second phase. The brief will be reused throughout 2026 and 2027 in: (1) Direct outreach to identified European and national policymakers; (2) Conference and event distribution at the project's remaining international engagements; (3) The forthcoming Citizen Science Stakeholder Summit (M21, September 2026 at the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz); (4) National engagement activities organised by consortium partners; and (5) The Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January to June 2027), as a strategic policy window.

4.4. Forward Link to the Second Policy Briefing

The second policy briefing (D7.2, due December 2027) will consolidate the full evidence base from both project phases, present the implementation roadmap and the impact assessment framework, and offer concrete operational recommendations for the launch and sustainability of the future infrastructure. It will be presented at the project's final policy event in Brussels in late 2027 and is expected to be available in both an executive summary version and a full report.



5. Conclusions

Deliverable 6.4 marks the first formal policy-facing communication of RIECS-Concept. It synthesises the project's first eighteen months of evidence into a public artefact designed to be read, used and acted upon by European and Member State policymakers. It equips consortium partners with country-specific editions for national engagement.

The brief opens a sustained policy engagement phase that will run through the second half of the project, culminating in the second policy briefing and the final policy event in Brussels in late 2027. The success of this engagement will be tracked through the project's dissemination indicators (events, attendees, media quotes, policymaker consultations) and through qualitative tracking of policymaker uptake at European and national levels.

PRE-APPROVAL



Annex 1. Universal policy brief



POLICY BRIEF June 2026

A federated Research Infrastructure for citizen science: from fragmentation to integration

This brief presents the evidence and recommendations from the first 18 months of RIECS-Concept, the Horizon Europe initiative designing a pan-European Research Infrastructure for citizen science (RIECS).

The problem: twenty years of projects, still no shared foundation

Climate adaptation, biodiversity monitoring and public health surveillance depend on evidence that only citizens can generate at scale. Yet European citizen science remains fragmented across five dimensions, with duplicated tools, incompatible data and short-lived platforms.

Five European policy reports between 2014 and 2024 (Socientize 2014; MLE 2023; REINFORCE 2023; TIME4CS 2023; INCENTIVE 2024) have called for shared infrastructure; none has been delivered at scale. The goal is not to replace what works, but to connect it.

01 Incompatible technologies Citizen science projects build on incompatible software stacks and components. Tools developed in one project cannot be reused in others, multiplying development costs.	02 Disconnected data Citizen-generated observations sit in incompatible formats. Data collected in one project cannot be aggregated with data from another, weakening its scientific and policy value.	03 Missing standards No agreed standards exist for data quality, validation or metadata. Citizen science outputs are difficult to publish, cite or feed into European policy reporting.	04 Locked-in knowledge Methods, training materials and best practices stay locked inside the project that produced them. Each new project reinvents what others have already solved.	05 Disconnected communities Volunteers cannot carry their contributions, skills or recognition from one project to another. Each platform asks them to start from zero, weakening long-term engagement.
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UP TO
€10.2 BN

THE COST OF INACTION

The European Commission estimates the annual cost of non-FAIR research data at up to €10.2 BN (European Commission, 2018). Citizen science data is part of this fragmentation problem and the price a shared infrastructure is designed to recover.

NEW TO THE TOPIC? WHAT IS CITIZEN SCIENCE?

Citizen science is research carried out with the public. Volunteers (community groups, students, patient associations, individual enthusiasts) work alongside professional researchers, contributing observations, data and local knowledge that professional teams cannot gather alone.

Across Europe today, communities monitor air quality in their cities, volunteers track biodiversity changes, patients support medical research and people record climate impacts in their regions. These contributions inform Horizon Europe programmes, EU Missions and national policy.

The European Commission, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures, the European Open Science Cloud and the renewed European Research Area all recognise citizen science as a strategic tool for evidence-based policy.



This project has received funding from the European Union's research and innovation programme Horizon Europe under the grant agreement No. 101188210

01



Achievements of **RIECS-Concept** in first 18 months

Designing the infrastructure with the community that will use it

A federated design: connect, do not replace

RIECS-Concept builds on twenty years of European investment in citizen science: national networks, EU-funded platforms and the European Open Science Cloud infrastructure. It connects them, rather than replacing them. One near-term integration pathway is a Citizen Science Node within the European Open Science Cloud, which would link existing citizen science platforms to European open-data infrastructure as one component of the broader RIECS system.

LAYER 3

Functionalities: tools people use

LAYER 2

Services: interoperability & attribution

LAYER 1

Resources: existing platforms & data

Built on open standards • three-layer reference design

6,780

participants
reached

28

in-person
events

18

co-design
workshops

10

stakeholder
groups

8

countries
engaged

13

partner
organisations

18 months of co-design: from a 700-strong European Commission event in Brussels and the Ars Electronica Townhall in Linz, to sessions with United Nations policymakers, research-infrastructure funders and a global course reaching 1,000 people.



Ibercivis workshop with the support of the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (2025)



ZSI and OeAD held a theme café at the OIS zam Forum (2025)



RIECS-Concept Kick-Off Meeting in Brussels (2025)

Engagement turned into concrete, reusable foundations

01 • Evidence base

European landscape mapping

An open inventory of Europe's citizen science platforms, tools and services, assessed against licensing, data protection and open-data principles.

02 • Method

Participatory engagement framework

A reusable model for engaging ten stakeholder groups in co-design, applied across eight European countries.

03 • Design

Preliminary infrastructure design

The federated, three-layer design above; on open standards, connecting existing platforms rather than replacing them.

04 • Integration pathway

Node within the European Open Science Cloud

A charter under preparation. One component of the broader RIECS, providing the near-term route from citizen science platforms to European open-data infrastructure.

05 • Recognition

Named in the Spanish Parliament

Referenced by a Member during a debate on a CS proposal in the Spanish Congress of Deputies in May 2026, illustrating that citizen science is being discussed at national political level.

06 • Outputs

Scientific & public reach

Four peer-reviewed publications • seven international conferences • 65 blog posts • three newsletter issues reaching 67 subscribers.



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02

EU Policy Fit: Why **RIECS-Concept** matters now?

RIECS-Concept responds directly to current European policy priorities on open science, research infrastructures, digital public infrastructure and citizen participation. It supports the European Research Area agenda by advancing open knowledge circulation and access to research infrastructures. It addresses the fragmented financing of research infrastructures flagged by the European Commission's 2025 Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures (COM(2025) 497). And it aligns with the 2026 European Technological Sovereignty Package by positioning federated, open-source citizen science as a trusted European digital public good. RIECS-Concept also develops shared quality assurance and validation protocols so citizen science data can be relied on for policy-relevant evidence.

Why a new infrastructure? National platforms serve their countries. Project-funded platforms serve their projects. The exploration of a Citizen Science Node within the European Open Science Cloud could connect citizen science platforms to EU open data infrastructure for the data layer. RIECS is the missing European layer that would tie governance, services, sustainability and community across all of them.

Three actions for European institutions and Member States

Grounded in evidence from the first 18 months and aligned with the **European Research Area** agenda, the **European Open Science Cloud** strategy and the roadmap of the **European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures**.

01 Recognise Citizen science as a horizontal research capacity. Include a Research Infrastructure for Citizen Science in the next roadmap of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures and in the priorities of the European Research Area as a cross-cutting enabler of the Horizon Europe missions and the European Green Deal. ADDRESSED TO European Commission · ESFRI · European Open Science Cloud	02 Sustain Investment toward an ESFRI-ready evidence base Programme funding for the next phases of development beyond the concept stage, building toward the evidence base required for a future ESFRI roadmap application. Secure Member State co-investment and align national citizen science strategies with the European research infrastructure pipeline. ADDRESSED TO European Union & Member States	03 Federate Design for interoperability, not replacement. Adopt federated architecture and open standards as the design principle for shared infrastructures, building on existing platforms as nodes. Require findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data practices in publicly funded projects. ADDRESSED TO European institutions & infrastructure managers
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How **RIECS-Concept** connects to EU policy frameworks?

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA Upcoming ERA Act Open knowledge circulation and access to research infrastructures. EP Res. P10_TA(2026)0068	DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY Technological Sovereignty Package Open-source, trusted European digital public infrastructure. European Commission · IP/26/1187
RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES European RTI Strategy Stable lifecycle financing, overcoming fragmented funding sources. European Commission · COM(2025) 497	DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE Tech sovereignty EP Resolution Trusted civic data flow, human oversight and European autonomy. EP Res. P10_TA(2026)0022



Funded by
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This project has received funding from the European Union's research and innovation programme Horizon Europe under the grant agreement No. 101188210

03



How to engage with **RIECS-Concept**?

For policymakers & ministries

Join the Ministries Advisory Board

Member State ministries can shape the design of the future Research Infrastructure for Citizen Science before architecture decisions are finalised in late 2027. Members receive early access to project findings and contribute to governance design.

Nominate your national citizen science networks as candidate nodes

Existing national platforms (such as Österreich forscht, mit:forschen! or medborgarforskning.se) can be put forward to become early nodes of the future federated infrastructure. RIECS-Concept will assess interoperability and capacity through 2027.

Co-host a policy event during the Lithuanian Presidency

The Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January to June 2027) is a strategic window. RIECS-Concept can support Member States, ministries or institutions hosting a high-level event on the citizen science research infrastructure agenda.

Attend the final RIECS policy event in Brussels

In late 2027 RIECS-Concept will present its final implementation roadmap, impact assessment framework and policy recommendations at a Brussels event for European institutions, Member States and research infrastructure stakeholders.

Stay connected with **RIECS-Concept** updates

WEBSITE



concept.riecs.eu

SOCIAL MEDIA



[linkedin.com/company/riecs-concept](https://www.linkedin.com/company/riecs-concept)



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REFERENCES USED IN THIS POLICY BRIEF

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Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme, Grant Agreement No.

101188210. Views and opinions expressed are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. Country versions of this brief are available via the project website.



Annex 2. Country-specific National Policy Alignment Boxes

The text content drafted for each country box is listed below as an indicative starting point. Consortium partners adapt and finalise the text for their country at the time of distribution, reflecting the most up-to-date national policy context, current contact details and any recent shifts in citizen science programmes or governance. A fully designed example of one country edition (Spain) follows the list.

5.1.1. For Policy Makers in AUSTRIA

RIECS-Concept connects to Sparkling Science 2.0, the Citizen Science Network Austria (Österreich forscht) and the OeAD Centre for Citizen Science. With Sparkling Science introducing funding in 2007, Österreich forscht established in 2014, and the OeAD Centre for Citizen Science established by the Austrian government in 2015, Austria has Europe's longest-running national citizen science ecosystem.

National contacts: OeAD Centre for Citizen Science · Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI) · Ars Electronica · International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA).

5.1.2. For Policy Makers in GERMANY

RIECS-Concept connects to the Citizen Science Strategy 2030, the mit:forschen! national platform, and the Strategic Foresight, Participation and Citizen Research division of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The project is scientifically co-coordinated from Berlin by the European Citizen Science Association.

National contact: Franziska Stressmann, European Citizen Science Association — franziska.stressmann@ecsa.ngo

5.1.3. For Policy Makers in ITALY

RIECS-Concept connects to the National Plan for Open Science 2021–2027 (Ministry of University and Research), the Italian Computing and Data Infrastructure (ICDI) and the Citizen Science Italia network.

National contact: University of Milano-Bicocca.

5.1.4. For Policy Makers in LITHUANIA

RIECS-Concept connects to the Law on Higher Education and Research and the Open Science Steering Group of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Lithuania holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from January to June 2027 — a strategic window for advancing the citizen science agenda.

National contact: Kristina Kovaitė, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University — kristina.kovaitė@vilniustech.lt



5.1.5. For Policy Makers in SERBIA

RIECS-Concept aligns with the Law on Science and Research (Article 6 on open science), the National Open Science Platform, and the new Open Science Policy (December 2024). The national citizen science programme run by the Centre for the Promotion of Science is the only such programme in the Western Balkans.

National contact: Centre for the Promotion of Science, Belgrade.

5.1.6. For Policy Makers in SPAIN

RIECS-Concept connects to the Law on Science, Technology and Innovation, the Organic Law of the University System and Spain's Unique Scientific and Technical Infrastructures (ICTS). The project is coordinated from Zaragoza by the Ibercivis Foundation.

National contact: Fermín Serrano Sanz, Ibercivis Foundation — fermin@ibercivis.es

5.1.7. For Policy Makers in SWEDEN

RIECS-Concept connects to the Research and Innovation Bill 2016 (open science strategy), the national citizen science portal medborgarforskning.se (ARCS project) and Vetenskap & Allmänhet (Public & Science Sweden).

National contact: Malmö University.

5.1.8. For Policy Makers in SWITZERLAND

RIECS-Concept connects to the Swiss National Open Science Strategy, which explicitly recognises citizen science, and to the national Open Access and Open Research Data strategies coordinated by Swiss universities, the Swiss National Science Foundation, the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, ETH Zurich and EPFL.

National contact: Citizen Science Center Zurich (joint initiative of the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich).



5.1.9. Sample policy brief (Spain edition)



POLICY BRIEF

June 2026

A federated Research Infrastructure for citizen science: from fragmentation to integration

This brief presents the evidence and recommendations from the first 18 months of RIECS-Concept, the Horizon Europe initiative designing a pan-European Research Infrastructure for citizen science (RIECS).

The problem: twenty years of projects, still no shared foundation

Climate adaptation, biodiversity monitoring and public health surveillance depend on evidence that only citizens can generate at scale. Yet European citizen science remains fragmented across five dimensions, with duplicated tools, incompatible data and short-lived platforms.

Five European policy reports between 2014 and 2024 (Socientize 2014; MLE 2023; REINFORCE 2023; TIME4CS 2023; INCENTIVE 2024) have called for shared infrastructure; none has been delivered at scale. The goal is not to replace what works, but to connect it.

01



Incompatible technologies

Citizen science projects build on incompatible software stacks and components. Tools developed in one project cannot be reused in others, multiplying development costs.

02



Disconnected data

Citizen-generated observations sit in incompatible formats. Data collected in one project cannot be aggregated with data from another, weakening its scientific and policy value.

03



Missing standards

No agreed standards exist for data quality, validation or metadata. Citizen science outputs are difficult to publish, cite or feed into European policy reporting.

04



Locked-in knowledge

Methods, training materials and best practices stay locked inside the project that produced them. Each new project reinvents what others have already solved.

05



Disconnected communities

Volunteers cannot carry their contributions, skills or recognition from one project to another. Each platform asks them to start from zero, weakening long-term engagement.

UP TO

€10.2 BN

THE COST OF INACTION

The European Commission estimates the annual cost of non-FAIR research data at up to €10.2 BN (European Commission, 2018). Citizen science data is part of this fragmentation problem and the price a shared infrastructure is designed to recover.

NEW TO THE TOPIC? WHAT IS CITIZEN SCIENCE?

Citizen science is research carried out with the public. Volunteers (community groups, students, patient associations, individual enthusiasts) work alongside professional researchers, contributing observations, data and local knowledge that professional teams cannot gather alone.

Across Europe today, communities monitor air quality in their cities, volunteers track biodiversity changes, patients support medical research and people record climate impacts in their regions. These contributions inform Horizon Europe programmes, EU Missions and national policy.

The European Commission, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures, the European Open Science Cloud and the renewed European Research Area all recognise citizen science as a strategic tool for evidence-based policy.

 Funded by the European Union

This project has received funding from the European Union's research and innovation programme Horizon Europe under the grant agreement No. 101188210

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21

Achievements of RIECS-Concept in first 18 months

Designing the infrastructure with the community that will use it

A federated design: connect, do not replace

RIECS-Concept builds on twenty years of European investment in citizen science: national networks, EU-funded platforms and the European Open Science Cloud infrastructure. It connects them, rather than replacing them. One near-term integration pathway is a Citizen Science Node within the European Open Science Cloud, which would link existing citizen science platforms to European open-data infrastructure as one component of the broader RIECS system.

LAYER 3

Functionalities: tools people use

LAYER 2

Services: interoperability & attribution

LAYER 1

Resources: existing platforms & data

Built on open standards - three-layer reference design

6,780

participants
reached

28

in-person
events

18

co-design
workshops

10

stakeholder
groups

8

countries
engaged

13

partner
organisations

18 months of co-design: from a 700-strong European Commission event in Brussels and the Ars Electronica Townhall in Linz, to sessions with United Nations policymakers, research-infrastructure funders and a global course reaching 1,000 people.



Ibercivis workshop with the support of the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (2025)



ZSI and OeAD held a theme café at the OIS zam Forum (2025)



RIECS-Concept Kick-Off Meeting in Brussels (2025)

Engagement turned into concrete, reusable foundations

01 • Evidence base

European landscape mapping

An open inventory of Europe's citizen science platforms, tools and services, assessed against licensing, data protection and open-data principles.

02 • Method

Participatory engagement framework

A reusable model for engaging ten stakeholder groups in co-design, applied across eight European countries.

03 • Design

Preliminary infrastructure design

The federated, three-layer design above: on open standards, connecting existing platforms rather than replacing them.

04 • Integration pathway

Node within the European Open Science Cloud

A charter under preparation. One component of the broader RIECS, providing the near-term route from citizen science platforms to European open-data infrastructure.

05 • Recognition

Named in the Spanish Parliament

Referenced by a Member during a debate on a CS proposal in the Spanish Congress of Deputies in May 2026, illustrating that citizen science is being discussed at national political level.

06 • Outputs

Scientific & public reach

Four peer-reviewed publications • seven international conferences • 65 blog posts • three newsletter issues reaching 67 subscribers.



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02



EU Policy Fit: Why **RIECS-Concept** matters now?

RIECS-Concept responds directly to current European policy priorities on open science, research infrastructures, digital public infrastructure and citizen participation. It supports the European Research Area agenda by advancing open knowledge circulation and access to research infrastructures. It addresses the fragmented financing of research infrastructures flagged by the European Commission's 2025 Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures (COM(2025) 497). And it aligns with the 2026 European Technological Sovereignty Package by positioning federated, open-source citizen science as a trusted European digital public good. RIECS-Concept also develops shared quality assurance and validation protocols so citizen science data can be relied on for policy-relevant evidence.

Why a new infrastructure? National platforms serve their countries. Project-funded platforms serve their projects. The exploration of a Citizen Science Node within the European Open Science Cloud could connect citizen science platforms to EU open data infrastructure for the data layer. RIECS is the missing European layer that would tie governance, services, sustainability and community across all of them.

Three actions for European institutions and Member States

Grounded in evidence from the first 18 months and aligned with the European Research Area agenda, the European Open Science Cloud strategy and the roadmap of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures .

01 Recognise Citizen science as a horizontal research capacity. Include a Research Infrastructure for Citizen Science in the next roadmap of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures and in the priorities of the European Research Area as a cross-cutting enabler of the Horizon Europe missions and the European Green Deal. ADDRESSED TO European Commission • ESFRI • European Open Science Cloud	02 Sustain Investment toward an ESFRI-ready evidence base Programme funding for the next phases of development beyond the concept stage, building toward the evidence base required for a future ESFRI roadmap application. Secure Member State co-investment and align national citizen science strategies with the European research infrastructure pipeline. ADDRESSED TO European Union & Member States	03 Federate Design for interoperability, not replacement. Adopt federated architecture and open standards as the design principle for shared infrastructures, building on existing platforms as nodes. Require findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data practices in publicly funded projects. ADDRESSED TO European institutions & infrastructure managers
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How **RIECS-Concept** connects to EU policy frameworks?

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA Upcoming ERA Act Open knowledge circulation and access to research infrastructures. EP Res. P10_TA(2026)0068	DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY Technological Sovereignty Package Open-source, trusted European digital public infrastructure. European Commission • IP/26/1187
RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES European RTI Strategy Stable lifecycle financing, overcoming fragmented funding sources. European Commission • COM(2025) 497	DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE Tech sovereignty EP Resolution Trusted civic data flow, human oversight and European autonomy. EP Res. P10_TA(2026)0022

How to engage with RIECS-Concept?

For policymakers & ministries

Join the Ministries Advisory Board

Member State ministries can shape the design of the future Research Infrastructure for Citizen Science before architecture decisions are finalised in late 2027. Members receive early access to project findings and contribute to governance design.

Nominate your national citizen science networks as candidate nodes

Existing national platforms (such as Österreich forscht, mit:forschen! or medborgarforskning.se) can be put forward to become early nodes of the future federated infrastructure. RIECS-Concept will assess interoperability and capacity through 2027.

Co-host a policy event during the Lithuanian Presidency

The Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January to June 2027) is a strategic window. RIECS-Concept can support Member States, ministries or institutions hosting a high-level event on the citizen science research infrastructure agenda.

Attend the final RIECS policy event in Brussels

In late 2027 RIECS-Concept will present its final implementation roadmap, impact assessment framework and policy recommendations at a Brussels event for European institutions, Member States and research infrastructure stakeholders.

FOR POLICY MAKERS IN SPAIN

RIECS-Concept connects to the Law on Science, Technology and Innovation, the Organic Law of the University System, and Spain's Unique Scientific and Technical Infrastructures (ICTS).

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Stay connected with RIECS-Concept updates

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Funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101188210. Views and opinions expressed are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. Country versions of this brief are available via the project website.

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