

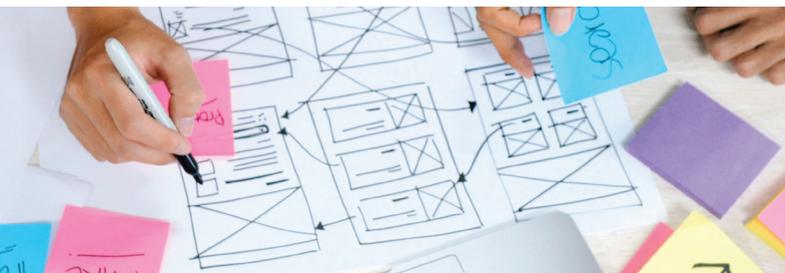
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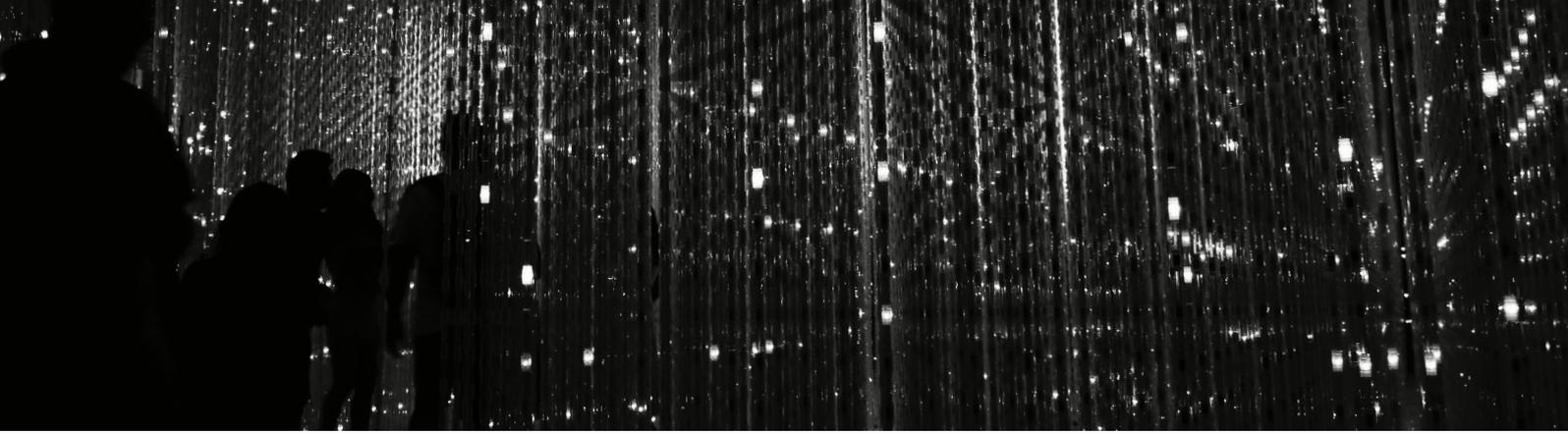
Success Stories

No.2



Project portraits of Horizon Europe's
Reforming and enhancing the European
R&I System programme area





IRECS

Improving research ethics expertise and competencies to ensure reliability and trust in science

Homepage: <https://www.irecs.eu>

Project duration: October 2022 – December 2025

Project coordinator: University of Bonn, Germany

Project contact address: contact@irecs.eu

Partners: 18 partners from Europe, Asia and Africa, including universities, research networks and research organisations from Germany, the Netherlands, Croatia, Lithuania, France, Greece, Belgium, Ireland, South Africa, UK, China and Korea

Can you briefly describe your project and the story behind it?

The irecs project has focused on research ethics and integrity across all areas of science. Building on a long history of collaboration in biomedical ethics networks, irecs has addressed the fast-changing ethical challenges in today's research landscape, from artificial intelligence and genome editing to extended realities. Its core ambition has been to make research ethics operational and visible in everyday research practice.

To make ethics part of daily research the team created training materials and practical guides that universities and Higher Research Institutions can adapt. In particular, the irecs Research Ethics Governance Implementation Guide and the modular training materials are designed to strengthen awareness and responsibility not only among researchers, but also at the level of university leadership and institutional governance. It's about turning principles into habits and embedding ethical reflection structurally into research environments – thereby improving the quality of research itself and strengthening trust in science across society. The project thus contributes to a more open, reflexive and trustworthy European Research Area (ERA).

What are the main objectives of the project and what have been the main challenges?

irecs has aimed to expand the scope of research ethics beyond the biomedical sector, tackling the ethical and legal questions that arise in new and emerging technologies. A key challenge has been that ethics standards and procedures differ greatly across disciplines and countries. irecs has therefore focused on finding common ground and developing frameworks and training materials that can be adapted to local and institutional contexts. A central objective was to strengthen ethically adequate research conduct through governance structures, incentives for interdisciplinary exchange and training formats that resonate with researchers' everyday realities. The team also explored how to motivate researchers and trainers to actively use the new materials in their institutions.



What are your main target groups?

irecs worked with a broad community, from students and early-stage researchers to university leadership, policymakers and members of ethics review boards. A special focus was on institutional governance: helping universities and research organisations strengthen their ethics structures and create incentives for ethical awareness. The project involved “pilot universities” (University of Bonn, Maastricht and Split) that tested new training materials and awareness-building activities, sharing their experience through workshops and round tables with rectors, vice-rectors and ethics officers. The results and implementation proposals were reviewed and disseminated by the European University Association. This helped anchor research ethics at decision-making levels where institutional cultures are shaped.



With its final conference on 11 and 12 December 2025 in Brussels the project enabled a constructive dialogue between academia, industry and policymakers.

This exchange was a deliberate and essential part of irecs, reflecting the fact that science, society and the economy are far more closely intertwined today than they were twenty years ago. Such dialogue is essential to ensure that ethical principles such as ‘ethics by design’ are not only formulated, but also embedded in research and innovation practices. Following the opening address by Joanna Drake on behalf of the European Commission, Christoph Marksches, President of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities, emphasised the importance of integrating freedom and responsibility in science.

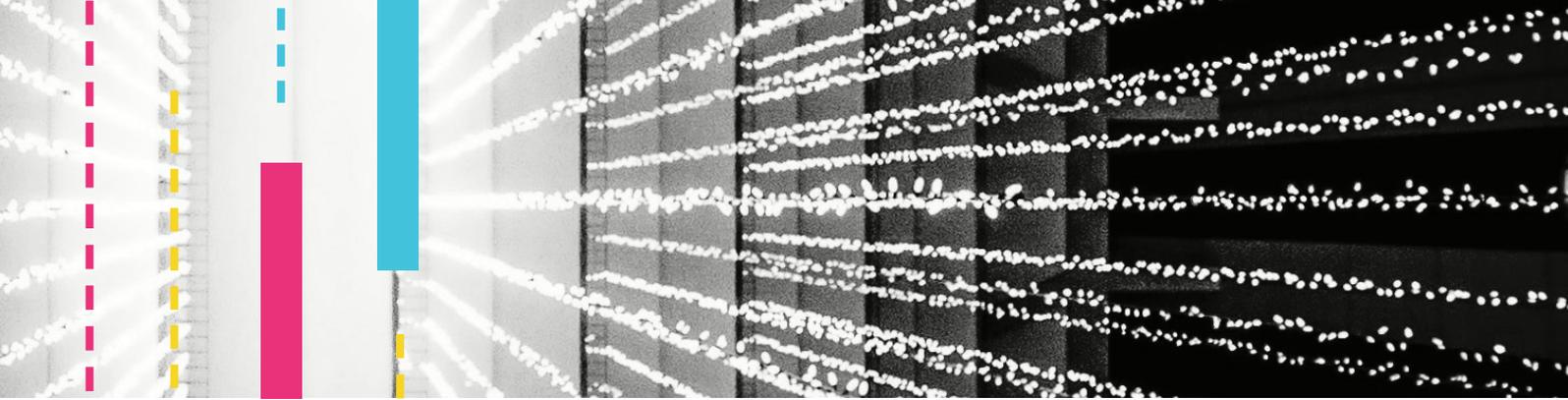
The contributions from industrial practice were particularly valuable. Michael Sahnau (Microsoft Health) and Karl-Heinz Land (neuland.ai) demonstrated how ethical reflection, governance structures and training formats can be embedded in corporate innovation processes as integral components of responsible technology development.

Maura Hiney, Chair of the ALLEA Permanent Working Group on Science and Ethics, further emphasised the importance of shared reference frameworks and European standards for this dialogue. In her presentation, Barbara Prainsack, Chair of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE), urged a reflective response to crises.

Among the project’s key outcomes are the Implementation Guide and the comprehensive Training Materials, which were developed, tested, and refined throughout the project. These resources systematically compile the insights gained in irecs and provide practical, governance orientated guidance for a variety of institutional and national contexts. By strengthening ethical awareness among researchers and research leaders alike, these tools contribute to better research and greater societal trust in science. In this way, irecs has established a robust foundation on which future initiatives, training programmes and follow-up projects in the field of research ethics can build.

irecs.eu





IMPETUS

Accelerating Citizen Science across Europe

Homepage: <https://impetus4cs.eu/>

Project duration: 4 years (July 2022 – June 2026)

Project coordinator: Zabala Innovation, Spain

Project contact address: comms@impetus4cs.eu

Partners: 7 partners from Spain, Italy, Austria and the UK with expertise in citizen science, policy, impact assessment and science communication

Can you briefly describe the IMPETUS project and its objectives?

IMPETUS supports and celebrates citizen science across Europe. It funds and mentors new citizen science initiatives through a series of Open Calls, an Accelerator Programme and the European Union Prize for Citizen Science. The project brings together citizens, researchers and local groups to tackle everyday issues, such as pollution, inclusion, or the use of data.

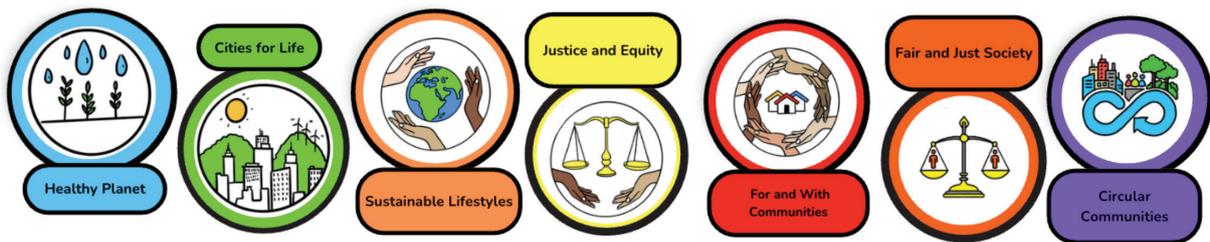
Through small grants, mentoring and promotion, the project helps local citizen-science teams grow and connect with others.



Throughout the IMPETUS project, the team organized three Open Calls to fund and support over 120 citizen science initiatives across Europe. Selected projects received funding, mentoring and training through the IMPETUS Accelerator, an innovative programme providing tailored guidance from experienced mentors. The third edition of the Accelerator ran from mid-2025 to early 2026, supporting the last cohort of citizen science initiatives within the project.

Alongside the Accelerator, the European Union Prize for Citizen Science celebrates outstanding citizen-driven projects. The prize is awarded annually at the Ars Electronica Festival in Austria, and the final edition was held in September 2025. Details of all past and 2025 winners can be found on the project website.

Accelerator Call Challenges



What are the main achievements and expected impact?

Since 2022, IMPETUS has supported over 80 projects from 20 countries with a strong focus on gender equality and diversity; 70% are led by women and more than half involve minority groups. These initiatives explore topics from repair culture and circular economy to urban belonging and marine conservation. The project has also awarded three rounds of the EU Prize for Citizen Science, highlighting innovative approaches such as the Isala project on women's health which is often overlooked, COACT for Mental Health using an online chatbot to share mental health stories, and the SeaPaCS project engaging coastal communities on plastic pollution, to name a few.

Prix Ars Electronica Award Ceremony 2024



By the end of the project in 2026, IMPETUS will have supported at least 125 projects and inspired many more thus hopefully highlighting the importance of citizen science in Europe.

How was the consortium built, and what makes it unique?

The IMPETUS consortium brings together partners with complementary expertise: Zabala Innovation leads coordination, while King's College London provides technical oversight. Nesta drives policy and anticipatory governance, Ars Electronica organizes the EU Prize, Science for Change runs the Accelerator, T6 develops impact assessment frameworks, and EUSEA leads communication. An interesting fact is that IMPETUS began as an all-women-led project team, which is almost unheard of in Horizon Europe projects.

What lessons have been learned so far?

One of IMPETUS's main insights is that citizen involvement must go beyond data collection. The project's Citizen Panel actively defines funding challenges, ensuring a truly bottom-up approach. Simplicity in application procedures and trust in the citizen science community have proven essential for engagement. Another lesson is the importance of policy connection: citizen science can only grow sustainably when policymakers recognise its value for the Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals.



impetus4cs.eu/





**Funded by
the European Union**

NCP_WIDERA.NET project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the grant agreement No 101055286.