

## EPA Network Interest Group on Citizen Science Work Programme

November 2021

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This Work Programme identifies priority work areas and main policy questions addressed by the Interest Group on Citizen Science (IGCS) of the EPA Network, taking into consideration the main goals of the group as described in its Terms of Reference (ToR). This work programme will be reviewed regularly in order to update it, close existing work areas or add new ones.

### 2. MANDATE

The IGCS was established in April 2014 during the 22nd EPA Network Meeting in Vienna. The objective of the working group is to improve the understanding and use of citizen science within environmental policy and governance, particularly by

- **assessing the influence and impact** of citizen science in national and EU-level policies,
- **sharing practical examples** of citizen science projects, infrastructures, tools and networks

**In order to assess the influence and impact of citizen science**, the IGCS will explore and demonstrate how citizen science contributes to diverse policy areas and policy stages. The policy topics include, for example:

- awareness and (early) warning of environmental risks;
- environmental monitoring (e.g.: air and water quality, species and habitats);
- monitoring of business' compliance to environmental standards;
- monitoring of policy goals, such as SDGs;
- raising environmental awareness and changing environmental behaviour of local communities and businesses.

Particularly, the IGCS will seek to highlight that successful citizen science cases should not only be measured by the amount of data that is collected, but also how this information leads to societal changes, such as better environmental decisions and community empowerment.

**In order to share practical examples**, the IGCS will meet regularly and devote significant time to share and discuss activities carried out by the members. IGCS will also consolidate existing best practices into practical guidance to be distributed to the wider EPA Network.

### 3. KEY ACTIVITIES

The IGCS will pursue the following key activities:

- Follow the **European and national policy discussions** and processes related to Citizen Science;
- **Exchange knowledge and experiences** on practical examples of citizen science and good practices;
- **Share strategic insights** with the Heads of EPAs during Plenary meetings.

#### 4. WORKING AREAS

This section elaborates on the working areas which respond to our mandate (1) and key activities to pursue (2):

**Working Area 1: Strengthening the role of citizen science by consolidating “best practices” documents on citizen science and advising wider EPA network related to implementation and uptake.**

IGCS will aim to provide specific “translation”/ guidance on how to implement “best practices” and recommendations emerging from major citizen science documents and processes. Given that the recommendations tend to be rather general, the IGCS will provide more details, such as discussing how citizen science data is collected and managed and identifying barriers and facilitators for effective implementation. Due to the wide range of actors and processes that could be addressed under this action, the IGCS will focus on the key policy actors (e.g.: European Commission’s DG Environment and JRC, UNEP) and documents providing recommendations and advice for national level actors, such as the EPAs. This work can cover policy areas considered relevant and appropriate by the members of the IGCS. In order to address topical policy issues, the IGCS will keep an eye on “policy windows” in order to synthesize good practices and activities related to citizen science.

In addition to “what is there”, the IGCS will work towards identifying gaps and “what is not there”. For example, the IGCS will explore further **good practices and activities** that build on citizen science approaches to empower communities to address environmental issues and exert behavioural change and shall reflect on **the role of the EPAs in these processes**. Therefore, citizen science offers an opportunity to improve interactions between EPAs and the public, helping to build mutual trust and ultimately improving environment protection<sup>1</sup>. Particularly, IGCS is also interested in strengthening inclusivity and openness related to citizen science. In this sense, IGCS will work towards ensuring FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) that ensure openness in the accessibility, use and sharing of citizen science data.

**Working Area 2: Building collaborations and networks with other actors engaged in citizen science**

Citizen science is an extensive field and thus IGCS involves various experts with diverse interests related to citizen science. In order to address different aspects (e.g. biophysical, technological, legal and social dimensions), it is crucial that IGCS identify relevant partners to work with, particularly given the limited resource constraints of the group. Given the increased interest in citizen science at different policy levels, IGCS will seek to identify synergies with other actors, including other Interest Groups of the EPA network, the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA) and its working groups. Potential collaborators include the IGCS Interest Group on Better Regulation, ECSA working group on Empowerment, inclusiveness and equity, the Environmental Knowledge Community (EKC), the GEO community activity on citizen science (GEO CITSCI), etc.

**Working Area 3: Knowledge and Information Exchange on Citizen Science Activities by the EPA members**

<sup>1</sup> Inspired by Owen, R.P.; Parker, A.J.; (2018) Citizen science in environmental protection agencies. In: Hecker, S. and Haklay, M. and Bowser, A. and Makuch, Z. and Vogel, J. and Bonn, A., (eds.) Citizen Science - Innovation in Open Science, Society and Policy. (pp. 284-300). UCL .

Knowledge and information exchange are the key activities of the IGCS, aiming at sharing practical examples of how Citizen Science is actually used to involve citizens in environmental issues.

#### **i) Knowledge sharing and exchange (IGCS website)**

In order to systematise and structure the continuous exercise of sharing knowledge and experiences, and to facilitate the exchange with other EPAs and external actors, IGCS will develop and maintain an online website containing basic information about the IGCS including its members, the ToR and Work Programme as well as key presentations, public reports and documents produced by IGCS. Where possible, the IGCS entry point should also include links to the members' citizen science portals as well as highlights from citizen science initiatives in which the IGCS members are involved. This website will ideally be located within the EPA Network website and maintained by the IGCS

Furthermore, the IGCS will actively consider other ways of highlighting EPA citizen science work and sharing experiences from its work. This can include, for example, adding projects to existing, well-acknowledged citizen science platforms<sup>2</sup> as well as organizing webinars or specific training sessions intended for EPA colleagues and other relevant audiences.

#### **ii) Data relevant issues**

As part of the knowledge sharing and exchange on citizen science activities and practices, the IGCS will also explore relevant **data issues**, in particular **the impact of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**<sup>3</sup> on how EPAs can use citizen science data, the implementation of FAIR and GEO Data Sharing and Management Principles<sup>4</sup>, or how citizen science can successfully complement authoritative geospatial or Earth observation data relevant for environmental policies made available through **INSPIRE** (Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe) and **GEO** (Group on Earth Observations).

#### **iii) Recommendations to the Heads of EPAs and other relevant activities**

When relevant and necessary, and based on our own experience and knowledge, the IGCS will provide **input, recommendations and advice** to the Heads of EPA during their meetings as well as to dedicated EPA Network activities related to Citizen Science.

## **4. OUR WAYS OF WORKING**

IGCS meetings are of critical importance to ensure the implementation of this Work Programme, in particular to share knowledge and experience and to learn about the latest developments in the field of environmental citizen science. Therefore, both physical and virtual meetings will be regularly organised as follows:

- **One face-to-face meeting per year:** The co-chairs will be responsible for the organisation of face-to-face meetings while all IGCS members are most welcome to take part in the organisation and hosting meetings. The meetings will be organised conveniently timed with the EPA Network meetings. Agendas will be prepared prior to the meetings by the

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. Eu-citizen.science platform (<https://eu-citizen.science/>)

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/679: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/justice-and-fundamental-rights/data-protection/2018-reform-eu-data-protection-rules\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/justice-and-fundamental-rights/data-protection/2018-reform-eu-data-protection-rules_en)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.earthobservations.org/open\\_eo\\_data.php](https://www.earthobservations.org/open_eo_data.php)

co-chairs with input from the IGCS members and support from the EPA Network Secretariat.

- **Virtual meetings (webinars)** will also be organised between face-to-face meetings as necessary.

The group may invite **observers** to their meetings (for example from relevant stakeholders such as the European Commission and the European Citizen Science Association, among others).

In accordance with our Terms of Reference, the IGCS will be **co-chaired** by the EEA and an EPA member of the IGCS. The EPA member co-chair will rotate biannually while the EEA will co-chair the group on a permanent basis, providing secretariat support to the group.

**Sharing of information and resources** will happen through the IGCS section of the EPA Network website as well as through email exchange.

## 5. OUR MEMBERS

The members of our group belong to agencies and institutions which are carrying out or supporting citizen science activities, or which are interested in learning about the potential and the benefits of building on citizen science approaches to improve our environment and promote behavioural change.

The group currently includes members from EPAs of:

- Belgium – Flanders
- England
- Estonia
- Finland
- Germany
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Spain
- Switzerland

As well as from the EEA.

The IGCS will continue reaching out to new members within the EPA Network in order to gain insight of citizen science activities taking place throughout Europe as well as share our knowledge and experience across the whole network.