

# THE DEMOCRACY GAP

## Ireland's Missing Innovation Pathway

An opportunity for the EU Presidency 2026

### The Gap

Ireland has no pathway for citizen (incl. postgraduate) innovation.

Ireland funds a **26-year national litter monitoring system** that **does not publish geospatial data, photographic evidence, its methodology, or enable citizen participation.**

**Ireland is home to a leading global open source UN-recognised platform** that has received 500k geotagged observations across 100+ countries and 98+ peer-reviewed citations — *incl. Nature & The World Bank* — yet **Ireland has no postgraduate pathway or pilot mechanism** to evaluate or advance the research.

Comparable platforms: **NZ \$2.7M · US \$1.5M · GER €2M · Ireland €0**

### The Window

**Q1-Q2 Decision Window:** A decision now will determine what Ireland can deliver.

**Q2-Q3 LitterWeek Pilots:** Schools, community groups & LA take the LitterWeek intervention.

**Q3-Q4 Evaluation & Results:** Present results at the Cork Mayors Summit on Climate & Health in December. Cork is home to OpenLitterMap & LitterWeek—the constituency of the Taoiseach and the EU Commissioner for Democracy.

### The Ask

1. **Name a Department lead for citizen science**
2. **Commission LitterWeek pilots via ETBs and Local Authorities.**
3. **Feature Ireland's citizen science as a Presidency outcome**

### The Stakes

Ireland will hold the EU Presidency having signed every relevant international agreement—Aarhus, SDGs, Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data—while supporting none of the digital infrastructure those agreements require.

The OECD's April 2025 report on citizen science explicitly recommends national strategies and dedicated funding mechanisms. Ireland will be assessed against these benchmarks by EU partners throughout 2026 and beyond.

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