DELIVERABLE 1.3

Interim Report on Project Governance Bodies

Central European Initiative - Executive Secretariat

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V2	28/08/2025	FINAL	InCE
V3	12/12/2025	Updated version: provided explanation on EB vs. PSC terminology; removal of annexes; insertion of dedicated analytical section to assess decision-making effectiveness.	InCE

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ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Consortium Agreement
CBE	Circular Bioeconomy
EB	Executive Board
EU	European Union
GA	Grant Agreement
KOM	Kick-off Meeting
PAB	Project Advisory Board
PCOORD	Project Coordinator
PGA	Project General Assembly
PP	Project Partner
WP	Work Package
WPL	Work Package Leader

Introduction

The Regional Inclusive Biobased Entrepreneurship Solutions (RIBES) Project is financed by the Horizon Europe Programme and is scheduled to last three years, from March 1, 2024, until February 28, 2027. It aims to enhance the uptake of biobased innovations through pioneering governance and business models developed on the convergence of the circular bioeconomy, social innovation, and rural development, thus contributing to the shift from a linear to a circular economy in 10 European regions lagging in innovation (Plovdiv Region, North Aegean, Pannonian, Campania, Western Balkans, Podkarpackie Region, Sibiu County, Vojvodina, Nitra Region, and Carpathian Region).

This document outlines the managerial work performed during the first 18 months of the project's lifetime, as conducted by the RIBES Governance Bodies. The structure of these bodies involves the Project Coordinator (PCoord), Project Partners (PPs) and external representatives.

The instructions for internal operational and managerial procedures within RIBES are set in D1.1 - The Project Management and Quality Plan, as well as in the Grant Agreement (GA) and the Consortium Agreement (CA).

1. Project's Governance Structure

As stipulated in Section 6 of the CA, as well as Section 1.2 of D1.1, the Project's Governance Bodies are as follows: the Project General Assembly (PGA), the Executive Board (EB), and the Project Advisory Board (PAB). Members of these bodies are listed in D1.1 annexes.

➢ **General Assembly**

The Project General Assembly serves as the primary decision-making body for all organisational and managerial aspects of project implementation. Each PP designates one representative to the PGA. The PGA is specifically tasked with making decisions concerning:

- project activities and outputs, including modification/revision of the work plan;
- financial management, including budget revisions and significant reallocations;
- IPR and Data Management issues, including changes in access to background information;
- changes in the Consortium structure and composition, such as the accession of new PPs or the withdrawal or termination of a member of the Consortium;
- significant modifications to be submitted to the REA, including project suspension, early termination, or change of PCoord;
- appointments to the EB and PAB.

Decisions within the PGA are taken by a simple majority (50%+1), provided a quorum of 66% of members is present or represented. If the quorum is not met, the Project Coordinator must schedule a regular meeting within 15 calendar days. Should the quorum still not be achieved, decisions may be made by a simple majority (50%+1) via written procedure.

PGA meetings are held at least twice per year and may also be convened at any time upon request from the Executive Board or one-third of PGA members. Unless agreed otherwise, the PCoord is responsible for organising and chairing these meetings.

➢ Executive Board

The Executive Board[1] is responsible for the timely implementation of PGA decisions and for improving coordination between activities implemented under specific Work Packages (WPs). Additionally, the EB offers support to the PCoord in managerial tasks. More specifically, the EB will:

- help monitor project implementation, identify risks, delays, and inconsistencies that could jeopardise the outcomes, and elaborate on possible solutions/workarounds;
- assist the PCoord in the preparation of PGA meetings, in particular when amendments or significant modifications to the work plan or budget are required;
- enhance information flow and knowledge exchange within the Consortium, and actively contribute to external communication efforts;
- support the PCoord with reporting obligations and other interactions with the Granting Authority by providing relevant information (data, deliverables, etc.) and contributing to defining the most effective strategies.

The EB members include the PCoord and representatives of PPs appointed by the PGA (generally, WPLs). Whenever possible, EB decisions are made by consensus. The PCoord is responsible for chairing EB meetings, unless 2/3 of its members agree differently.

➢ Project Advisory Board

The Project Advisory Board is an external consultative body that plays a vital role in offering strategic direction, facilitating connections with wider stakeholder communities, and supporting the long-term impact and sustainability of the project's outcomes.

Members of the PAB are appointed by the PGA, which is also responsible for clearly defining their roles and monitoring their contributions.

While PAB members may be invited to attend PGA meetings, they serve in an advisory capacity only and do not hold voting rights. The composition of the PAB is flexible and will remain open to the inclusion of new members throughout the project's duration, allowing for the evolution of expertise and perspectives as needed.

[1] This governance body was cited in the Grant Agreement as "Project Steering Committee", while in the Consortium Agreement and all subsequent project documents as "Executive Board".

2. Project Meetings

During the project's lifetime, Project General Assembly meetings are to be held every six months, while the Executive Board will convene quarterly. Once selected, the members of the Project Advisory Board are invited to attend the GA meetings, when possible. While the PGA involve all partners and PAB representatives, to share information, monitor progress, discuss deliverables, plan upcoming activities, the Executive Board is more restricted in terms of the number of participants (PCoord and WP/task leaders), where the aim is to address project tasks implementation in a manner and fine-tune working strategies. Additional meetings could be organised, if required. For both PGA and EB encounters, the PCoord prepares and circulates meeting minutes.

2.1 General Assembly Meetings

At least seven Project General Assembly meetings are planned to be held throughout the project's lifetime, of which three will be in-person: the kick-off meeting, the mid-term meeting, and the final meeting. The other four sessions will be held remotely.

The schedule of PGA meetings is depicted in Table 1. By M18, the first three meetings had been held.

Table 1 –PGA meetings time plan

NO.	DESCRIPTION	DATE	MONTH	LOCATION	STATUS
1	Kick-off Meeting	21 March 2024	M1	Trieste, Italy	✓
2	General Assembly	24 September 2024	M7	online	✓
3	General Assembly	17 March 2025	M13	online	✓
4	Mid-term meeting	23 September 2025	M19	Turin, Italy	
5	General Assembly	February 2026	M24	online	
6	General Assembly	August 2026	M30	online	
7	Final Meeting	February 2027	M36	TBD	

➢ **Topics of discussion**

The RIBES Kick-off Meeting, the first PGA meeting, was held at the Central European Initiative (PCoord) headquarters in Trieste on 21 March 2024 (M1) and marked the official launch of the project. Project Partners gathered to align on project objectives, timelines, and expectations. The Project Officer from the European Research Executive Agency (participated online) emphasised the importance of timely deliverables, transparent communication, and continuous reporting, while also providing implementation guidance and support tools.

Technical work packages were introduced to outline the project's multidimensional approach. PPs responsible for WP2 focused on co-creating a social-ecological transformative innovation framework and mapping regional ecosystems. At the same time, for WP3, they emphasised the development of sustainable, human-centred digital tools, the assessment of the economic viability of CBE supply chains, and inclusive business models to facilitate the CBE transition in the RIBES region. The WP4 leader presented its tasks, which involve building capacity and governance toolkits for innovative and inclusive CBE through workshops and stakeholder engagement, ensuring the tools are tailored to diverse regional contexts. Dissemination and exploitation activities under WP5 were also discussed, including facilitating the development of communication plans and the establishment of Multi-Actor Transformative Forums (MTFs) to promote regional impact and knowledge exchange. Following the presentation of key coordination and monitoring activities planned in WP1, PCoord addressed the need to effectively comply with ethics requirements, also covering WP6. In this regard, he informed participants about the initial contact with an external ethics advisor and GDPR expert to ensure adherence to relevant regulations. The meeting concluded with a call for close coordination between work packages, refinement of methodologies, and sensitivity to local conditions—especially in light of ongoing developments in Ukraine.

The 2nd RIBES General Assembly Meeting was held online on 24 September 2024 (M7), covering the progress and coordination across all work packages. Project management updates included news of a new Project Officer and an ongoing internal monitoring process. A key topic was the upcoming amendment to correct project data and incorporate changes, such as the inclusion of SME owner costs and potential task reallocations in WP4, particularly concerning internal changes in WPL - BIOCOM.

WP2 discussions focused on ongoing tasks (T2.1/2/3), including literature reviews and survey development aimed at mapping connections between social and environmental innovation. Workshop outcomes and survey strategies were debated, with emphasis on balancing global vs. regional results and integrating local insights. WP3 addressed progress in identifying bio-based value chains, the development of assessment platforms, and the application of the AHP methodology to evaluate scenarios. Partners stressed the need to extrapolate replicable solutions across regions and emphasised the inclusion of broader societal impact in analysis. Discussions highlighted the challenge of selecting suitable case studies and refining the number of value chains for optimisation. There was consensus on the importance of local partner involvement and cross-work package coordination to prevent overlap and ensure coherent methodology development.

Updates in WP4 emphasised governance models and future capacity-building outputs. WP4 deliverables and coordination plans were outlined, while WP5 presented progress in launching MTFs and dissemination efforts (MTFs' operational manual D.5.5 was submitted in July), including event participation and synergies with "sister projects". The first set of WP5 deliverables was submitted between May and August 2024. WP6 introduced the external ethics advisor and discussed tasks ahead, particularly for non-EU data exchanges. The meeting concluded with calls for alignment across tasks, attention to ethical requirements, and further meetings to clarify outstanding operational and methodological issues.

The 3rd RIBES General Assembly meeting, held online on 17 March 2025 (M13), began with updates on administrative, ethical, and communication matters. WP1 reported that project activities and deliverables were on track, with the interim report due in October 2025. The amendment process was outlined, focusing on adjusting person-month allocations and making minor budget reallocations without increasing total costs. The previous issue of WP4 task reallocation is no longer active, as BIOCOM resolved the matter internally. Furthermore, the project successfully recruited members of the Project Advisory Board. WP6 emphasised the importance of ethics checklists, GDPR compliance—particularly concerning non-EU partners—and precise documentation of ethical risks. The first set of ethics deliverables was submitted in October 2024. WP5 presented outreach progress, including a multilingual promotional video (launched in November 2024), website updates, newsletter planning, and ongoing efforts to expand stakeholder engagement through events and synergies.

WP2 outlined progress on analytical tasks and survey activities supporting conceptual clarity around bioeconomy and social innovation. Key deliverables and regional case studies were discussed. Methodological challenges and limitations of survey data were acknowledged, prompting proposals for mixed methods and interactive data visualisation tools. WP2 also emphasised the importance of cross-regional harmonisation, early stakeholder involvement, and integration with educational efforts to ensure the practical application of findings. WP3 focused on the development of a digital platform to facilitate bio-based value chain engagement. Features, accessibility, GDPR compliance, and long-term sustainability were discussed, along with integration strategies with the project website. Various tasks under WP3 include advanced feasibility studies, lifecycle and cost analysis, stakeholder mapping, and performance assessments for regional value chains. WP4 highlighted governance and policy frameworks, focusing on citizen engagement, risk assessment, and performance indicators. Coordination across WPs was emphasised to avoid fragmentation and ensure that the evolving methodologies—particularly for value chains and platform development—remain aligned with local needs and project objectives.

➢ **Minutes**

The PCoord is responsible for producing minutes of each PGA meeting, which contain a formal record of all the discussions held and decisions made. A draft of the minutes of the three PGA meetings held so far was circulated among participants for revision and final approval.

2.2 Executive Board Meetings

EB meetings are to be held quarterly throughout the project's lifetime; however, the schedule may vary due to the project's state-of-play, PGA meetings, and review meetings' final dates, and thus, the eventual need to anticipate/postpone.

As stated earlier, EB meetings are organised to better monitor project implementation, detect risks in advance, identify potential delays and inconsistencies, and work out possible solutions together. Consisting of fewer members than the GA, it represents a governing body that can be more easily assembled on short notice, if needed.

The schedule of Executive Board meetings is depicted in Table 2. By M18, three EB meetings were held.

Table 2 –EB meetings time plan

NO.	DESCRIPTION	DATE	MONTH	LOCATION	STATUS
1	Executive Board Meeting	8 July 2024	M5	online	✓
2	Executive Board Meeting	3 December 2024	M10	online	✓
3	Executive Board Meeting	23 June 2025	M16	online	✓
4	Executive Board Meeting	TBD			
5	Executive Board Meeting	TBD			
6	Executive Board Meeting	TBD			
…	Executive Board Meeting	TBD			

➢ **Topics of discussion**

The 1st RIBES Executive Board meeting of the RIBES project took place online on 8 July 2024 (M5). PCoord (INCE) opened the session, setting the agenda to include an update and discussion on the initial activities of the work packages. In WP2 (MERIT), three workshops related to the bioeconomy and social innovation were discussed, as well as upcoming activities of the Multi-Actor Transformative Forums. Ethics considerations were highlighted, including consent and data management protocols. Discussions also included scheduling and determining the scope of participants for future MTF meetings. In WP3 (CERTH), the launch of tasks was reported, with the Greek MTF focusing on the mushroom value chain. As for WP4, BIOCOM introduced a proposal[1] to reallocate some of its functions to a new partner to address an expertise gap caused by staff leave. The proposal was noted, with the next step being consultation with the broader partnership. WP5 (WHITE) reported timely progress on deliverables, including promotional materials, a website, and upcoming outreach tools. Partners were encouraged to share dissemination-relevant content and complete event documentation templates. Project management updates from INCE covered the pending project amendment and the timeline for internal monitoring in September. There was an open discussion on the number and selection of value chains for the MTFs, with the consensus that flexibility should be maintained based on regional needs. **The 2nd Executive Board meeting**, held online on 3 December 2024 (M10), reviewed progress across all work packages. For WP1 (INCE), it was reported that the PAB list is ready, and financial monitoring results for M1–M6 were shared. The pending project amendment, as per the Project Officer, will adjust budget allocations and P/M distribution. However, it no longer includes tasks' leadership changes, as BIOCOM has resolved these issues, which are also affected by a change in Project Officer. However, it

[1] This issue on WP4 task reallocation was a point of discussion during the 2nd General Assembly meeting as well, as it was seen as a potential amendment request. However, later, this issue was no longer active as it had been resolved internally, and all relevant tasks remained under the responsibility of BIOCOM (see 2nd EB meeting summary).

no longer provides leadership changes for tasks, as BIOCOM has resolved its internal staffing issues. A new BIOCOM expert in social innovation has been hired to resume WP4 activities, with confidence to meet deliverables by August 2025. In WP6 (INCE), the submission of 4 ethics-related deliverables was confirmed. Partners were reminded to adhere to ethics guidelines, especially in MTF activities. PCoord reminded that the RIBES ethics approach and general measures are available in D6.4; therefore, in case of any doubt, PPs should contact the INCE/Ethics advisor. In WP5 (WHITE), all relevant deliverables to date have been submitted, promotional materials have been completed, and strong MTF engagement has been achieved. The next MTF meeting will focus on value chains and biomass valorisation routes. MTF participants have been briefed on ethics requirements via checklists and consent procedures. As for the technical WPs - WP2 (UM) is on track, with the first deliverable due in February 2025 and a conceptual framework in place. Survey work (T2.2) is planned for January 2025 to avoid the holiday period, with potential phased distribution across EU countries. In WP3 (CERTH), a revised approach to value chain analysis was presented, focusing on general rather than specific cases, and progress was shared on tasks 3.2–3.4. Collaboration between CERTH, CIRCE, and WP2 leader remains key for aligning next steps. The meeting concluded with action points, including the following: determining the PGA meeting format, reinforcing ethics communication with MTFs, and finalising WP2 survey timelines. **The 3rd Executive Board meeting**, held online on 23 June 2025 (M16), reviewed upcoming deliverables. In WP5, WHITE confirmed KPIs were on track and called for partners to provide website content and use the dissemination template on SharePoint. Preparations for the third cycle of MTF meetings were underway, focusing on governance KPIs, regional training needs, and updating deliverables due in M18. A partnership map and synergies with networks such as the Rural Bioeconomy Alliance and EUBioNet were discussed to enhance collaboration. In WP2, UM presented results from the “Bioeconomy – more than a technological fix?” survey, based on 155 participants from 10 European regions, with work moving towards regional-level analysis. Task 2.3 is nearing completion, with a higher sampling focus on four countries to ensure stronger data quality. The final results will be shared in July for consortium review. In WP3, CERTH reported progress on platform development, value chain identification, and sustainability analysis, while stressing delays in MTF value chain definition. A dedicated meeting is planned to resolve the issue and provide CERTH with the necessary technical data. In WP4, BIOCOM is advancing on governance appraisal and capacity-building methodology, linking results from WP2 to upcoming workshops. For WP1, INCE is finalising the amendment, planning the mid-term project meeting in September in Turin, and preparing for the October review meeting. Furthermore, for WP6, PCoord reminded partners to submit feedback on data minimisation and ethical checklists. The action list highlighted key deadlines for deliverables due in August 2025.

- **Minutes**

The PCoord is responsible for producing minutes of EB meetings. A draft of the minutes of the three EB meetings held so far was circulated among participants for revision and final approval.

2.3 Project Advisory Board

The process of appointing and confirming members of the RIBES Advisory Board occurred within the first twelve months of the project’s cycle. They were informed about the RIBES project, their role within, and provided with supplementary informative materials. PAB members, whose details are listed in Annex III of D1.1, were invited to participate in the 3rd GA meeting, which was held online in March 2025 (M12).

3. Decision-Making Effectiveness

This section provides an analytical assessment of the effectiveness of decision-making processes within the RIBES governance structure during the first 18 months of implementation. The analysis examines how the PGA, EB, and PAB contributed to informed, timely, and coordinated decisions aligned with the project's objectives and the governance model described in the GA and the CA. During the first 18 months, decision-making mechanisms within RIBES operated effectively, supported by regular and well-structured meetings, transparent documentation and information flow, coherent alignment between operational and strategic levels, systematic risk monitoring and follow-up, and inclusive participation of partners and external experts.

Areas requiring continued attention include cross-WP methodological coordination and harmonisation of regional stakeholder engagement processes. The governance structure contributed to maintaining project progress and alignment with planned objectives.

3.1 Timeliness and Transparency

The PGA held its planned meetings at M1, M7, and M13, ensuring regular intervals for strategic decision-making. The EB convened at M5, M10, and M16, allowing continuous monitoring of technical progress and emerging challenges. Overall, the frequency and timing of meetings enabled governance bodies to address key issues without significant delays and to maintain continuity between strategic oversight (PGA) and operational follow-up (EB).

This cadence supported timely responses to issues such as:

- adjustments in survey and methodological timelines (WP2)
- clarifications required for WP3 value chain selection and platform development
- internal staffing changes within WP4 and subsequent stabilisation of responsibilities
- ethics requirements linked to MTF activities

Documentation practices—including the systematic preparation and circulation of minutes—ensured transparency and supported effective decision-making. Presentations of WP updates during PGA and EB meetings provided partners with comprehensive information on progress, risks, interdependencies, and upcoming deliverables. The EB discussions in particular allowed early identification of finetuning across tasks (e.g., value chain definitions, survey roll-out, ethics compliance), enabling the consortium to take corrective actions before they affected higher-level decision-making. The onboarding of PAB members and their invitation to the M13 PGA demonstrates a commitment to transparent information sharing with external experts, supporting future advisory contributions.

3.2 Strategic Coherence and Alignment

Decisions taken during the reporting period were consistent with the project's overall objectives and governance framework. Examples include:

- refinements to methodological approaches across technical WPs
- harmonisation efforts in stakeholder engagement strategies across MTFs
- budgetary and person-month adjustments included in the project amendment
- continuous reinforcement of ethics and GDPR obligations

The interplay between the PGA and EB contributed to maintaining coherence: the PGA validated high-level orientations and amendments, while the EB monitored and coordinated the underlying technical work. This dual mechanism helped maintain alignment between day-to-day operations and long-term project planning.

3.3 Risk Monitoring and Resolution

Internal project monitoring performed every 6 months, as well as the EB meetings demonstrated effectiveness in identifying and addressing risks at early stages, that were also thoroughly discussed during the PGA meetings. Issues raised included: variation in regional survey participation in WP2, minor delays in the definition of regional value chains in WP3, initial task coordination in WP4, ethical risks linked to data collection, consent procedures, and interactions with non-EU partners in WP6. Mitigation steps were initiated promptly through follow-up actions, dedicated meetings, or clarifications from the PCoord. When risks had important implications—such as the temporary disruption in WP4 leadership—they were addressed appropriately during the PGA, which confirmed the resolutions.

4. Conclusion

In international projects like RIBES, governance bodies, including the General Assembly, the Executive Board, and the Advisory Board, play a central role in ensuring strategic alignment, effective coordination, and the smooth delivery of project objectives. The General Assembly serves as the project’s highest decision-making body, bringing together representatives from all partners to review progress, approve significant amendments, and decide on strategic issues such as budget reallocations, timelines, and work plan adjustments. It provides a forum for consensus building, long-term planning, and formal endorsement of project directions.

The Executive Board, on the other hand, is usually responsible for operational oversight and tactical decision-making. Composed of work package leaders and task coordinators, the EB monitors ongoing activities, addresses risks, manages interdependencies between work packages, and ensures the timely submission of deliverables. It also addresses technical and administrative issues as they arise, coordinating with the Project Coordinator to implement corrective measures where necessary.

The Advisory Board represents an independent body of experts that provides strategic guidance, external perspectives, and quality assurance. Comprising specialists from relevant CBE fields, the board advises on the project’s direction, ensures alignment with best practices and emerging trends, and helps identify opportunities for impact and dissemination. Although it lacks formal decision-making authority, the Advisory Board’s recommendations support the consortium in refining methodologies, validating results, and enhancing the project’s relevance and credibility.

Together, the PGA and EB provided a complementary governance framework: the PGA safeguarded strategic vision and partner commitment, while the EB ensured efficient day-to-day management and problem-solving. This dual structure allowed RIBES to remain agile in execution while maintaining transparency and alignment with both contractual obligations and long-term objectives.

RIBES
REGIONAL INCLUSIVE BIOBASED ENTREPRENEURSHIP SOLUTIONS

The project

The **RIBES** project **aims** to enhance the uptake of bio-based innovations in nine (9) European regions (Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine) by developing new governance and business models that combine social entrepreneurship with rural development, thus advancing the transition to a circular economy.

Coordinator: **Central European Initiative (CEI)**

PARTNER		SHORT NAME
	Central European Initiative	INCE
	Maastricht University	UM
	Centre for Research and Technology Hellas	CERTH
	BIOCOM	BIOCOM
	White Research	WR
	University of Hohenheim	UHOH
	CIRCE - Centro Tecnológico	CIRCE
	Q-PLAN International	QPL
	ARX.net	ARX.NET
	European Rural Development Network	ERDN

	Agricultural University Plovdiv	AUP
	MedINA	MedINA
	Energy Institute Hrvoje Požar	EIHP
	SPRING	SPRING
	Balkan Rural Development Network	BRDN
	Rzeszowska Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A.	RARR
	Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu	ULBS
	Faculty of Technical Sciences University of Novi Sad	FTN
	Bioeconomy Cluster	BEC
	FORZA Agency for Sustainable Development of the Carpathian Region	FORZA