

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

2023



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ECPGR IN 2023 – HIGHLIGHTS

End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting, Oeiras, Portugal, May/June 2023

- The meeting took note of progress made during Phase X (2019–2023), noting that the complementary funding from EC projects and bilateral projects sponsored by Germany enabled several activities to be accomplished. In particular, the *Plant Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe* (PGR Strategy) was published in 2021, orienting the ECPGR objectives for the coming decade. The *European Evaluation Network* (EVA) prompted successful public–private partnerships, involving more than 90 partners carrying out evaluation trials over more than 100 sites across Europe. The *European Search Catalogue for Plant Genetic Resources* (EURISCO) was further developed, increasingly receiving phenotypic data and preparing to host *in situ* crop wild relative population data. The *Genetic Resources* journal, with the editorial office hosted by the ECPGR Secretariat, has become a new reference point for free publishing and free reading for the genetic resources community.

A new 5-year phase (2024–2028) was launched, with a budget of ca. €3 million with the Secretariat based at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT in Rome, Italy. The hosting of EURISCO was re-confirmed at the Leibniz Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research (IPK) – Gatersleben, Germany. A new Network of European Genebank Managers was established, which will start operating as a self-funded mechanism, with the overall aim of strengthening the management of European genebanks through the exchange of knowledge, cooperation and capacity building.

PRO-GRACE project

- The ECPGR Secretariat participated in the Horizon project PRO-GRACE, leading a work package developing the concept, governance and financial plan for a proposed European Research Infrastructure (RI) for PGR, developed along the lines of the PGR Strategy for Europe. This GRACE-RI should enable the effective exploitation of European PGR in research and breeding, connecting the ECPGR community with relevant stakeholders and enabling their active contribution to reaching international Sustainable Development Goals.
- During a combined project meeting, workshop and training school, participants learned about project progress, other European research infrastructures, PGR conservation and research initiatives, and provided input to the development of the GRACE-RI concept in an interactive session.
- Deliverable D5.2, developed under ECPGR leadership, lists the main stakeholder groups and potential services of the future GRACE-RI, including possible links and synergies among them.

European Evaluation Network (EVA)

- The five crop-specific EVA networks, numbering ca. 90 partners operating in 33 countries, continued to evaluate six crops in multilocation trials and conducted analyses of the generated data.
- The EURISCO-EVA information system provided network partners access to all relevant experiment metadata and collected phenotypic data, and also served as a model for similar databases in other European projects. By the end of 2023, data from 364 trials have been uploaded to the database, totalling almost 500,000 individual datapoints.
- An amendment to the project added funds for preparatory actions towards the expansion of the EVA networks to legumes, additional activities and effective data management, extending the project until December 2024.

- A meeting of the Grant Scheme Activity ForEVA took place on 10–11 October 2023 in Bucharest, Romania to discuss priorities and develop the EVA Legumes network, which will be implemented starting in 2024, with > 50 interested partners working on seven grain legumes.
- Results of EVA networks were presented by the EVA coordinator and project partners in ten international conferences and meetings. Two academic publications resulted from the work of the EVA networks (Goritschnig *et al.* 2023; Tripodi *et al.* 2023).

German-funded project for *in situ* CWR data in EURISCO

- The expansion of the EURISCO infrastructure for *in situ* CWR data was completed in 2023. The database schema was expanded, and all necessary procedures and functions for uploading, validating and updating the data in EURISCO as well as a separate *in situ* intranet were developed.
- The public EURISCO web interface has also been expanded. The first simple search and filter options were made available.
- The first production data from four countries in the pilot group was imported and made publicly available at the end of 2023.

EURISCO

- The public EURISCO web interface has been continuously developed to respond to user demands. Of particular note is a new search functionality for DOIs for genebank accessions. Furthermore, users requested an additional full dump as a CSV file, which has been implemented.
- The intranet infrastructure of EVA continued to be hosted after the project funding ended to enable the various EVA consortia to import their data.
- The first in-person training workshop since the COVID-19 pandemic took place in September 2023 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.
- Articles about EURISCO were published in *Nucleic Acid Research* (Kotni *et al.* 2023) and in a book chapter on database solutions for genebanks (Shaw *et al.* 2023).

1. ECPGR STRUCTURE AND MODE OF OPERATION IN PHASE X

1.1. MEMBERSHIP AND CONTRIBUTIONS

At the end of Phase X, 36 countries were members of ECPGR, with Belgium and Poland signing the Letter of Agreement in 2023. The list of members during all past phases is available [here](#).

The ECPGR budget for Phase X was increased in 2023 by €14,400 thanks to the contribution received from Poland which decided to join ECPGR in 2023. Further €10,000 were received from the European Regional Focal Point for Animal Genetic Resources (ERFP), as a contribution to the management of the *Genetic Resources* journal. The EVA project received an additional € 51,549 through an amendment to promote the establishment of an EVA Legumes network, allow additional genotyping and biochemical analyses and support data management.

Therefore, the total ECPGR budget for Phase X increased from originally €2,688,250 (agreed in May 2018 in Thessaloniki) to €4,454,930 at the end of 2023 (see details in the Financial Report 2023).

1.2. CHANGES IN NATIONAL COORDINATORS

In 2023, the following change in National Coordinators took place:

- **Lithuania:** Bronislovas Gelvonauskis, Department of Forest Genetic Resources, retired in December 2023. The new coordinator, Ms Gitana Štukėnienė, was nominated in 2024.

1.3. SEVENTEENTH (END-OF-PHASE) MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The [17th ECPGR \(End-of-Phase\) Steering Committee meeting](#) was held in Oeiras, Portugal, from 30 May to 1 June 2023. The meeting was organized in collaboration with and hosted by the Instituto Nacional de Investigação Agrária e Veterinária (INIAV).

The Steering Committee took note of the progress made during Phase X (2019–2023) and unanimously decided to continue ECPGR into a new 5-year phase (2024–2028), with a consolidated Secretariat of four staff members, based at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT in Rome, Italy. Operations at the Secretariat should be sufficiently equipped not only to coordinate and support the existing 24 Working Groups, but also to continue the experience of the EVA networks, the *Genetic Resources* journal, and the AEGIS coordination. The hosting of EURISCO was re-confirmed at the Leibniz Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research (IPK) – Gatersleben, Germany, fully funded for the next phase. Updated ECPGR Rules of Procedure and Terms of Reference for Operational Bodies and Mechanisms will guide the operations of the network and its members, together with a Table of Priority activities, which defines how ECPGR can best contribute to the targets of the PGR Strategy. The Steering Committee appreciated the start of the activities of the recently established Working Group on Cryopreservation and recommended its continuation. A completely new initiative and new approach were adopted for the establishment of a Network of European Genebank Managers, which will start operating as a self-funded mechanism, initially under the coordination of the Director of NordGen, Lise Lykke Steffensen, with the overall aim to strengthen the management of European genebanks through the exchange of knowledge, cooperation and capacity building.

A budget of ca. €3 million for the next five years was approved for the ECPGR programme, with the understanding that additional carry-over funds and new voluntary contributions or other project funds will be necessary to maintain the operations at the same level as in the past phase.

The Steering Committee agreed to the continuation of the ECPGR Secretary, Lorenzo Maggioni, in his position for another three years, until the end of 2026, while the ExCo Chair, Marianne Lefort, wished to step down after a 5-year mandate and called for the recruitment of a new ExCo Chair.

1.4. MANAGEMENT OF ECPGR WORKING GROUPS

All Working Groups: A meeting of the Working Group Chairs and the Executive Committee was held online on 8–9 March 2023 in preparation for the End-of-Phase ECPGR Steering Committee meeting of May/June 2023. Chairs and vice-Chairs representing 22 Working Groups attended. During two afternoons, Chairs were given the opportunity to comment on draft background documents setting the scene for ECPGR's Phase XI. In particular, the meeting discussed and suggested changes to the draft Tables of Priorities for Phase XI, with detailed proposed activities that could be prioritized for ECPGR funding. The draft revised 'ECPGR Terms of Reference for Operational Bodies and Mechanisms' were also commented on in the relevant sections for the Working Groups. These documents were eventually discussed and finalized by the Steering Committee in June, taking into consideration comments received from the Working Group Chairs.

The opportunity given to the Chairs to offer inputs prior to the Steering Committee meeting was appreciated with a recommendation to continue maintaining a similar approach of collaboration.

A meeting with Working Group Chairs and ExCo members was organized online by the Secretariat on 10 November 2023 to explain and discuss the Steering Committee's and Executive Committee's main decisions affecting Working Group operations in ECPGR's Phase XI. In particular, the new ECPGR Rules of Procedures and Terms of Reference for Operational Bodies and Mechanisms were explained. The meeting also covered how to access the new Grant Scheme Call. The recording is available [[here](#)].

The meeting provided an opportunity for Chairs to express their willingness to continue in this role in the upcoming phase. After several years serving as Working Group Chairs, Andreas Katsiotis, Greece (*Avena*), Ferdinando Branca, Italy (*Brassica*), Jelka Šuštar Vozlič, Slovenia (Leafy Vegetables) and Valeria Negri, Italy (On-farm Conservation and Management) expressed the will to step down in Phase XI, with the intention to identify new Chairs as soon as possible. Heartfelt thanks were given to Andreas, Ferdinando, Jelka and Valeria for their work and commitment!

Forages Working Group: in February 2023, Susanne Barth from Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Development Authority) – Crops Research Centre, Ireland, was appointed as the new Chair, supported by Evelin Willner (Leibniz Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research (IPK), Germany) and former Chair Anna Palmé (Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen), Sweden) as co-Chairs.

Solanaceae Working Group: in August 2023, Pasquale Tripodi from the Council for Agricultural Research and Economics (CREA), Italy was appointed as the new Chair.

See full lists of [Working Group members](#), [Working Group members by country](#) and [Working Group Chairs](#).

1.5. ACTIVITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (ExCo)

At the end of 2023, the ExCo was composed of Marianne Lefort (Chair), Petra Engel (Italy) replacing Benvindo Martins Maçãs (Portugal) as of 1 January 2023, Pavol Hauptvogel (Slovakia), Birgitte Lund (Denmark), Beate Schierscher (Switzerland), and Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat, *ex officio*).

The ExCo held five main meetings in 2023:

- Twenty-fifth meeting, 13 February 2023, online
- Meeting of Working Group Chairs and the Executive Committee, 8–9 March 2023, online
- Twenty-sixth meeting, 28 April 2023, online
- Twenty-seventh meeting, 11 May 2023, online
- Twenty-eighth meeting, 22 September and 19 October 2023, online

In 2023, the main activities of the ExCo were related to the following items:

- **Evaluation, selection and awarding of proposals submitted under the ECPGR Grant Scheme**
The revised proposal 'EURO-POTATOES' was approved under the Sixth Call of Phase X.
- **Requests from the Working Groups and National Programmes**
The ExCo evaluated and granted a proposal by the Cryopreservation Working Group to hold a meeting in May 2023 and later approved a proposal by the same group to organize a training workshop on dormant buds cryopreservation in 2024. They also evaluated a request from the Bulgarian genebank for ECPGR support for the regeneration of soybean accessions at risk of being lost due to loss of viability. There was no consensus to support this request at the time being and the opportunity to establish an ECPGR 'emergency fund' was then brought up for discussion at the Steering Committee level, but still considered inappropriate.
- **Preparation of the revised ECPGR Terms of Reference (ToRs)**
Three ExCo members including the Secretariat actively participated in the Task Force dedicated to the ECPGR Terms of Reference revision.
- **Consultation of Working Group Chairs in preparation for the End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting**
The ExCo participated in the Working Group Chairs online meeting (8–9 March 2023), discussing the draft Table for Priorities for Phase XI and the Terms of Reference of ECPGR, specifically those sections related to the Working Groups.
- **Preparation of End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting**
The ExCo finalized the meeting's agenda and the list of background documents to be prepared. Based on inputs from the Secretariat, they agreed on a proposed table of country contributions for Phase XI and a draft budget incremented by 10%, compared to the current phase. They also prepared a background document to discuss 'Support to European endangered collections: Potential responsibility and role of ECPGR'.
- **End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting (29 May–1 June 2023, Oeiras, Portugal)**
During the Steering Committee meeting, the ExCo members chaired various sessions and helped reach an agreement and draft the report.
- **Appointment of Working Group Chairs**
During 2023, the ExCo appointed new Chairs for the Forages and Solanaceae Working Groups. A procedure was established for the appointment of Chairs for Phase XI, based on the new ECPGR Terms of Reference.
- **Participation of Azerbaijan and Ukraine in ECPGR**
The ExCo agreed to suggest the Steering Committee write off an old outstanding debt of Azerbaijan and Ukraine to ECPGR, which was then accepted. This proposal was based on the

consideration that these two countries made very limited use of ECPGR funds during their past participation and this step would enable them to rejoin ECPGR during Phase XI.

- **Planning for the use of the budget line ‘Working Group Activities’ in 2024**

The ExCo agreed to continue assigning funds to the Working Groups through the existing mechanisms (‘Grant Scheme Calls’ and ‘Applications for Working Group meetings’) and decided to launch the first Call for proposals of Phase XI towards the end of 2023. A table was prepared, highlighting eligible activities for funding, based on established priorities.

2. ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN 2023

2.1. ECPGR ACTIVITY GRANT SCHEME

Note: for all activities, details on the implementation and all available documents (interim and final reports, complementary data, references etc.) can be found on the respective Activity webpages. The available final reports can also be found [here](#) (for Phase IX) and [here](#) (for Phase X).

Overall, 15 activities have been granted during Phase X. By the end of 2023, four had been concluded with an Activity report. During Phase IX, 31 activities had been granted and by the end of 2023, 27 had been concluded with an Activity report and 4 reports were still pending.

The status and/or outcomes of activities that were still ongoing or completed during 2023 are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Status of activities at the end of 2023

Working Group	Name of the Activity	Planned Activity Timeframe	Main information and outputs
<i>Allium</i> , Cryopreservation and Documentation and Information	Genotyping-by-sequencing of the European garlic collection to develop a sustainable <i>ex situ</i> conservation strategy (Garli-CCS)	April 2023- March 2025	Work towards a rationalization of the conservation of garlic in Europe, through systematic genotyping and a strategy for collaborative cryopreservation.
<i>Avena</i>	Updated morphological Descriptors for <i>Avena</i> Species (UMORPHEAS)	March 2020 – February 2022	Starting date was delayed until March 2022, due to COVID-19 restrictions. Partners made plans to update the IBPGR Oat descriptors, involving the widest possible global community. A core set of descriptors was tested in the field, starting from December 2022, with a selected number of diverse accessions. A second round of testing started in the end of 2023. The FAO-ITPGRFA Secretariat and the Canadian genebank curator also offered their expertise for this initiative.

Working Group	Name of the Activity	Planned Activity Timeframe	Main information and outputs
Berries	Collaborative action for updating the documenting about berry genetic resources in Europe (EUROPE.BERRIES)	January 2021 – June 2022 (extended to February 2023)	The final Activity report was published in May 2023 (here). Revision of the berries genetic resources inventories was completed and updates sent to partners for submission to the national focal points and inclusion of data into EURISCO. A first draft of crop-specific technical guidelines for genebank management of berry genetic resources was prepared. The results of the project were presented to the XXI International Horticultural Congress in Angers, France, August 2022.
Beta	Improving a cooperation network between actors involved in conservation and utilization of Beta genetic resources (BETANET)	December 2017 – November 2018	The final report is pending.
Brassica	Capturing Brassica Wild Relatives Diversity in South Eastern Europe (EUBRASWILD)	October 2020 – August 2023	Samples of several species of wild Brassicaceae were collected in Albania, Croatia, Italy, Serbia and Slovenia and populations were monitored. A summary paper of the collecting missions was submitted for publication in <i>Genetic Resources</i> . Field characterization was carried out in partners' fields. The final meeting was scheduled for February 2024 in Catania, Italy.
Cucurbits	Exploitation of Cucurbita local germplasm for sustainable agriculture (Cucurbitlocal)	February 2021 – January 2023 (extended to September 2023)	The final Activity report was in preparation at the end of 2023 and was published in March 2024 (here). Morphological characterization and regeneration of <i>Cucurbita</i> accessions was completed at IPK, Gatersleben, Germany (75 accessions), the University of Naples, Italy (12), and the Suceava genebank, Romania (20). A trial with two different irrigation treatments carried out both in Italy and Spain allowed the identification of potential drought-tolerant genotypes. Characterization was also carried out at CRRHAB, Tunisia (10) and UPV, Spain (13). Taxonomical characterization was done for all accessions at IPK and the AEGIS flagging was revised in Germany and Romania.
Documentation and Information	GRIN-Global Workshop 2021 for European Genebanks (GRIN-Global II)	September 2020 – February 2021	The final Activity report was published in 2023 (here). A workshop dedicated to countries with an interest in adopting GRIN-Global was organized in Prague, Czech Republic, 18–21 October 2022. An invited expert from USDA introduced the past, present, and future of GRIN-Global.

Working Group	Name of the Activity	Planned Activity Timeframe	Main information and outputs
Grain Legumes	Efficient management of resources for smart legumes utilization (SMARTLEG)	January 2017 – December 2017	The final Activity report was published in February 2023 (here). Collected accessions of <i>Phaseolus coccineus</i> from eight geographic origins were morphometrically evaluated (seeds) and genotyped using SSR molecular marker analysis. Under field conditions, morpho-agronomic traits showed differentiation between accessions even for standard varieties under geographically distinct field conditions. Overall results indicate a common origin of <i>P. coccineus</i> accessions from different collections within Central Europe; on the other hand, a high level of variability among accessions from the same geographic origin occurs.
Grain legumes	Lathyrus diversity: available resources with relevance to crop improvement – progress reviews and relationship with AEGIS (EUGrainLeg)	August 2018 – March 2021	The final Activity report was published in January 2023 (here). A panel consisting of 26 accessions of <i>Lathyrus</i> was grown in seven locations for phenotyping investigations (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, and Romania). Phenotypic data have been partially uploaded to EURISCO.
Grain Legumes	Exploring grain legumes diversity for sustainable European agri-food systems (Explo-Div)	March 2023 – November 2025	The kick-off meeting was held online in April 2023. The Activity intends to characterize and evaluate several accessions and species of grain legumes throughout Europe, aiming to feed EURISCO and AEGIS and to identify climate change resilient accessions.
Grain Legumes	Fostering the need for implementation of the ECPGR European Evaluation Network (EVA) on grain legumes (ForEVA)	March 2023 – April 2024	The project meeting took place in October 2023 in Bucharest, Romania. More than 50 project partners and other stakeholders made the preparatory steps towards the creation of a grain legumes EVA network. The EVA Legumes network will be working on seven priority legume crops: beans, chickpeas, fava beans, lentils, lupines, peas and orphan legumes. This Activity was supported by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture.
<i>Malus/Pyrus</i>	Building and promoting a European <i>Pyrus</i> collection – a case study (EcoHisPy)	January 2015 – December 2016	The Activity was completed and the final Activity report is pending. Sixteen SSR markers data have been produced and analyzed for 149 European historical pear accessions from 16 countries. One hundred thirty (130) different genotypes have been identified as well as 11 synonyms mostly within the country but also between countries. A catalogue of 112 European historical pear cultivars with fruit pictures, summarizing the main information on their history, main characteristics, qualities and different uses was produced and its publication is in preparation.

Working Group	Name of the Activity	Planned Activity Timeframe	Main information and outputs
<i>Malus/Pyrus</i>	Common ECPGR protocols and tools available for Characterization & Evaluation of <i>Malus/Pyrus</i> genetic resources (Pomefruit – C&E)	February 2017 – September 2019	The Activity report was published in May 2023 (here). The ECPGR <i>Characterization and Evaluation Descriptors for Apple and Pear Genetic Resources</i> were published in 2022. This Activity was supported by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture.
<i>Malus/Pyrus</i> and <i>Prunus</i>	Improvement of Fruit Tree Data Inclusion in EURISCO (FRUITTREEDATA)	January 2023 – December 2024	This Activity started in December 2023 and is planned to run for two years. Each partner committed to revising national inventory data in comparison with information currently in EURISCO and filling gaps in EURISCO for all the relevant accessions. Partners will also work towards the inclusion of available C&E data, following the EURISCO standards and procedures.
On-farm Conservation and Management and Wheat	Inventorying wheat on-farm diversity (Inwheatory)	October 2023 – November 2024	The Activity focuses on survey and inventory of wheat landraces across Europe, collection of on-farm case studies and analysis of genetic erosion.
Potatoes	Get Potatoes United – Collaboration Action for Updating the Virtual European Potato Collection (EURO-POTATOES)	March 2023 – January 2025	The first meeting was scheduled for February 2024 in Poland. The aim is the revitalization of the Potato Working Group, with improvement of the potato genetic resources inventories, with genotyping-aided identification of accessions suitable to become part of AEGIS.
Umbellifer crops	Improving the characterization and conservation of umbellifer crop wild relatives in Europe (CarrotDiverse)	February 2017 – September 2019	The Activity was concluded in 2019, but partners wished to carry out the final analysis of the data, input in EURISCO and prepare scientific publications. However, the pandemic caused some issues in terms of staffing and ability to carry out the final analyses. Field tests were carried out in three locations. Phenotypic data also can be matched with genotypic, biochemical and bio-assay disease resistance data obtained in the laboratory. Genetic data have shown clear clustering of the analyzed accessions into groups of common geographic or taxonomic origin. The bio-assays for disease resistance detected promising accessions affected by lower disease severity compared to the controls. New tests on germination protocols gave good indications of the possibility of improving germination of wild material. The final report remained pending. This Activity was supported by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture.
<i>Vitis</i>	Increasing the efficiency of conservation of <i>Vitis sylvestris</i> genetic resources in Europe (Sylvestris)	March 2023 – May 2024	An online kick-off meeting and a physical meeting in Greece were organized in 2023. The aim is to further expand knowledge on the occurrence and diversity of <i>Vitis sylvestris</i> in Europe and improve its <i>in situ</i> and <i>ex situ</i> conservation.

Working Group	Name of the Activity	Planned Activity Timeframe	Main information and outputs
Wheat	Training on identification of botanical varieties in <i>Triticum</i> species (Training in <i>Triticum</i> species: TTS)	July 2018 – September 2019	The workshop ‘Training on identification of botanical varieties in <i>Triticum</i> species’ was held on 17-19 September 2019 at the Research Institute of Plant Production, National Agricultural and Food Centre in Piešťany, Slovakia. Training focused on the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature, the taxonomy of wheat and the practical recognition of the main wheat taxa, including <i>Aegilops</i> and the diploid, tetraploid and hexaploid <i>Triticum</i> species. The final Activity report remained pending.
Wheat and On-farm Conservation and Management	Chances for the conservation and re-cultivation of central European club wheat (Binkel) through a nutritional and genetic differentiation towards other wheat species (Bi-Different)	January 2022 – December 2023	The Activity aimed to promote the conservation and re-cultivation of central European club wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i> subsp. <i>compactum</i>). Field tests of club wheat varieties were carried out at five locations in Italy, Austria, Germany and France. Bakery tests accompanied the field evaluations. Fingerprinting tests were carried out at JKI. The final Activity Report is expected in 2024.

2.2 WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

• Cryopreservation Working Group

The First meeting of the Cryopreservation Working Group was held in Prague, Czech Republic, 3–4 May 2023, organized with the Crop Research Institute and attended by representatives of 14 countries in presence.

The two co-Chairs Milos Faltus (Czech Republic) and Bart Panis (Belgium) explained the need to bring together experts on cryopreservation to share knowledge and information and offered an introduction to the main concepts and state of the art of plant cryopreservation. Among various observers, Dave Ellis, former genebank manager of the International Potato Center and now CGIAR consultant, offered an online presentation on the Global Plant Cryopreservation Initiative, advising on the need to create an efficient global network to ensure proper conservation for future generations.

All the Working Group members provided reports on the status of cryopreservation in their respective countries, including information on methodologies used, prioritized species, internal coordination, existing projects and main constraints and limitations.

The members were enthusiastic about the opportunity to operate as a group with enhanced opportunities to share knowledge, organize training, and develop standard protocols and strategies for increased collaboration. Networking and training were considered high-priority activities, considering that several members and countries are at the initial stages of developing their expertise in this field. More information is available [here](#).

2.3 AEGIS

2.3.1. AEGIS membership

In 2023, no additions were made to the number of countries or Associate Members of AEGIS, which remained at 35 Member Countries and 68 Associate Member agreements. A consolidated version of a Declaration of Intent prepared by France to enable its participation in AEGIS was circulated to the Steering Committee and was endorsed in February 2023 with minor changes. Unfortunately, the signature process was not completed by the French authorities during this year.

2.3.2. Status of the European Collection

By the end of December 2023, a total of 70,428 accessions from 21 contributors were part of the European Collection, with only a negligible increase compared to 2022. Owing to this slow progress, the ECPGR Steering Committee encouraged the Secretariat to increase its engagement towards the revitalization of AEGIS activities. As a first initiative, all the Associate member institutions will be contacted in 2024 to verify their level of compliance with the AEGIS principles and commitments and to solicit the provision and publication of genebank manuals and other protocols. The AEGIS activities will be closely connected with the ongoing preparation of the blueprint for a genebank certification scheme, which is happening as part of the PRO-GRACE project.

The composition of the European Collection at the end of 2023 is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The European Collection: breakdown by contributors

Contributor	No. of accessions flagged as AEGIS			
	by end 2020	by end 2021	by end 2022	by end of 2023
1. Albania	8	8	8	8
2. Belgium	0	0	2	2
3. Bosnia and Herzegovina	29	29	29	29
4. Bulgaria	341	391	391	391
5. Croatia	90	90	90	90
6. Czech Republic	1,659	1,682	1,682	1,695
7. Estonia	129	129	134	135
8. Germany	26,725	26,725	37,220	37,220
9. Italy	8,815	10,691	10,917	10,918
10. Latvia	27	27	27	27
11. Lithuania	45	45	45	45
12. Montenegro	31	31	31	31
13. The Netherlands	5,841	5,841	5,840	5,840
14. Nordic Countries	4,779	4,785	4,785	4,785
15. Poland	443	443	443	443
16. Portugal	86	86	86	86
17. Romania	732	752	752	752
18. Slovakia	640	640	640	640
19. Slovenia	0	19	21	21
20. Switzerland	5,611	5,611	5,611	5,611
21. United Kingdom	1,659	1,659	1,659	1,659
Total	57,690	59,684	70,413	70,428

2.3.3. AEGIS-related actions

Within the framework of the Horizon 2020 project AGENT (see below), a task led by CGN, the Netherlands, was completed with the organization of a third cycle of peer reviews, involving genebanks from the Netherlands, the Nordic Countries and the United Kingdom into reciprocal visits. The respective reports were published on the [AEGIS website](#). A fourth cycle of visits is planned for 2024.

Crop-specific standards for orthodox seeds were endorsed by the Forages Working Group and published on the AEGIS website ([here](#)).

2.4. EURISCO

Both the activity report for 2022 and the work plan for 2023 were made available online on the EURISCO website.

2.4.1 EURISCO coverage

In the course of 2023, 36 production updates of passport data from various National Inventories were performed, either partially or completely. Overall, this involved updating passport data for 535,225 accessions. The total number of accessions documented in EURISCO increased by 10,312 to 2,092,387.

In 2023, passport data on *in situ* CWR populations were integrated for the first time. They come from four countries that are part of the pilot group within the project 'Extension of EURISCO for Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) *in situ* data and preparation of pilot countries' data sets'. Data on 20 populations have been imported for Bulgaria, 66 for Germany, 1,912 for the Netherlands and 27 for Spain.

In 2023, the number of phenotypic records rose by 13,181 to a total of 2,729,780. In total, phenotypic data are available for 91,449 accessions from 21 countries.

	Progress in 2023	Countries that contributed to the progress
Documented accessions	+10,312	Several countries. In addition, passport data updates of > 535,000 accessions
Phenotypic data records	+13,181	France, Germany, Netherlands, Nordic Countries, United Kingdom

2.4.2 EURISCO development

Uploads of *ex situ* passport data and phenotypic data are initiated via the same web application. Various PL/SQL packages are used in the background for this purpose. Both the web application and the PL/SQL packages were continuously maintained and further developed. This concerns minor enhancements in terms of content, but in particular bug fixing. The revision of the upload mechanism for phenotypic data, which was completed in 2022, has proven to be very stable.

Building on initial work in 2022, the extension of EURISCO for *in situ* CWR data was continued in 2023. The focus here was on finalizing various PL/SQL packages for upload and data integrity checks as well as extensive testing of these. Procedures for the subsequent integration of the data into the EURISCO database schema were newly developed and also tested. The PL/SQL packages were then integrated into the intranet web interface for *in situ* CWR data. Based on feedback from *in situ* CWR data providers, extensions were made to the data standard. Once the tests in the development environment were completed, the *in situ* extension was rolled out in the production system. At the end of 2023, the first *in situ* CWR data from four countries were imported into EURISCO and made publicly available.

The public EURISCO web application was continuously maintained and further developed in 2023. In particular, the following enhancements were made:

- A subpage with a data dictionary was created to better explain the column headings used in the various reports in the application.
- An additional export mechanism was implemented to provide a full dump of the passport data in EURISCO as a CSV file. Previously, a full dump was only provided as a MS Access file.
- For each search possibility for passport data, additional filter options were implemented to limit the number of hits to those accessions for which phenotypic data is available.
- As the acceptance of Digital Object Identifiers (DOI) as permanent and unique identifiers for genebank accessions continues to grow, an additional search mechanism for DOIs has been implemented.

In order to make the data of the first *in situ* CWR populations imported into EURISCO searchable, work has begun on expanding the public web application. It is possible to search for all populations of an *in situ* National Inventory, for specific taxonomic terms or a combination thereof. Additional filters can be applied in a subsequent step using a faceted search. In addition, all previous features that search the entire EURISCO dataset, which includes the *in situ* CWR populations, can also be used. The accession details pages in EURISCO have also been extended to display the additional information.

The intranet infrastructure of EVA continued to be hosted after the project funding ended to enable the various EVA consortia to import their data. The EVA infrastructure will continue to be hosted in the future and adapted if required.

More details can be found in the EURISCO Annual Report 2023.

2.4.3 Information on EURISCO provided at national and international meetings

The EURISCO Coordination has made various efforts to raise awareness of EURISCO in the community through presentations and publications:

- At the BOLD WP1 workshop, which was jointly organized by CropTrust and IPK, three lectures were given on documentation and data management, which also covered aspects of EURISCO, 22–24 May 2023, Gatersleben, Germany.
- A presentation on the progress of EURISCO during ECPGR Phase X and prospects for Phase XI was given during the 17th Meeting of the ECPGR Steering Committee, 30 May–1 June 2023, Oeiras, Portugal.
- A presentation on the importance of information management for genetic resources conservation in genebanks was given at the GPZ workshop ‘Activating plant genetic resources in the crosshairs of plant breeding’, 5–6 July, Gatersleben, Germany.
- A talk on the FAIRness of European PGR information was given at the PRO-GRACE ‘International workshop on the sustainable management of plant genetic resources’, 3–4 October 2023, Chania, Greece. (Talk given by C.H. Aguilar)
- A presentation on phenotypic data in EURISCO was given at the kick-off meeting of the project ‘Improvement of Fruit Tree Data Inclusion in EURISCO (FRUITTREEDATA)’, 8 December 2023 (online).
- A presentation on *in situ* CWR populations in EURISCO was given at the final meeting of the project ‘Extension of EURISCO for Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) *in situ* data and preparation of pilot countries’ data sets’, 12 December 2023 (online).

- An article about EURISCO was published in the 2023 edition of the renowned database issue of *Nucleic Acids Research* (Kotni *et al.* 2023). This special issue is published once a year with articles on the most important databases in the field of life sciences.
- In addition, together with colleagues from the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the James Hutton Institute, among others, a book chapter on database solutions for genebanks and germplasm collections was written, in which EURISCO was also discussed (Shaw *et al.* 2023).
- The conservation of the rapeseed gene pool in European genebanks was analyzed on the basis of data from EURISCO and other sources. In addition to a gap analysis of accessions of the various species, this also included the use of a niche modelling approach to investigate how the natural distribution ranges of these species are expected to change by the end of the century, assuming different climate change scenarios (Weise *et al.* 2023).
- The EURISCO newsletter was distributed in December 2023. This is considered very important for providing feedback to the EURISCO users.

A EURISCO training workshop for National Inventory Focal Points took place from 12–14 September 2023 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. It was the first in-person training since the COVID pandemic and brought together 16 Focal Points who were briefed on the latest developments. The main emphasis of the training was put on the submission of passport and phenotypic data to EURISCO. The major focus in this context was on the preparation and uploading of data, in particular the quality and completeness of the data, but also on the data templates to be used and the uploading procedure. Practical exercises on uploading and testing data sets of the individual participants were carried out. In addition, the use of Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) as unique and stable identifiers for plant genetic resources and their support by EURISCO was discussed. The [report](#) of the training workshop is available from the ECPGR website.

2.4.4 Participation in EC projects

An indispensable task of the EURISCO coordination is to acquire additional funding for the future development of EURISCO. Fortunately, some of the corresponding project applications were approved.

Also in 2023, the EURISCO coordination participated in the ongoing Horizon 2020 project ‘Activated Genebank NeTwork’ (AGENT) (see Section 3).

In 2023, work started on the project ‘Promoting a Plant Genetic Resource Community for Europe’ (PRO-GRACE) (see Section 3). In this context, the EURISCO coordination is responsible for a work package focusing on an inventory of PGR-related systems and information standards.

2.4.5 EURISCO Data Sharing Agreement (DSA)

As of December 2023, the following 25 out of 43 countries have signed the EURISCO DSA, regulating the terms and conditions of data sharing between the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, on behalf of ECPGR, and the data provider countries: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, The Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden/Nordgen, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ukraine.

2.5 CROP WILD RELATIVES *IN SITU* DATA IN EURISCO

The ECPGR [project](#) 'Extension of EURISCO for Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) *in situ* data and preparation of pilot countries' data sets' was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, with a budget of €247,318 (December 2021–December 2023).

Most of the project objectives were reached at the end of 2023. The definition of the scope of the type of *in situ* CWR data that should be included in EURISCO, as well as the data exchange standard to be adopted at the ECPGR level, were completed early on, with the publication of the document *Principles for the Inclusion of CWR Data in EURISCO*. The document was endorsed by the project partners and the EURISCO Advisory Committee, also in consultation with the Secretariat of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). It also established a mechanism for data flow from national inventories to EURISCO, through CWR National Inventory Focal Points.

The EURISCO catalogue was prepared to host and make the *in situ* CWR data provided by the European countries publicly available. Newly nominated CWR National Focal Points started to dispatch their data to EURISCO via the provided Excel template. The group of pilot countries, which has increased from the initial number of seven to 11 (Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom), started to organize their internal data flow and data gathering mechanisms, as well as to prepare their *in situ* CWR data according to the standards and requirements defined in the project. A few countries have provided initial sets of data, which were being processed for publication by the EURISCO coordination.

By enabling the extension of EURISCO to *in situ* CWR population data, the project has endowed the European region with a previously missing mechanism to provide and display this type of data for the benefit of the plant genetic resources community, which will have an entry point to browse through the data of potentially available *in situ* CWR.

2.6. EUROPEAN EVALUATION NETWORK (EVA)

In 2023, the five crop-specific networks of the [ECPGR European Evaluation Network \(EVA\)](#), funded by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture with a total budget of €1,053,275.40, proceeded with their project activities following their network-specific work plans for the phenotypic and genotypic evaluation of crop accessions as well as analysis of the generated data.

An amendment to the current project granted by the donor in September 2023 provided an additional €51,549 dedicated to the expansion of EVA networks to legumes, additional experiments and effective data management.

The five EVA networks currently have 89 active partners operating in 33 countries and additional partners may join the existing networks for future evaluation cycles. The newly formed EVA Legumes network brings together more than 50 partners who will initiate implementation in 2024.

Annual in-person project meetings were held by three networks in 2023, with additional virtual meetings held by all networks to discuss, review and plan ongoing activities. Links to reports of the annual meetings are available in Section 4 of this report.

Some key indicators for the EVA networks in 2023 are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Key indicators for the EVA networks in 2023

EVA Network	Countries involved	Public partners	Private partners	Meetings held in 2023 ¹⁾	Trials planned in 2023	Accessions evaluated in 2023
EVA Wheat and Barley	25	22	22	4	149	2,901
EVA Carrot	8	6	8	4	0	0
EVA Lettuce	8	6	6	3	0	0
EVA Pepper	13	10	6	1	3	111
EVA Maize	9	11	8	4	20	453 ²⁾

¹⁾ Including annual and coordinating project meetings. Only the reports from annual meetings are made publicly available.

²⁾ Including original accessions and hybrid populations

Phenotypic evaluations and genotyping continued for the EVA Wheat and Barley, Pepper and Maize networks in 2023, while the EVA Carrot and Lettuce networks had finalized their trials for the time being. By the end of 2023, data from 364 trials have been uploaded to the EURISCO-EVA database, totalling 495,953 individual datapoints. Statistical analyses of available data commenced for all EVA networks. Additional seed multiplication was carried out in 2023 for EVA Wheat and Barley, Maize and Carrot.

Results of some EVA networks were presented in international meetings and resulted in two scientific publications by the EVA Carrot and Lettuce networks (Goritschnig *et al.* 2023; Tripodi *et al.* 2023). Another publication by the EVA Maize network was in preparation. A promotional video for EVA produced under the leadership of the ECPGR communications officer was released in early 2024.

The ECPGR Steering Committee, in its 17th meeting in Oeiras, Portugal (30 May–1 June 2023), agreed to include the EVA networks as a priority activity in the ECPGR work plan for Phase XI, guaranteeing funding for the EVA coordinator after the end of the current project until at least 2026.

Establishment of a new EVA Legumes network has progressed, building on the ECPGR Grant Scheme Activity ForEVA with an inception meeting and a survey among partners and stakeholders in late 2023 that will guide future activities. The EVA Legumes network will be implemented starting in 2024, involving more than 50 partners working in seven overlapping crop groups (bean, chickpea, lentil, fava bean, lupine, pea and orphan legumes).

3. LINKS WITH OTHER NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES

3.1. EUROPEAN COMMISSION-FUNDED PROJECTS

- [AGENT – \(Activated GENEbank NeTwork\) – A Coordination and Support Action on Establishing an innovative gene bank network \(2020–2025\)](#)

The project, coordinated by the Leibniz Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research (IPK), Gatersleben, Germany, includes ECPGR-relevant activities such as capacity building for genebanks, genebank reviews and an extension to the EVA Wheat and Barley network, providing a third set of accessions. AGENT aims to unlock the full potential of the biological material stored in genebanks around the globe by using FAIR international data standards and an open digital infrastructure for the management of plant genetic resources. The ECPGR Secretariat leads one work package (WP7), in which CGN the Netherlands is also coordinating genebank peer reviews and training workshops.

In-person genebank review visits were conducted in 2023 involving CGN (the Netherlands), the Millennium Seed Bank (UK) and NordGen (Sweden); review reports are available on the dedicated

AEGIS webpage¹. Several training events and datathons took place, aimed at building capacity of genebank curators using bioinformatics tools developed in the project. One thousand seven hundred (1,700) wheat and barley accessions from AGENT partners' collections were evaluated by the EVA Wheat and Barley network. During a farmers' field day organized by the NGO Rete Semi Rurali, the ECPGR secretary and EVA coordinator communicated on project activities and ECPGR initiatives.

- [PRO-GRACE - Promoting a Plant Genetic Resource Community for Europe \(2023–2025\)](#)

The PRO-GRACE (Promoting a Plant Genetic Resource Community for Europe) project, coordinated by Agenzia Nazionale per le Nuove Tecnologie, l'Energia e lo Sviluppo Economico Sostenibile (ENEA), Italy, aims at laying the foundations for a European Research Infrastructure (RI) dedicated to the conservation, management and study of European plant genetic resources.

ECPGR is coordinating WP5 of PRO-GRACE: 'Research Infrastructure concept, social and regulatory aspects, governance, and financial plan' and led the writing of the deliverable 5.2: 'Identification of the scientific services, stakeholders, promoters, and utilizers of the proposed RI (v1)'². All public deliverables are available on the project website, developed by ECPGR. ECPGR participated in the organization of the project meeting and the '[1st International Workshop and Training School](#) on the Sustainable Management of Plant Genetic Resources' held in Chania, Greece, from 3–6 October 2023, giving three oral presentations and co-leading an interactive hybrid workshop session which gathered stakeholder feedback for the development of the GRACE-RI. Additionally, ECPGR participated in several other work packages and deliverables, authoring and co-authoring seven deliverables in the first year of the project.

- [BRESOV – Breeding for Resilient, Efficient and Sustainable Organic Vegetable Production \(2018–2023\)](#)

The project, coordinated by the University of Catania, Italy, aimed to tackle the nutritional challenges of a growing world population and changing climatic conditions by enhancing the productivity of different vegetable crops in an organic and sustainable farming infrastructure. BRESOV worked on *Brassica*, snap bean and tomato. The project was concluded in April 2023 with a final conference held in Sicily, Italy. In this context, S. Goritschnig, as scientific advisor, participated in the final meeting, promoting ECPGR and EURISCO for the exploitation of generated results, resulting in the establishment of an EVA Legumes network through a Grant Scheme activity (ForEVA).

- [INCREASE – Intelligent Collections of Food Legumes Genetic Resources for European Agrofood Systems \(2020–2025\)](#)

The project, coordinated by Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy, aims to improve the sustainable use of plant genetic resources by enhancing the status of chickpea, common bean, lentil and lupin genetic resources. In 2023, linkages with this project were strengthened through the involvement of its partners in the ForEVA Grant Scheme Activity.

- [BreedingValue – Pre-breeding strategies for obtaining new resilient and added value berries \(2021–2024\)](#)

This project, coordinated by the Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy, focuses on berries (strawberry, raspberry and blueberry) to identify conserved germplasm appropriate for sustainable berry production throughout the EU. The project organized a workshop on genetic resources in March 2023. S. Goritschnig contributed with a presentation on the EVA experience exchanging genetic resources within public–private partnerships.

¹ <https://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/aegis/aquas/peer-visits>

² <https://www.grace-ri.eu/pro-grace/outputs/deliverables/identification-of-the-scientific-services-stakeholders-promoters-and-utilizers-of-the-proposed-ri-v1>

- [COUSIN – Crop Wild Relatives Utilization and Conservation for Sustainable Agriculture \(2024–2028\)](#)

This project, coordinated by the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain, involves 25 partners, including some members of the ECPGR Working Groups. The project was selected for funding under the HORIZON Call CL6-2023-BIODIV-01-13. COUSIN aims to demonstrate a roadmap for the use of CWRs in breeding and farming, working with five flagship crops: wheat, barley, pea, lettuce and brassicas.

- [BELIS - Breeding European Legumes for Increased Sustainability \(2023 – 2028\)](#) and [Legume Generation - Boosting innovation in breeding for the next generation of legume crops for Europe \(2023 – 2028\)](#)

These two projects, funded through the same Horizon Call, work on improving legume breeding activities and started their work in October 2023. The newly established EVA Legumes network will contribute to the projects' stakeholder engagement activities, involving also partners from both projects in the EVA network.

- EURO CWR

A project proposal for 'Conservation and Use of Crop Wild Relative Genetic Diversity to Sustain European Agriculture' (EURO-CWR), coordinated by the University of Birmingham, UK, was submitted to the EC for funding in March 2023, under the HORIZON Call CL6-2023-BIODIV-01-13. The ECPGR Secretariat was one of 43 partners, leading the dissemination, exploitation and communication work package and being involved in the evaluation of CWRs as part of the existing EVA networks, as well as a broker for the establishment of a regional *in situ* network. The project was unfortunately not selected for funding.

3.2. LIAISING WITH PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The ECPGR Secretariat continued to follow the **Crop Trust** initiative in support of the Ukrainian plant genetic resources programme, also attending online a specific meeting organized in June in Bonn. The expectation that Ukraine could join ECPGR with FAO support was reiterated. Exchange of information and dissemination took place regarding the global crop strategies, the FAO/Trust emergency funds eligibility conditions and the Global Crop Diversity Summit organized by the Trust in Berlin, Germany, in November 2023.

As a follow-up to the inter-networks collaboration undertaken during the implementation of the GenRes Bridge project, a Task Force with representatives of ECPGR and the European Regional Focal Point for Animal Genetic Resources (**ERFP**) continued brainstorming about ways and options to establish the European Coordination and Information Centre for conservation and sustainable use of agricultural genetic resources (ECIC). The Task Force held its third meeting online on 23 March 2023. An analysis of the existing legal framework was made by Szonja Csörgö, Euroseeds, and Jeanne Bormann, from the Administration of Technical Agricultural Services (ASTA). The Task Force agreed that the establishment of a Platform/Observatory as a loose structure to coordinate knowledge gathering and sharing activities on agricultural genetic resources at regional level could be a realistic first step towards the establishment of ECIC and the implementation of the Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe. The right steps to move in this direction were not immediately evident, but it was clear that political initiative from the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) and the Parliament would be necessary, based on a strong justification. A Council Conclusion or Resolution and a European Parliament recommendation would be the first necessary targets, to address with the new European Parliament in 2024.

Collaboration between ECPGR and ERFPP remained ongoing for the joint support of the *Genetic Resources* journal.

The Secretary continued in his role as a member of the **EUCARPIA** Genetic Resources section board. However, no activities went on in 2023. The novel genotyping panel developed by the EVA Lettuce network was presented at the EUCARPIA Leafy Vegetables Conference (28-31 August, Utrecht, the Netherlands)

All EUCARPIA conferences are publicized on the ECPGR website.

Within the framework of the MOU between ECPGR and **Euroseeds**, collaboration continued especially for the establishment of the new EVA network on grain legumes. Partnership with Euroseeds was also fruitful for the preparation of a joint project proposal (EURO CWR, see above) and in the implementation of the ongoing PRO-GRACE project, with shared tasks for the communication work package.

Nick Vangheluwe was welcomed as the new Euroseeds representative, succeeding Szonja Csörgő.

Within the framework of the MOU between ECPGR and the **FAO-ITPGRFA** Secretariat, the ECPGR Secretary attended the Fifth Meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on the Global Information System ([GLIS-SAC-5](#)) at FAO, Rome, Italy, May 2023. ECPGR Documentation and Information activities were presented. ECPGR Secretariat staff attended several side events during the Tenth Session of the Governing Body of the ITPGRFA, Rome, Italy, 20–24 November 2023, contributing to the discussions and connecting with several stakeholders on ECPGR issues. A Treaty representative (Mary Jane Ramos Dela Cruz) attended as observer the End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting in May/June 2023.

Within the framework of the AGENT project, ECPGR collaborated closely with the **NGO Rete Semi Rurali**, Italy, which was subcontracted for the multiplication and coordination of the evaluation of wheat and barley accessions by an organic farmers network across Italy. Secretariat staff presented its activities on the occasion of a field day open to visitors and farmers at the multiplication site of Peccioli, Tuscany.

In November 2023, the Secretariat organized a webinar for Steering Committee members featuring Riccardo Bocci, Rete Semi Rurali, who provided a brief on the process leading to the approval of the EU Regulation on Plant Reproductive Material (PRM). As an outcome of the webinar discussions, a statement was prepared by the Secretariat, Riccardo Bocci, Isabel Lopez Noriega (Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT) and François Meienberg (ProSpecieRara), highlighting the conflict of the new regulation with the ITPGRFA and the FAO Global Plan of Action, and suggesting an amendment to ensure the transfer of plant genetic resources is not affected by the new Regulation. The statement was signed by 24 Steering Committee members, sent to the DG Sante and submitted to the EC '[Have your say](#)' portal.

A smooth interaction with all the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT departments was maintained, receiving special support from the legal office regarding the EURISCO Data Sharing Agreement. Exchange of information on a reciprocal basis went on regarding opportunities for partnership in project proposals. The Alliance Policy Unit was involved in discussions related to clarifying aspects of the new EU Regulation on PRM. Participation of Josephine Luzon (Head of Business Operations and Finance - Europe Region) in the Steering Committee meeting was functional to reach an agreement on the continued hosting of the Secretariat by Bioversity International in Rome. An advanced draft hosting agreement for Phase XI was ready at the end of the year.

4. PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

4.1. PUBLICATIONS PRODUCED IN 2023

4.1.1. Administrative and operational documents

- ECPGR [Annual Progress Report 2022](#) and [Financial Report 2022](#)
- [ECPGR Network of European Genebank Managers - Terms of Reference](#)
- [ECPGR Rules of Procedures and Terms of Reference for Operational Bodies and Mechanisms - Phase XI](#)

4.1.2. Reports from ECPGR bodies

Executive Committee meeting minutes:

- [Twenty-fifth meeting](#), 13 February 2023, online
- [Twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh meetings](#), 28 April 2023 and 11 May 2023, online
- [Twenty-eighth meeting](#), 22 September and 19 October 2023, online
- [Meeting of the Working Group Chairs and the Executive Committee](#), 8–9 March 2023, online

Steering Committee:

- [Report of the Seventeenth \(End-of-Phase\) Meeting](#), 29 May–1 June 2023, Oeiras, Portugal

Task Force for the European Coordination and Information Centre for conservation and sustainable use of agricultural genetic resources (ECIC):

- Minutes of the third [ECIC meeting](#), 27 March 2023, online

4.1.3. Grant Scheme Activity reports and related data

- *Lathyrus* diversity: available resources with relevance to crop improvement – progress reviews and relationship with AEGIS ([EUGrainLeg](#)) – by C. Brezeanu *et al.*
- Efficient management of resources for smart legumes utilization ([SMARTLEG](#)) – by V. Meglič
- GRIN-Global Workshop 2022 for European Genebanks ([GRIN-Global II](#)) – by L. Papoušková
- Common ECPGR protocols and tools available for Characterization & Evaluation of *Malus/Pyrus* genetic resources ([Pomefruit C&E](#)) – by M. Lateur *et al.*

4.1.4 EURISCO

[Report of the EURISCO Training Workshop 2023](#) – by S. Weise

4.1.5 AEGIS

- [Forages crop-specific genebank standards for orthodox seeds](#) (agreed by the Forages Working Group, August 2023)
- [Operational genebank manual of the National Genebank of Bulgaria, Institute of Plant Genetic Resource 'K. Malkov'](#) (February 2023)

4.1.5. European Evaluation Network (EVA)

- [Report of the EVA Lettuce network annual meeting](#), 31 August–1 September 2023, Wageningen, the Netherlands

- [Report of the EVA Carrot network annual meeting](#), 2 October 2023, York, United Kingdom
- [Report of the EVA Maize network annual meeting](#), 28–29 November 2023, Montpellier, France

4.1.6. ECPGR Information Bulletin

The Bulletin was published in May (issue no. 27), September (no. 28) and December (no. 29). The Bulletin is distributed by email to all Steering Committee and Working Group members and is also available [online](#).

4.1.9. Genetic Resources Journal

The open-access journal *Genetic Resources* (www.genresj.org), launched in 2020 with financial support from the GenRes Bridge project, continued operation in 2023. The ECPGR Secretariat provides the editorial office of the journal, which is published by Bioversity International on behalf of ECPGR and ERFP, which has provided funding support to the journal in 2023.

The journal aims to disseminate global knowledge and tools used by the community of practitioners of plant and animal genetic resources involved in monitoring, collecting, maintaining, conserving, characterizing and using genetic resources for food, agriculture and forestry, welcoming contributions from all world regions. *Genetic Resources* is indexed in relevant open-access indexing services such as Scopus, CrossRef, DOAJ and Google Scholar.

In 2023, *Genetic Resources* published two regular issues 7 and 8, including 13 articles covering topics on animal and plant genetic resources as well as cross-cutting issues. The two issues are accessible here: <https://www.genresj.org/index.php/grj/issue/view/genresj.2023.7>
<https://www.genresj.org/index.php/grj/issue/view/genresj.2023.8>

Articles are further disseminated through the dedicated [Genetic Resources Twitter/X account](#). Usage statistics for the journal confirm a global readership and continued interest of genetic resources stakeholders in the journal. Manuscript submissions from ECPGR stakeholders are welcomed.

4.1.10. External publications with contribution from the Secretariat

Goritschnig S, Pagan P, Mallor C, Thabuis A, Chevalier J, Hägnefelt A, Bertolin N, Salgon S, Groenewegen M, Ingremeau A, Santillan Martinez M, Lehnert H, Keilwagen J, Burges T, Budahn H, Nothnagel T, Lopes V, Allender C, Huet S and Geoffriau E. (2023). Exploring European carrot diversity through public–private partnerships in EVA Carrot. *Acta Hort.* 1384, 63-70. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17660/ActaHortic.2023.1384.8>

Maggioni L. (2023) Cooperazione in Europa per la conservazione del germoplasma vegetale. Atti Seminario Nicolaj Vavilov: la storia e l’eredità, S. Angelo Lodigiano, Italy, 13 October 2023 [[link](#)]

Tripodi P, Beretta M, Peltier D, Kalfas I, Vasilikiotis C, Laidet A, Briand G, Aichholz C, Zollinger T, Treuren Rv, Scaglione D and **Goritschnig S** (2023) Development and application of Single Primer Enrichment Technology (SPET) SNP assay for population genomics analysis and candidate gene discovery in lettuce. *Front. Plant Sci.* 14:1252777. doi: [10.3389/fpls.2023.1252777](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpls.2023.1252777)

Kotni P, van Hintum T, **Maggioni L**, Oppermann M, **Weise S**, EURISCO update 2023: the European Search Catalogue for Plant Genetic Resources, a pillar for documentation of genebank material, *Nucleic Acids Research*, Volume 51, Issue D1, 6 January 2023, Pages D1465–D1469, <https://doi.org/10.1093/nar/gkac852>

4.2. OTHER PUBLIC AWARENESS PRODUCTS

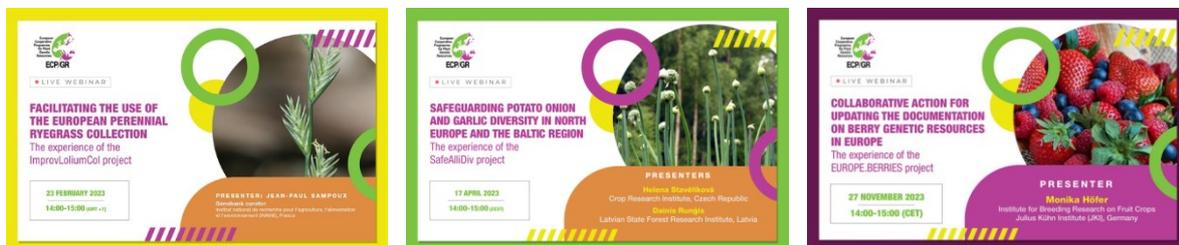


A new brochure '[ECPGR - Promoting conservation, management and sustainable use of plant genetic diversity in Europe](#)' summarizes ECPGR achievements and initiatives, and provides information on the next Phase XI. Developed by the Secretariat in consultation with the ExCo, it was distributed at meetings and events.

The Secretariat prepared a [press release](#) (posted on EurekAlert! – the news-release distribution platform operated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) as a resource for journalists and the public – and subsequently on the ECPGR website) on the paper published in *Frontiers in Plant Science* by the EVA Lettuce Network on the 'Development and application of Single Primer Enrichment Technology (SPET) SNP assay for population genomics analysis and candidate gene discovery in lettuce'.

A 4-minute [video](#) on the EVA Networks was prepared in 2023 and was released in early 2024. The video illustrates how the EVA Networks operate and highlights the crucial role of conserving, characterizing and evaluating plant genetic resources in fostering sustainable agriculture and enhancing climate resilience.

To increase the visibility of the Activities carried out under the Grant Scheme, a series of webinars was organized in 2023 for the ECPGR community. The webinars allowed the sharing of knowledge and ideas, and contributed to encouraging collaboration and improving communications among the different ECPGR bodies. All the webinar recordings are available on the ECPGR website on a dedicated [page](#).



New rollup banners highlighting the main ECPGR initiatives were developed to be used in meetings and events. More will be developed in 2024 and the layouts will be made available for download, should any national programme wish to print them for use at local events.



4.3. WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT AND UPDATES

In 2023, a major update of the ECPGR website content management system (CMS) (Typo3 9.5 LTS to 11.5 LTS) was undertaken to address security vulnerabilities, fix bugs, optimize performance and user experience, comply with standards, and maintain long-term support. Regular updates are crucial to maintain a website secure, reliable and aligned with the latest web technologies, and should be performed every 4-5 years.

In the CMS update process, which will be concluded in 2024, the ECPGR website domain will be changed from 'ecpgr.cgiar.org' to 'ecpgr.org'. The domain change will not affect users since the old URLs will automatically redirect to the new ones.

This adjustment was made in consideration of CGIAR's planned rebranding, which encompasses a name change. The purpose is to prevent any potential confusion regarding ECPGR being a CGIAR centre and to underscore ECPGR's status as an independent entity.

To align the ECPGR website with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a form was created and distributed to ECPGR's current members (approximately 1,000 individuals) for their consent to display their data on the website for participation in ECPGR activities. As of January 2024, approximately 500 members have granted consent. A follow-up will be conducted in 2024 to obtain consent from the remaining members.

4.4. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Approved by the Steering Committee in January 2020, a [Communication and Public Relations Strategy](#) was developed to help ECPGR optimize its resources and increase its effectiveness in communicating the crucial importance of plant genetic resource diversity for food security and sustainable agriculture. The

strategy outlines communication objectives, target audiences, key messages, activities, roles and resources in this regard.

In Phase X, major communication efforts went towards the preparation of the '[Tubilee video](#)' to celebrate ECPGR's 40th anniversary, and the development and uptake of the *Plant Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe* in the context of the GenResBridge project and beyond.

In Phase X, additional communication efforts included revitalizing the ECPGR brand. This involved creating comprehensive guidelines and a suite of coordinated materials to effectively communicate ECPGR's achievements and initiatives.

Looking ahead at Phase XI, the communication strategy framework remains robust. It is crucial to emphasize the pivotal role that all ECPGR entities – including National Coordinators, ExCo, Working Group Chairs and members – play in the success of such a strategy. It would be advisable to assess and align the actions outlined in the communication strategy with the evolving needs of Phase XI and the available resources, encompassing both funding and human resources.

4.5. PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

The Secretariat represented ECPGR in the meetings listed below, offering presentations and/or contributing to project planning and/or attending as observers.

- BRESOV final project meeting
- World pulses day 2024 – Pulses for a sustainable future, 10 February 2023, online
- AGENT Train-the-Trainer workshop, 8 March 2023, Gatersleben, Germany
- Breeding Value – Workshop on Genetic Resources, 15 March 2023, Dresden, Germany
- AGENT, 3rd Progress Meeting, 23–24 May 2022 Warsaw, Poland
- ISTA Seminar: From Biodiversity to Diversification: resources, tools and technologies to meet new challenges, 29 May 2023, Verona, Italy
- Cultivating diversity, 9–10 June 2023, Peccioli, Italy
- 6th Working Group Meeting of the CGIAR Germplasm Health Units, 28 August 2023, AGROINNOVA, University of Turin, Turin, Italy
- EUCARPIA Leafy Vegetable Conference, 28–31 August 2023, Utrecht, the Netherlands
- PRO-GRACE 1st International Workshop and Training School on the Sustainable Management of Plant Genetic Resources, 3–6 October 2023, Chania, Greece
- Nikolaj Vavilov, La storia e l'eredità, 13 October 2023, Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, Italy
- H2020 BELIS network project kickoff meeting, 17–18 October 2023 Ancis, France (online)
- 10th Session of the ITPGRFA Governing Body, 20–24 November 2023, Rome, Italy

5. ECPGR MEETINGS HELD IN 2023

5.1. GRANT SCHEME ACTIVITIES

- [Genotyping-by-sequencing of the European garlic collection to develop a sustainable *ex situ* conservation strategy \(Garli-CCS\)](#), First and second meeting, 10 March and 22 September 2023, online
- [Increasing the efficiency of conservation of *Vitis sylvestris* genetic resources in Europe \(Sylvestris\)](#), Kick-off meeting, 17 March 2023, online, second meeting 10–11 October 2023, Kavala, Greece and coordination meeting, 27 October 2023, online

- [Chances for the conservation and re-cultivation of central European club wheat \(Binkel\) through a nutritional and genetic differentiation towards other wheat species \(BiDifferent\)](#), mid-term meeting, 29–30 June 2023, Clermont-Ferrand, France and final workshop, 7 November 2023, Passau, Germany
- [Fostering the need for implementation of the ECPGR European Evaluation Network \(EVA\) on grain legumes \(ForEVA\)](#) project meeting, 10–11 October 2023, Bucharest, Romania
- [Capturing Brassica Wild Relatives Diversity in South Eastern Europe \(Eubraswild\)](#), coordination meeting, 17 November, 2023, online
- [Improvement of Fruit Tree Data Inclusion in EURISCO \(FRUITTREEDATA\)](#), Kick-off meeting, 8 December 2023, online

5.2. ECPGR BODIES

- [Twenty-fifth meeting](#) of the ECPGR Executive Committee, 13 February 2023, online
- [Meeting of the Working Groups' Chairs and the Executive Committee](#), 8–9 March 2023, online
- [Twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh meetings](#) of the ECPGR Executive Committee, 28 April and 11 May 2023, online
- [Seventeenth \(end-of-phase\) meeting](#) of the ECPGR Steering Committee, 30 May–2 June 2023, Oeiras, Portugal
- [Twenty-eighth meeting](#) of the ECPGR Executive Committee, 22 September and 19 October 2023, online

5.3. EUROPEAN EVALUATION NETWORK (EVA)

- [EVA Lettuce network annual meeting](#), 31 August to 1 September, Wageningen, the Netherlands
- [EVA Carrot network annual meeting](#), 2 October, York, United Kingdom
- [EVA Maize network annual meeting](#), 28–29 November, Montpellier, France

5.4. WORKING GROUPS

- Cryopreservation Working Group ([First meeting](#)), 3–4 May 2023, Prague, Czech Republic

5.5. EURISCO

- [EURISCO training 2023](#), 12–14 September 2023, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

5.6. OTHER GERMAN-FUNDED PROJECTS

- [Crop Wild Relatives in EURISCO](#) project meeting, 12 December 2023, online

5.7. GENE BANK MANAGERS NETWORK

- First meeting of the [Genebank Managers Network](#), online, 16 November 2023

6. COORDINATING SECRETARIAT

During 2023, the following staff employed by the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT have worked for the Coordinating Secretariat: Vanessa Bryant (half-time Administrative Assistant, January 2023 and September to December 2023); Nora Capozio (Specialist, editing and communications), Sandra Goritschnig (Scientific Officer – EVA coordination and editorial management of the *Genetic Resources* journal); Filippo Guzzon, (Research Specialist, joining the Secretariat team in July 2023, working on the Horizon project PRO-GRACE, as well as supporting the EVA coordination and the ECPGR communication activities), Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretary); Loredana Maria (Senior Administrative Assistant – assisting in all administrative and financial matters and website maintenance). Stephan Weise (IPK, Gatersleben, Germany) acted as EURISCO Coordinator.

The scientific and technical contributions, as well as management and administrative support provided by other staff from the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT and from IPK to the work of ECPGR, are duly acknowledged.



Lorenzo Maggioni
ECPGR Secretary

(with inputs from Nora Capozio, Sandra Goritschnig, Filippo Guzzon, Loredana Maria and Stephan Weise)

Rome, 30 June 2024

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