

MID-TERM REPORT ON **ECPGR PHASE XI** January 2024–April 2026



Prepared for the 18th Steering Committee meeting
1–4 June 2026, Tbilisi, Georgia

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1. Introduction

Phase XI of ECPGR (2024–2028) was launched at the [17th Steering Committee \(SC\) meeting](#), held in Oeiras, Portugal, in May–June 2023. This report, prepared for the 18th (Mid-Term) Steering Committee meeting, summarizes and complements the information provided in the ECPGR Annual Reports for 2024 and 2025 (see [Background Documents](#)).

The SC agreed in Oeiras that the proposed priority objectives of Phase XI align with the *Plant Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe* (PGR Strategy). A set of activities was also agreed upon, aimed at contributing to the achievement of the PGR Strategy targets. These activities were assigned priority levels from P1 to P3, agreed after several iterations involving the Secretariat, SC, Executive Committee (ExCo), and Working Group (WG) Chairs. The resulting Phase XI [Table of Priorities](#) served as the basis for orienting ECPGR activities during Phase XI, particularly in awarding WG proposals submitted under the Grant Scheme.

The revised ECPGR Phase XI *Rules of Procedure and Terms of Reference for Operational Bodies and Mechanisms* were also approved in Oeiras, with one of the main changes being the elimination of the country quota system. In Phase XI, ECPGR funds are distributed to the Working Groups upon submission of requests for WG meetings and through Grant Scheme Calls for proposals, which are periodically launched by the ECPGR Secretariat following ExCo instructions.

The ECPGR structure, as illustrated [here](#), continues to involve the Steering Committee, Executive Committee, Secretariat, and 24 Working Groups. A new Genebank Managers Network is associated with, but not funded by, ECPGR, according to its dedicated [Terms of Reference](#). The ECPGR initiatives (AEGIS, EURISCO, EVA, and the *Genetic Resources* journal) have been added as part of the structure, with dedicated budget lines established to guarantee their coordination and implementation.

A Hosting Agreement was concluded between Bioversity International and the ECPGR Steering Committee. This agreement regulates the relationship with the hosting institute, specifically defining the costs for hosting and the provision of services, and will remain in force until 31 December 2026. Renewal of this agreement is in preparation, and a new draft – essentially confirming the same arrangement until 31 December 2028 – is submitted for approval by the SC at its 18th meeting in Tbilisi.

A total budget of €3.11 million was agreed upon for Phase XI, with the envisaged participation of 38 countries, divided into 11 contribution categories. This starting budget was increased over the subsequent two years, reaching €4.86 million by the end of 2025, thanks to carryovers from past phases (€814,925) and voluntary contributions from Germany (€914,065) and the European Regional Focal Point on Animal Genetic Resources (ERFP) (€37,350), as detailed in the ECPGR 2025 Financial Report. Furthermore, the successful participation of the ECPGR Secretariat in Horizon projects (AGENT, Pro-GRACE, and COLIBRI) enables savings in staff costs, as some of these expenses are covered by European Commission (EC) funds.

This report provides an account of the implementation of Phase XI until April 2026. This period has been characterized by considerable activity and progress (notably through EC- and German-funded projects). The WGs have accessed available funds through the Grant Scheme and meeting requests, with a level of demand that remained compatible with the available offer.

Progress made toward the PGR Strategy targets and ECPGR priority activities – to the best knowledge of the Secretariat – is presented in the document entitled ‘*ECPGR Secretariat evaluation of progress in the implementation of the PGR Strategy targets and the corresponding ECPGR priorities (April 2026)*’ (see [Background Documents](#)).

2. Implementation of Phase XI

2.1 Participation of countries/memberships

Out of the 38 countries expected to participate in and contribute to Phase XI, Iceland decided not to join, while Italy did not clearly express its intention and did not contribute to this phase. Regarding Ukraine, after the Ukrainian government approved the national strategy for plant genetic resources in 2024, the decision to join ECPGR was pending at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.

2.2 Mode of operation in Phase XI

The mode of operation of the Working Groups for Phase XI continued to be based on the opportunity to request meetings with simple justifications and on the submission of proposals through the Grant Scheme, both of which were subject to approval by the ExCo.

WG Chairs were approached to verify their intention to continue in their role or to promote a change. New Chairs were appointed for the *Avena*, Barley, *Brassica*, Leafy Vegetables, and On-farm Conservation and Management WGs, while the Fibre Crops WG remained with a vacant Chair's position.

A [meeting of the WG Chairs and the Executive Committee](#), intended to facilitate inter-group coordination and discuss items in advance of the Steering Committee meeting, was held on 3–4 March 2026 in Aranjuez, Spain. A list of proposals was made by the Chairs and commented on by the ExCo. The *Summary of Chairs' Proposals with ExCo Annotations* is available among the [Background Documents](#).

2.3 Operation of the Executive Committee

Between 2024 and 2026, the Executive Committee (ExCo) formally met six times (either in person or online). Regular rotations took place for the members representing the West region (Germany replacing Switzerland in 2024), the North region (Latvia replacing Denmark in 2025), and the East region (Poland replacing Slovakia in 2026), while the South region has been represented by Italy since 2023. A new Chair (Jens Weibull) was appointed by the Steering Committee in 2024 when Marianne Lefort retired from this position.

The main activities of the ExCo were related to:

- Signature of the Hosting Agreement with Bioversity International
- Evaluation of proposals submitted under the Grant Scheme and of WG meeting proposals
- Appointment of WG Chairs
- Follow-up on Pro-GRACE project developments, in particular the role of ECPGR in a potential future GRACE Research Infrastructure (GRACE-RI)
- Participation in the Pro-GRACE policy symposium (27–28 June 2024, Brussels, Belgium)
- Preparation for and participation in the All-Chairs' meeting (3–4 March 2026, Aranjuez, Spain)
- Preparation of the Mid-Term Steering Committee meeting (1–4 June 2026, Tbilisi, Georgia)
- Preparation for the new Secretary recruitment and selection of the new Secretary in May 2026

(See also *Report from the ExCo on its activities during Phase XI*, presentation to be offered in Tbilisi, June 2026)

2.4 Operation of the Steering Committee

During the first part of Phase XI, the SC was directly involved in regular approval processes via the Steering Committee listserv, regarding:

- Endorsement of the Hosting Agreement between ECPGR and Bioversity International
- Approval of new ExCo members proposed each year for rotation
- Approval of delegation to the ExCo of the selection of the new Secretary

Through the same communication channel, the SC was kept informed about the ExCo's approval of Grant Scheme proposals; they regularly received ECPGR annual technical and financial reports; they were informed of developments regarding the ongoing negotiation by the EC bodies of the draft Regulation on Plant Propagating Material; and they were solicited to offer hosting for the Mid-Term SC meeting, which was eventually assigned to Georgia.

2.5 Secretariat staff

During the first part of Phase XI, the Secretariat maintained a stable staff organigram, with four permanent staff members: Lorenzo Maggioni (Secretary); Sandra Goritschnig (Scientific Officer – Horizon Projects coordination, EVA coordination, and editorial management of the *Genetic Resources* journal); Nora Capozio (Specialist, Editing and Communications); Loredana Maria (Senior Administrative Assistant). Temporary staff were also employed: Filippo Guzzon (Research Specialist) until May 2025; Vanessa Bryant (half-time Administrative Assistant) for five months in 2024 and five months in 2025. Stephan Weise (IPK, Gatersleben, Germany) acted as EURISCO Coordinator, in close coordination with the ECPGR Secretariat.

2.6 Implementation and follow-up on SC recommendations and decisions from the Seventeenth (End-of-Phase) meeting

- **Hosting arrangements**

The hosting arrangements for EURISCO and the ECPGR Secretariat remained the same as in the previous Phase X. These were formalized through a Hosting Agreement between ECPGR and Bioversity International (expiring 31 December 2026) and a Letter of Agreement between Bioversity and IPK, Gatersleben, for the continued hosting and development of the EURISCO information system (valid until 31 December 2028). The choice of the Hosting Institution for the ECPGR Secretariat will need to be reconsidered during the Mid-Term meeting in Tbilisi. The new hosting conditions are reflected in the renewed draft Hosting Agreement, which will be submitted to the SC. These conditions are essentially the same as before, with slightly reduced costs for facilities and IT services and unchanged overheads of 15%.

- **Table of Priorities for Phase XI**

The endorsed [Table of Priorities](#) was used as a reference to guide ECPGR activities, in particular to align the proposals submitted under the Grant Scheme. A slightly revised version of this table (see [Background Documents](#)) is proposed by the ExCo for endorsement by the SC at the Mid-Term meeting in Tbilisi. This version includes updated priorities.

- **Cryopreservation WG**

The [Cryopreservation WG](#), composed of 43 nominated members, continued its activities, in particular organizing a Training School on Dormant Bud Cryopreservation (Faenza, Italy, 21-23 May 2024), joint workshops with the *Allium* and the Documentation and Information WG as part of the Garli-CCS Activity (Prague, Czech Republic, 17-20 September 2024 and Gatersleben, Germany, 20-22 May 2025), and was granted in 2025 a project submitted under the Grant Scheme on 'A Regional Initiative for a Cross-Border Cryobank in the Western Balkans and the Caucasus – A case study based on a sample of fruit tree and grape local accessions (CryoConnect)'. At the upcoming Mid-Term meeting, the SC intends to evaluate the activities of the WG and to revisit the concerns previously expressed regarding maintaining its focus on Europe. For more details on the Garli-CCS and CryoConnect activities, see the ECPGR Annual Progress Report 2025.

- **Rules of procedures and terms of reference (ToRs) of ECPGR for Phase XI**

The ToRs approved in Oeiras were implemented in Phase XI. A proposal for changes of Rule of Procedure N. 2 was submitted by Germany and will be up for discussion in Tbilisi (see [Background Documents](#)).

- **ECPGR Network of European Genebank Managers**

This new self-funded network started its operations in 2024 and organized online and in-person meetings under the leadership of Lise Lykke Steffensen, NordGen, until May 2025. A new Chair, Dagmar Janovská, Czech Republic, was then elected and is continuing to lead the network, which counts 69 members. Its dedicated [web page](#) is maintained as part of the ECPGR website. The SC intends to review the ToRs and evaluate the progress of the network during the upcoming Mid-Term meeting in Tbilisi.

- **Phase XI budget**

As it is detailed in the ECPGR Financial Report 2025, the regular budget of Phase XI agreed in Oeiras, at €3,114,250, has been reduced by the missing contribution of Iceland, which decided not to join Phase XI. On the other hand, it has been increased by the carryover of past phases and voluntary contributions from Germany and ERFP, reaching €4,862,839. The budget is further complemented by additional funds from EC projects (not included in the ECPGR Financial Reports), which primarily enable reducing the staff costs charged to ECPGR. A revised Phase XI budget, taking into account budgetary developments since the meeting of 2023 in Oeiras, will be submitted for approval at the Mid-Term meeting.

- **Other issues**

A new ExCo Chair (Jens Weibull) was selected at the end of Phase X and started in his role in September 2024, replacing Marianne Lefort.

The ExCo and Secretariat undertook the procedures for the recruitment of a new ECPGR Secretary. The announcement for the position was published in March 2026, and interviews, lead by ExCo members, took place at the Bioversity International Headquarters in Rome in May 2026.

2.7 WG Activities – meetings

Seven WGs (*Allium*, Berries, Cryopreservation, Documentation and Information, Leafy Vegetables, Maize, and Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAP)) submitted requests to organize their WG meetings using the WG activities budget line. These were all approved for funding by the ExCo, except for the MAP WG, which was asked to resubmit the request with a better-focused agenda for the meeting. Accounts of the WG meetings that took place in 2024 and 2025 are provided in the respective ECPGR Annual Reports, while the Leafy Vegetables WG meeting is planned for later in 2026.

2.8 WG Activities – implementation of the Grant Scheme

Three Calls for proposals were launched during the first part of Phase XI. Eight proposals were submitted and six were awarded for a total of €205,097 involving eight WGs. A comparison is made in the table below, recording various statistics across the last three phases. The general trend shows a reduction in the average number of submitted and awarded proposals, even though the average budget assigned per proposal has doubled. One element that could partly explain the apparent reduced interest of the WGs in submitting proposals is the parallel engagement of several Working Groups in Horizon projects over the last five to eight years.

Phase	No. of Calls	No. of submitted proposals	Average submitted per Call	No. of awarded proposals	Average awarded per proposal	Total budget assigned	Average budget assigned per awarded proposal	Number of WGs involved
IX (2014-2018)	6	45	7.5	31	5.2	€517,838	€16,704	15
X (2019-2023)	6	21	3.5	15	2.5	€387,822	€25,855	15
XI (2024-2026)	3	8	2.7	6	2.0	€205,097	€34,183	8

Successful proposals of Phase XI are listed below. More details on their implementation are provided in the ECPGR Annual Progress Reports.

1. **Maize WG:** MALANIRS - MAize LANdraces traits phenomic prediction using Near InfraRed Spectra. September 2024 – September 2027 (€29,920). Coordinator: Stéphane Nicolas (France).
2. **Solanaceae WG:** EUROPEPLAND - Implementing a trans-EUROpean PEPper LANDrace collection for resilient agriculture. September 2024 – December 2026 (€29,947). Coordinator: Pasquale Tripodi, Italy.
3. **Cryopreservation WG:** CryoConnect - A Regional Initiative for a Cross-Border Cryobank in the Western Balkans and the Caucasus – A case study based on a sample of fruit tree and grape local accessions. June 2025 – May 2028 (€29,945). Coordinator: Tatjana Vujović, Serbia.
4. **On-farm Conservation and Management WG and Documentation and Information WG:** ABC Mediterranean Landraces – Annual & Biennial Crop Landraces Catalogue of Mediterranean Countries. September 2025 – August 2027 (€28,820). Coordinator: Lorenzo Raggi, Italy.
5. **Barley WG and Wheat WG:** ValoResWB - Multi-environment validation, mapping, and marker development for resistance to fungal diseases in barley and wheat. September 2026 – August 2028 (€56,438). Coordinator: Albrecht Serfling, Germany.
6. **Berries WG:** BerryTraits - Collaborative action for developing trait descriptors for berry genetic resources in Europe. May 2026 – April 2028 (€29,997). Coordinator: Tuuli Haikonen, Finland.

2. 9 EURISCO

2.9.1 EURISCO coverage

Between January 2024 and April 2026, the number of accessions documented in EURISCO increased by 30,651, reaching 2,123,038 from 43 National Inventories. Of these, 2,115,996 accessions were from 434 *ex situ* collections, and 7,042 populations were from 39 *in situ* crop wild relatives collections. In total, passport data of more than 1,610,000 accessions were updated. A large number of phenotypic data sets were validated and will be imported as soon as the infrastructure expansion is complete. Data statistics as of 30 April 2026 are given below:

	Totals in EURISCO as of 30 April 2026
Documented accessions	2,123,038
Phenotypic data records	2,792,589
DOI/PUIDs	316,095

2.9.2 EURISCO Advisory Committee

The fourth EURISCO Advisory Committee (AC) meeting took place on 20 September 2024 in Tallinn, Estonia. The AC agreed to explore stronger synergies with Genesys, recommending intensified dialogue to integrate Genesys features into EURISCO's branded web interface. Other discussions covered types of material and data to include, a potential online ordering system, and a solution for including phenotypic data of Single Seed Descent (SSD) lines not part of EURISCO. The encouragement for National Inventory Focal Points to assign DOIs to their accessions was reiterated.

2.9.3 EURISCO development

Due to a new software developer joining only in October 2024, development activities were initially limited. Maintenance continued for *ex situ*, *in situ*, and phenotypic data upload mechanisms, while the European Evaluation Network (EVA) infrastructure, including a DivBrowse instance for lettuce genotyping data, was hosted. Design, usability, and functionality improvements were explored. Following recommendations from the EURISCO AC meeting in September 2024 in Tallinn, Estonia, the public web application was completely redesigned from scratch using Oracle APEX to provide a uniform and user-friendly interface. The new portal features a fully functional home page with search bar, dynamic statistics, crop carousel, and news feed; an 'About' section with background information, documents, terms of use, and germplasm access guidance; search and visualization for both *ex situ* passport data (via Genesys REST APIs, supplemented by EURISCO's own APIs) and *in situ* crop wild relative (CWR) passport data (via dedicated EURISCO REST APIs). A more user-friendly phenotypic data exchange format was agreed upon, with redesigned management and search functionalities underway. The new EURISCO portal is expected to launch in 2026. Implementation of SSD accession handling was postponed, and integration of EVA data will begin once the revision of the phenotypic data update and storage mechanism is completed.

2.9.4 EURISCO Coordination, training and public awareness

The EURISCO Coordinator held an online training session in April 2024 for pilot countries in the context of the 'Crop wild relatives *in situ* data in EURISCO' project, and two presentations were given at the project meeting in Sadovo, Bulgaria, in June 2024. Additional training sessions for data providers were planned but deferred until after the completion of extensive revisions to the EURISCO infrastructure. The coordination team raised awareness through multiple presentations and publications.

2.9.5 Participation in project consortia

EURISCO participated in the Horizon 2020 project 'Activated Genebank NeTwork' (AGENT) until its conclusion in April 2025, playing a central role in managing data from European wheat and barley collections. The project served as a sandbox for expanding EURISCO, with particular focus on improving data FAIRness and evaluating solutions for linking traditional genebank data with genotyping data. To enable this, the EURISCO infrastructure will be expanded to link genotyping data in public repositories (e.g. EBI systems) to corresponding genebank accessions or derived SSD lines.

From January 2023 to October 2025, EURISCO also participated in the PRO-GRACE research project (Horizon Europe), focusing on information standards and the interaction of different information systems. An inventory of PGR-related data systems and standards was created to help prioritize actions toward a more integrated European PGR information system centred around EURISCO. Project partners were also supported in developing a demo application illustrating how EURISCO can link with external repositories for phenotypic data.

2.10 AEGIS

2.10.1 Coordination of AEGIS

Following a decision at the ECPGR SC meeting in June 2023 to allocate a dedicated budget line to AEGIS coordination, the ECPGR Secretary began dedicating approximately 20% of his time to this task. Initial efforts focused on verifying the validity of Associate Member Agreements with National Coordinators, including updating contact details and confirming members' intentions to meet commitments such as voluntary designation of accessions, increasing transparency through operational genebank manuals, striving for conservation standards and safety duplication, and using the SMTA for germplasm

distribution. Positive replies were received from most countries, confirming further engagement with AEGIS implementation. In a few cases, lack of progress was attributed to insufficient funds and staff resources or slow bureaucratic processes. In summer 2024, an opportunity arose to propose a dedicated AEGIS project (New AEGIS) to the German Ministry for Food and Agriculture, which was submitted in June 2024, approved, and ran from September 2024 to May 2025 with a total budget of €153,640. Subsequently, a follow-up proposal (AEGIS Plus) was submitted in September 2025 to the German Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity, approved with a start in November 2025, running until December 2026 and with a total budget of €175,076. These two projects partially cover staff costs of the ECPGR Secretariat (2024–2026) for a total of €56,444. The ECPGR Secretary’s coordination role mainly involved managing the German-funded New AEGIS and AEGIS Plus projects.

2.10.2 AEGIS membership and status of the European Collection

At the end of April 2026, a total of 120,574 accessions from 23 contributors were part of the European Collection.

During the first part of Phase XI, the European Collection has increased by 50,136 accessions (a 71% increase compared to the end of Phase X). During this period, two countries contributed for the first time (Austria and Hungary). The number of member countries remained stable at 35, while the associate member institutes’ agreements increased to 75 from 68 at the end of Phase X. The changes in the composition of the European Collection over the end of 2023 are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The European Collection: breakdown by contributors

Contributor	No. of accessions flagged as AEGIS		
	by end of 2023	by April 2026	Difference
1. Albania	8	698	+690
2. Austria	0	619	+619
3. Belgium	2	2	-
4. Bosnia and Herzegovina	29	29	-
5. Bulgaria	391	391	-
6. Croatia	90	90	-
7. Czech Republic	1,695	2,143	+448
8. Estonia	135	408	+73
9. Germany	37,220	83,896	+46,676
10. Hungary	0	559	+550
11. Italy	10,918	10,974	+56
12. Latvia	27	27	-
13. Lithuania	45	45	-
14. Montenegro	31	31	-
15. The Netherlands	5,840	5,838	-2
16. Nordic Countries	4,785	4,785	-
17. Poland	443	443	-
18. Portugal	86	92	+6
19. Romania	752	822	+70
20. Slovakia	640	1,381	+741
21. Slovenia	21	21	-
22. Switzerland	5,611	5,611	-
23. United Kingdom	1,659	1,659	-
Total	70,428	120,564	+50,136

2.10.3 Overall AEGIS improvements during Phase XI

Mainly thanks to the support of two projects funded by Germany (New AEGIS and AEGIS Plus), the following main improvements were achieved during the first part of Phase XI:

- The European Collection increased by 71%.
- Twenty-six operational genebank manuals were prepared for the first time or updated, bringing the total number of online available manuals to 35. Several manuals were analyzed by three experts, and suggestions for improvement were individually sent to the genebanks. The manual template was also analyzed, and a revised, more user-friendly version is in preparation.
- For the first time, Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) were made available online. After CGN (the Netherlands), the Romanian genebank, Suceava, the University of Pavia (Italy), and Isoplexis (Madeira, Portugal) also made their SOPs available.
- A few Associate Membership Agreements (AMAs) were withdrawn, while others were newly signed, bringing the total number to 75.
- Two new crop-specific standards were completed: berry crops and maize.
- Eleven genebanks were peer-reviewed during 2024–2025, and another 12 will be reviewed in 2026.
- A genebank metrics tool was tested and promoted, including through a hands-on workshop, across several genebanks. Its principles and operations were published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- Safety duplication support was provided, and eight institutions from seven countries have applied for funding.
- A questionnaire survey on the availability of AEGIS accessions found that the AEGIS designation has no significant influence on their availability or demand.
- Training and capacity-building workshops have been organized or are in preparation, including joint meetings with the genebank managers network in 2025 and 2026.

Even though the above list testifies to the dynamism and ongoing improvements of the AEGIS system, weaknesses also remain. For example, only an estimated 40% of the unique accessions held by AEGIS members have been flagged as part of AEGIS, and ECPGR countries such as France, Greece, North Macedonia, and Spain have not yet become members. Awareness of the AQUAS quality standards is steadily improving, but several genebanks have a large margin of improvement before their quality systems are perfectly upgraded. This may be one of the main reasons limiting the increase of the European Collection.

2.11 European Evaluation Network (EVA)

The ECPGR European Evaluation Network (EVA), now an ECPGR initiative with a dedicated regular budget, continued to expand, coordinating multi-location trials of genebank accessions across Europe. During Phase XI, membership grew from over 120 partners in 34 countries to 130 partners in 37 countries, with six crop-specific networks (Barley/Wheat, Carrot, Legumes, Lettuce, Maize, and Pepper).

The first EVA project, funded by Germany (budget: €1,053,275, covering 2019–2025), was finalized in March 2025. Its final report confirms results above expectations, having generated data on over 5,500 accessions through more than 450 trials. EVA is increasingly cited as a successful example of transnational public–private partnership, particularly valuable for niche crops and SMEs.

A second German-funded project, EVA Boost (budget: €353,740, running until 2027), supports the Legumes network and includes preparatory work for a perennial crops network. Additional activities are supported by ECPGR Grant Schemes. Networks are actively exploring further funding opportunities for follow-up activities.

Networks held annual in-person and virtual meetings to plan and review evaluations. By May 2026, the EURISCO-EVA database contained nearly 644,000 data points from 473 trials. In 2025, the focus shifted toward data exploitation and publication. A mechanism for transferring embargoed data to EURISCO remains under discussion. The Maize network has additionally introduced the Thalia DB

database, which aggregates genotyping data across multiple projects (including MALANIRS and MineLandDiv), complementing the EURISCO-EVA information system.

Crop Network Highlights

- **Wheat & Barley:** Finalized evaluations of SSD lines and on-farm organic trials. Building on preliminary results, the group developed the ValoResWB project under the Third Call for Grant Schemes, which will validate resistance phenotypes for priority diseases and advance promising lines toward genetic analyses and pre-breeding.
- **Carrot:** Focused on statistical analysis of phenotypic data. A new set of 50 carrot landraces from five genebanks has been defined and will be evaluated by breeding companies in field trials in 2026.
- **Lettuce:** Conducted additional genotyping and lab trials. Genotyping data from wild lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*) are being analyzed using the network-developed SPET assay, alongside *Bremia* resistance testing, enabling both genetic diversity analysis and association studies.
- **Pepper:** Expanded through the EuroPepLand Grant Scheme Activity, adding genotyping and abiotic stress trials. Genetic analyses will contribute to defining new accession sets for future multilocation field trials.
- **Maize:** Finalized evaluations of initial trial sets. A webinar presented the Thalia DB database, allowing consolidated analysis across projects. Follow-up activities continued under the MALANIRS Grant Scheme Activity.
- **Legumes:** Launched in 2024, conducted regenerations and field trials, including on-farm evaluations in Italy. Following the November 2025 meeting in Athens, all seven crop groups (common bean, chickpea, lentil, lupin, faba bean, pea, cowpea) finalized 2026 work plans. A LinkedIn call for partners successfully identified additional evaluation locations; between two and ten trials per crop will be conducted in 2026, including on-farm and controlled biotic stress trials.

Outreach included a promotional video, podcast, conference presentations, and academic publications (Maize network; EURISCO-EVA information system). Preparatory actions for a new EVA Perennials network were completed, including stakeholder mapping, a workshop, and a published roadmap. Activities across all networks continue through in-kind contributions, EVA Boost, and Grant Scheme Activities, with consortia actively pursuing additional funding.

2.12 Genetic Resources journal

The open-access journal Genetic Resources (www.genresj.org) continued its successful operation. Published by Bioversity International on behalf of ECPGR, which manages the editorial office, and ERFP, which provided funding support, the journal serves the global community of plant and animal genetic resources practitioners. It disseminates knowledge on monitoring, collecting, maintaining, conserving, characterizing, and using genetic resources for food, agriculture, and forestry, welcoming contributions from all world regions. The journal is indexed in Scopus, CrossRef, DOAJ, and Google Scholar.

In 2024, the journal published two regular issues (Vol. 5, Issues 9 and 10), containing 19 articles. A special issue on *ex situ* conservation of plant genetic resources in Europe was launched in mid-2024. In 2025, the journal published two full regular issues (Vol. 6, Issues 11 and 12) with 26 articles, plus the completed special issue featuring 16 original contributions, including genebank reports and review papers. In 2026, one regular issue was published so far (Vol.7, Issue 13) with 12 articles.

Usage statistics confirm growing global engagement. Unique visitors rose 24% in 2024 compared to 2023, and a further 47% in 2025, with total visits increasing 46% year-on-year. Articles were disseminated via ECPGR's LinkedIn account. Manuscript submissions from ECPGR stakeholders remain welcome.

2.13 Communication and public awareness

ECPGR significantly expanded its publication output and public engagement, reinforcing its role as a knowledge hub for plant genetic resources in Europe. The Secretariat actively contributed to peer-reviewed literature. External publications with Secretariat contributions covered diverse topics, including maize landrace evaluation, the EURISCO-EVA information system, wild *Brassica* diversity, European research infrastructure for PGR, genebank metrics, and integrated conservation approaches. Administrative and operational documents included the ECPGR Annual Progress Reports and Financial Reports for 2023, 2024 and 2025. Executive Committee meeting minutes (six meetings across 2024–2025) were published, along with Working Group reports on Cryopreservation, Documentation and Information, *Allium*, Berries, and a joint Maize/MALANIRS/EVA meeting. Several Grant Scheme Activity reports became available, covering projects on *Cucurbita*, wheat on-farm diversity, *Vitis sylvestris*, club wheat (*Binkel*), and grain legumes (ForEVA).

Under AEGIS, operational genebank manuals were published for 17 genebanks across Europe (nine in 2024, 17 in 2025), along with nine genebank peer review reports and two crop-specific genebank standards (Berries and Maize). The AEGIS corpus continued to expand into early 2026, with the final report of the *New AEGIS* project, a factsheet for the *AEGIS Plus* project, and a report from the *Workshop on Genebank Metrics* (Prague, February 2026) becoming available. The operational genebank manual for Tops Potato Propagation Centre (Ireland, December 2025) was also published.

The EVA network contributed multiple meeting reports, including the summary report of the EVA Boost Legumes Project Meeting (Athens, November 2025) and the final project report for the first EVA project (2019–2025), which summarized activities across wheat, barley, carrot, lettuce, pepper, and maize.

The ECPGR Information Bulletin was issued six times (three issues per year), distributed by email and available online. The ECPGR website successfully migrated to the independent domain ecpgr.org in early 2024, with no user disruption. In 2025, website metrics showed substantial growth: unique visitors rose by 28%, total visits by 27%, and pageviews by 14% compared to the previous year.

In September 2024, ECPGR launched a new LinkedIn page to better connect with science and policy communities, prompted by declining engagement on X/Twitter. By the end of 2025, the page reached 1,000 followers, primarily from research, higher education, biotechnology, and government administration. Consequently, ECPGR decided to discontinue its X accounts in 2025, focusing communication efforts on LinkedIn while exploring additional platforms such as Bluesky.

Other public awareness products included a promotional video on the EVA networks (reaching nearly 700 views by May 2026), a podcast audiobook explaining EVA Lettuce network research, a set of five ECPGR roll-up banners, and branded virtual backgrounds for online meetings. In 2025, additional materials were produced: an EVA Boost factsheet, an interactive brochure and video on the Crop Wild Relatives in EURISCO project, a New AEGIS brochure, and a flexible slide deck for National Coordinators. Two Grant Scheme webinars and one collaborative webinar with the Crop Trust were also organized.

In early 2026, a new introductory video was released to help incoming Working Group members get up to speed with ECPGR. The resource covers the organization's structure and governing bodies, the purpose and function of Working Groups, and the roles and responsibilities expected of their

members. Recent publications also include the final report of the ‘*In situ* Crop Wild Relatives in EURISCO’ project.

Finally, the Secretariat represented ECPGR at numerous international meetings in 2024 and 2025, including the AGENT project meetings, INCREASE annual meetings, EUCARPIA Congress, PRO-GRACE events, and various policy symposia across Europe. The first months of 2026 have seen continued activity, including a metrics workshop in Prague (February), a joint Working Group Chairs and ExCo meeting in Aranjuez, Spain (March), the 35th ExCo meeting (April 2026, online), a Genebank Managers Network meeting (April 2026, online), and the 18th Steering Committee Meeting (June 2026, Tbilisi, Georgia).

3. German-funded projects

The German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (formerly Ministry for Food and Agriculture) provided several voluntary contributions, in the form of bilateral agreements with Bioversity International, on behalf of the ECPGR Secretariat. These were conducive to advancing various aspects of the ECPGR objectives. A few agreements were already running during the previous Phase X and were completed in Phase XI. Others were newly established during Phase XI. All these agreements are briefly listed and summarized below, including their achievements and current status.

3.1 Implementation of EVA network on wheat, barley, vegetable crops and maize (EVA) (GenR 2019-2)

This project (July 2019–March 2025; €1,053,275) established the ECPGR European Evaluation Network (EVA), applying a public–private partnership to connect genebanks with breeders and generate standardized data on genebank accessions.

Over five years, the project grew to six crop-specific networks (wheat/barley, maize, carrot, lettuce, pepper, legumes), involving 125 partners from 37 countries.

Key results: wheat and barley evaluated over 3,500 accessions; maize conducted 90 trials on 612 accessions; carrot generated 1,500 datapoints per accession; lettuce developed a novel SPET genotyping assay; pepper identified promising disease resistance; and the legumes network launched in 2024. The project produced six peer-reviewed publications, videos, a podcast, and numerous presentations. Some 1,743 EVA accessions were flagged for the AEGIS European collection.

Challenges included data management complexity, genotyping costs, and the need for centralized regeneration funding. Phenotypic data transfer to EURISCO remains under development due to quality and procedural considerations.

The EVA model is now embedded in the European PGR Strategy and ECPGR Phase XI. All networks intend to continue, supported by in-kind contributions, new German funding (EVA Boost for legumes), and ECPGR Grant Scheme activities (EuroPepLand, MALANIRS). Future needs include dedicated funding for regeneration, genotyping, and pre-breeding to ensure sustainable continuation.

3.2 Extension of EURISCO for Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) *in situ* data and preparation of pilot countries’ data sets (GenR 2021-1)

This project (November 2021–June 2025; total budget €317,315) addressed the lack of systematic documentation of *in situ* Crop Wild Relative (CWR) populations in Europe, a gap hindering effective conservation aligned with the Convention on Biological Diversity and the ITPGRFA.

Initially funded at €247,318, two extensions allowed additional countries to join, ultimately engaging 17 nations. The project delivered four core outputs. First, the *Principles for the Inclusion of CWR Data in EURISCO* established standardized data requirements and a technical data flow mechanism. Second, EURISCO was extended with seven new database tables, an upload mechanism, and a public web

interface. Third, all 17 countries officially nominated *in situ* CWR National Inventory Focal Points. Fourth, participating countries uploaded standardized population data.

The 17 countries – Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom – contributed 19,212 *in situ* CWR population records to EURISCO. Progress was coordinated through dedicated meetings, including a pivotal in-person meeting in Sadovo, Bulgaria (June 2024), and supported by a project brochure, video, and web news items.

Challenges included varying national capacities and the need for coordination between agricultural and environmental authorities. Nevertheless, the project successfully established a permanent, standardized data flow mechanism for *in situ* CWR information across Europe, linking *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation efforts and advancing implementation of international commitments.

3.3 Reinforcement of the AEGIS Quality System and EURISCO data coverage (New AEGIS) (GenR 2024-1)

This project (September 2024–June 2025; total budget €153,649) strengthened the AEGIS quality system and EURISCO data coverage, addressing obstacles that had limited AEGIS's success. It aimed to improve transparency and capacity of AEGIS Associate Member genebanks through operational manuals, peer reviews, genebank metrics, and crop-specific standards, while also enhancing EURISCO with existing characterization data.

Key achievements: Overall, 22 operational genebank manuals were developed or finalized, and three experts analyzed 30 manuals, providing recommendations for improvement. Nine genebanks participated in reciprocal peer visits across three trios, with eight reports published. Three Working Groups advanced crop-specific standards, with Berries and Maize completed. A genebank metrics tool was tested by 15 genebanks, and a resulting manuscript was published in *Plant Genetic Resources*. Three genebanks provided English translations of their Standard Operating Procedures.

For EURISCO, phenotypic datasets were compiled from seven institutions across Albania, France, Italy, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia, covering maize, wheat, *Brassica*, tomato, grapevine, and hop accessions.

A final in-person meeting in Prague (May 2025), jointly with the annual meeting of the Genebank Managers Network, consolidated progress, discussing manual templates, metrics implementation, peer reviews, and safety duplication. Public awareness outputs included a project webpage, factsheet, news items, and LinkedIn posts.

The project revitalized the AEGIS network, enhancing genebank quality and transparency. While some objectives (SOP translations, crop standards) saw limited completion, the project successfully built a foundation for future quality improvements and integrated valuable phenotypic data into EURISCO, supporting climate adaptation and food security efforts. A remaining balance of €17,092 was returned to the donor.

3.4 Implementation of the ECPGR European Evaluation Network (EVA) on legumes and preparatory actions for the creation of a new network on perennial plants (berries and fruit trees) – EVA Boost (GenR 2024-2)

Building on the success of the first EVA project, the EVA Boost project (September 2024–December 2027; total budget: €353,740) supports two strategic objectives: implementing the EVA Legumes network and preparing for an EVA Perennials network.

EVA Legumes: Following the ForEVA Grant Scheme Activity, the legumes network was formally established with 39 partners from 20 countries, working across seven crop groups (chickpea, bean, faba bean, lentil, lupin, pea, orphan legumes). A cooperation agreement is in place, and a dedicated database was created within the EURISCO-EVA intranet. In 2025, regeneration activities were completed for six crop groups. Field trials were conducted on bean and chickpea accessions, with data from 15 trials

(8,553 data points) uploaded to the database. An Italian farmers' network (Rete Semi Rurali) initiated on-farm evaluations. An in-person project meeting in Athens (November 2025) reviewed the first results and finalized work plans for 2026–2027, with field trials planned for all seven crops.

EVA Perennials: A preparatory action successfully identified stakeholders, organized an in-person workshop in Ancona, Italy (March 2025), and developed a roadmap for establishing an EVA network for berries and fruit trees. Key priorities include sustainable funding, improved data sharing, and addressing material exchange challenges. Follow-up Horizon project proposals are under development.

Despite delays in project start, activities are on track. Future needs include completing regenerations, expanding NIRS and biotic stress trials, and securing long-term funding for perennial crop evaluations.

3.5 Reinforcing European *ex situ* conservation through AEGIS implementation and capacity building – AEGIS Plus (GenR 2025-1)

This project (November 2025–December 2026; €175,076) is a natural continuation of the New AEGIS project, aiming to reinforce European *ex situ* conservation by accelerating implementation of AEGIS principles among Associate Member genebanks.

A metrics tool integration workshop was held in Prague (February 2026) with participants from nine countries, plus advisors from the Crop Trust, to advance adoption of universal genebank metrics. An expert group is revising the operational genebank manual template.

Two technical hackathons will train up to 20 curators in practical workshops on germination testing, drying, etc., in late 2026. Safety duplication support will facilitate the transfer of up to 700 AEGIS accessions among genebanks in Albania, Austria, Cyprus, Lithuania, Portugal, and Slovenia.

Twelve genebanks will participate in reciprocal peer reviews across four trios, involving institutes from the Czech Republic, Serbia, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, Albania, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, and Portugal.

An accessibility desk study, led by the Centre for Genetic Resources, The Netherlands (CGN), analyzed distribution levels of AEGIS material through a questionnaire sent to 30 AEGIS Associate Members.

Communication outputs include a project factsheet, slide deck, news items, and social media posts. A final in-person dissemination meeting is planned jointly with the Genebank Managers Network in Poland (October 2026).

Expected impact is improved genebank quality and reliability, enhanced germplasm availability under the ITPGRFA, and preparation for future genebank certification.

4. Participation in Horizon Europe projects

The ECPGR Secretariat contributed as a partner to various consortia preparing project applications for funding under the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe work programmes. Three projects were successful, as listed below:

AGENT – (Activated Genebank NeTwork) – A Coordination and Support Action on Establishing an innovative gene bank network (2020–2025)

The AGENT project, coordinated by IPK and concluded in April 2025, aimed to unlock genebank potential using FAIR data standards and open digital infrastructure. ECPGR led the Innovation management work package, with CGN coordinating genebank peer reviews and training.

Key outputs include the AGENT data portal, where phenotypic data on nearly 80,000 wheat and barley accessions and genotypic data for almost 13,000 accessions are publicly available. The EVA Wheat and Barley network received a third set of AGENT accessions for further exploitation.

During the project, four cycles of genebank peer reviews involved 11 genebanks (2022–2024), including CREA-CI (Italy), Agroscope (Switzerland), and IHAR (Poland).

A final webinar series (February–March 2025) presented AGENT's bioinformatics tools, supporting genebanks in transitioning to bio-digital resource centres.

ECPGR mobilized a total budget of €276,825 from the European Commission, partially covering Secretariat staff costs.

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

PRO-GRACE, coordinated by ENEA, Italy, aimed to lay the foundations for a European Research Infrastructure (GRACE-RI) dedicated to plant genetic resources conservation and study. ECPGR coordinated Work Package 5, covering research infrastructure concept, governance, and financial planning.

In June 2024, a policy symposium in Brussels, co-organized with EMPHASIS-RI, raised awareness about GRACE-RI, with ECPGR presented as a potential foundation for the future infrastructure.

Partners developed an ESFRI proposal, but it did not secure sufficient political and financial support. ECPGR proposed that GRACE-RI could adopt ECPGR's existing governance framework, but this approach was not taken forward. The project concluded in October 2025 with a final meeting and the 2nd International Workshop on Plant Genetic Resources in Chania, Greece, followed by the first GRACE-RI General Assembly, where MAICH (Greece) was elected Chair.

ECPGR mobilized a total budget of €185,000 from the European Commission, partially covering Secretariat staff costs.

COLiBRI – Collaborative Crop Breeding Research and Innovation for a Green Europe (2026–2028)

COLiBRI, a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) recently approved under [Horizon Europe Cluster 6 – Farm2Fork \(HORIZON CL6 2025 02 FARM2FORK 09\)](#), and coordinated by the Julius Kühn-Institut (Germany), includes 17 partners from the plant breeding value chain, representing public research, private breeders, farmers, and policy actors.

The project, starting in June 2026, aims to strengthen Europe's plant breeding R&I ecosystem to address climate change, food security, biodiversity loss, and bioeconomy demands. It will assess current needs, gaps, and funding models, then co-create a European roadmap and implementation strategy for a collaborative European plant breeding R&I network. COLiBRI will also lay the groundwork for a long-term collaborative funding framework.

ECPGR will co-lead stakeholder engagement (with EPSO), organize one stakeholder workshop and contribute to integrating research and infrastructure needs into the roadmap, as well as developing the project website.

ECPGR has a budget of €241,000, partially covering Secretariat staff costs.

5. Liaising with partner organizations

5.1 ERFPP

Collaboration with the European Regional Focal Point for Animal Genetic Resources continued for the joint support of the *Genetic Resources* journal. ERFPP contributed in-kind through editorial support and an annual €10,000 contribution towards journal management costs.

5.2 EUCARPIA

The Secretary remained a member of the EUCARPIA Genetic Resources section board. The EVA project was presented at the EUCARPIA General Congress in Leipzig (August 2024). All EUCARPIA conferences are publicized on the ECPGR website.

5.3 Euroseeds

Partnership was especially fruitful under PRO-GRACE, including collaboration for the policy symposium in Brussels (June 2024). Euroseeds co-organized expert webinars on biodiversity regulation and IP protection. Collaboration continues in the COLIBRI project.

5.4 FAO

ECPGR and the FAO-ITPGRFA Secretariat worked towards renewing their MOU to formalize cooperation on the Multilateral System and sustainable use of PGRFA. In May 2025, a joint event at FAO Headquarters in Rome strengthened partnerships on information exchange. The Scientific Advisory Committee recommended close collaboration between the Global Information System and ECPGR on expanding the *in situ* section and publishing CWR data. ECPGR members also contributed to key FAO descriptors for peas, foxtail millet, and fonio millets published in 2025. ECPGR contributed to the *Third Report on the State of the World's PGRFA* (published March 2025).

5.5 NGOs (Arche Noah, Rete Semi Rurali, Fundación Entretantos, Let's Liberate Diversity)

A webinar on the EU Plant Reproductive Material Marketing Law Reform was organized (June 2024), providing an overview of negotiations and discussing critical issues for influencing national-level policy. Rete Semi Rurali has regularly facilitated partnership of farmers networks in the EVA trials and will represent Let's Liberate Diversity as observers in the ECPGR Steering Committee.

5.6 Crop Trust

The Secretariat organized a webinar on Global Conservation Strategies for Eggplant and *Capsicum* (June 2025) and participated in the 'Seeds for Tomorrow' workshop (September 2025), aimed at engaging the crop diversity community in IPBES assessments.

5.7 Alliance of Bioversity International & CIAT

A smooth interaction was maintained with all departments of the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, with special support received from Human Resources for the preparation of the terms of reference and the announcement for the recruitment of a new ECPGR Secretary in 2026.

6. PGR Strategy targets and ECPGR priorities – status of implementation

See in [Background Documents](#): 'ECPGR Secretariat evaluation of progress in the implementation of the PGR Strategy targets and the corresponding ECPGR priorities'.

7. Financial situation

See in [Background Documents](#): 'ECPGR Financial report 2025'

★★★

Lorenzo Maggioni
ECPGR Secretary

(with inputs from Nora Capozio, Sandra Goritschnig and Stephan Weise)

Rome, 6 May 2026

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