



Minutes of the 33rd ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

2 September 2025 (h 10:00-11:30)

Online (Teams)

Present:

Jens Weibull (Chair)
Imke Thormann (Germany)
Petra Engel (Italy)
Dainis Rungis (Latvia)
Pavol Hauptvogel (Slovakia)
Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

1. Mid-Term Steering Committee Meeting

The Committee initiated preparations for the Mid-Term Steering Committee meeting, scheduled for June 2026. To identify a suitable venue – logistically convenient, geopolitically stable, offering good geographical alternation from previous locations, and cost-effective – the Secretariat will solicit offers from Steering Committee (SC) members.

Regarding the meeting's content, the agenda will comprise a reporting session followed by a planning session. The reporting session will include:

- Technical and financial reports from the Secretariat, detailing progress on ECPGR priorities
- Standard reporting tables from all Working Groups
- Specific presentations on progress from EURISCO, EVA, AEGIS, the Genebank Managers Network, and on ECPGR's participation in Horizon projects

A key agenda item will be the potential renewal of the hosting arrangement with Bioversity International, based on a cost estimate for 2027–2028.

The planning session will focus on:

- Reviewing and updating current priorities
- Examining the Phase XI budget for potential revisions
- Discussing perspectives for Phase XII, with a view to mandating the Secretariat to prepare a draft budget for the next SC meeting.

Volunteers could be assigned, based on SC suggestions, to prepare strategic planning presentations. The ECPGR Secretary and Chair will prepare a draft agenda for review by the ExCo before circulation to the entire SC for comments.

2. Meeting of the Working Group Chairs

A meeting of the Working Group (WG) Chairs is planned for March 2026 (approximately three months prior to the SC meeting) to solicit their inputs for the SC. The Secretariat will seek offers from Chairs to host this meeting.

The ExCo recommended a two-day format:

- **Day 1:** Closed session for WG Chairs only

- **Day 2:** Joint session with ExCo members in attendance
- **Day 3:** ExCo to hold its own separate meeting.

A small group of Chairs will be asked to lead the preparation of the agenda and to share chairing duties during the meeting.

3. Grant Scheme – Launching a new call for proposals

Expenditures and commitments for ECPGR activities in 2024–2025 total approximately €164,800 (€118,600 allocated to four Grant Scheme proposals and €46,200 dedicated to meetings). The remaining budget for 2026 is therefore approximately **€141,300** (comprising the 2026 annual allocation of €102,000 plus €39,300 in unspent funds from previous years). This amount will be used to fund a Third Call for Proposals and any subsequent requests for WG meetings.

The Call will be launched in October 2025, with a submission deadline at the end of January 2026. The ExCo will evaluate the proposals during its March 2026 meeting. Proposals must address either Priority 1 (P1) or Priority 2 (P2) activities of the Phase XI work plan.

4. PRO-GRACE update

Jens Weibull reported that he had been invited to attend the final PRO-GRACE meeting in Crete in October 2026 as an ECPGR representative. He expressed hesitation in accepting, citing that ECPGR's suggestions for an appropriate role in a future GRACE Research Infrastructure (RI) had not been sufficiently considered. After consulting fellow National Coordinators and receiving little feedback, he maintained his position and, due to a prior commitment, will be unable to attend. He will therefore decline the invitation, noting that ECPGR will be represented by other project partners.

The Secretariat's Sandra Goritschnig will be mandated to speak on behalf of ECPGR, aligning with the principles she outlined at the AEGIS meeting in Prague (May 2025). The ECPGR position is to:

- Build on PRO-GRACE outputs to strengthen the implementation of ECPGR initiatives and the *Plant Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe*
- Engage in collaborative actions to better connect PGR conservation, research and breeding
- Enhance outreach to policymakers and the public to lobby for increased and stable PGR funding.

The PRO-GRACE initiative failed to secure the minimum number of country commitments and a coordinator, thus being unable to submit a proposal to the European Commission to establish the GRACE-RI. Despite this, the project coordinator is forming a new consortium to establish a voluntary RI, governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Research centres and other stakeholders that are signatories to this MoU will be able to attend the first General Assembly, which is planned during the meeting in Crete. ECPGR will not join the GRACE consortium, as it has thus far received only weak political support and no financial backing from EC countries.

5. Any other business

The ExCo member for the East region, Pavol Hauptvogel, will conclude his term at the end of 2025. Following his suggestions and a short consultation, the Committee agreed on a shortlist of potential candidates. The Chair will contact these candidates in order of preference to confirm their availability. A nominee will then be submitted to the Steering Committee for formal decision.

The Committee expressed its sincere gratitude to Pavol for his valuable commitment and service over the last four years.