



ECPGR Genebank Managers Network Meeting

Date: 16 April 2026
Time: 13:00–15:30 CEST
Format: Online (Teams)

Minutes

1. Welcome and opening of the meeting

Chairperson Dagmar Janovská (CARC) opened the meeting, welcomed participants, and introduced the agenda. She briefly recalled the role of the Genebank Managers Network (GMN) as a platform for exchange, cooperation and capacity building, with a strong focus on practical support for genebank managers.

2. Cybersecurity and Data Protection in Genebank Operations

Lene Krøl Andersen, Executive Director of NordGen, delivered a presentation on cybersecurity and data protection in genebank operations. She emphasized that genebanks are no longer only physical repositories of biological material, but also digital bioinfrastructures that depend on databases, documentation systems, cloud platforms, digital workflows and increasingly AI-related tools. For this reason, cybersecurity should be seen not merely as an IT issue, but as part of biodiversity protection and institutional responsibility. She highlighted risks such as data theft, ransomware, data manipulation, supply-chain vulnerabilities, model poisoning, and the growing gap between physical accessions and digital genetic information.

Lene explained that the regulatory environment increasingly affects genebanks, mentioning GDPR, national cybersecurity legislation related to the implementation of NIS2, the Cyber Resilience Act, the Data Act and the AI Act. She stressed that cybersecurity governance must be addressed at management and board level, and that genebanks need incident response procedures, infrastructure protection, secure backup systems, and stronger awareness of data sovereignty issues. NordGen's current approach includes an overall preparedness plan, gap analysis, updated IT policy, multi-factor authentication, multiple backup copies in different locations, network segmentation, vulnerability testing, security monitoring, staff awareness training, and work towards EU-based digital solutions.

In the discussion, participants agreed that cybersecurity is already a real issue for genebanks, not a future concern. Experiences of previous cyberattacks were shared, and the need for secure backup and stronger awareness across institutions was emphasized.

3. Nagoya Protocol and Digital Sequence Information (DSI): Implications for Genebanks

Eliška Rolfová, representing the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic and currently seconded to the European Commission, presented an overview of the Nagoya Protocol, the EU ABS Regulation, and recent developments concerning DSI. She explained that the relevant legal framework includes the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Nagoya Protocol, Regulation (EU) No 511/2014, the implementing regulation, and national legislation. She summarized the three main pillars of the Nagoya Protocol: access to genetic resources, benefit-sharing, and compliance by users. She also pointed participants to the ABS Clearing-House as the key source of information on national rules and procedures.

Eliška then explained the scope of the EU ABS Regulation and the due diligence steps expected from users: checking whether ABS measures apply, obtaining permits and PIC/MAT where necessary, keeping documentation, using material in accordance with the agreed conditions, transferring material together with relevant information, and making due diligence declarations where applicable. She clarified that collection holders as such do not have direct obligations under the EU legislation unless the same institution also utilises the material for research, or unless material is distributed to users who then need the relevant documentation. She therefore recommended that genebanks keep and transfer available documentation and establish clear internal procedures at institutional level. She also noted the ongoing evaluation of the Nagoya Protocol and the EU ABS Regulation in 2026–2027.

In the section on DSI, Eliška explained that the CBD has established a multilateral mechanism and the Cali Fund to address benefit-sharing from digital sequence information. The current model is aimed at large companies in sectors benefiting from DSI, while public research institutions, academic institutions and public databases are not targeted for monetary contributions. They are, however, expected to continue non-monetary benefit-sharing, provide information on origin where available, and support principles such as TRUST, FAIR and CARE. She also stressed that DSI is being handled separately from the bilateral ABS system used for physical genetic resources.

In the discussion, several participants stressed the importance of keeping access conditions simple for genebanks and users. The use of the SMTA was discussed as a practical tool for facilitating the distribution of plant genetic resources, and its possible use for non-Annex I material was also mentioned.

4. Follow-up actions and next steps

Dagmar informed participants about the Meeting of Working Group Chairs and Executive Committee held in Aranjuez in March 2026. GMN was presented there as a network supporting better genebank management, cooperation, capacity building and exchange of experience.

She also referred to PRO-GRACE as an important initiative that created strong foundations for future cooperation, even though the planned research infrastructure step was not achieved. In this context, she introduced the 2026 COST Open Call as a possible practical way forward for networking, training, knowledge exchange and capacity building. She stressed that one common COST Action would be preferable to parallel competing proposals.

Dagmar presented AEGIS Plus as an important current initiative funded by the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity and coordinated by the ECPGR Secretariat. Its main aims are improving operational quality, strengthening genebank capacity, and enhancing accessibility and impact. Planned activities include the metrics tool integration workshop, a revised operational manual

template, technical hackathons, safety duplication support, peer-review visits, and a desk study on the accessibility and distribution of AEGIS accessions.

Dagmar and Lorenzo also highlighted the planned AEGIS Plus technical hackathons. These are intended as hands-on workshops for curators on practical operational topics such as germination testing, drying procedures, and seed handling and sampling routines. Lorenzo confirmed that funding is available through the project for travel, local costs and compensation for trainers, but host genebanks and trainers still need to be identified. Participants were invited to express interest in volunteering as host genebanks, and Dagmar proposed the end of April 2026 as the deadline for offers.

5. Planning of the next GMN physical meeting

Dagmar announced that the next physical GMN meeting will take place in Poland in November 2026, together with the final AEGIS Plus meeting. The exact date will be confirmed later. Funding support is expected for a limited number of participants through AEGIS Plus.

Lorenzo clarified that, in line with the usual GMN model, support can be provided for AEGIS Associate Members through AEGIS Plus resources, with funding expected for about 28 participants. Countries not participating in AEGIS, such as Spain or France unless their status changes, would normally attend on a self-funded basis. Maja Boczkowska, as the host, welcomed the group and briefly informed participants about the practical arrangements, including accommodation in Warsaw and transport to the institute.

6. Closing

Dagmar thanked all participants for attending and for the fruitful discussion. She gave special thanks to the invited speakers, Lene Krøl Andersen and Eliška Rolfová, for presenting on topics that were considered highly relevant for present and future genebank management. The meeting was then closed.