

Preamble to the proposed Terms of Reference for an ECPGR Network of European Genebank Managers

A proposal to establish a network of European genebank managers was made during the 16th Steering Committee (SC) meeting in Sweden (June 2022), with the aim to better connect people with this function and focus on their specific area of work. No decision was taken in this regard during the meeting in Sweden, but subsequently, the Executive Committee (ExCo) decided to verify with the SC, via email, whether there was support for the establishment of this network. A possible starting point was identified as an ad hoc meeting of genebank managers, organized by an ad hoc Chair (*Lise Lykke Steffensen, NordGen Director*), based on a proposed agenda, and with the support of the Secretariat. This body could then possibly evolve into a more stable entity (either a *sui generis* 'network of genebank managers', with Terms of Reference (ToRs) to be defined, or a Working Group (WG) on genebank management, following the same format and rules of the other thematic WGs.

A message to seek opinions was sent in August 2022 by the Secretariat to the Steering Committee, with a deadline of 15 September 2022 for comments.

A few National Coordinators (NC) explicitly supported the establishment of the genebank managers network. Lise Lykke Steffensen kindly agreed to act as 'ad hoc Chair' and thus she was invited to start preparing a draft agenda and a proposal for a meeting of genebank curators.

Eventually, it was not possible to organize this meeting before the SC meeting of June 2023, but Lise Lykke had several interactions with a group of genebank managers from different European subregions, brainstorming for the definition of the ToRs for the new network. Draft ToRs were then also discussed with the Secretariat and the ExCo Chair.

Part of the discussion focused on the difference between establishing a regular thematic WG on genebank management, that would follow the rules and mode of operation of all the other WGs, as defined by the new ECPGR Terms of Reference, versus establishing something different, i.e. a 'Genebanks network'.

Based on the feedback gathered by Lise Lykke, the ToRs of a regular ECPGR WG would not fit with the requirements of the newly proposed entity, principally considering the expectation to regularly meet (physically once a year and virtually more often) as well as to maintain high flexibility in terms of participation of various experts. These aspects would clash with the rules established for the operation of the existing 24 WGs, which are not expected to meet too frequently, for mainly budgetary reasons, and also with the demanding coordination effort that would be required from the Secretariat in supporting a rather dynamic network (organization of meetings, reporting requirements, follow up of implementation decisions).

As a possible solution for establishing a dynamic network, with frequent meetings and relatively intense coordination without excessively affecting the ECPGR budget and coordination workload of the Secretariat, it is proposed that the 'ECPGR Network of European Genebank Managers' be established as a largely self-funded service, with coordination offered in-kind by a delegated institution on behalf of ECPGR on a rotational basis (NordGen offered to be the first coordinating institution).

Therefore, the Network would operate based on its specific Terms of Reference, available below.

A strong link with ECPGR would be guaranteed by the following provisions:

- Nominations of the Network members to be made by ECPGR National Coordinators
- Self-sustained approach to be complemented by ECPGR funding support for participation in physical meetings of country members belonging to categories A and B countries of the ECPGR contributors, up to an upper limit to be defined by the SC as part of the ECPGR Budget for Phase XI
- Reporting duties to the SC (via the ECPGR Secretariat) about progress and decisions
- Possibility for the Network to apply for additional ECPGR funding for capacity building or other activities
- Approval of the Network's Terms of Reference by the ECPGR Steering Committee.

The ToRs of the ECPGR Network of European Genebank Managers presented in this document are submitted to the Steering Committee for discussion and possible endorsement.

ECPGR

Network of European Genebank Managers

Terms of Reference

Background

The idea of establishing a Network for European Genebank Managers was proposed during the Steering Committee (SC) meeting in June 2022, with the aim to better connect people with this function and focus on their specific area of work. Establishing the Network would strengthen the cooperation among leaders of genebanks in Europe.

In 2022, the ECPGR SC gave its support for the establishment of this Network. It is the aim that the Network of European Genebank Managers shall be a long-term entity which these ToRs are defining.

Objectives

The establishment of the European Genebank Managers Network has the overall aim to strengthen the management of genebanks through the exchange of knowledge, cooperation and capacity building of genebanks, including the various aspects of leading and managing a genebank.

Scope

The Network will focus on management and leadership issues of relevance for improving genebanks and their management. This will be done through exchanging experiences and ideas; learning from each other to obtain efficient and high-quality systems of plant genetic resources conservation and utilization.

The Network will share and exchange ideas and experiences, demonstrate each other's methodology, and support and find synergies when possible. Further, the Network can contribute to inputs and developments of various policies and initiatives to strengthen the conservation and utilization of plant genetic resources in genebanks.

The Network will not cover topics already covered by the ECPGR Working Groups or the EVA Networks.

Topics

The Network will decide on which topics and activities it want to use its time and resources within its mandate. The below list of topics is therefore for inspiration and not exhaustive:

- Professional topics such as facilitation of AEGIS and AQUAS, development of a Genebank Quality Certification System and management of genebank collections, e.g. developments of a genebank manual; databases, conservation techniques and new developments etc.
- Leadership topics such as the development of strategies, change management, digitalization, security back-ups, fundraising, working with a Board etc.
- Management topics such as people management, capacity building, optimization of techniques and work streams, genebank methodology, sourcing etc.
- Policy issues, e.g. promoting the implementation of national and regional conservation strategies through sharing of knowledge and experience, promoting the implementation of relevant aspects of the Plant Genetic Resource Strategy for Europe, etc
- Support, help and back up each other in case of challenges and problems
- Support to solve practical problems at genebanks within the scope of ECPGR and provide guidance for other European countries' genebanks, which are beyond the scope of ECPGR.
- When relevant, support and interact with the ECPGR Working Groups.

Meetings

The Network should meet at least once a year for a 1–2-day meeting at the premises of a European genebank. The Network should strive for 1–3 digital meetings each year.

The preparation and meeting location should rotate among the participating institutions.

The Network will, well in advance of each calendar year, plan topics and dates for next year's in-person meeting and digital meetings.

Funding

The Network shall seek to be as self-funded as possible. ECPGR can provide complementary funding for the organization and participants of category A and B ECPGR contributors, based on the available budget, and is mobilized by the Secretariat upon request of the Network Chair.

The Genebank Network may apply for additional ECPGR funding, such as for capacity building or other activities by submitting proposals to the Steering Committee.

Working methods

The approach at the meetings will be to gain as much shared knowledge as possible within the objectives of the Network.

The in-person meeting will be co-organized by the Network Chair and the host of the meeting. The digital meetings will also be co-organized between the Network Chair and members of the Network.

The agenda and meeting documents will be circulated at least three weeks in advance of the network meeting. Minutes will be circulated not later than seven working days after a Network meeting.

Subgroups can be formed for the preparation of any relevant topic for the Network.

Members and participation in meetings

Network members are nominated by the ECPGR National Coordinators, indicating one contact person per country who should be heading and/or managing a public genebank in Europe.

Normally, only one person from each country should attend the in-person meetings. To allow for maximal benefit from the available expertise in the European Region, the Network Chair can invite additional experts.

The Network should seek to have members from as many ECPGR member countries as possible. However, to make the in-person meetings manageable these meetings should strive to be limited to a maximum of 35 persons. The final list of participants in each in-person meeting is defined by the Chair, based on the nominations made by National Coordinators, the level of contribution that participants can offer to each specific meeting and the need to maintain the size of the meeting within the limit of 35 participants, for the meeting to be effective and manageable.

All members can attend the virtual meetings.

Role of the Chair and the Vice-Chair

The role of the Chair is the following:

1. Formulate the meeting's agenda in consultation with the network members
2. Chair the Network meetings
3. Oversee the implementation of the Network work plan
4. Provide information to the Network members on ECPGR events
5. Encourage the involvement of all Network members
6. Be proactive in proposing activities for the Network

7. Contribute to the coordination of the Network
8. If needed, define the list of participants for each meeting
9. Three months in advance of the Steering Committee (SC) meetings, provide the ECPGR Secretary with a status report on progress made
10. The Vice-Chair has a supporting function in the implementation of the Chair's tasks and in preparing the minutes from the Network meetings.

Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair

The Network selects a Chair among its members. The Chair is selected at the end of an in-person Network meeting, and they exercise their role for two years until the next election.

The selection of the Chair is made by consensus. In case of lack of consensus, a majority vote by secret ballot is organized by the Vice-Chair. Only regular Network members attending the meeting have the right to vote. In case of resignation of the Chair at any time during their term, the Vice-Chair will act as an 'interim' Chair. The selected 'interim' Chair leads the Network until the next regular election.

The Chair selects the Vice-Chair amongst the Network members and seeks the consensus of the Network members on their choice.

Amendment, modification or variation

These Terms of Reference may be amended, varied or modified in writing after consultation with and agreement by the Steering Committee.

Term

This Terms of Reference is effective from 1 June 2023.