

Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPoW) for the period 2024 – 2027

The core activities of the European Regional Focal Point (ERFP) for Animal Genetic Resources (AnGR) for the period 2024-2027 are defined in this Multi-Year Programme of Work. This MYPoW is the follow up of the 2019-2023 MYPoW and considers the outcomes and orientations from the 3 ERFP Working Groups (WG), specific Task Forces (TF) and Ad Hoc Actions (AHA) from the previous period.

The publication of the Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe (EGRS) in 2021, the establishment of the Animal Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe that was validated and released by the ERFP General Assembly, and the establishment of the European Union Reference Centre on Endangered Animal Breeds (EURC-EAB) by the EU Commission, active from 1 January 2023 are all highly relevant events that preceded the development of this MYPoW.

Therefore, the key recommendations and associated actions of the Animal Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe (AnGRSE) and the significant accomplishments and policies related to AnGR that have occurred lately are considered for this MYPoW.

This MYPoW is developed under the ERFP Terms of Reference which describes the mission, vision, objectives, and operational structures of ERFP.

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1 Improving the effectiveness of the ERFP

1.1 Further development of the ERFP Secretariat

The Secretariat plays a central role in the functioning of the regional platform and network. Since its establishment ERFP has worked with a rotating Secretariat, the Assembly electing a new Secretariat every 4 years. Based on the outcome of a SWOT analysis in 2018 and the TF about the Permanent Secretariat, the ERFP assessed the pros and cons of setting up a permanent ERFP Secretariat in the future, to further improve the functioning and effectiveness of ERFP with the possible budget implications and suggested longer hosting period.

France through IDELE Institute was re-elected for a second term as Secretariat for the period 1st of January 2023 until 31st of December 2026. IDELE is also part of the consortium of the EURC-EAB.

The AnGRSE highlights the importance of the designation of an EURC-EAB and the close link between ERFP and the EURC-EAB. Synergies and collaboration between ERFP and EURC-EAB should be further developed, and in this context the hosting and positioning of the ERFP Secretariat should also be considered.

1.2 Involvement of the National Coordinators

As a regional network, the ERFP development relies on the strong involvement of its members, i.e. the National Coordinators and other experts. Therefore, the accomplishment of the MYPow will depend on their active participation.

NCs play an important role in strengthening their national network and can involve any relevant national institution or organisation in further development of national AnGR strategies and in the implementation of the FAO Global Plan of Action at national level.

Their work is important for monitoring AnGR, updating information in DADIS/EFABIS and collecting relevant information to analyse the situation and evolution of AnGR at national level for the elaboration of FAO reports on the state of the world's animal genetic resources for food and agriculture.

Moreover, NCs can take responsibility to implement the action plan associated with the AnGRSE, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders at national and European level.

To take advantage of exchange of knowledge and experiences between countries, all NCs will be encouraged to nominate experts to the ERFP Working Groups (WGs), and to propose specific *Ad hoc* actions.

Also, it is important for the ERFP network to maintain a strong connection with the EC Standing Committee on Zootechnics (if NC is not the representative), in relation to the work programme of the newly established EURC-EAB as it is relevant the collaboration between ERFP and EURC-EAB on tasks of mutual interest, in the context of the AnGRSE.

Countries, that are currently not or less active in the ERFP framework, will be encouraged and supported to intensify their collaboration. There will be special efforts, with the help of FAO, to reach countries with no officially appointed NC or less reachable NC. Members of the Steering Committee are specifically targeted to help with this task.

ERFP will also determine in more detail what the expectations of different stakeholders and actors are with the support of the NCs work and EURC-EAB, to take them on board in the implementation of the action plan associated with the AnGRSE.

1.3 Funding

All European countries will be encouraged to financially support ERFP and hence contribute to the ERFP activities.

The budget allocated to the various activities should be used in a cost-efficient way and justified according to the ERFP reimbursement rules.

The Steering Committee will revisit regularly the ERFP Reimbursement rules and the ERFP Voting and Election procedures in the context of the ERFP annual budget and the state of individual country contributions on an annual basis.

The use of virtual meeting tools will be promoted to improve the attendance on the meetings and to reduce costs and carbon emissions.

1.4 GenRes Bridge and AnGR strategy for Europe: Action plans

An overarching EGRS, bolstered by individual strategies for plant, animal, and forest genetic resources, was launched on 30 November 2021 in Brussels.

The EGRS is a product of GenRes Bridge project, a coordination and support action funded under the EU Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, involving 17 partner organizations representing a wide range of actors including the 3 European programmes on plant, forest, and animal genetic resources. As the result, the three domain-specific strategies for plant, animal and forest genetic resources were prepared by the three European genetic resources programs for plant, forest, and animals.

In parallel, the AnGRSE sets out a roadmap with several chapters and 32 key recommendations (KR) to improve the conservation and sustainable use of livestock diversity. It was developed by an ERFP *ad hoc* action group with input from NC and WG experts.

Implementation of an Action Plan will operationalise the proposed KR of the AnGRSE, in the next years at national and European level involving relevant actors.

Several KR and actions are directly connected to ERFP competences and included in the ERFP MYPow. However, the level of fulfilment of the KR will depend on the level of adoption, commitment and support from the Governments, National Coordinators, European Institutions, and other involved actors that should provide the financial, human, and institutional resources required to fully execute the action plan.

2 Networking and communication

The main objective of ERFP network is to serve as the regional platform to support the *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation and sustainable use of AnGR. Information sharing, communication, and coordination of activities among NCs and other experts within the ERFP network involving a wide range of stakeholders, as well as enhancing awareness of the roles and values of AnGR, are key activities of ERFP and its Secretariat.

Recommendations from the ERFP SWOT analysis (2018) are still valid and proposed actions will be continued and extended in the new MYPow. In addition, the designation of the EURC-EAB will also influence the communication and networking of ERFP. The following networking and communication activities will be prioritized:

- Further develop and strengthen the ERFP communication strategy and enhance the interest of the NCs to use already available tools and modules of the new website and social networks.
- Encourage annual and regular reporting of NCs on national news, providing information for the country pages on the website, an ERFP newsletter or any other forms (such as social networks) with the support of Secretariat.
- Strong communication and connection to EURC-EAB activities.
- Increase the level of actions to give more visibility to ERFP and to raise awareness of the AnGR values.

2.1 The ERFP communication tools

The ERFP website is a platform for the exchange of information within the ERFP network. It contains an overview of the objectives and activities of ERFP and its different bodies. Reports of ERFP meetings and other events related to AnGR in Europe are published on the website. The contact data of the National Coordinators will be updated regularly with the support of FAO.

In addition, the website should be used in the way that NCs inform the ERFP Secretariat about important developments in their countries and information is uploaded on the website and in the newsletters.

The ERFP newsletter is also an important tool to disseminate and to exchange information. It informs about ERFP activities and news in the field of AnGR in Europe. A modernized way to create and distribute the newsletter based on the website contents will be implemented. Reports from projects, events or other activities could be published as well as information about important developments at the national and EU level.

The Genetic Resources Journal and the Gateway created in the GenResBridge project are also important communication tools as mentioned in the next section that will be assessed to plan about their continuation in the future.

2.2 European communication on Genetic Resources

The EGRS and follow up actions have had a positive impact on exchange of information, documentation, and communication actions about AnGR as well as further strengthening of the ERFP specific activities.

The decision to continue *Genetic Resources* journal for the future in its current form, providing free publication and access to relevant literature, must be assessed in the framework of the future strategies according to the results and level of interest.

The GenRes Bridge project also launched a Genetic Resources Gateway, a crowd-sourced platform serving as the entry point to the landscape of forest, plant, and animal genetic resources in Europe.

The Gateway was an important milestone in the project, aiming at generating tools and user-oriented services to ease navigation through the digital genetic resources landscape. It could be a useful repository for users of genetic resources, from which they can access a large diversity of data and media scattered over many different sources.

This Gateway is officially online since May 2021 and its future maintenance has to be assessed.

A specific Task Force has been set composed by ERFP and ECPGR members to step forward the future European Coordination and Information Centre (legal basis and points of common interest related to the global strategy).

2.3 Follow-up of AnGR projects

The ERFP will give specific attention to the follow up of relevant European AnGR related projects in the framework of Horizon Europe program for research and innovation and will take part as adviser in some of them.

Where relevant ERFP will develop follow up action plans to make sure that the contents and tools developed by those projects are or will become available to the AnGR community once the projects have ended. Specific attention will be given to the outcomes of the previous EU DG AGRI Preparatory Action, IMAGE and GenRes Bridge, and more specifically to the dissemination of new tools and best practices, and to the sustainability of databases and portals.

ERFP will foster collaboration and partnerships in research and innovation across countries, including through Horizon Europe and EIP instruments by promoting R&D related to conservation and sustainable use of AnGR.

2.4 Collaboration with other European AnGR networks and organisations

The ERFP will maintain an appropriate liaison with relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations and other European networks in the same field, in particular the European Federation of Animal Sciences (EAAP), through its Animal Genetic Resources Working Group, the European Commission (EC) and the EURC EAB, the SAVE Network (Safeguarding Agricultural Varieties in Europe), the European Forum of Farm Animal Breeders (EFFAB), other regional European genetic resources networks such as The Nordic Genetic Resource Centre (NordGen), the International Association for the Conservation of Animal Breeds in the Danubian Region, (DAGENE), ProSpecieRara, Rare Breeds International (RBI) and any other relevant organisation, network and project.

ERFP foster collaboration and connection with the FAO representatives and other European networks for plant and forest genetic resources as the outcome of the GRSE and to deal with the common interest the TF/AHA can be established to address the specific common issue.

ERFP will identify, connect, and try to engage the breeding sector and all other relevant actors, stakeholders, and institutions in the implementation of the AnGR strategy for Europe according to their roles.

These liaisons will be implemented through targeted invitations to the ERFP WG meetings, the General Assembly, and other specific meetings organised by ERFP as well as attending their meetings. During the period of the MyPOW, specific efforts will be made to develop joint activities with the key networks in Europe and overall, with the EURC EAB.

2.5 Exchange of information about national activities

National activities related to AnGR published in national reports or reports from projects will be circulated among National Coordinators and other stakeholders of the ERFP. When such reports exist only in the country language, efforts should be done to provide an English abstract. The ERFP website provides the opportunity for such publications, and information can be further disseminated through newsletters and social media.

National Coordinators will inform the ERFP Secretariat about important or interesting activities in their countries and success stories. The ERFP Secretariat will circulate this information through the mailing list and/or upload it on the ERFP website.

3 Support for international processes in the field of AnGR

The ERFP will review the main international, European and national policies and instruments, with direct or indirect impact on AnGR, in particular the FAO's GPA for AnGR, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to identify needs and improve the integration of conservation and sustainable use of AnGR into relevant national and regional policies and regulations.

3.1 FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

ERFP will facilitate the coordination of European statements and contributions from European countries to the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and ITWG-AnGR session, as well as the actions orientated to the achievements to SDGs.

The ERFP network of National Coordinators plays an important role in preparing for Intergovernmental technical working group for AnGR at FAO.

The FAO, after the last assessment of the state of implementation of the GPA, strongly recommends strengthening the institutional frameworks for the management of AnGR and have released many documents, publications, and guidelines of interest.

The ERFP members will support FAO effort to implement GPA and to prepare the third world report of the state of AnGR. The ERFP network will review and prepare inputs to the GPA AnGR in advance of the 21st session of the CGRFA in 2026/2027 where the GPA AnGR will be reviewed. The ERFP Secretariat is in a permanent contact with the FAO.

Information about important issues and FAO activities will be exchanged within the ERFP network. A bilateral meeting between the ERFP Steering Committee and the FAO staff takes place once a year. These meetings are used to discuss important issues related to the collaboration between the ERFP and the FAO and how FAO and ERFP can help individual countries on implementation of the Global Plan of Action (GPA).

3.2 CBD and the Nagoya Protocol on ABS

The Nagoya Protocol adopted in October 2010 provides a legal framework for regulating access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their use in research

and development. Compliance and user control in the EU are subject to common rules laid down in Regulation (EU) No 511/2014 (EU ABS Regulation).

ERFP Secretariat and all relevant WG will continue to collaborate with ABS policy experts in order to inform NCs about international policy developments on ABS and about the EU ABS Guidance documents for Animal Breeding and for Research/Collections (material transfer/acquisition agreements for genebanks, accessing/acquiring genetic material), also about Digital Sequence Information issues and if needed, the ERFP TF on ABS could be reactivated.

3.3 EU policies and regulations

The ERFP Secretariat and the Steering Committee, will follow and inform NCs about developments related to EU policies with impact on AnGR, mainly the implementation of the EU Animal Breeding Regulation 2016/1012.

The EU Animal Breeding Regulation creates a legal basis for setting up the Reference Centres for AnGR, not only for genetic evaluation but also for endangered breeds (Art. 29 and Annex IV). This Centres and specifically the EURC EAB can enable harmonisation of the methods used by breed societies for the management of endangered breeds, and provide training, cooperation and support to all involved institutions and actors.

The work of this reference centre, a Consortium already appointed by the EC, will be crucial for the future coordinated activities with ERFP and harmonisation of the management and sustainable use of AnGR.

The EURC EAB is therefore a central element of the future AnGR strategy since many of its key recommendations lie within the centre's designated and ERFP tasks. ERFP has to discuss and agree with EURC EAB the way to channel communication and implement activities.

Other European policies, strategies and initiatives that play a role in the further development of AnGR management that will be overseen by ERFP like the Community Agricultural Policy and the European Green Deal with the Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies.; The EU Research framework program and European Innovation Partnerships is also relevant.

The management of genetic resources is also affected, both positively and negatively, and should be assessed, by other EU legislative fields such as animal health Law, agricultural product quality, organic farming, promotion of EU farm products, state aid, food and market regulations, climate change, animal welfare and intellectual property. The policies are listed in the AnGR strategy.

4 Improvement of documentation of AnGR in Europe, tools, and guidelines

4.1 Updating and improvement of national data and documentation

The documentation and monitoring of AnGR are important components of implementing the FAO GPA and underpin informed decision-making by countries, the ERFP, the European Commission and FAO.

The ERFP Working Group Documentation and Information raises the importance of the establishment of national inventories for AnGR and promotes the harmonized monitoring on European level in the European and global database (European Farm Animal Biodiversity

Information System - EFABIS/ Domestic Animal Diversity-Information System - DAD-IS). The WG identified barriers to harmonise monitoring and implement actions to improve the quantity and quality of data. To help with this matter, tools to (semi) automatically upload national data into EFABIS/DAD-IS will be developed in close collaboration between National Coordinators, ERFP and FAO. ERFP WG Doc and info will support this process. ERFP will work on identification of new and review existing characteristics in monitoring and developing indicators for monitoring the status and trends of AnGR.

Some improvements have been achieved and explained in different workshops and training sessions. This is for example the case of for the new tools on ecosystem services.

ERFP will work with the support of Ad Hoc Action to assess needs, user perspectives, and to contribute to the development of Application Programming Interface (API)'s for data exchange to improve the inter-operability of population and gene bank data with other relevant databases. ERFP will help to enhance EFABIS updates through collaboration among NCs, breeding organisations, and genebanks. ERFP together with EURC EAB will facilitate and stimulate the genomic and phenotypic characterizations, research, and access to the data.

The ERFP will gather the relevant information and give publicity to the main documents, guidelines and publications of interest for AnGR. Some of them are released by FAO to facilitate the GPA, as the important Guidelines for genomics and cryopreservation.

4.2 Further development of DAD-IS: EFABIS

EFABIS is the regional documentation system for AnGR in Europe (*ex situ* and *in situ*). Besides the European specificities in EFABIS its content is largely the same as the global database DAD-IS at the FAO. Physically, EFABIS and DAD-IS are the same database, managed by FAO.

EFABIS is essential for monitoring and assessing the diversity of AnGR in Europe and allows for an informed decision-making by countries from a regional perspective. Both monitoring and assessment as well as user needs might require further functionalities of EFABIS which should be identified and further developed by the ERFP Working Group Documentation and Information. Before communication with FAO, the proposal should be agreed with all NCs and the ERFP Steering Committee. Assessing the convenience of completing data fields in EFABIS to monitor the status and trends of new species would be part of the work of ERFP during this period.

A long-term engagement by a technical expert is needed to support the ERFP network in communication with FAO, to help with further development and maintenance of EFABIS, and to facilitate exchange of data between EFABIS and related databases at European level.

Input from the national level to these databases is provided by the European National Coordinators with the collaboration of breeding organisations and gene banks to improve the updating of EFABIS. The improvements of EFABIS will be aligned with the improvements of DAD-IS that in the last years have been renewed and modernised.

4.3 EUGENA portal

The EUGENA Portal web page is the single-entry point to the register of AnGR Gene banks in the net. It is the ERFP's responsibility to organize, update and maintain this portal. A close connection will be developed with the ERFP website, EFABIS/DAD-IS and the portal that was developed by the Horizon 2020 IMAGE project.

The correct management of gene banks needs the support of useful and powerful data bases. The analysis of future development and necessary improvements of cryo databases, including CryoWeb will be planned ideally, compatible with other databases. The establishment of a TF for the creation of a modern genebank documentation software will facilitate the analysis and improvement of managements and exchange of information.

4.4 Development and improvement of AnGR indicators

Indicators will be refined or proposed by the Working Groups in close collaboration with the EURC-EAB (classification of endangered breeds, assessment of breeding programs, etc.).

The AnGR Strategy for Europe action plan established indicators to follow the KR level of implementation and development.

A close attention should be given to the achievement of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 on conservation of genetic diversity.

5 Sustainable use and genetic improvement

Sustainable use, in terms of breeding programmes, requires fine tuning. It needs to balance the improvement of animal performance, through selection, while maintaining within-breed diversity, which is the foundation of adaptation and genetic improvement.

Securing the sustainable use of AnGR should be a high priority in Europe. A variety of local breeds have characteristics that make them potentially valuable in the growing market of niche products or in the provision of a range of ecosystem services and other environmental challenges. However, many of these breeds are currently not sufficiently valued and thus play a minor role in global livestock production.

The AnGRSE recommends development of sustainable breeding programmes by promoting participatory approaches that involve farmers and breed societies, as well as investment in innovation, research, and new breeding methods. KR were designed to ensure the sustainable use and genetic improvement of AnGR.

To achieve those KR the ERFP in collaboration with the EURC EAB will implement some actions to boost, assess and improve the effectiveness of the breeding programs by facilitating the tools, knowledge transfer, innovation, and promotion to all the related actors and better integration of agro-ecological principles and quality schemes.

6 AnGR Conservation

Many KR and actions from AnGRSE are related to the conservation of AnGR and most of them will be implemented with the support of the EURC EAB. In this Section some of them are mentioned.

The support to the breeder associations for the implementation of the breeding programs for local breed in risk will be crucial but also the determination of genetic variability and inbreeding rate of transboundary breeds through collaboration between breed societies and research entities.

ERFP will identify and make available the initiatives and plans, guidelines, and related actors for the implementation of integrated and complementary *in situ* and *ex situ* long term conservation

strategies for AnGR in collaboration with the EURC EAB engaging all relevant public and private stakeholders in the process.

6.1 *In situ* Conservation

Due to the importance of the *in-situ* conservation of AnGR within the GPA and efforts towards improvement of the *in-situ* conservation of AnGR in Europe, the Working Group *in situ* conservation and valorisation of AnGR was established in 2018.

This Working Group will take up the recommendations of the AnGR Strategy for Europe and other available outcomes (i.e EU Preparatory Actions on plant and animal genetic resources in agriculture) to support countries in the implementation of *in situ* measures and strategies related to AnGR conservation. Successful *in-situ* conservation requires a well-designed breeding program with emphasis on maintaining genetic diversity within the breed.

The collaboration with the EURC EAB will be crucial and necessary to implement some activities such as:

- Review of the definitions, frameworks and *in situ* conservation programs to explore support measures and initiatives related to niche markets, ark farms, management of landscapes and wildlife habitats, touristic activities, and ecosystem services.
- Networking activities to identify, coordinate the main actors involved and strengthen cooperation and valorisation of AnGR and their products with steps for an European network of *in situ* conservation in specific ecosystems.

6.2 *Ex situ* conservation

The ERFP will promote the importance of *ex situ* conservation measures for AnGR throughout Europe as it has been detected that in some countries the recognition, infrastructure, or technical capacities for implementation of *ex situ* conservation of AnGR are lacking or not existing and there are needs to convince the responsible Institutions for further activities.

The *ex-situ* WG will stimulate the exchange of experiences, knowledge, protocols, and expertise between European countries to strength the national capacities and support the establishment and further development of national genebanks with efficiency and effectiveness in order to ensure the long-term conservation of AnGR through core collections.

The WG will promote the identification of gene banks at national level to establish and maintain an official European inventory to take advantage of IMAGE project outcome and get EUGENA officially recognized by the EU in the future as the network and database for *ex situ* conservation facilities in Europe.

The inventory should be the tool to disseminate information about EUGENA and the activities of the WG to a wider number of stakeholders involved in the *ex situ* conservation.

It will be important to encourage countries to enrol in the Eugena network and sign the Memorandum of Understanding (recently updated) to facilitate the incorporation of new genebanks and to upload their data in the EUGENA portal.

Also, as a follow up of the IMAGE project, the WG will help with the harmonisation of procedures, guidelines to implement the Nagoya protocol, as well as analyse the user policies and access rules of

national gene banks. It will try to enhance quality and data management by spreading the activities and tools with the support of an Ad Hoc Action related to the use of IMAGE self-diagnostic tool to support the development of a quality management system in European animal gene Banks.

The Working Group will also analyse the impact of new EU regulations on animal health requirements for the movements of germinal products on *ex situ* conservation within the EU and develop recommendations for national governments regards the collection and distribution of gene bank material. Specific *Ad hoc* action has been established to work on the development of specific national regulations and recognitions of genebanks and the possibilities of derogations in the framework of the Animal Health Law.

A special attention will be paid to the *ex-situ* conservation of transboundary breed and also the identification of experts in cryobiology in each country should be developed to ease the application of *ex situ* conservation.

7 Education and awareness raising

It will be very important to promote education, training and awareness raising of the essential roles and values of AnGR (economic, environmental, social), linked to the ecosystem services and other fields like climate change.

The AnGRSE includes several KR and actions that should be implemented at different levels (european and national) by engaging a wide range of actors and a communication strategy to raise awareness about the roles and values of AnGR.

ERFP will contribute to the valorisation of AnGR and promotion of labelling of local products from breeds in traditional production systems and will review the existing communication approach to develop actions to different target groups to strengthen the linkages between producers and consumers, including ecosystem services, tourism, and gastronomy alliances.

The breeders' awareness of their role as key actors in the conservation of AnGR should be increased by empowering them through societies breeding programs.

To strengthen education on AnGR, ERFP will contribute to identify stakeholders in education and connected sectors, analyse their roles, and develop promotional and training material and encourage integration of AnGR into existing programmes as well as training courses in farming sector, industry, Colleges or universities.

To achieve these goals, various awareness-raising channels can be used: social networks, public events (exhibitions, conferences, museums, zoos, schools), and other print and electronic media (books, brochures, posters, media, etc).