

Second Meeting of the High-Level Reflection Group on the Future of the Commission's Civil Service

3 December 2025, Brussels & Online

Meeting minutes

Main objectives of the meeting

The second meeting of the high-level reflection group explored the theme of innovation in the public sector. The objectives were three-fold: 1) to explore the enablers of innovation in the public sector; (2) to gain insights from real-life examples in other public administrations and (3) to discuss the role of innovation and digital transformation in the future of the Commission's civil service.

Welcome and large-scale review update

The chair of the high-level reflection group, Catherine Day, opened the meeting by welcoming all participants. The head of the large-scale review team, Paul McAleavey, gave a brief update on the large-scale review, covering the main milestones since the group met on 14 October.

Innovation in government

Marco Daglio, Head of the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation in the OECD, gave a presentation on innovation capacity in government. His presentation touched upon a variety of cultural, structural and process elements to consider including skills development, motivation and reward; innovation labs and how to scale and the culture needed to foster innovation in government.

This was followed by a presentation from Luukas Ilves on technology and innovation in government. Luukas provided some case studies and lessons learned in the public sector and raised a number of relevant issues to consider. This included the principle of user centricity, digital infrastructure as an enabler, the importance of senior management sponsorship and options for acquiring talent and skills. The potential for automation and AI in government was also covered.

These presentations were followed by a panel discussion, facilitated by Darja Isaksson. During this discussion, the members dug deeper into many areas covered in the presentation. In particular, the role of managers in fostering a culture of innovation was explored as well as the challenges they face given their high workload, legal responsibilities and political pressure. This was followed by a more general discussion on the burden of compliance within the public sector and how governments can strike the right balance between compliance, innovation and experimentation. Staff engagement and career development also came up, including exploring the use of more horizontal career pathways in government and use of mission-driven projects.

Innovation in the Commission

Saâd Kadhi, Director of CERT EU and leader of the workstream on Innovation and AI, gave an update on this workstream and posed a number of open issues to the members. The chair then

convened an open floor discussion among the group touching on elements linked to governance; skills development; creating space for experimentation and learning and the use of strategic foresight to keep up pace in this fast-moving area. The success factors for digital transformations in government were also discussed.

Discussion on how to work together

The chair opened a discussion on how to work together in 2026 and how to facilitate interaction between the group members and the large-scale review workstreams. The possibility to invite the workstream leaders to the next high-level group was discussed and all members agreed. The secretariat shared the proposed dates for the next three group meetings in 2026. The issue of collaboration was also discussed and members agreed to continue using TEAMs for document sharing and logistics going forward.

Next steps

The secretariat will confirm dates for the 2026 meetings to all members as soon as possible and share relevant documentation from 3 December meeting on TEAMs.

List of participants

Chairperson

Catherine Day

Members

Miroslawa Boryczka

Marco Daglio

Luukas Ilves

Darja Isaksson

Luis Romero Requena

Giorgios Pitsilis

Maria Schack Vindum

Absent : Theresa Twachtmann

European Commission

Ana Carrero

Saâd Kadhi

Paul McAleavy

Lauren O'Hanlon