

THE FUTURE OF THE COMMISSION'S CIVIL SERVICE

An outside-in perspective to the Commission's
large-scale review:
Final report of the High-Level reflection group

Manuscript completed in October 2026

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High-Level reflection group on the future of the Commission's civil service

Mandate and members of the High-Level reflection group

In September 2024, President von der Leyen tasked Commissioner Serafin to carry out a large-scale review of the Commission's organisation and operations¹. The High-Level reflection group on the future of the Commission's civil service (HLG) was set up to support this review, chaired by the former Secretary-General of the Commission, Catherine Day.

Nine members, with expertise in transforming public organisations and driving organisational change, were appointed in their personal capacities to serve as an external sounding board throughout the process to offer expert insights and an outside-in perspective on the work.

The members of the High-Level group are²:

- **Chair, Catherine Day** - former Secretary-General of the Commission
- **Mirosława Boryczka** - Director of Management and Finance, OSCE
- **Marco Daglio** - Head of the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, OECD
- **Luukas Ilves** - Founder, The Agentic State (former government CIO and undersecretary for digital transformation, Estonia)
- **Darja Isaksson** - Director General, Sweden's Innovation Agency VINNOVA
- **Giorgios Pitsilis** - Governor, Greek Independent Authority for Public Revenue
- **Luis Romero Requena** - former Commission Director-General of the Legal Service and the Directorate-General for Budget
- **Maria Schack Vindum** - Permanent Secretary, Danish Ministry of Nature and Animal Welfare
- **Theresa Twachtmann** - Managing Director, PD - Berater der öffentlichen Hand GmbH

1 "I would like you to carry out a large-scale review of the Commission's organisation and operations, together with an external benchmarking exercise. You will be supported in this work by a High-Level reflection group on the future of the Commission's civil service". Mission letter from President von der Leyen to Commissioner Serafin, September 2024.

2 Members contributed to this report in their individual expert capacities. The recommendations do not necessarily reflect the official positions of members' respective organisations.

Introduction

The need for change

The European Union (EU) is unique in its capacity to evolve. Over seven decades, it has repeatedly transformed itself, from starting out as a coal and steel community of six nations to becoming a political and economic union of twenty-seven members, from a customs union to a single market, from a peace project to a geopolitical actor. Each transformation was a response to what Europe and its citizens needed at the time. This capacity to adapt and evolve is the EU's greatest institutional inheritance.

This is an era when profound change is taking place at unprecedented speed. The world is no longer operating on a straight path and the challenges it faces are moving faster than the institutions built to govern them³. In common with other national and international administrations, the capacity of the European Commission to adapt will determine its future.

It needs to adapt the way it works to deliver faster and better results for Europe and its citizens. It must become more agile and responsive, in an increasingly unstable geopolitical environment, with growing threats to trust in democracy. New technologies, and artificial intelligence (AI) in particular, represent a generational shift in how we work and are already transforming how citizens, businesses and institutions operate daily. The Commission must respond to these changes, while managing the opportunities and challenges they bring.

The Commission has not undertaken an in-depth review of its broader administrative structure in over 25 years⁴. The pace of change and the uncertainties in Europe and beyond underline the urgent need for deep and far-reaching change now. While we cannot predict the context that the Commission will face in 5-10 years' time, it is clear to us that the Commission needs to become more flexible and adaptable now so that it has the capacity to react strategically and quickly to future challenges.

The current Commission is not yet at the halfway point of its term of office, but it has both the necessary insights and the time horizon available to make the Commission future-ready. Determined political leadership will be crucial. Buy-in from Commission staff will be equally important.

The purpose of this report is to recommend how the Commission can build the adaptive capacity it needs to continuously evolve and deliver results for future generations.

³ European Commission, Joint Research Centre. (2023). Reference foresight scenarios: Scenarios on the global standing of the EU in 2040. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC132943>

⁴ 2000 White Paper Reforming the Commission

The EU has always found a way to adapt when it mattered most. The Commission must do the same. In our view the fundamental question is: *how does a respected and stable but risk-averse civil service become fast enough, flexible enough and bold enough, to meet the demands of citizens, the global economy and a changing international order?*

In this report we make key recommendations on how the Commission can answer this question.

The outside-in perspective

View of the Commission as seen by the High-Level group (HLG)

“Over the course of our engagement with the Commission, we encountered an institution with exceptional strengths: a highly committed workforce, deep expertise across an unparalleled range of policy areas, a strong public service ethos and a genuine willingness to reflect critically on its own future. We were particularly struck by the openness to discuss challenges and opportunities candidly and by the breadth of ideas generated through the large-scale review.

This great strength is also its greatest constraint: the Commission has extraordinary policy depth, but it is held in a structure that was not designed to move that expertise across organisational boundaries quickly. There is a genuine appetite for change. But comparative evidence across OECD governments shows a consistent pattern: institutions that fail to build strong horizontal coordination and tolerate proportionate risk-taking end up fragmenting effort rather than compounding it.

The Commission’s future success will depend not only on its expertise and professionalism, but also on its ability to strengthen collaboration across organisational boundaries, develop greater strategic agility, embrace innovation and artificial intelligence, and continually align its resources, capabilities and ways of working with the outcomes Europe needs it to deliver.

The Commission is well placed to achieve this transformation, provided it acts with ambition, consistency and a clear sense of common purpose.”

How this report was prepared

The HLG worked from October 2025 to October 2026 and focused on the administrative level of the Commission⁵. Its work was informed by a deep, internal review carried out by 15 cross-Directorate-General (DG) workstreams⁶. This work has shown that large parts of the leadership of the administration and the staff themselves have an appetite for change. We were impressed by the open and thorough examination of multiple aspects of how the Commission works today and by the wealth of ideas for change identified by the workstreams.

An external benchmarking exercise was carried out in parallel by Gartner⁷, with additional briefings from the OECD, providing evidence-based insights and international best practice to the 15 workstreams.

The recommendations made by the HLG and the external insight brought by the members have drawn on this work. The group focused on what they see as the key needs that will deliver long-lasting change in the decades ahead. Therefore, they chose to limit their recommendations to nine inter-related proposals. Many other recommendations for change can be found in the final reports of the workstreams.

The recommendations should be implemented alongside the changes required to deliver the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)⁸. Although the proposed architecture of the next long-term budget has not been decided at the time of writing, it will certainly have an impact on the Commission's organisational structure and working methods. It is likely to require a more integrated, coordinated and agile approach to programme management, delivery and oversight, which would fit well with our proposals.

Most of the recommendations can be decided by the Commission itself without requiring inter-institutional negotiation⁹. Several of the recommendations are linked and need to be implemented together. In some cases, the HLG recommends ways to implement change. In others they point to where change is needed without going into detail as the working through of the recommendations will need more detailed work by the Commission.

5 Our mandate did not cover the European External Action Service (EEAS) or the interface between the Commission and the EEAS. We also worked on the basis of the existing Staff Regulations.

6 See Annex 1 for further information on the large-scale review process and the 15 workstreams

7 Gartner is a global research and advisory company that offers project-based guidance to help organisations plan and execute goals

8 The MFF refers to the EU's multiannual budget

9 With the exception of the recommendation on decentralised agencies and the need to amend Regulation 1049/21

The recommendations can be phased in over three time periods:

PHASE 1:	PHASE 2:	PHASE 3:
can begin immediately upon Commission decision.	runs until the end of the current Commission’s term of office (by 1 December 2029). The HLG does not suggest changing existing Commissioner portfolio responsibilities during this term of office.	structural changes in portfolio arrangements and further restructuring of Directorates-General can be decided once the next Commission takes office.

Section 1

One Commission – with a renewed purpose

The Commission performs many tasks, but they can be summarised in four main areas:

- shaping EU strategy and policy
- proposing and overseeing implementation of EU law
- managing the EU budget
- managing EU external economic and development policy

Delivering results in each of these areas requires different capabilities – but they are also deeply interconnected. As the EU has grown in complexity, and particularly since the Lisbon Treaty, the roles of the Presidents of the European Council, the European Parliament and Commission have grown and changed. The Commission has become more focused on delivering complex policy proposals under more predictable annual programmes to facilitate the work of the other institutions.

Events over the past few years have also shown that what Member States need from the Commission has changed. Increasingly, the Commission has moved into delivering more executive and operational tasks, stepping into new policy areas such as defence procurement, health and housing to provide EU-wide approaches to shared challenges. The Commission's purpose is therefore deeply connected to the outside world, which means that its capacity to continuously listen and stay connected to the Member States and to the wider world is essential.

The EU has always adapted to meet the needs of the present but the Commission's structures have not adapted at the same pace as its evolving role. The current structure of 42 Directorates-General (DGs), with limited mechanisms to enable effective, cross-DG collaboration is a major barrier to the kind of integrated, rapid response policy work the Commission now needs. It locks resources in place and fosters a culture of ownership rather than collaboration and coordination. It leads many officials to identify more with their DG than with the Commission as a whole. It can create duplication and complexity in procedures and cause confusion with external partners. Staff need to feel their work is part of an overall, coherent Commission work programme and cooperate across departments to deliver it.

To continue to play its full role, the Commission needs to adapt its internal ways of working to these new realities. The Commission should act as one organisation, delivering on the political guidelines of the President. This would ensure all leaders and staff clearly understand how their work contributes to the political priorities, know where to focus their efforts and facilitate stronger cooperation across DG boundaries.

The Commission should build its reform around an updated organisational statement of purpose that reconfirms its values.

It should underpin a shared organisational culture based on three design principles:

1. **Collaboration as the norm** – *because few major policies now sit within a single service*
2. **Flexibility by design** – *enabling people, budget, data and attention to move quickly to where they are most needed, reflecting political priorities*
3. **A focus on outcomes** – *because the Commission is judged by the result it delivers for Europe, not on its processes and compliance.*

Under the banner of ‘One Commission’, the Commission should define itself as one institution that serves European citizens with a clear strategic direction to which all staff, DGs and agencies contribute. Future enlargement should be treated as an organisational stress test, with systematic assessment of its capacity to absorb new EU members, governance arrangements, decision-making processes and staffing model under different enlargement scenarios.

While the focus of the large-scale review is on the administrative level of the European Commission, the involvement and commitment of the political level of the organisation (i.e. the Commissioners and their Cabinets) are vital to the success of the proposed reform.

In common with other political entities internationally, there is a perception of increased tension between the political and administrative levels, as the speed and complexity of decision-making increases¹⁰. It is important that the political leaders and senior management of the administration do not shy away from acknowledging and addressing this tension. This report highlights both the need for central coordination and swift delivery, and the need for ‘space-to-think’ and to draw effectively on collaborative, integrated policymaking aligned to the political priorities. The political and administrative levels of the Commission need to work closely as One Commission in reconciling these essential needs.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Build the reform around a **statement of purpose setting out the Commission’s values**. It should be designed to foster a shared organisational culture anchored in collaboration, flexibility by design, and focused on outcomes over process. This should provide the political and administrative levels with a shared sense of working in the service of the EU.

10 OECD (2024), *Steering from the Centre of Government in Times of Complexity: Compendium of Practices*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/69b1f129-en>.

Section 2

A new way of working: from silos to portfolios

The Commission's current organisational architecture largely reflects past priorities and assumptions. It assumes a degree of stability, predictability and a separation between policy domains that is no longer relevant today. The HLG considers that the Commission's ways of working should now undergo its own transformation. To deliver on today's challenges – which are inherently cross-cutting – it needs to harness its greatest strength: the collective expertise of its workforce. Working together is essential to deliver high-quality policies. Failure to work together will put the quality of the work that the Commission can deliver at risk.

Outside the Commission many organisations are already working on the basis of portfolios¹¹ – rather than on outputs of individual policy departments – and the HLG has explored the benefits of this approach. To make collaborative working the new norm requires redesigning work around outcomes rather than siloed departments. This would enable cross-DG teams to contribute diverse expertise and skill sets, building on collective intelligence and high commitment and passion to their collaborative work, with less duplication of effort.

The staff and resources needed to deliver each of the future priority proposals should be clearly identified at the beginning, and for the duration of, the policy work, with a designated lead and a clear mandate. This would enable staff from different DGs to ensure policy coherence and provide early signals to the political level of difficulties or need for arbitration as proposals emerge. Opportunities for staff would become more meaningful as career journeys are designed laterally and less rigidly focused on titles, or grades, with more empowerment at all levels. These changes would speed up the decision-making process as choices are confronted early, rather than deferred through back-and-forth exchanges of documents.

The proposed portfolio approach should apply not only to new policy work, but also to ongoing implementation, compliance and regulatory work – where AI will increasingly change how the Commission and Member States work and interact together.

Embedding this cross-departmental way of working as the norm will ensure that the Commission is equipped on an ongoing basis to reconfigure around whatever challenges

¹¹ Portfolio management, in this context, refers to the selection, prioritisation and control of an organisation's programmes and projects, in line with its strategic objectives and capacity to deliver. It is not related to the term 'portfolio' typically used in the Commission to describe the allocation of responsibilities to Commissioners.

the future brings, rather than having to reinvent its response mechanisms each time. The success of this transformation will depend on the ability to set clear priorities, align incentives, adjust the governance, leadership and culture and to secure strong political support.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Deliver all important, **future policy proposals through cross-DG portfolio teams**, rather than individual DGs. The Commission should provide a clear mandate - with a designated lead and clear expected outcomes, timeline and resources - for each proposal before work starts and empower the Secretariat-General to put the necessary collaboration in place (see Recommendation 3). This should take immediate effect without the need to change structures.

Experiment with applying the portfolio approach to ongoing implementation, compliance and regulatory work, where beneficial.

Analyse the lessons learned from the portfolio approach and further **adapt structures if needed when the next Commission takes office**.

Section 3

A strategic centre to empower strong horizontal coordination

The portfolio approach requires a strong, strategic centre capable of driving results. The Secretariat-General should be given a clear mandate to play this role.

The research is clear. In a world of compounding crises and cross-cutting challenges, governments that fail to build strong horizontal coordination mechanisms at the centre are governments that fragment, duplicate, and under-deliver¹². In particular, the coalition contexts of many governments require the centre to “increase focus on central co-ordination and relationships due to the necessity of maintaining good relationships with all parties”. The same logic applies to the European Union and European Commission.

A new role for the Secretariat-General

The Commission’s College of Commissioners functions much like national coalition governments, with multiple Commissioners with different portfolios, political affiliations, and national perspectives. In light of today’s demands, the role of the Secretariat-General should be updated. In addition to its necessary procedural co-ordination functions, the Secretariat-General should be responsible for two core roles that involve coordinating the work between the political/administrative levels: (i) driving cross-DG collaboration (beyond procedural coordination) and (ii) acting as the strategic centre, translating the Commission’s political priorities into coordinated cross-DG action and ensuring high quality and on-time delivery.

This can be achieved through a new role for the Secretariat-General which:

- **Sets direction and provides strategic clarity throughout the Commission’s administration:** Steer the administration to focus on the strategic outcomes aligned with political priorities. Enable the DGs and services to deliver effectively by guiding prioritisation, managing trade-offs, resource allocation and encouraging a culture of ownership, proportionate risk taking and innovation. Bring the whole-of-Commission perspective, enabling DGs to act with greater confidence and autonomy, while ensuring the Commission pulls in the same direction.
- **Translates political priorities into administrative action.** The Secretariat-General should ensure that the President’s political guidelines

12 OECD (2024), *Steering from the Centre of Government in Times of Complexity: Compendium of Practices*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/69b1f129-en>

and the Commission Work Programme are delivered through cross DG work programmes with clear deliverables, timelines, and accountability. The HLG considers this as the most critical function as, without it, political vision and administrative execution drift apart.

- **Enables the conditions needed for effective, cross-DG portfolio working.** The Secretariat-General should ensure that portfolio teams have all the conditions to succeed (clarity on the outcome to be achieved, institutional backing, structures, data, resources, information).
- **Drives delivery through structured, regular feedback** to give political and administrative decision-makers a clear overview of the state of play and force early identification of problems. This should draw on live, structured data rather than manual DG submissions.
- **Reinforces the capacity for foresight and insights from the Member States:** Create a permanent strategic foresight capability within the strategic centre, integrated into the work of priority setting, resource allocation and organisational planning.

A **Priority Delivery Service** should be set up as a high-level strategic function in the Secretariat-General. It would bring policy delivery teams together and accompany them throughout the decision-making process to ensure the Commission delivers on quality and on time. The Service should work through direct contact, not document exchange. It should ensure that up-to-date information flows between the political and administrative levels and be ready to bring people together to resolve problems as they arise.

Quality and speed

Ultimately, the Commission will be judged on its results. It has a unique ability to think EU-wide and to propose and steer long-term strategies that can sometimes take decades to complete such as the single market, the euro and different stages of enlargement. However, the kind of evidence-based work that is the Commission standard takes time, and the pace of change sometimes demands rapid responses. The average deadline for interservice consultations (ISCs) on politically sensitive initiatives has roughly halved over the last decade. This has created dissatisfaction at both the political and technical levels and means that the full range of Commission expertise may not be deployed in the initial proposals.

The Commission should acknowledge this tension and distinguish between the need to frame a rapid response and the need to make fully fledged proposals. It could decide to issue a new form of '**Commission ideas paper**' in urgent situations. The aim would be a short-term opener to inform debate with the European Parliament and the Council while more detailed proposals are being prepared.

Skills for the centre

OECD evidence shows that a centre of government approach requires ‘a diverse and well-trained set of staff’ with specific capabilities: mediation, negotiation, systems thinking, digital and data, political sensitivity, and the ability to defend the line between appropriate responsiveness and inappropriate partisanship¹³. These should become explicit selection criteria for roles in the Secretariat-General and for the senior management positions that work at the interface between the political and administrative levels. Enhanced skills in strategic foresight and innovation are also important to embed more agile and innovative ways of working in cross-DG teams.

A more strategic Secretariat-General

From discussions we have had with staff, we have the impression that, while the Secretariat-General is seen as an essential co-ordinating service, it is also perceived as overly procedural. A necessary degree of oversight requires procedures, but the HLG considers that the Secretariat-General would benefit from a deep-dive look at its procedures, including a cost-benefit analysis of the value versus the burden of what it requires of other DGs. The same exercise should extend across all central services. With AI, it should now be possible to work very differently with DGs, drawing on shared sources of information rather than requiring DGs to submit reports. A deep dive into how the work of the Secretariat-General and all other central services can be redesigned using AI should be carried out with the support of the Chief AI Officer recommended in Section 4.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Redefine the role of the Secretariat-General to act as the **strategic centre** for the Commission, ensuring that the political and administrative levels work together as one team. Create a specific Priority Delivery Service.

Evaluate and significantly **reduce the reporting burden of the Secretariat-General and central services**. Carry out a deep dive analysis of how the work of the central services could be redesigned in the age of AI.

Consider issuing ‘**Commission ideas papers**’ in situations where a Commission contribution to an urgent matter is needed.

13 OECD (2024), *Steering from the Centre of Government in Times of Complexity: Compendium of Practices*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Section “Building the skills of CoG officials at the interface” <https://doi.org/10.1787/69b1f129-en>; OECD (2021), *The OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4e7c3f58-en>

Section 4

Reimagining the Commission with AI and new technologies

AI is a general-purpose technology and **this is a generational shift**. Earlier waves of digitisation automated rule-based transactions. Today's AI systems perform a lot of the analytical work that underpins the substance of what the Commission does and increasingly carry out sequences of such tasks on their own. Capability is advancing on a timescale of months. The Commission now has, in effect, a third input to its work alongside its own staff and the services it buys, and that changes what the institution can be expected to deliver.

The value comes from redesigning the work, not the technology itself. Research¹⁴ into how general-purpose technologies generate returns finds that the gains depend on the complementary investments made around them: redesigned processes, new skills and different ways of organising work. These investments are typically far greater than the cost of the technology itself, which is why the measured benefits lag behind adoption. Organisations that add AI to existing processes benefit little; those that redesign the work obtain a great deal. This is why the recommendation on AI cannot be separated from the rest of this report. Making the Commission faster, less encumbered by procedure, better able to work across services and move people and money to priorities will make it capable of using AI well.

However, the pace at which AI is evolving presents a major challenge, exceeding the ability of most institutions today to adapt. The OECD frames this revolution not merely as a technological challenge but as a governance challenge¹⁵. There are also risks such as over-reliance on AI tools without fully understanding their capabilities, or 'learned helplessness', where teams depend too much on automation without applying critical thinking.

Adopting **human-centred, trustworthy AI in the Commission** is critical to maintaining public legitimacy, confidence and trust while enabling the benefits to serve Europe's interest. EU citizens share this concern, seeing its advantages but want it regulated¹⁶. The Commission's unique role as major buyer, regulatory authority, and funding body puts it

14 Elisa Pereira, Alvin Wang Graylin & Erik Brynjolfsson, The Enterprise AI Playbook: Lessons from 51 Successful Deployments (Stanford Digital Economy Lab, Stanford University, April 2026, https://digitaleconomy.stanford.edu/app/uploads/2026/03/EnterpriseAIPlaybook_PereiraGraylinBrynjolfsson.pdf).

15 OECD (2025), Governing with Artificial Intelligence: The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/795de142-en>.

16 European Commission, Special Eurobarometer on the Digital Decade 2026 (17 June 2026) Digital Decade 2026: Special Eurobarometer | Shaping Europe's digital future

at a greater risk of AI inaction, potentially leading not only to failure to use AI, but also its ability to regulate it. The Commission should maximise the benefits of AI while minimising the risks such as cyber-threats and misinformation. Its use should be guided by EU values, ensuring transparency, safety and security, accountability and risk management. Ultimately the Commission takes responsibility for the validity of every decision it takes or reply it makes to a question from the European Parliament or from its citizens.

The Commission has already taken practical steps to integrate AI. Active AI communities are working in all DGs and internal tools, training, and solutions are being developed. It has shown that it can put AI to work in ways that create value. However, what distinguishes the organisations that have gone furthest is not the number of initiatives, but the investment made in three habits: (i) they hold themselves to an external standard and publish how they measure up; (ii) they keep a current, shared picture of their own work, so that decisions on redesigning work are based on evidence; and (iii) they place accountability on named senior individuals. The Commission should build its own approach on the lines of this model.

Closing the gap in implementation is not only an internal matter: what the Commission builds has an influence on every administration that depends on it and failing to close the gap between itself and the organisations it deals with will become a liability rather than a missed opportunity. This will also have consequences for resources and recruitment: many tasks will be facilitated by AI, offering scope for redeployment and requiring reskilling. In time, it will require an assessment of services and how supervisory roles are carried out.

At the same time, the Commission needs to cultivate a technology-adaptable environment and be able to make use of current and upcoming technologies to reorganise and improve ways of working, while ensuring high-quality, human-controlled policy making functions and service delivery. To help achieve this aim, we recommend that the Commission appoint a Chief AI Officer to lead and leverage the roll-out of its AI strategy. This would ensure that the design of the Commission's AI governance strategy is Commission-wide and that it adopts the ethical and regulatory standards needed to implement a responsible approach. The Chief AI Officer should also be tasked with helping to shape the AI culture of the Commission and dismantling data silos.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Deliver **human-centred, responsible AI transformation** that prioritises democratic legitimacy and upholds citizens' trust in the EU. The Commission should require an AI risk and rights impact assessment before rolling out any AI system in decisions that affect citizens or Commission staff.

Take **a whole-of-Commission approach to AI transformation**. **Appoint Chief AI Officers** - one for the Commission as a whole, with institution-wide authority and a political mandate within the Secretariat-General, and one AI officer in every DG. Accountability should rest with the named senior officials. A mandate and reporting line should be defined by mid-2027. .

Hold the Commission to an **external standard** and every year publish a small number of benchmarked indicators tracking capability outcomes and work redesigned, rather than technology deployed, together with named administrations, including in Member States.

Cultivate the **conditions for adaptation** that enable technological transformation. Pilot AI-specific 'sandboxes' in two or three volunteer DGs by end-2027, exempting defined categories of internal-process AI tools from standard procurement/compliance timelines. The results should feed into the work to separate compliance and experimentation areas outlined in Section 6.

Set **capability goals**: identify a small number of objectives that the Commission should be able to complete, to a defined standard, within a defined time. Not everything should be faster, but the Commission should be fast when it needs to be. For example, produce a jurist-linguist quality text in all official languages within days of the political agreement or an impact-assessed proposal in weeks where circumstances demand it.

Build a **shared pool of data** so that the Commission can use its internal knowledge as a single asset: known, findable, and available by default to any authorised official and to the systems working on their behalf, with sensitive material protected as the exception. Every other goal here depends on it. Non-sensitive data should also be published in machine-usable form, as a resource for Member State administrations, researchers and citizens who rely on the Commission's evidence.

Equip **every member of staff with an AI assistant** that can draw on the institution's knowledge and able to act within set limits on their behalf. Each official remains answerable for the work produced in their name.

Maintain a **dynamic view of how AI could reshape the Commission's work**, covering the Commission functions. Each function can be assessed against a few key markers: how well a machine can perform it, how much it matters, whether any gain could be measured, and whether the data, the organisation and the law are ready. Where this has been done at whole-of-government scale, functions that are otherwise ready, are almost never held back by technology alone. Instead, the constraints are organisational and legal, which is precisely what the rest of this report addresses. Most of the knowledge or data needed for this analysis can already be assembled by machine from what the Commission already publishes. In time, it could become the evidence base for decisions on redeployment, on what to stop doing, and on where posts are most needed.

Use **procurement to set standards** on transparency, explainability, security and data governance, and pool demand with Member State administrations where interests align. The Commission's own demand is small relative to the global market; its influence lies in shaping the services provided to European public administrations, not in creating scale.

Section 5

Modernising the machinery – reducing complexity and updating priorities

For the Commission to remain adaptive it must be disciplined about what it stops doing, not only what it starts.

The Commission has taken on an increasing number of new tasks and competences in recent years, but there is no real incentive to stop doing things or de-prioritise. New political priorities are added with each new term of office with no real political appetite, or incentives for DGs and management, to discontinue what came before.

This constant accumulation of tasks also brings complexity. Each new task, priority or crisis brings with it an increase in complexity of procedures, coordination mechanisms, structures and reporting lines. The result is an institution that is asked to do increasingly more, while the system itself is reducing the time leaders and staff can spend on the highest value work.

This challenge is not unique to the Commission¹⁷ but the consequences of these constraints are uniquely high, given the scale of what Europe now asks of its institutions.

The Commission has invested considerable effort to reduce the regulatory burden of EU legislation, but the overall impact on citizens and business has not yet matched the scale of what is needed. DGs are sensitive to the resource implications of reducing the volume of legislation and Member States and interest groups are often reluctant to support change because their systems are used to the current processes. De-prioritisation has political and cultural dimensions that also need to be considered. Previous exercises in de-prioritisation and simplification, based on DGs proposing which tasks to stop, are also likely to miss cross-policy linkages and have produced uneven results across DGs.

The HLG believes that a different approach to de-prioritisation is now needed: one which is **politically driven, centrally steered, mandatory and recurring.**

Deprioritisation should be based on a clear understanding of the objective to be achieved, with targets where appropriate, agreed in advance at political level. The Commission needs to decide whether the purpose is to update priorities and stop work that is no longer in line with EU priorities, or has been overtaken, is being done elsewhere or no longer needed. It should indicate to the DGs whether the aim is to reduce the regulatory

¹⁷ OECD (2026), Government Unstuck: The Next Frontier of Government Transformation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/464c0cff-en>.

burden in particular sectors or to reduce the burden on business or citizens, and how AI can be used to make the process more efficient. The concept for each de-prioritisation round should be based on key criteria to force strategic choices and require all DGs to identify the activities they propose discontinuing or scaling back that no longer align with political priorities, lack EU added value, can better be carried out by another institution or body than the Commission, or duplicate efforts. Where relevant, numerical targets for reduction should be set. To give it teeth, this work could be linked to the annual allocation of posts from the budget in line with compliance and achievement of agreed goals.

The ways in which administrations outside the Commission now implement the body of EU law (*acquis communautaire*) have also changed and will change again. Reviewing the *acquis* can now be largely machine-assisted: technology can be used to map overlaps, obsolete provisions, contradictions and cumulative burden, with the senior official leading the review taking ownership of the results. This makes the review repeatable on a five-year cycle and produces as a by-product, a structured, machine-readable compendium of EU law, which is an asset for Member States, candidate countries and the Commission's enforcement work.

In working with candidate countries on the *acquis*, DGs have also gained new insights into the complex challenges of achieving compliance. The Commission cannot continue to add to the volume of EU law and regulatory practice. The key principles will remain over time, but the ways in which Europeans work are constantly changing and EU legislation needs to be adjusted regularly to remain fit for purpose. From a capacity point of view, more of its staff should be focused on upcoming priorities. Therefore, simplification and de-prioritisation also need to be ongoing aspects of the work to administer the body of EU law and practice.

De-prioritisation should also be embedded in the Commission's way of working by design. Across the Commission, it should be clear that all initiatives, policies and projects are designed with an end point (or sunset clause) in mind. The portfolio approach will facilitate this shift, enabling a culture where the Commission continually adapts, makes room for new capabilities and measures its progress against clear outcomes.

The Commission's approach to transparency should also evolve. Instead of the current approach to transparency focusing on giving access to documents, the Commission should propose revising Regulation 1049/2001 to enable the EU to move toward a more proactive information-centric approach, where information is classified at the point of creation and made publicly available by default, with exceptions for highly sensitive or personal data.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Draw up a **mandatory framework for regular de-prioritisation** with clear objectives set at political level to guide the DGs and with the Secretariat General steering the process.

Carry out a **centrally-led review of all EU legislation** to recommend what should be repealed, amended or integrated into other control systems. Decisions should be based on key criteria such as EU added value, subsidiarity and alignment with political priorities. AI-assisted methods should be used to map overlaps, obsolete provisions and contradictions, making the review repeatable on a five-year cycle.

Impose a **major reduction target** for low-impact recurring activities ('stop doing'), which DGs should tackle in the de-prioritisation plans.

Propose a revision of Regulation 1049/2001 to move to a **proactive, information centric model of transparency for the EU**, where information is classified and published by default (where appropriate), with clearly defined exceptions to protect personal data, security and other legitimate interests. Information to be published must be built for both machine and human readers since most of what is released will increasingly be read by systems acting for Member States, businesses and citizens. This would improve the perception of the Commission as an open organisation ready to explain how and why decisions are taken.

Section 6

Toward smarter risk management and real innovation

Trust in democratic institutions across Europe is a vital part of protecting our values. The Commission's comparatively high scores on trust in a recent Eurobarometer survey¹⁸ must not be taken for granted. The Commission needs to assess its risk and compliance culture regularly to ensure it delivers best results as efficiently as possible. Its approach to compliance and risk should be an enabler of transparent governance and public trust.

A significant proportion of staff work on compliance activities and day-to-day practice is often based on the assumption of zero-risk. Demanding full compliance with all rules regardless of the material risk leaves no space for proportionality or professional judgement.

This persists despite a 2017 commitment to risk-based internal control and despite 77% of staff saying in the most recent staff survey that the Commission needs to change how it works. The culture of over-compliance is compounded by a fear of leaks due to the high scrutiny placed on the Commission externally, which discourages open internal debate and further restricts risk-taking, experimentation and collaboration.

The current strategic planning and programming cycle (SPP)¹⁹ is fragmented, document-heavy, and resource-intensive. Management plans and annual activity reports attempt to fulfil multiple purposes at once, and this overlapping focus has resulted in overly lengthy, complex documents that lack a clear core purpose. Large parts of the reporting cycle still rely on manual drafting, fragmented workflows, and repetitive administrative work split across multiple information systems. Due to the volume of output produced (exceeding 8,000 pages every year, including annexes) and a heavy reliance on manual inputs, the SPP is overly resource intensive compared to the value it delivers.

This situation is no longer sustainable, and two shifts are now urgent.

First, **the focus must move from process to outcomes**. Staff should not be spending their time navigating decades of accumulated procedural layers. A more proportionate, risk-based compliance system would free staff capacity and help services deliver on political priorities. The strategic planning and programming process should be radically overhauled.

18 European Commission (2025), Standard Eurobarometer 103: Public Opinion in the European Union, Spring 2025, European Commission, Brussels.

19 Strategic programming and reporting is the annual cycle the Commission uses to set policy goals, plan daily work, and measure results.

Second, **experimentation must become possible**. Responding to a fast-moving world – adopting AI, piloting new working methods, faster policy delivery – requires protected spaces for controlled risk-taking. Today, the incentive structure penalises failure far more than inaction. For organisations that must continuously adapt, using recognised techniques for experimentation, such as regulatory sandboxes²⁰, test-and-learn approaches, and safe spaces with clear guardrails and senior sponsorship is essential. Leaders should foster psychologically safe environments that encourage staff to challenge, experiment and express constructive dissent.

Risk-based *ex-post* control is also the precondition for automation: a system that requires prior human sign-off on every transaction can never let machines handle the routine. Shifting to proportionate, risk-based control is therefore not only a compliance reform, it is the gateway to the AI-enabled working methods recommended in Section 4.

None of these recommendations weaken accountability. Zero tolerance for corruption, fraud, and deliberate misconduct must remain absolute. But a system built to avoid all risk creates its own dangers: institutional paralysis, lack of innovation, failure to adapt and deliver.

Ultimately, if the Commission cannot experiment it cannot evolve. Embedding a culture of proportionate risk-taking and learning from failure is essential to building the Commission’s long-term adaptive capacity.

²⁰ The OECD defines a regulatory sandbox as a controlled environment, created to understand the opportunities and risks associated with specific innovations and to develop an appropriate regulatory environment to accommodate them effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Make a clear **distinction between areas that require strict compliance** (e.g. budgetary spending, law, finance) **and areas where experimentation should be encouraged** (e.g. process, innovation, technology and policy design). This should be done by end 2027 in parallel with the adoption of new budgetary rules to implement the next long-term budget.

Promote a **culture of delegation and empowerment**, ensuring that decisions and tasks are handled at the most appropriate level and that leaders can spend proportionately more time on people and strategy.

Overhaul the strategic planning and programming cycle and replace it with a single, much shorter text, aligned with the policy areas of specific MFF headings. Management information should live as continuously updated structured data, with staff drafting the strategic narrative.

Provide guidance on how to **expand delegations of powers** and bring in standardised, risk-based approval thresholds to apply across the board.

Introduce **portfolio-based risk management** recognising that different activities require different risk tolerances and oversight models, in line with the portfolio approach set out in Section 2.

Create a **Commission-wide innovation system** with clear responsibility for identifying, testing, evaluating and scaling innovations across DGs.

Section 7

Matching strategy and resources – empowering talented and motivated staff

The Commission's greatest strength is its talented and motivated staff. They are committed to the ideals of the EU Treaties and work hard to deliver the best possible results at EU level for their fellow citizens. The Commission attracts extraordinary interest – over 170,000 applications for recent graduate competitions. It employs talented, committed staff across an unrivalled breadth of policy areas, from EU delegations in 144 locations to frontline work on climate, digital and defence.

Yet, in common with other public administrations, it needs to question whether the way it currently recruits, develops and leads its staff still works in today's more complex, digital and uncertain world. The evidence suggests that systems designed for a different era are not enabling organisations to make the most of these strengths. The recruitment process from application to contract takes far too long. Non-permanent staff now make up over one-third of the workforce, but they face unclear pathways, as the career system was not designed with this category of staff in mind.

The system is struggling to manage the number of applicants and there is a lack of clarity on sourcing the skills needed for future challenges. Once inside, mobility satisfaction is generally low, despite the wide range of jobs available. The pace of change makes a new approach to matching strategy and resources all the more pressing as AI, geopolitical shifts and interconnected policy challenges demand that our institution and people are capable of adapting continuously, experimenting, learning and innovating.

Senior management – building the leaders for tomorrow

To build leaders and talent for tomorrow requires capacity to deliver in a new type of organisation. The HLG looked, in particular, at the need and opportunity for a planned succession policy at senior level. With between 30 to 50 percent of senior leaders retiring in the next five years, this is an unprecedented opportunity for planned renewal.

First, the Commission should agree on **an overall set of criteria for the qualities its future leaders need**. The HLG considers that certain criteria are essential, such as ability to lead people through change, systems thinking, technology readiness, understanding of the political-administrative interface and evidence of prior mobility. The criteria for senior leadership should also include the ability to lead teams where machines do the routine work and people take ownership of the decisions. This is the new context of leadership that AI creates and the Commission should select the skills needed to manage this change deliberately.

Ensuring the right leaders are in place requires the Commission to shift how leaders are selected. Instead of the current practice of filling senior posts one-by-one as vacancies arise, sometimes leaving vacancies open for extended periods, the Commission should **pre-qualify a time-limited list of suitable senior managers** who could then be appointed through a selection process as vacancies become available. This will enable the Commission to identify high potential candidates who have a balanced range of capabilities required to lead. This process would also ensure there are smaller gaps between departures and appointments. The list should focus on talent, while also taking account of geographical and gender representation and under-representation.

The HLG also recommends **opening senior management posts for certain roles** to external candidates as this will help bring new talents and perspectives to the organisation. Newcomers should receive structured support to master the interinstitutional framework and adapt quickly to the Commission's organisational culture.

The case for opening up to external candidates and introducing more flexibility in recruitment pathways applies not only to senior management positions. The HLG recommends that the Commission should also explore pathways to bring people in quickly at all levels of the organisation with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience of change in external organisations.

Although it was decided several years ago that mobility for senior managers would be compulsory after five years in their post, this requirement is not always applied in practice. The shift toward more portfolio-ways of working makes cross-sectoral expertise essential for effective policy and programme delivery. Therefore, to ensure that senior managers share their expertise and bring different perspectives to their work, the HLG recommends that the **compulsory mobility requirement be fully applied**.

We also recommend providing regular professional development training for senior managers, particularly in areas such as change management, leading people and adapting to AI.

Unlocking leadership potential

In moving to a more portfolio way of working, the Commission needs new ways of recognising and developing staff in addition to the current hierarchical progression and standard promotion rounds. The HLG recommends implementing a **parallel leadership track** that recognises talent based on capability not only grade, by temporarily seconding officials to lead high-impact projects aligned with political priorities. This temporary track, which could be put in place under the existing Staff Regulations, would help develop and reward talented staff across grades and generations, while delivering key benefits for the Commission and its staff. The expected benefits include: giving high-performing junior staff direct leadership of high-priority projects, rapid leadership development, flatter hierarchies and accelerated innovation by bringing in diverse pathways into leadership.

Reward collaborative ways of working

The creation of this new track also calls for a new look at promotion procedures. At present, promotions are proposed by DGs but if an official is working in a cross-Commission team the quality and demands of their work may be less visible to their home DG than for others who work solely in one DG. Therefore, the HLG recommends that the promotion procedures are reviewed to ensure that **cross-DG experience is recognised and rewarded**.

Future-proofing the Commission's workforce

The Commission currently employs a diverse staffing model representing a mix of functions covering administrators, assistant and secretarial roles - with over one-third of the workforce on temporary contracts. Increasing the use of new technologies will have an impact on the type of work required and increase the need for new skills. The Commission has operated under a principle of stable staffing since 2014, emphasising the need to critically evaluate the impact of emerging technology on future needs. This should include an **analysis of the current tasks that could be facilitated by AI** and redefining roles, redeploying and reskilling/upskilling as needed. The AI work-redesign inventory set-out in Section 4 above would create the evidence base for this work. Posts returned to the central pool from the mechanism below create the capacity. Linking the two means each returned post triggers a decision to refill, redesign or redirect taken against evidence.

Future-proofing the Commission requires assessing the optimum balance of temporary and permanent contract types. A recent OECD report on implementation of the recommendation on public service leadership and capability (2025)²¹ noted that public administrations are increasingly balancing permanent and temporary employment to create a more flexible and effective workforce. **The Commission needs to optimise this hybrid model** - allowing for flexibility to adapt and inject skills as needed, while providing a transparent, fair pathway to recruit permanent officials in line with needs. The HLG flags that pathways should be open to the widest possible talent pool across the EU, taking account of geographic and gender representation and under-representation. Recruitment procedures should be designed to attract and secure the right talent that the Commission needs (fast, adaptable procedures that test the skills it needs with a mechanism to retain valuable expertise) and clearly distinguish between permanent pathway and fixed-term contracts.

21 OECD (2025), Report on the implementation of the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability, OECD, Paris, C(2025)132.

Management and ‘ownership’ of posts

To streamline the future organisation of work in the Commission and promote the ‘One Commission’ approach of everyone working for one organisation, there is a need to review how posts are allocated and under what conditions. The more fluid, cross-Commission method of working outlined in this report needs to be matched by greater flexibility on posts and a greater focus on mobility. The Commission should evolve towards a model of capacity elasticity in which people, expertise and resources can be rapidly redeployed to work on strategic priorities, crises and emerging opportunities. **Posts should not be regarded as ‘belonging’ to a particular Directorate-General or service.** As the new MFF enters into force, the Commission should fix an annual percentage of posts to be returned to a central pool. These would then be used to staff new priorities, enabling the kind of flexible working described in this report.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Agree on the **key capabilities required for senior managers** and pre-qualify a time-bound list of candidates available to be appointed through a selection process when vacancies arise. The list should take talent, geographical and gender balance into account.

Open senior management posts for certain roles to external candidates.

Apply the **five-year mobility rule** strictly to all senior management appointments and require any exceptions to be agreed by the College. Ensure all senior managers regularly engage in professional development training.

Introduce a **temporary leadership track** to recognise the value of input to collaborative and flexible arrangements in areas such as innovation, priority initiatives and cross-DG cooperation.

Ensure promotion procedures reward collaborative, cross-DG working.

Carry out a review of how **all posts will be affected by AI** and reflect this in future recruitment planning.

Create transparent **career pathways for a hybrid workforce**, balancing permanent talent and temporary expertise.

Create an annual pool of posts that can be reallocated to new priorities by deciding on an annual differential tax on DGs to make a fixed number of posts available. Link the returned posts explicitly to the AI work-redesign inventory so that reallocation decisions take into account efficiency gains from AI.

Section 8

The Commission's representations in the Member States – a strategic resource

The EU's legitimacy has always rested on its ability to understand and serve the diverse realities of Member States. Strengthening this connection is essential to the Commission's continued capacity to evolve with the Union it serves. With a revised mandate, the Commission's representations in the Member States can play a vital role in ensuring the Commission is well informed about the complex national and regional realities that determine the outcome of EU policies.

The Commission has representations in all 27 Member States plus six regional offices. These are staffed by Commission officials who come from, and return to, a wide range of DGs following their postings, and locally recruited staff. This represents a significant investment of resources and the Commission should ensure that it maximises the added value of posting staff to representations located across the EU.

While the Commission has always maintained multiple channels of engagement with Member States, its approach is not strategic and remains largely scattered. This means that the Commission often lacks a more holistic view of the realities in each Member State. The Commission's increased responsibilities and the greater impact of EU policies have raised the stakes, particularly in recent years, as the Commission has taken on more sensitive tasks that affect citizens directly. For example, tasks that require national policy reforms as conditions for EU funding, the increased use of regulations rather than directives and new areas of work such as housing and health in response to recent crises.

Despite multiple individual contacts, current efforts to use the country knowledge of the DGs and the representations are not yielding the benefits of a more organised approach. DGs frequently engage with national authorities individually on their policies without taking the wider Commission agenda into account. This brings the risk of overlaps, contradictions and missed opportunities for better mutual understanding. For example, policy implementation dialogues with Member States are not co-ordinated across DGs, with central services or the representations. The Heads of Representation are not fully included in preparations for the negotiations of the national and regional partnership plans.

In line with the One Commission approach advocated in this report, it is time for a different type of engagement. The Commission can turn its collective country expertise into a real strategic asset for policymaking by changing the way it works. By drawing on all its knowledge, the Commission can improve its engagement with the

Member States and the range of national-level bodies and organisations. A strategic steer with Commission-wide country teams bringing in-depth country knowledge to internal discussions, would break silos and facilitate regular country specific strategic discussions at political level. It would also contribute to a more agile and collaborative culture within the Commission.

Due to their in-country presence, the representations can play an important role in understanding the level of sensitivity of issues, the best timing to initiate certain discussions, and local perceptions of the EU and the Commission's work. This would help the Commission to factor in the likely impact of key decisions in its deliberations and ensure that the national level has a better understanding of the purpose of new proposals, which helps to strengthen trust with Member States and citizens. Making this change is a key factor in reinforcing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Commission's work.

The HLG therefore recommends reshaping the role and mandates of representations so they play a more integral part in the Commission's work and purpose, enhancing the Commission's distributed capacity for understanding and learning.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Facilitate **regular country specific strategic discussions at political level**, and create a more interactive, collaborative culture within the Commission and with Member States.

Give a new mandate to the representations and strengthen their capacity to act proactively as enablers of policy engagement and sounding boards with Member States.

In future, **the representations should be placed where they can work strategically** combining centralised support with decentralised expertise. AI should be used to provide an AI-assisted layer of intelligence gathering to support this practice.

Section 9

Rethinking the agency landscape

The EU has created a range of agencies to support its work. It has 35 decentralised agencies located in Member States with a current budget of €3 billion a year and over 15 000 staff. It has six executive agencies with a combined budget of €420 million and 3 305 staff. It also has six offices with an annual budget of €395 million and a staff of 3 380. The Court of Auditors prepared a special report on agencies in 2020 in which it recommended that the Commission and the agencies: (i) ensure the relevance, coherence and flexibility of the set-up of agencies, (ii) allocate resources in a more flexible manner, (iii) improve governance, accountability and reporting on performance; and (iv) strengthen the role of agencies as centres of expertise and networking²².

Given the steady increase of their number, cost and staffing and the small size of several decentralised agencies²³, the HLG considers that a further review is now needed. The Commission should launch a review for discussion with the agencies and the Member States. The concept should include revising the mandates of certain agencies, looking at full or partial mergers of some and at discontinuation in appropriate cases. The review should also factor in the transformational impact of AI.

This recommendation would mostly be implemented throughout the period of the next MFF, given the time needed to prepare and adopt legislative amendments. Unless an imperative need can be established, there should be a moratorium on the creation of new decentralised agencies. Pooling support and administrative services amongst decentralised agencies should be scaled up to enhance synergies and cost-efficiency. Finally, as part of wider initiatives to improve governance, action should be taken to enhance the administrative oversight of the decentralised agencies, including by the Commission.

All relevant recommendations in this report should be applied to agencies where possible to increase their agility, effectiveness and their capacity to evolve.

22 European Court of Auditors, Future of EU agencies – Potential for more flexibility and cooperation, Special Report No 22/2020 (2020)

23 13 have a headcount below 150

RECOMMENDATION 9

Carry out a **thorough review on the relevance of the tasks of decentralised agencies** to determine whether they are still necessary or are already performed either by the Commission or by the Member States. Apply the AI work-redesign approach set out in Section 4 of this report, alongside the relevance assessment, so that decisions to consolidate agencies are based on workloads that are about to change shape.

Strictly enforce a **moratorium on new agencies** until this review is complete.

Where new tasks are judged necessary, the preferred option should be to **allocate them to an existing decentralised agency**, updating its tasks as required.

Conclusion

The High-Level group has been impressed by the openness of the Commission and by its commitment to look frankly at the way it works. We have shared our experiences of working in other organisations and questioned some of the legacy practices identified in the Commission. We would like to express our thanks and appreciation for the co-operation of all concerned.

The Commission has made a major investment in carrying out its large-scale review and this has been a valuable and worthwhile exercise. It has raised expectations across the staff but has also created a coalition for change in all DGs and has provided a wealth of ideas on where change is needed and how to make it happen.

In our view, the option of the status quo is not a real choice because the world is changing too quickly. The EU's greatest institutional strength has always been its capacity to evolve. The Commission must now turn that same capacity inward - not merely to deliver for today, but to build an institution that is permanently equipped to adapt, learn, and respond to whatever the future demands.

Our report indicates what is not working and recommends ways of making improvements. It is up to the political level of the Commission to decide when and how to implement them. We have designed our recommendations as a package, so a piecemeal selection of only some of the recommendations will not deliver the best results. We acknowledge that change can be difficult and disruptive, but we believe that the case for the Commission to embrace change is now urgent.

If the Commission is willing to unite its political and administrative levels around the approach of One Commission and commits to working differently to deliver a clear set of well-defined priorities that meet the real needs of EU citizens, it has a real chance of success. With three years of the current Commission's term of office still to run, we believe that now is the time for the kind of changes we have outlined.

We would like to thank the Commission for the opportunity to offer our outside-in perspective and wish all involved success in completing the task of making the Commission future ready.

Annex 1

The large-scale review of the Commission’s organisation and operations – the workstreams

In September 2024, President von der Leyen tasked Commissioner Serafin to carry out a large-scale review of the Commission’s organisation and operations.

The internal dimension of this review was organised around 15 cross-Commission workstreams, structured under three pillars: People and Culture, Structures, and Processes. The workstreams were led by senior managers from across the Commission and supported by diverse, cross-departmental teams. In total, more than 150 colleagues contributed to this phase of the review. Work began in November 2025 and ran for approximately nine months.

The 15 Workstreams:

People and Culture	Structures	Processes
• Purpose and Values • Leadership • Talent Acquisition • Careers, Mobility, Learning and Development	• Collaboration • Directorates-General • Service Model • Offices and Agencies • The Commission’s Presence in Member States • Discontinuation / De-prioritisation • Unlocking Resources	• Innovation and AI • Compliance and Impact • Simplification • Financial Management

The workstreams drew on a wide range of evidence and input, including: The 2025 Staff Satisfaction Survey; an external benchmarking exercise (with briefs prepared by Gartner and the OECD); a staff suggestion box (open to all Commission staff); input from the Central Staff Committee and staff representatives and exchanges with the High-Level reflection group.

The workstreams delivered 96 recommendations on 13 July 2026. These were presented to Commissioner Serafin and made available to all Commission staff.

The workstream recommendations provide a key input for the final report to be presented by Commissioner Serafin to President von der Leyen and the college by the end of 2026.

The final report will be complemented by additional inputs, including this independent report of the High-Level reflection group on the Future of the Commission’s Civil Service and insights from the external benchmarking exercise. Together, these inputs will inform the Commission’s decisions on how to modernise and future-proof its civil service.

