



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

25 February 2026, Brussels

Meeting minutes

Main objectives of the meeting

The purpose of the third meeting was to deepen the group members' understanding of the issues being explored internally in the Commission and to meet and discuss these with the workstream leaders.

The meeting was organised around the three broad clusters: processes, structures and people and culture.

Processes

The leaders of the workstreams under the processes cluster joined for the first session. During the session, leaders outlined key areas their teams are examining. These include exploring how artificial intelligence (AI) could shape the future of the Commission, as well as ways to address current operational challenges such as complex internal processes and a cautious risk appetite within the organisation.

The members recognised an ongoing tension between compliance and performance in the public sector, noting that a strict 'zero risk' culture usually hinders efficiency and innovation. To address this, they stressed the value of setting out a clear, well-defined risk appetite which ties directly to the Commission's overall objective and prioritises delivering real outcomes. Additionally, the discussion highlighted the role of incentives in shaping organisational culture, helping to strike the right balance between compliance requirements, driving high performance and maximising positive impact.

The members also explored ways to reduce compliance pressure at an organisational level, including radical transparency and using AI to automate low-risk, repetitive tasks. These tools, they noted, could free up space for innovation and allow staff to focus on activities that deliver a greater impact. Finally, the members emphasised the critical role of leadership in driving organisational change. They highlighted, for example, the need for senior leaders to champion a culture of continuous improvement, helping the Commission adapt and thrive in today's fast-paced environment.

Structures

In the second session, leaders from the structures workstreams explored issues linked to making the Commission's structures more agile, collaborative and responsive. The workstream leaders flagged that they are exploring how to make workforce mobility more flexible, enabling staff to shift more easily between roles and teams. They are also examining mechanisms for dynamic resource

allocation. Another key issue, identified by the workstream leaders, was how to break down silos by embedding collaboration as the norm across the organisation. The discussion that followed touched upon various structural models which could support these goals. The use of matrix structures to support cross-policy working was flagged as well as the idea of a central innovation fund to raise finance for cross-departmental projects. Additionally, outcome-based portfolio approaches were discussed as a way to help organisations to respond with more agility by organising work around goals rather than rigid hierarchies. The potential that AI is beginning to play in this area in identifying opportunities and tracking outcomes across programmes and portfolios was also flagged. The group also highlighted the behavioural and cultural shifts required to make these changes successful, including the need for systematic incentives that reward collaboration and the use of targeted training to equip staff with skills needed to thrive in more interconnected, fluid structures.

People and culture

The final session of the day brought together leaders from the people and culture workstream, who began by underscoring the foundational role of organisational culture in all other workstreams and the importance that leaders have in modelling and reinforcing values needed to drive change. Issues linked to careers and talent acquisition were also raised, touching upon a variety of topics from career mobility and learning and development to recognition, reward and motivation. A central theme which emerged was how the Commission can better leverage its existing talent, ensuring staff are empowered to use and develop their skills.

The open discussion that followed focused on the opportunities provided by the current review to future-proof the organisation by aligning culture, leadership and changes in future workforce demographics. Members emphasised the need to define not only the skills and profiles needed to thrive in the coming years but also the leadership behaviours and cultural attributes which will be required. To capitalise on this, the group highlighted the importance of a coordinated approach that aligns leadership selection, talent programmes and succession planning to the organisations challenges. Agility, flexibility and innovation were flagged as important attributes for the workforce, particularly considering the potential of AI to reshape jobs and profiles needed. To prepare for these changes, the group highlighted the value of workforce foresight and scenario planning as tools to anticipate trends and adapt proactively as well as revisiting the incentive structure to ensure they reward outcome-based performance.

Next steps

The Chair confirmed the next meeting will take place on 8 April and indicated that the Secretariat will follow up with members to facilitate further discussions between the workstreams and group members if needed.

List of participants

Chairperson

Catherine Day

Members

Mirosława Boryczka

Marco Daglio
Luukas Ilves
Darja Isaksson
Luis Romero Requena
Giorgios Pitsilis
Maria Schack Vindum
Theresa Twachtmann

European Commission

Stephen Quest
Paul McAleavey
Pascal Leardini
Ana Carrero
Lauren O'Hanlon
Michaela Sullivan-Paul
Workstream leaders from processes; structures and people & culture clusters