

Food Consumption Data Network

Minutes of the 16th meeting



17-18 June 2024

09:00-18:00 / 09:00-13:00

Minutes agreed on 8 July 2024

Location: EFSA - Parma (Meeting Room 00/M07)/Web conference

Attendees:

- o Network Participants:

| Country | Name ¹ |
|------------------------|--|
| Austria | University of Vienna |
| Belgium | Sciensano |
| Bulgaria | National Center of Public Health and Analyses |
| Croatia | Faculty of Food Technology Osijek, University Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek |
| Cyprus | State General Laboratory of Cyprus |
| Czech Republic | National Institute of Public Health |
| Estonia | National Institute for Health Development |
| Finland | The National Institute for Health and Welfare |
| France | Anses |
| Germany | Max Rubner-Institut |
| Greece | Hellenic Food Authority |
| Ireland | University College Dublin |
| Italy | Consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'economia agraria (Council for Agricultural Research and Economics - CREA) |
| Latvia | Institute of Food Safety, Animal Health and Environment "BIOR" |
| Lithuania | Institute of Hygiene |
| Luxembourg | Luxembourg Veterinary and Food Administration |
| Malta | Malta Competition & Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) |
| Netherlands | Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) |
| Norway | VKM (Scientific Committee for Food and Environment) |
| Poland | National Institute of Public Health NIH - National Research Institute |
| Portugal | University of Porto (invited by Autoridade de Segurança Alimentar e Económica (ASAE)) |
| Romania | NATIONAL SANITARY VETERINARY AND FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY |
| Slovak Republic | National Agricultural and Food Centre |
| Slovenia | National Institute of Public Health |
| Spain | Complutense University of Madrid |



| | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| | AESAN |
| Sweden | Swedish Food Agency |

- Observers:
Swiss Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (Switzerland);
Institute for Medical Research, University of Belgrade, National institute of Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia; Kosovo Food and veterinary Agency;
Institute of Public Health of Montenegro; Food and Veterinary Agency, North Macedonia; Food Safety Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Hearing Experts:
FAO; WHO
- European Commission/Other EU Agencies representatives:
DG Joint Research Centre
- EFSA:
IDATA Unit: Fabrizio Abbinante; Sofia Ioannidou (SI); Anastasia Livaniou (AL);
Valentina Bocca (VB); Elissavet Valanou (EV); Ayo Ogunye; Pedro Ferreira;
NIF Unit: Lucia Fabiani (LF), Silvia Valtuena Martinez (SVM)
MESE Unit: Giulio Di Piazza (GDP); Bruno Dujardin (BD), Rita Sofia Ferreira De Sousa (RF), Zsuzsanna Horvath (ZH), Efisio Solazzo (ES),
ENREL Unit: Sanja Ilieva (SIL)
LA Unit: Anna Schuster; Citlali Pintado

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed the participants.
Apologies were received from Denmark, Iceland and Türkiye.

2. Tour-de table

Short presentation of all Network meeting attendees.

3. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted with the following changes:

- Change of chairperson
- Meeting starting at 09.00 on Day 2
- Swapping of agenda items 16 and 19

4. FCD Network ToR 2024-2027

Anastasia Livaniou (AL) presented the recent changes in the Terms of Reference of the Food Consumption Data Network, as approved by EFSA's Advisory Forum in May 2024. Specifically, the new ToR foresee the creation of ad-hoc Network subgroups, as well as the update of the EFSA Guidance on harmonised food consumption data collection. The ToR are due for revision in 2027.



5. Food Consumption data at EFSA - updates

Elissavet Valanou (EV) presented the status of the Comprehensive Food Consumption Database together with a demonstration of the summary statistics available for the Comprehensive Food Consumption data. Details were also provided on the number of countries participating in the EU MENU project (officially closed at 2023) by population group. Finally, an update was given on the changes that will be introduced in the new release of the Comprehensive Food Consumption Database in 2024. Overall, the new comprehensive release will include the datasets provided by Croatia, Montenegro, and Poland. In addition, this update introduces further changes related to the classification of food items, which should be aligned with the latest version of the FoodEx2 catalogue. In addition, a small number of corrections were made to the consumption of certain foods, where inaccurate quantities and missing facets were identified. The presentation concluded by outlining the next steps for continuous data collection. These include the data sharing agreements with Norway, Greece, Ireland and the Netherlands and the possibility of obtaining data through the tailor-made activities of the Focal Points.

AL called the participants to inform EFSA if they have ongoing or planning food consumption data collections and if they wish to share their data with EFSA via data sharing agreements. She informed that the focal point tailor-made activities can be an option for receiving support for coding and transmitting data to EFSA, and that EFSA will try to direct funding in coming years to support continuous data collection activities. Finland informed that they start a new survey for adolescents and expressed interest in sharing this data with EFSA.

6. EFSA Rebuild Data Framework project: status & survey outcome

Valentina Bocca (VB) presented the progress of Rebuild project, that aims at creating a new modern data collection and analysis system in accordance with the EFSA Strategy 2027. In order to identify the challenges and requirements, EFSA ran several elicitation activities, and among these, an online survey was launched in June 2023 and communicated to over 300 stakeholders. A response rate of 45% was registered, covering all countries and scientific domains. The major findings and the relevant scores of the survey analysis regarding the data preparation, transmission, validation, and error management, as well as terminology management were presented. The requirements were clustered, and the main aspects highlighted are the following: flexibility and scalability, common tools to support stakeholders in data preparation and management, improvement of the error management system, the need for a connected and automated system. The next steps of the Rebuild project and the 2 waves of implementation were described. Currently, EFSA is running the technical analysis and a blueprint of the new system is expected to be delivered by Autumn 2024. After that, the system will be implemented and piloted with volunteer Member States (MS) in March 2026.

Sofia Ioannidou (SI) remarked that EFSA will be able to share more details on the project during next year's meeting.

7. Intake Assessment for the UL on preformed vitamin A



Silvia Valtueña Martinez (SVM) presented the experience of using the ESFA Comprehensive Food Consumption and food composition databases to obtain harmonised intake estimates of preformed vitamin A (mostly retinol) in the context of setting a Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL) for the vitamins. Retinol occurs at very high concentrations in animal liver, a food less frequently consumed, and accumulates in the liver. Standard intake scenarios led to 2 to 8 times higher P95th vales as compared to national surveys that had adjusted for the frequency of liver products intake. In the absence of data from food propensity questionnaires, different scenarios were used for the risk characterisation i.e., assuming consumption of liver products 1/month, 2/month, 1/week, and no liver consumption. Frequency data at individual level is critical to obtain accurate intake estimates in this context.

Discussion followed with Norway on the differences that were observed between EFSA vs national intake estimations, stemming from different occurrence levels in products sold in different countries. Portugal (PT) stressed the importance of nutrients information in the food consumption data, as well as of having details on traditional foods which are not commonly used via FPQs. SI confirmed that EFSA will encourage such collection in the future. Switzerland asked to clarify to which non-invasive biomarkers of vitamin A status/intake. SVM explained that while stable isotope dilution methods are proposed as markers of status (non-invasive, but difficult to use in big numbers), plasma retinyl ester concentrations as markers of intake are minimally invasive and also the most promising. Lucia Fabiani (LF) provided the link to the Opinion on vitamin A for further reading on this matter.

8. EFSA Fish Consumption Mandate

SI presented the European survey on Fish and other seafood consumption and related consumer awareness project. This was initiated on receiving a mandate from EC for a scientific report on the frequency of the consumption of different species of fish, crustaceans and molluscs and on the effectiveness of MSs' advice on the consumption of these species in relation to their contamination with mercury. To address this mandate EFSA will run a survey in two time points (before and after communication activity is run by MSs) covering both consumption frequency and awareness of existence/effectiveness of MSs advice on fish and seafood. The first survey has already taken place and the results have been shared with the network in the form of country fact sheets and were summarised during the presentation. The second survey is planned for Q4 of 2024. The analysis and comparison of the two-point surveys will then take place and the EFSA scientific opinion is expected by December 2025.

Luxembourg (LU) inquired on the criteria used for the second point survey country selection. SI explained the countries selected were those planned to update communication, those who confirm periodical communication and those with high frequency of fish consumption as control points compared with previous survey.

Future communication activities will depend on both the countries and the EC decisions. Following the second point survey results, there might be an update of the legal limits, alteration of the communication strategies at EU-level or national level.

LU also questioned if the awareness of the ecological impacts was considered. SI clarified that it was not required under the EC mandate, therefore, it was not considered in the project.



Belgium (BE) noted that even though the results of a risk-benefit analysis showed high swordfish consumption in pregnant women, such consumption was not observed in the national food consumption surveys. SI mentioned that it might be important that we include such a check against the EFSA Comprehensive database for every participating country (if data available) also for this fish survey. BE also inquired about the questions on risk awareness and how difficult it's been to get a correct answer from the public. SI clarified that questions were developed by communication and national experts and thus, can give accurate results.

Norway shared their observation that for some foods, e.g., fish, many frequency options in the FPQ are necessary to capture meaningful distributions for countries with low/medium/high consumption frequencies for the food in question, even though this has some drawbacks too. It was also suggested to include an option to provide the approximate number of consumption events per year.

Last, SI highlighted that intermediate results cannot be referenced yet, but the Network will be informed as soon as the final report is made available.

9. Dietary cumulative risk assessment: substances and organ prioritisation

In the first part of the presentation, Efsio Solazzo (ES) explained how consumption data are instrumental to an innovative risk assessment (RA), carried out in the framework of cumulative risk assessment activities. The methodology and outcomes of the recent scientific report on 'Prioritisation of pesticides and target organ systems for dietary cumulative risk assessment based on the 2019–2021 monitoring cycle' were presented. The prioritisation method adopted allowed to reduce the number of substances by about 80%. These substances were in turn grouped based on their capacity to cause toxicological effects on common organ systems and, as second step, probabilistic combined exposure calculations were carried out for 16 target organ systems. This step allowed to identify the organ systems that need further assessment, reducing their initial number by about 70%. The organ systems would need to be prioritised as follows: reproductive and developmental toxicity, liver, kidney, male reproductive system, and haematopoietic system and haematology.

The second part of the presentation, Giulio Di Piazza (GDP) zoomed into the challenges posed by, and to, the data for assessments of increasing complexities. Among the topics covered were: the Raw Primary Commodities (RPC) model, a model for slitting the composite food into RPC Derivatives, and RPC; future update of the RPC model; quality aspects on the foodEx2 codification in the consumption database; general assumptions taken before using the consumption database, and the importance of having enough data; the reliability of percentiles mandate, and its importance on define how much data is enough to be used in RA; the various model available to EFSA, that are using the consumption database for self-service RA; and the plan for updating/enhancing those models.

BE asked if EFSA would consider exploring the use of new AI technologies to automatically assign facets based on the brand name. Bruno Dujardin (BD) recognized this could be useful and added there are ongoing projects to explore the use of such technologies in EFSA's work, however if this would be one of the topics to be explored would depend on the priorities set.



BE highlighted the importance of collecting information on brand and name of packaged products whenever is possible. Zsuzsanna Horvath (ZH) complemented that these facets are also useful for the supplements and fortified foods.

France noted that the facets normally needed are those we do not often know. SI and BD confirmed the issue and proposed the solution of a database linked to the dietary software to support this process e.g., if brand name is available, it will be easier to derive more info.

10. Deriving indicators to monitor healthy sustainable diets

JRC gave a presentation on the use of EFSA's food consumption data to support monitoring progress towards healthy, sustainable diets and sustainable food systems in the EU. Diet change is central to the food system transformation and many sustainability and health priorities in the EU and Member States. To overcome limitations of using food consumption data for monitoring, the Joint Research Centre is exploring the potential use of EFSA food consumption data to derive indicators in support of monitoring progress towards healthy, sustainable diets. The presentation was an opportunity to share the methods developed to project consumption changes over time for 10 key dietary aspects using market sales data trends. Exploring collaboration opportunities within the EFSA food consumption network in the context of monitoring healthy, sustainable diets could be an opportunity to improve underlying methods, data quality and data availability while contributing with better evidence for supporting EU policies and the transition towards sustainable food systems in the region.

LF shared information on the EFSA Opinion on the upper level on sugars, that contains estimates for intakes of total and free/added sugars and share the link, as it will help to fill in gaps of the work presented.

PT appreciated the use of the food consumption data for better indicators at EU-level and reiterated their support to such activities. PT went on highlighting that in the recommendation it is often not clear if the defined amounts refer to raw or 'as consumed' and this should be a key point of attention for this analysis.

BE stressed that seeing data used in broader-than-EFSA context, can help to further justify continuation of funding. BE also inquired whether a comparison was made using historical consumption data to ensure that the extrapolation is not a random guess. The JRC said that this is very valid approach to consider in the future.

FAO informed about the Healthy Diets Monitoring Initiative (HDMI), established in 2022 with the aim of enabling decision-makers and stakeholders to monitor and achieve healthy diets for people and the planet.

11. Food Consumption surveys in the post-covid society

BE shared reflexions and issues raised during the data collection of the Belgian Food Consumption Survey 2022-2023 which took place towards the end of the pandemic. The main difficulty met during the recent fieldwork was the low response rate, which also impacted the ability to retain interviewers to conduct the fieldwork, and therefore



added a burden on the survey team. The fieldwork approach had to be adapted and the budget of the survey increased to finish the data collection.

For future data collection, BE will most likely change the approach, and look towards the use of apps to conduct interviews. The question of representativeness and sampling approach remain the main problems going forward. Future survey will most likely need to improve the value for participants by finding ways of providing direct feedback, which would help more than financial incentives. Further research and financial support will be needed to transition from GloboDiet-led interviews to web-/app-based interviews. A continuous data collection approach will also be considered.

LU questioned the possibility of using survey companies for the recruitment, as they cannot reach high response rates either. BE confirmed that indeed, it's not always clear how they calculate the weights and whether the sample is really representative of the population. The idea though would be that such a task is rather assigned to survey companies that work mainly or are affiliated with universities, that have better transparency on how the panels of respondents are selected.

Norway emphasized that collecting data through telephone interviews could achieve a similar response rate and be cost-effective compared to face-to-face interviews.

12. ERA EU Menu: Advice for the update of EU Menu Guidance

The results of the ERA EU Menu Project were presented by the University of Porto, Portugal, Project partner and Network member.

Based on a literature review on the landscape of methods and tools available for national dietary surveys and lessons learned through an evaluation of the data collected under the first round of EU Menu, recommendations for an update of the EU Menu Guidance were derived. Results can be seen in detail [here](#).

13. Network taskforce: EU Menu 2 Pilot proposal & discussion

LF presented the formation of the Network taskforce, how the results of the ERA EU Menu report were discussed in the group, as well as the concluding taskforce proposals for a possible pilot project before the update of the EU Menu Guidance.

The discussion focused on whether a full-scale pilot project is needed (within the context of a national survey and addressing all dimensions) or smaller size exploratory or developing projects would suffice. The main concerns of both EFSA and participants were the limited budget and the timelines i.e., can we afford to wait at least three more years for the next round of EU Menu, and what can we really do with the available budget. The key points and ideas for the next steps that came up during the discussion, are the following:

- Performing additional literature searches on areas we need to further explore,
- Use the knowledge of the group to develop material to be used in the updated Guidance (e.g., comprehensive facet compendium, standardised FPQ etc.),
- Focus to be given on most relevant aspects having the highest impact,
- Be careful in not taking onboard changes that may impact the quality of the data. Trying to increase response rate, might increase 'noise in the data'



- (possible solution: need to use only well designed and validated dietary tools, with checks after completion),
- Possibility to adapt Guidance as soon as possible only with ERA EU Menu results and possible pilot/exploratory projects do not delay launching of EU Menu 2,
 - EFSA to encourage submission of existing data that have been collected following the EU Menu methodology (e.g., via EFSA Focal Point tailor-made activities, or other funding options),
 - Related to the use of convenience sampling for special population subgroups and self-administered methods, we have enough evidence to go ahead with,
 - Possibility to explore the representatives of the convenience sample, as well as stratification aspects,
 - Test how to improve the quality of self-administered methods e.g., link with branded DBs

14. Welcome back and Apologies

The Chair made a quick recap of Day 1.

15. EU Menu 2 Pilot: poll & discussion

Discussion kicked off with reflections on Day 1. Then a poll followed to identify the areas that the Network participants thought should be further tested/explored. The key points and ideas for the next steps that came up during the discussion, are the following:

- Given the limited budget some key areas to explore could be: the complete facet compendium per food group, a model for submitting existing FPQ data to EFSA, and self-administered tools with connections,
- There's enough evidence to proceed with the proposal for self-measured over self-reported (if interviewer-measured not possible). This would suffice to assess misreporting however, perhaps not accurate enough if data are to be used for obesity indicators and other uses. It was also noted that self-measures are used by the European Health Information Survey (data used by Eurostat),
- Should not make compromises on ensuring coverable of 4 seasons and controlling for seasonality as it's important to simulate yearly consumption,
- Dietary assessment tool and Self-administered tool should not necessarily need to be common, if they comply to common standards and specifications,
- Consider introducing three non-consecutive days 24HDR, to be able to capture some less frequently consumed foods (e.g., fish, eggs, corn products),
- EFSA should support either the development and validation or the enhancement of an existing self-administered tool that includes carefully designed food and recipe list incorporating the appropriate quantification methods which would be also linked to brand databases,
- Prerequisites and specifications for both interviewer and self-administered tools should be explicitly defined and closely monitored to ensure the accuracy of the collected data,
- For a self-administered method, we could investigate the cost-benefit of including more than 2 days (i.e. 3 or more). This decision could be derived through literature search and through the assessment of the datasets included



- in comprehensive database, and through the experience/ best-practices followed,
- If the vision is to make food consumption data more accessible and feasible to collect for Europe, then perhaps some compromises can be made in terms of methods and costs burden.

The top 4 choices identified via the poll for further exploration are: self-administered methods, standard FPQ, Food list checks and facet compendium, mandatory PAL value questions.

EFSA confirmed that all discussions will be taken into consideration and that will reach out to the Network for any decision and next steps.

16. Networking and capacity building initiatives with IPA countries

Sanja Ilieva (SIL) presented the networking and capacity-building initiatives for IPA countries under EFSA's IPA III Action. The program, established for 2023-2026, includes preparatory measures for the participation of IPA beneficiaries in EFSA's activities, and it was intended to target the competent authorities for food and feed safety, the scientific community, and the general public in these countries. The main goals of IPA III Action are to strengthen the capacities for risk assessment and communication, increase the scientific cooperation and networking activities between IPA beneficiaries and MS, and promote the harmonisation risk assessment and data collection methodologies with those in EFSA.

The presentation highlighted EFSA-funded capacity-building events occurring until the end of 2024, such as EFSA's Parma Summer School and EU-FORA induction training. It also covered other tailor-made activities developed with Focal Points in pre-accession countries. Additionally, to enhance involvement in EFSA's activities, experts from IPA countries currently participate as observers in 8 Scientific Networks and 13 Sub-groups.

No questions were received but Network was invited to contact Sanja for any further information.

17. Environmental footprints from foods and diets

Sweden (SE) presented the analysis of the environmental impact of the diets in the latest dietary surveys on adolescents (2016-17) and young children (2021-23) which has been conducted by the Swedish Food Agency. A study on adolescents' dietary climate impact using a Swedish climate database has already been published. Analyses of environmental indicators in both children and adolescents is upcoming, using a newly developed free and public platform called SAFAD (Sustainability Assessment of Foods and Diets) where environmental data (8 different indicators) are matched to FoodEx2-codes (<https://safad.se/>). It is possible to look at the impact from specific foods or the whole diet. You can also upload your own FoodEx2-coded data and estimate the environmental impact. It is developed by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences within the EU-project Plan'Eat.



The discussion followed with Norway asking if the footprint of the current dietary recommendations for the Swedish population was assessed. SE informed that this analysis was not conducted.

LU inquired on whether packaging was considered which was indeed the case. Then discussion continued focusing on the gender differences identified. SE confirmed that according to their findings boys are higher consumers of meat (and thus, with greater contribution to greenhouse gas emissions), and girls higher consumers of fruits and vegetables. PT inquired on whether the meat consumption was energy adjusted which was confirmed by the presenter. Serbia also noted that perhaps a gender-neutral approach might also be worth exploring.

SI noted that EFSA is currently running a project, with the collaboration of JRC on the environmental footprint of foods and that perhaps, some results can be presented in the next year's meeting.

18. FAO data dissemination platforms

FAO presented data sharing platforms under their mandate to collect, analyse, interpret, and disseminate information relating to nutrition, food and agriculture. FAO/WHO Global Individual Food consumption data Tool, also called "FAO/WHO GIFT" (<https://www.fao.org/gift-individual-food-consumption/en>) was presented as the FAO data dissemination platform of most relevance to the EFSA Food Consumption Data Network. The platform is an open access global database that shares individual-level dietary intake data collected using 24-h recalls or food records. The platform enables users to access data in two formats: 1) as survey microdata downloaded in Excel format; 2) As statistics and infographics visualized on the platform. A live demo of the platform was provided. The platform shares summary data on 351 dietary surveys and microdata on 55 dietary surveys, including 5 from the European Union.

Data owning institutions from European Union Member States are encouraged to share dietary data through the FAO/WHO GIFT platform to promote their work and facilitate secondary use of the data. To share data through the FAO/WHO GIFT platform, it must be harmonized, including coding with FoodEx2. The data owning institution is also required to sign a standard legal agreement regulating terms and conditions of data sharing and dissemination. The FAO team highlighted that 43 dietary surveys from EU Member States have been identified as suitable for inclusion in the platform and welcomed their inclusion.

BE questioned EFSA about plans to improve data visualization. SI informed nothing is planned yet, but this might be the case after the launch of the EU Menu 2. PT underlined the relevance of having a harmonized platform to explore and compare data from different countries.

19. The Zero Hidden Hunger Project

Serbia (RS) presented the Zero Hidden Hunger EU project. This project aims to provide estimates of the true prevalence of micronutrient (MN) deficiencies, based on priority biomarker and MN intake data in European populations and their associated health costs. It is focused on high-risk population subgroups and supported upon the best possible evidence to develop context-specific, tailored food-focused solutions to ensure adequate supply of vitamins and minerals from diets from



sustainable sources. The project consortium focuses the research effort on existing high-quality data resources and biobanks from diverse and representative population groups around Europe, supplemented by targeted studies in underrepresented groups, maximizing research investment and adding value. Using high-throughput biomarker and advanced data analytical and modelling techniques, Zero Hidden Hunger EU will deliver credible evidence enabling policymakers and food system actors to deliver food-focused strategies to eradicate MN deficiencies from Europe.

The discussion followed with LU asking about the inclusion of data from food supplement users. RS informed this will be done, but most likely only for the recent surveys, for which data on food supplements use is of a higher quality. BE inquired about the use of data from old surveys, and RS clarified that a literature search will be performed in parallel to understand possible changes at the country level.

In addition, SI asked how these nutrient intake estimations are different from the EFSA's ones performed by EFSA for the Dietary Reference Values and the Upper levels opinions (NDA Panel). RS answered that they are re-matching national food consumption data (not only from EU Menu surveys – and not only from EU countries) with their national food composition databases.

20. Any Other Business

Network participants were invited to ask any question they have in relation to the Public Access to Documents process, to the EFSA Legal representatives.

BE conveyed the importance of countries knowing with whom their data is shared. This allows the best possible use of the data (e.g., in the research field), and it strengthens the importance of these projects to their sponsors.

The date of the next meeting was also discussed and EFSA proposed the first week of June (i.e. 2-6 June 2025). There was no objection from the Network participants. Network members were asked to notify EFSA if a concurrent meeting/conference falls during that week that will prevent them from attending. In that case, EFSA can consider finding alternative dates.

Closure of the meeting

The Chair thanked all participants for their valuable contribution and closed the meeting at 13:00.