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STUDY ON THE EVALUATION OF THE EFSA NETWORKS

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Abstract

The evaluation of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) networks over the 2021-2023 period was conducted pursuant to a requirement in Article 4.4 of the EFSA Management Board (MB) Decision (2021) setting up European Networks of scientific organisations operating in the fields within the Authority's mission. The 22 networks/sub-groups covered by the evaluation are set up to foster a cooperative environment for exchanging knowledge and expertise and to improve harmonisation in risk assessment across the Union. The evaluation addressed five evaluation questions (EQs), by applying 22 judgement criteria. Feedback was collected from network/sub-group participants and other relevant stakeholders through a survey. Interviews were held with network/sub-group coordinators and an extensive review of relevant documents was carried out. The analysis assessed each network/sub-group individually and the findings were synthesised to provide an overall assessment of the extent to which networks/sub-groups enable collaboration between EFSA and Member States (MSs).

The evaluation found overall positive outcomes and impacts on the performance of the 22 networks/sub-groups during the implementation period. The knowledge base of each network/sub-group has provided valuable inputs, particularly through the exchange of data/ information and collaboration in data collection, thus enhancing the work of EFSA (EQ1). The networks/sub-groups have also enhanced collaboration between EFSA and the MSs (EQ2).

The frequency and nature of engagement within the networks is considered adequate. The generalised introduction of hybrid meetings since 2023 is greatly appreciated for allowing in-person attendance and enlarging participation for alternates and other experts. All networks/ sub-groups are effective in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration within their remit, although there is scope to further enhance collaboration. The networks/sub-groups have fulfilled their intended objectives, as set out in their terms of reference (ToR), with many key accomplishments identified and few perceived shortcomings (EQ4). In meeting their individual objectives, the networks/sub-groups have also met the overarching objectives outlined in Article 2 of the EFSA MB Decision, when relevant to their remit (EQ3).

The networks/sub-groups have dealt with topics of current interest and have been efficient in addressing them (EQ5). They engage in activities that contribute to the current strategic objectives set out in EFSA's Strategy 2027, albeit to varying extents depending on their remit and activities undertaken. They are also able to respond promptly to relevant emerging health/safety challenges and crises. Moreover, the funding mechanism for the networks/sub-groups' operations, in terms of budget and participants' time, is considered sustainable in the medium to long-term (next 3-5 years). The total budget earmarked for all networks during 2021-2023 constitutes a small share of EFSA's annual budget.

Despite the overall positive findings, certain areas for improvements were identified. These include the scope to improve collaboration with other EFSA networks/sub-groups, including the exchange of best practices, as well as to enhance the level of participant proactiveness, including through improvements in the nomination process and in the collection/dissemination of network/sub-group information at national level. There is also scope to explore the development of a clear framework for the process of setting up the networks/sub-groups in the future.

Keywords: EFSA; networks; evaluation; risk assessment; scientific advice; collaboration

Question number:

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Executive Summary

Introduction: objectives and methodology

The evaluation of the **European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) networks** is the first review of the networks' operation and covers the 2021-2023 period. It forms part of a requirement set out in Article 4.4 of the EFSA Management Board (MB) **Decision** of 2021 setting up European Networks of scientific organisations operating in the fields within the Authority's mission.[1] The evaluation was conducted for EFSA between November 2023 and May 2024, and was led by Agra CEAS Consulting (part of S&P Global Commodity Insights) in cooperation with Areté Agrifood s.r.l.[2]

The networks were set up by EFSA to foster cooperation of scientific organisations in EU Member States (MSs), Iceland and Norway, in various scientific domains in EFSA's remit, as specified in Article 22(7) and Article 23(g) of EFSA's Founding Regulation, the General Food Law (**Regulation (EC) No 178/2002**) as amended by the Transparency **Regulation (EU) No 1381/2019**. Their tasks include coordinating activities, facilitating information exchange, developing and implementing joint projects, and sharing expertise and best practices.

In line with the terms of reference (ToR), the evaluation analyses the activities of each network and sub-group(s) to assess their **effectiveness**, **efficiency**, **sustainability**, **adequacy** and **impact** in improving the work of EFSA. It analyses the extent to which the specific goals of each network/sub-group, as specified in their respective ToRs, have been achieved. In doing so it also checks **alignment with the overarching objectives of Article 2 of the EFSA MB Decision**, which are shared across all networks.

The evaluation addressed **five evaluation questions (EQs)**, by applying 22 judgement criteria. The findings are based on feedback collected from a large number of network/sub-group participants and other relevant stakeholders (426 responses out of over 1 400 targeted by the survey), interviews with the EFSA coordinators of the 22 networks/sub-groups, and extensive desk research and review of documents relevant to the work of the networks/sub-groups during the 2021-2023 period.

The analysis was conducted in two steps. First, each network and sub-group was assessed on the basis of the five EQs and corresponding judgement criteria; second, the findings of the assessment for each network and sub-group were synthesised across all judgement criteria to provide the answers to the EQs across all networks and sub-groups.

Analysis: key findings

Key findings of the synthetic analysis are presented below for each of the five EQs.

1 Article 4.4 of the EFSA MB decision states:
"EFSA shall evaluate the work of each network at least every three years beginning in 2021 on the basis of the criteria outlined in Paragraph 1 of this Article. EFSA shall report the outcome of such evaluations of networks to the Management Board and the Advisory Forum. Based on the evaluation reports for each network, the Advisory Forum shall recommend non-binding either the continuation or discontinuation of each network and the Management Board shall decide whether a particular network should be continued or discontinued."
2 Members of the Consortium Civic Consulting (Consortium leader) – Agra CEAS Consulting (S&P Global Commodity Insights) – Areté – DTI – TNO – Gesundheit Österreich – LSE Consulting – Europe Economics – Euromonitor International (subcontractor). The study was launched by EFSA in the context of Framework Contract SANTE/2021/OP/0002SANTE/2016/A1/039 (RC/EFSA/RAL/2023/01 - SC01).

EQ1: Has each network/sub-group enhanced the work of EFSA?

The networks and sub-groups are set up to foster a cooperative environment for exchanging knowledge and expertise and to improve harmonisation in risk assessment across the Union. Given this aim, the networks/sub-groups should contribute to enhance the work of EFSA. The evaluation found that the knowledge base of each network/sub-group provided valuable inputs to EFSA during the 2021-2023 period, thus enhancing the work of EFSA.

In particular:

- According to the feedback received from EFSA staff and staff from other EU institutions, networks/sub-groups provide useful support to EFSA across the activities that are relevant/applicable to each network/sub-group. The activities commonly undertaken by nearly all networks/sub-groups are the exchange of data/information and collaboration in data collection.
- Networks are perceived positively by EFSA because they enhance exchange on the scientific methodology for risk assessment, including its dissemination and application in the MSs. The networks produce exercises and data/information that are incorporated in EFSA's work. Occasionally, where relevant, these may include inputs to scientific/technical reports (under GFL Art. 31 mandates) and, more rarely, scientific opinions (Art. 29 GFL mandates).

EQ2: Has each network/sub-group enhanced collaboration between EFSA and the Member States in the risk assessment activities

Collaboration between EFSA and the MSs in the risk assessment activities encompasses different forms of engagement amongst network/sub-group participants, both within formal and informal meetings and other activities.[3] The extent to which collaboration between EFSA and the MSs is enhanced was assessed for each network/sub-group on the basis of the frequency and nature of engagement; effectiveness in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration; and, the scope for enhancing collaboration. The evaluation found that the networks/sub-groups have enhanced collaboration between EFSA and the MSs.

In particular:

- **Frequency and nature of engagement within and outside the networks.** Engagement on formal activities is mainly occasional across all networks/sub-groups. The frequency of meetings varies from one to two meetings per year (and in a few cases more than two meetings), depending on each network's/sub-group's remit and actual needs. This is considered to be sufficient both by EFSA staff and by participants. Physical meetings are generally appreciated more than online meetings. Since 2023, hybrid meetings have become standard policy for EFSA, and this is greatly appreciated as they provide more flexibility and enable a wider number of participants to attend, including for example, alternates and other experts.

[3] Generally, for all networks/sub-groups, the following types of activities are identified as providing relevant occasions for engagement amongst participants: 1. Collaboration/coordination in data collection; 2. Exchange of data and information; 3. Exchange of expertise and best practices; 4. Participation in exercises; 5. Participation in joint projects; 6. Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31); 7. Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29); 8. Other forms of collaboration/activities (e.g. training and conferences).

Beyond meetings, participants' highest levels of engagement tend to be in the context of two types of formal activities: (i) exchange of data/information; and, (ii) exchange of expertise and best practices. The frequency and nature of engagement outside the network/sub-group meetings tends to be lower than that for formal network activities. Generally, the more active participants are in the network's formal activities, the more actively involved they are in collaborations outside of the network. Although it is not always possible to attribute the initiation of these collaborations to the network, clearly the existence of the network enables interaction between participants that can foster and support other forms of collaboration outside the formal network context.

- **Effectiveness in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration.** All networks/sub-groups were found to be effective. Although the form of collaboration is shaped by each network's/sub-group's remit and objectives, some common patterns emerged. Networks/sub-groups are generally most effective in enabling the exchange of data and information and the exchange of expertise and best practices, i.e. the two core activities on which they engage. Networks/sub-groups with data collection activities at their core are also considered to be effective in carrying out this activity. Furthermore, according to two-thirds of participants that responded to the survey, national-level systems exist for interacting with relevant national experts in the context of their respective network/sub-group activities. In most cases, this interaction (i.e. the collection and passing of national-level inputs to EFSA and the dissemination at the national level of information provided by EFSA) takes place mainly via the national Focal Points (FPs). There is also consensus that the networks/sub-groups are useful for participants' networking. Although some other networking opportunities exist at EU or international level, the EFSA networks/sub-groups provide a unique and irreplaceable role in fostering collaboration between MSs, as well as with EFSA, towards common goals. It is noted that networking is not a core objective or task of the sub-groups which tend to have specific objectives; rather, networking falls more generally under the remit of the 'parent' networks (e.g. AHAW and ZMD networks).
- **Scope for enhancing collaboration.** Participants reported a high level of collaboration with other EFSA networks/sub-groups, as well as with EFSA panels, networks of other EU agencies and EURL networks. However, in practice collaboration with these other networks tends to vary according to the remit of each network/sub-group. Collaboration between EFSA and the MSs is considered to be effective and useful, and participants are satisfied that suggestions for improvements in collaboration are taken on board. Nonetheless, persistent issues relate to administrative and technical challenges, such as the use of MS Teams which constrains the communication and exchange between participants due to the need to switch between accounts to use the EFSA channel. Thus, according to both participants and EFSA there is potential to improve future collaboration between EFSA and MSs, as well as with other networks. Some examples of suggestions for improvement in collaboration relate to potential future legislative developments resulting in new needs for data collection and new mandates for EFSA. Some other examples relate to strengthening collaboration with other EU agencies and/or other scientific platforms and fora in which MSs participate. New areas of collaboration with MSs are opened up by the EU Transparency Regulation for dedicated consultation with MSs, and in following up potential opportunities stemming from technological advances (e.g. the use of citizen science and artificial intelligence). These can play a role in the further development and harmonisation of methodologies for data collection and risk assessment.

EQ3: Has each network/sub-group satisfied the overarching objectives outlined in Article 2 of the EFSA MB Decision?

The evaluation found that the networks/sub-groups have met the overarching objectives outlined in Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision[4] to the extent these are relevant to the remit of each network/sub-group. In particular, the objectives of Art. 2 are not relevant for all networks/sub-groups. For many networks/sub-groups, participation in exercises and joint projects is not relevant; for other networks/sub-groups data collection is not relevant. Furthermore, the extent to which the overarching objectives of Art. 2 are fulfilled is also linked to the extent to which each network/sub-group fulfils its individual objectives (see EQ4).

EQ4: Has each network/sub-group met their individual targets, as laid down in their ToR?

Each network/sub-group is established to meet specific objectives in line with its remit, as set out in its ToR. The extent to which each network/sub-group met its individual targets during the 2021-2023 period was assessed through their perceived effectiveness in fulfilling their intended objectives; their accomplishments and successes; and, the extent to which shortcomings were identified. The evaluation found that the networks/sub-groups have met their individual targets.

In particular:

- **Effectiveness in fulfilling their intended objectives.** Most of the objectives set out in the ToR of each network/sub-group are being fulfilled. The level of fulfilment varies by network/sub-group, and this partly reflects the extent to which the objectives set out in the ToR are relevant. For example, in the case of complex networks (AHAW, ChemMonDC, ZMD) the objectives set out in the network's ToR are not always relevant for the sub-groups.
- **Accomplishments and successes.** Many key accomplishments were identified for each and every network/sub-group. Networking, sharing information and data, knowledge, experience and best practices, getting information on upcoming EFSA activities (such as scientific opinions) and addressing specific questions are considered to have been largely successful for all networks/sub-groups.
- **Shortcomings.** Few shortcomings were identified and these are either technical, i.e. related to a specific topic, or organisational/process-related. A common shortcoming is that many members/participants of the networks/sub-groups are not as proactive as intended. This is generally attributed partly to the participant nomination process, which is done at national level with the support of the FPs, and partly to the lack of resources and available expertise in some countries. It should be noted that, by their nature, sub-groups have specifically defined tasks that do not require the same level of proactiveness as networks which have continuous activities for the exchange of data/information.

[4] These include four key objectives: 1. facilitating the development of a scientific cooperation framework by the coordination of activities; 2. the exchange of information; 3. the development and implementation of joint projects; and, 4. the exchange of expertise and best practices in the fields within the Authority's mission."

EQ5: Is the topic of each network/sub-group of current interest and/or efficient in addressing it?

The extent to which networks/sub-groups follow a topic of current interest, and are efficient in addressing it, is determined by the relevance of their remit to health/safety risks and scientific developments over the 2021-2023 period, as linked to the priorities identified in **EFSA's Strategy (2027)**.[5] It is also influenced by each network's/sub-group's agility in responding to emerging challenges and depends on the extent to which the funding mechanisms for the networks/sub-groups' operations are sufficient and sustainable. The evaluation found that the networks/sub-groups have dealt with topics of current interest and have been efficient in addressing them.

In particular:

- **Relevance to health/safety risks and scientific developments.** Networks/sub-groups engage in activities that contribute to EFSA's current strategic objectives, albeit to varying extents depending on their remit and activities undertaken. There is consensus that the topics covered by the networks/sub-groups have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments in their remit.
- **Agility in responding to emerging challenges.** There is consensus that the networks/sub-groups are able to respond promptly to relevant emerging health/safety challenges and crises. The majority of the 346 participants that responded to the survey did not identify any failures in this respect. Only 22 respondents indicated perceived failures in that their network's/sub-group's remit does not cover the identification of emerging risks. However, the examples provided do not allow identifying any systemic failures.
- **Funding mechanisms for the networks/sub-groups' operations.** The EFSA networks are funded by the EFSA budget which is funded by the European Union. Networks only need a small proportion of the EFSA Units' annual budget to cover the travel expenses for participants attending physical meetings. The budget earmarked for all networks during the 2021-2023 period was EUR 634 760, of which 48.4 % was actually used. The underspend resulted from meetings being held mostly online in 2021 and 2022 due to Covid-19, and the introduction of hybrid meetings on a systematic basis from 2023. The current use of network participants' and network coordinators' time for formal network/sub-group activities in the current format is considered to be sustainable in the medium to long-term (next 3-5 years) across all networks/sub-groups. If demands change, for example through a different format for conducting activities and more frequent exchanges, then this may increase the workload for both EFSA coordinators and participants. Nonetheless, all networks/sub-groups are making efforts to avoid overloading participants and to maintain an acceptable level of participant engagement.

[5] The following three key objectives are defined in EFSA's Strategy 2027: Strategic Objective 1: Deliver trustworthy scientific advice and communication of risks from farm to fork: Strategic objective 2: Ensure preparedness for future risk analysis needs; Strategic objective 3: Empower people and ensure organisational agility.

Conclusions

The evaluation of the performance of EFSA networks/sub-groups during the 2021-2023 period has overall found positive outcomes and impacts across the 22 judgement criteria that were applied for addressing the five evaluation questions.

Despite the overall positive findings, certain areas for improvements were identified. These include:

1. Depending on the remit of each network/sub-group, opportunities could be explored to improve the level of collaboration with other EFSA networks/sub-groups, as well as EFSA panels, networks of other EU agencies and EURL networks (***EQ2***). For example, there may be opportunities for networks with adjacent topic areas (e.g. between the various EFSA networks and sub-groups involved in the animal health field) to enhance collaboration by engaging in some common activities (e.g. on data collection) or through the development of clusters allowing them to exchange on certain common topics and on best practices. The scope of using such opportunities could also be enhanced by potential future legislative developments resulting in new needs for data collection and new mandates for EFSA; the EU Transparency Regulation increasing the need for dedicated consultation with MSs; and, opportunities for the networks to advise on or leverage the potential of diverse emerging technological trends, such as citizen science or artificial intelligence.
2. A common shortcoming in terms of interaction within formal activities of the networks/sub-groups is that many participants are not as proactive as intended (***EQ4***). The process for the nomination of participants, which is done at national level with the support of the FPs, was commonly identified as an area to be improved, since it is quasi-systematically related to participant proactiveness. EFSA's support would be helpful in developing guidelines and/or criteria to assist FPs with identifying the required optimal profile of experts. Although the evaluation focused on the process at national level, the process may also need to be reviewed internally at the level of EFSA, to the extent that simplification may be required. Efforts are also made for other improvements to the level of interaction, including at a practical level. In this context, the exchange and sharing of best practices among the network/sub-group coordinators (see point 1. above) could extend to the experience gained from existing initiatives to enhance the active involvement of participants. Beyond the nomination process, participant proactiveness can be encouraged by supporting the network/sub-group representatives at national level, for example by providing guidance on their role and function to ensure higher visibility.
3. Currently, the national mechanism for the collection of inputs and for the dissemination of network/sub-group information to the relevant actors is not well established in all MSs. In most cases, the collection/dissemination at national level takes place via the FPs and in some cases no mechanism is in place (**EQ2**). The system needs to be revisited at national level to ensure a more uniform systematic process both for the collection and for the dissemination of the information in all countries. Concerning dissemination, the need is identified to reflect on additional ways of reaching out to a wider audience at national level, beyond the network/sub-group participants.

The process of setting up the networks/sub-groups was not explicitly covered by the evaluation questions. However, this was identified as an issue while conducting the evaluation. The 22 EFSA networks/sub-groups are diverse and some networks/sub-groups are particularly large and more complex than others (e.g. EREN, AHAW, PSN). Although network/sub-group size or complexity was not found to have a bearing on their performance

in meeting objectives, the structure of the networks and the process for forming sub-groups has evolved over time in an *ad hoc* manner. There are no defined criteria for EFSA's decision to set up a new network versus a sub-group within an existing network, nor for discontinuing any networks/sub-groups. Also, sub-groups work independently of the 'parent' networks. This raises the question of (i) whether some large and complex networks should be further split (e.g. the two existing AH and AW groups of AHAW into two separate networks); (ii) whether some sub-groups should become independent networks; or, (iii) some could be merged to explore synergies. It might also be helpful for EFSA to review the framework for the process of setting up the networks/sub-groups in the future, as well as for defining their time/length scope and the process to be followed for discontinuing any of the established networks/sub-groups.

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1 Introduction

The evaluation of the **European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) networks** was conducted for EFSA in response to request for services SANTE/2021/OP/0002. The study was led by Agra CEAS Consulting (part of S&P Global Commodity Insights) in cooperation with Areté Agrifood s.r.l. members of the consortium led by Civic Consulting GMBH.[6]

In line with the EFSA terms of reference (ToR) for this study, this Draft Final Report (Deliverable 3) presents the study findings and conclusions addressing the purpose and specific objectives of the evaluation. This Report contains the following sections:

- **Section 1**: Background and context of the evaluation, objectives and scope.
- **Section 2**: Methodology, including approach to address the evaluation questions (EQs), and primary and secondary data collection activities to construct the evidence base for the analysis of the EQs.
- **Section 3**: Analysis and assessment of each EQ, performed on the basis of a detailed analysis per network and sub-group.
- **Section 4**: Conclusions drawn on the basis of the analysis and findings presented in section 3, i.e. the answers to the EQs.

In addition, Annexes contain technical details of the study, including:

- ***Annex I***: approach to the EQs as finalised at the end of the inception phase of the study.
- ***Annex II***: outcome of the data collection activities: survey results and interviews conducted.
- ***Annex III***: data collection tools (survey questionnaire; interview topic guide).
- ***Annex IV***: background of the study, including an overview of the background and objectives of the networks.

1.1 Background on the networks

The networks were set up by EFSA to foster cooperation of scientific organisations in EU Member States (MSs), Iceland and Norway. Their tasks include coordinating activities, facilitating information exchange, developing and implementing joint projects, and sharing expertise and best practices in areas that fall under EFSA's jurisdiction, as specified in Article 22(7) and Article 23(g) of EFSA's Founding Regulation, the General Food Law (**Regulation (EC) No 178/2002**) as amended by the Transparency **Regulation (EU) No 1381/2019**.

To achieve these objectives, the **EFSA Management Board (MB)** took a **Decision in 2021** concerning the establishment and operation of European Networks of scientific organisations operating in the fields within the Authority's mission, aiming to optimise the operational procedures of EFSA networks in alignment with the Authority's remit and strategic goals.

Currently, EFSA oversees a total of 14 networks and a further eight sub-groups which were created under three of these networks. All these networks/sub-groups consist of EU MS

[6] Members of the Consortium Civic Consulting (Consortium leader) – Agra CEAS Consulting (S&P Global) – Areté – DTI – TNO – Gesundheit Österreich – LSE Consulting – Europe Economics – Euromonitor International (subcontractor). The study was launched by EFSA in the context of Framework Contract SANTE/2021/OP/0002SANTE/2016/A1/039.

organisations appointed based on their expertise in various scientific domains **Figure 0-1**). Each network operates within defined parameters set by its ToR. The purpose of each network, according to the EFSA MB Decision of 2021, is to strengthen EFSA's activities by aligning with the overall objectives shared among all networks, while also fulfilling the specific targets defined in its ToR.

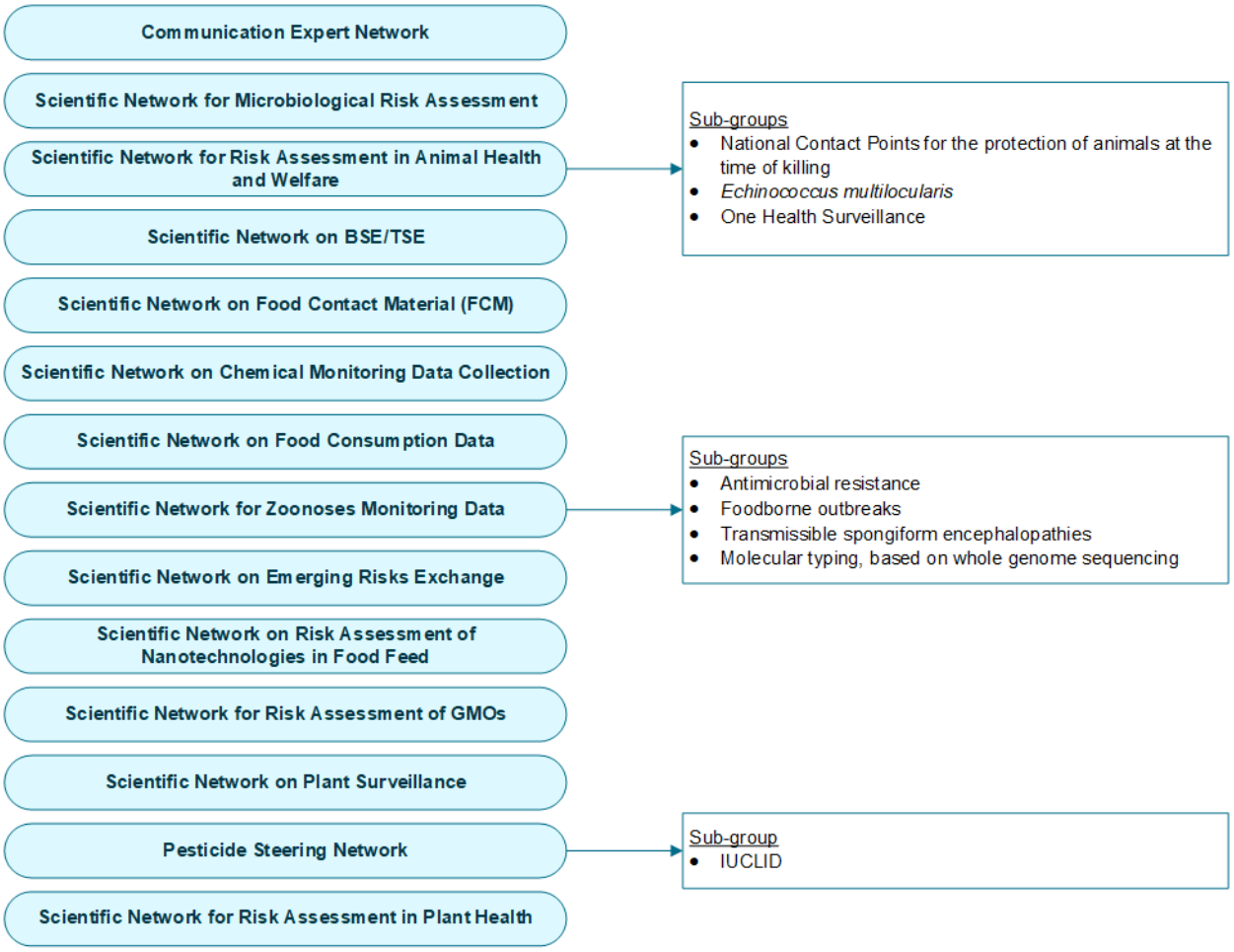

Figure 0-1 Overview of existing EFSA networks and sub-groups

The first of the current networks/sub-groups established by EFSA was the scientific network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data (ZMD) in 2004, followed by the scientific network on BSE/TSE in 2006, the Food Consumption Data (FCD) network as well as the Microbiological Risk Assessment (MRA) network in 2007, and the Pesticide Steering Network (PSN) in 2008. The Food Contact Material (FCM) network was set up in 2013, the Communication Experts Network (CEN) in 2017, and the scientific network on Chemical Monitoring Data collection (ChemMonDC) in 2018. The newest network is the scientific network on Plant Pest Surveillance (PPS), which was established in 2023. It should be noted that there was also previously a network on novel foods, which was recently discontinued.

More background on the networks and their objectives is provided in ***Annex IV***.

1.2 Evaluation objectives and scope

The evaluation is the first review of the networks' operation, and forms part of a requirement set out in Article 4.4 of the EFSA MB Decision: *"EFSA shall evaluate the work of each network at least every three years beginning in 2021 on the basis of the criteria outlined in Paragraph 1 of this Article. EFSA shall report the outcome of such evaluations of networks to the Management Board and the Advisory Forum. Based on the evaluation reports for each network, the Advisory Forum shall recommend non-binding either the continuation or discontinuation of each network and the Management Board shall decide whether a particular network should be continued or discontinued."* In this context, the outputs of this study will help inform any decisions on the future of the networks.

In accordance with Article 4.4 of the MB Decision, this evaluation establishes a robust foundation for the EFSA Advisory Forum and the Management Board to make informed decisions regarding the potential continuation or discontinuation of individual EFSA networks and/or sub-groups.

In doing this it analyses the activities of each network and sub-group to assess their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, adequacy, and impact in improving the work of EFSA. It furthermore checks the alignment with the overarching objectives shared across all networks, as defined in Article 2 of the EFSA MB Decision, and analyses whether the specific goals of each network/sub-group specified in their respective ToRs have been achieved. The evaluation is composed of five EQs. Section 0 sets out the methodology used to address the EQs, informed by the intended outcomes of the evaluation. The scope of the evaluation is summarised in Table 0-1 below.

Table 0-1: Scope of the evaluation

	Scope
Time period covered	The evaluation covers the last three years, i.e. the 2021-2023 period. It focuses on the current ToR of each network/sub-group, which (in their most recent version) are dated between 2021 and 2023.(a)
Networks covered	The study covers all of the existing 14 networks and their eight sub-groups. ***Annex IV*** outlines the background to the networks, including their objectives and recent network activity.
Main stakeholders	The main stakeholders consulted for this study are: • Representatives in networks from EU-27 Member States, as well as those from EFTA countries and pre-accession countries; notably representatives of the MS organisations that are network participants, as well as the members of the Focal Point network (Focal Points – FPs). • EFSA, mainly EFSA staff in the Scientific Units managing networks/sub-groups, including network coordinators and EFSA senior management. • Staff of the European Commission (DG SANTE), mainly in the relevant Units involved in the topics covered by the networks; staff of the EURLs and other relevant EU and international bodies.

(a) Where appropriate, elements dating prior to the current ToRs and latest three years (2021-2023) are considered in the evaluation.
(b) The methodology for the consultation of stakeholders is described in Section 0.

2 Methodology

This section summarises the data collection and analysis methodology followed in this study to address the EQs.

2.1 Overview of study plan

The evaluation was conducted between November 2023 and May 2024. The study activities, including the refinement of the methodology design and of the data collection tools, were launched following a kick-off meeting with EFSA and preliminary interviews.

The methodology followed for the main data collection activities is described below.

2.2 Data collection activities

In line with the objectives and scope of this project, data collection took place through **desk** research, an **online survey** and **interviews** as set out below.

2.2.1 Desk research

Key literature of relevance to the study was identified and reviewed from the initial stages of the study. Literature covered included documents relevant to the operation of the network/sub-group, including their ToR, annual reports, meeting notes, scientific/technical reports and other outputs, as well as other relevant documents (if any) produced at EU (European Commission, EFSA) and/or national level.

This activity had two purposes:

a. to analyse the activities of the networks/sub-groups during the 2021-2023 period to provide a first evidence base of secondary (i.e. already existing) data/information that could be relevant to addressing the EQs; and,

b. to identify gaps in the data/information available through existing documents, that could be filled through primary data collection.

The desk research, as well as preliminary interviews, assisted with the fine tuning of methodological tools. It was used in particular to refine the approach to the EQs, and the survey questionnaires and interview topic guides.

The refinement of the methodology also identified the best approach to address some key anticipated challenges involved in carrying out this evaluation:

- **Variability in available information across networks/sub-groups.** Not all EFSA networks and their sub-groups have the same level of detailed secondary information available. Primary data collection, including most notably the large-scale online survey, has been an important tool in addressing these gaps.
- **Diverse nature of networks/sub-groups.** The heterogeneous nature of networks/ sub-groups added complexity to the core task. This was exacerbated by the fact that sub-groups operate independently. These issues required an approach that combined both a universal, cross-cutting coverage for all networks/sub-groups combined with some elements which focused on the specificities of each network/sub-group.

- **Level of engagement with the evaluation.** To mitigate the risk that time constraints might limit potential consultees from actively participating in the survey, the survey questionnaire was kept concise. Furthermore, EFSA assisted with identifying the participants of the networks/sub-groups during the 2021-2023 period and communicating the importance of participation to potential consultees.
- **Potential unconscious inherent bias of consultees.** The extension of the consultation to other stakeholders such as EFSA Panels and scientific staff aimed to counterbalance potential bias in consulting participants about their own network's/sub-group's performance.
- **Balancing perspectives of multiple stakeholders.** Following on from the previous point, triangulation was performed in order to balance diverse perspectives and arrive at overarching conclusions.

In line with the above considerations for the refinement of the methodology, the analytical approach to the EQs and the data collection tools were fine-tuned, as presented in the following sections. The analysis of the individual networks/sub-groups on the basis of the desk research (presented in **Annex II**), was used to improve the focus of the interviews.

2.2.2 Online survey

The approach to the online survey, including the target groups and the questionnaire, was developed following the preliminary interviews and feedback from EFSA, as well as the desk research and refinement of the analytical approach to the EQs. The survey **targeted** the following groups:

- **Network/sub-group participants**: the survey focused on feedback from full members; observers were also given the opportunity to provide feedback. This includes participants from the MSs and other countries (having observer status), EFSA scientific staff and the European Commission (DG SANTE: observers).
- **EFSA management** (Heads of Unit and Heads of Department).
- **Focal Points** (27 MSs).

The **survey questionnaire** (***Annex III***) was built in self-adapting modules, so that respondents were only asked relevant questions, specific to the network/sub-group(s) they sit in/are familiar with. The main modules were the following:

Introduction: common module for the identification and profiling of respondents.

A. Questions for network/sub-group participants –composed of two parts:
   A1: Common module on common topics: experience with network/sub-group functioning, i.e., questions applicable to all network/sub-group(s).
   A.2: In addition, 22 specific modules, one for each network/sub-group, with a question related to their unique scope of activity.
B. Additional questions for relevant EFSA/Commission staff.
C. Specific module for EFSA Focal Points.

The survey was launched on 18 January 2024 for one week and was extended three times to 16 February 2024. Overall, the survey remained open for one month. **A total of 426 valid replies were** received, of which 346 were participants in the networks/sub-groups. The **survey findings** (***Annex II***) were incorporated in the analysis of each network/sub-group.

2.2.3 Interviews

In addition to the preliminary interviews carried out for the purpose of refining the data collection via the survey, further information was collected via interviews with the **network and sub-group coordinators**. A total of **22 interviews** were carried out, i.e. with each of the coordinators of the **14 networks** and the **eight sub-groups**. As in the case of the survey questionnaire, the **topic guide for the interviews** (***Annex III***) was also based on the refined analytical approach to the EQs. The interviews took place after responses to the survey were received. The findings from the interviews were also incorporated in the analysis of each network/sub-group.

2.3 Approach to the Evaluation Questions

The evaluation assessed the performance of each network and sub-group during the 2021-2023 period, as well as the overall performance of all 14 networks and eight sub-groups.

The ToR provided five EQs which together address the following broader evaluation themes:[7]

- **Effectiveness**: the extent to which the network has fulfilled its stated objectives.
- **Efficiency**: the outputs that the network is able to generate in relation to the inputs it requires.
- **Sustainability**: the possibility for the network to keep functioning with the current means/methods it employs.
- **Adequacy (relevance)**: the extent to which the network specific objectives fit with the current objectives and work of EFSA.
- **Impact**: the impact that the network has. While this overlaps with effectiveness to a certain extent, it should be noted that the network may have impacts beyond those set out in the stated objectives**.**

The Contractor developed further the EQs by formulating sub-questions and criteria fully to address themes including sustainability and relevance. An overview of the EQs and their sub-questions, as well as criteria and sources used to address them, is provided in **Annex I**.

Although there are intangible impacts of the networks/sub-groups, such as increased awareness and cooperation with Member States, it is difficult to identify tangible impacts. Related to this, tangible, quantifiable outputs are not *per se* a relevant criterion of the impact of the networks given the diverse nature and subject matter of each network/sub-group. Thus, the analysis of the judgment criteria presented in **Annex I** takes into account the specific objectives and scope of each network/sub-group.

[7] The definitions are based on the Better Regulation guidelines, adapted for the specific purposes of this evaluation. Given that the Better Regulation guidelines do not define the concept of "adequacy", we interpret adequacy, as stated in the ToR, to mean relevance.

3 Analysis

This section presents the findings of the analysis and the assessment of each EQ per network and sub-group. It follows the structure provided in the **'Analytical approach to the EQs'** (***Annex I***).

The assessment is based on the evidence base drawn from the data collection activities undertaken during the study. The analysis across all networks/sub-groups is a synthetic overview of the findings from the analysis of the evidence base for each network/sub-group. It therefore provides **overarching findings based on key findings per network/sub-group**.

The EQs are addressed on the basis of the judgment criteria (JC) which provide the evidence base for answering the EQ. The analysis per network/sub-group is based on a review of relevant documents describing the operation of each network/sub-group, including the EFSA annual report on the networks for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023, enriched with the findings from the survey and the interviews.

3.1 Has each network/sub-group enhanced the work of EFSA?

The networks and sub-groups are set up to establish and strengthen collaboration between EFSA and the MSs in the various scientific domains in EFSA's remit. The aim is to foster a cooperative environment for exchanging knowledge and expertise and to improve harmonisation in risk assessment across the Union.

Given this aim, the networks/sub-groups should contribute to enhance the work of EFSA. This depends on the extent to which the knowledge base of each network/sub-group provides valuable inputs to EFSA, based on the inputs provided during the 2021-2023 period. Thus, this EQ is addressed through a synthetic overview of findings from the analysis of the evidence base for JC.1 to JC.3 (see below and the sub-sections which follow).

Key findings are presented below as follows:

	EQ1: Has each network/sub-group enhanced the work of EFSA? **Key findings**
JC.1	According to the feedback received from the staff of EFSA and other EU institutions, networks/sub-groups provide useful support to EFSA across the activities that are relevant/applicable to each network/sub-group. The activities commonly undertaken by nearly all networks/sub-groups are the exchange of data/information and collaboration in data collection.
JC.2/ JC.3	Networks are perceived positively by EFSA because they enhance exchange on the scientific methodology for risk assessment, including its dissemination and application in the MSs. They produce exercises and data/information that are incorporated in EFSA's work. Occasionally, where relevant, these may include inputs to scientific/technical reports (under GFL Article 31 mandates) and, more rarely, scientific opinions (Art. 29 GFL mandates).

3.1.1 Does the knowledge base of each network/sub-group provide valuable inputs to EFSA? (JC.1 to JC.3)

Opinions on the usefulness of the support provided to EFSA by each network/sub-group, in terms of: a. collection of data from MSs and/or harmonisation of data collection; b. exchange of data/information; c. technical/scientific reports; d. exercises; e. joint projects; f. scientific opinions (Art. 29 GFL mandates); g. other activities (to be defined). ***(JC.1)***

EFSA staff and staff from other EU institutions indicated that networks/sub-groups are **overall very useful or useful** for the support provided to their work (*n=45 out of 47 respondents to the survey*). None of the respondents indicated that the networks/sub-groups are not useful, and only two respondents did not express an opinion.

Respondents stated that the networks/sub-groups were useful across all activities to the extent these were relevant/applicable to each network/sub-group:

- Networks/sub-groups are considered most useful for the exchange of data/information and for collaboration in data collection; these activities are relevant to nearly all networks/sub-groups.
- On the other hand, not many networks/sub-groups contribute to the preparation of technical/scientific reports (under GFL Art. 31 mandates) and even fewer to scientific opinions (Art. 29 GFL mandates),[8] as this is not relevant for them; their usefulness in this activity is *de facto* limited.

Number of Publications and Reports: number of scientific and technical reports which the networks/sub-groups have contributed to (support to EFSA's work under GFL Article 31 mandates). ***(JC.2)***

Examples (if any) of other valuable inputs provided to EFSA during the 2021-2023 period, in terms of the above activities, by network/sub-group. ***(JC.3)***

Generally, the networks are perceived positively by EFSA because they produce valuable inputs in terms of data and information that are incorporated in EFSA work, thus contributing to enhance exchange on the scientific methodology for risk assessment. These include, where relevant, inputs to EFSA scientific/technical reports and (to a lesser extent) scientific opinions (see ***JC.1***).

Networks are largely seen as the tool through which to work with the MSs on different topics. The exchange of information, knowledge and insights that takes place within the network/sub-group meetings is captured not only in the minutes of the meetings but also in the network/sub-group annual reports and provides the scientific basis for EFSA's, reports, updates, recommendations and decision-making processes.

Topics range from the provision of data and scientific advice to the identification of relevant experts on the topics of interest. The networks/sub-groups contribute to the data collection at both practical and scientific levels, from the review of data collected from MSs to the review of the guidance and tools provided by EFSA to MSs to support them in their data collection activities.

[8] The EFSA Panels deal with mandates from DG SANTE in accordance with Article 29 of the GFL Regulation which demand an in-depth risk assessment. A network might be asked to help an EFSA Panel with an assessment perhaps once a year, but in any case, these are sporadic requests. Article 31 of the GFL Regulation demands more of an overview, and networks might be involved in such a task (scientific or technical report).

The data collected with the practical support of the networks/sub-groups is used in many of EFSA's reports, publications and assessments. For example, the Animal Health Animal Welfare (AHAW) network would be asked to support EFSA in following the epidemiology of a certain disease within Europe on a regular basis (e.g. ASF on an annual basis),[9] thus contributing to EFSA's epidemiological updates and communication campaigns. It is noted that an important part of the data collection is pursuant to obligations laid down in EU legislation, including notably data on zoonoses, foodborne outbreaks, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), other priority animal diseases, priority plant pests, chemical contaminants, and residues of veterinary medicinal products, pesticides and regulated substances in food and feed.

The extent and form of the support provided to EFSA during the 2021-2023 period depends on the remit of each network/sub-group, as summarised in **Table 0-2** below which provides an overview of inputs in terms of the topics covered and network activities. The length of period during which networks/sub-groups have been active is not as related to the extent and form of their activities, but it can play a role. Most networks/sub-groups have been established for over a decade, but in three cases (PPS network; AH sub-group on *E. multilocularis*; and, ZMD-WGS sub-group) these have been set up fairly recently; activities are therefore more limited for these networks/sub-groups. Conversely, for some of the oldest networks such as the ZMD – FBO sub-group, there may be less need for technical support/updates as the data collection methodology is well established.

Table 0-2: Overview of network/sub-group inputs provided to EFSA during the 2021-2023 period

Network/ sub-group	Overview of inputs provided to EFSA
AHAW network	Exchange of updates and discussion on various topics, participation in themed exercises, presentation of scientific opinions, introduction of new mandates, support to revise EU legislation, and identification of relevant experts. For example: • **AH group** support EFSA in following the epidemiology of a certain disease within Europe on a regular basis; • **AW group** report on the occurrence of a certain animal welfare issue in the different member countries.
AH sub-group on *E. multilocularis*	This AH sub-group produces an annual report on *E. multilocularis*. In addition, the overall *E. multilocularis* situation in Europe is described in the ZMD network's annual report and data feed into the annual Zoonoses report.
AH sub-group One Health surveillance	Although only set up recently, this AH sub-group has already contributed to two scientific reports published in the EFSA journal on coordinated surveillance systems under the One Health approach for cross-border pathogens that threaten the Union.
AW sub-group NCPs	Contributes to annual reports of EFSA networks on animal welfare (detailing activities of AW group and NCP sub-group); also, exercises on different animal species, such as the use of animal-based measures at slaughter for assessing the on-farm welfare of turkeys, and contribution to technical reports on the subject.

[9] EFSA has a mandate to provide annual epidemiological updates on the evolution of ASF in the EU and to review the risk factors involved in the maintenance and spread of the disease: https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/african-swine-fever

Network/ sub-group	Overview of inputs provided to EFSA
MRA network	Exchange of updates regarding microbiological risk assessments at national/EU level and annual reports on the subject. Presentation of rapid outbreak assessments on salmonella infections in different products.
BSE-TSE network	Exchange of updates and annual reports on BSE-TSE, and identification of experts. Contributes feedback to finalise the annual EFSA report on TSE surveillance data from MSs. Presentation of emerging topics, such as the chronic wasting disease (CWD) situation which belongs to the TSE family, or zoonotic potential.
PLH network	Exchange of updates on cooperation and communication in the field of risk assessment on plant health, including on plant health projects funded by EFSA.[10] Collaboration in the collection of data on the occurrence of plant pests in Europe.
PPS network	Only set up recently (2022), the network is already actively preparing MSs to apply the tools prepared by EFSA to support MSs in planning and designing harmonised risk-based pest surveys (RiPEST tools)[11] as from 2024.
ChemMonDC network	Support to the annual data collection activities of MSs relating to chemical monitoring in food and feed (chemical contaminants, residues of pesticides, veterinary medicinal products, and regulated substances in food and feed), so as to provide to EFSA the results of the monitoring programmes conducted. Exchange of information and updates on both the practical and scientific aspects of the data collection, including the Chemical monitoring reporting guidance, [12] to ensure uniform data collection. Contributes feedback to finalise the two annual EFSA Scientific Reports on pesticides residues and on veterinary medicinal product residues which are based on surveillance data from MSs.
ZMD network	The network addresses all scientific and practical aspects associated with the collection, reporting, and analysis of data related to zoonoses monitoring. Data collection on zoonoses is a mandatory task for MSs according to EU legislation. The Network's key tasks include: review of national zoonoses reports; review of reporting guidance documents for zoonoses, foodborne outbreaks and AMR; review of technical specifications for surveying activities; contribution to the EU One Health Zoonoses report; review of communication tools (dashboards and story maps) available at EFSA on various zoonoses.
ZMD – FBO sub-group	Historically created as a sub-group of ZMD to focus on harmonising the reporting of data on foodborne outbreaks (FBO), this sub-group has been less active after the final publication in 2014 of the EFSA Guidance for the collection of FBO data, focusing mainly on updates and exchange of information.
ZMD – TSE sub-group	Supports all aspects of data collection activities relating to MSs surveillance activities on TSEs. The sub-group reviews the data collected from MSs for the annual EU summary report on surveillance for the presence of TSEs. Other activities include feedback to improve the tools

[10] Projects supported financially by EFSA, in the form of grants. Only organisations on the EFSA's list of Competent Organisations (also known as Article 36 List) are eligible to receive these grants.
[11] A description of the tools of the EFSA pest survey toolkit is available at: https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-09/2023-09-delbianco.pdf
[12] The latest guidance, for 2024 is available here: https://www.efsa.europa.eu/it/supporting/pub/en-8596

Network/ sub-group	Overview of inputs provided to EFSA
	provided by EFSA for the data collection (the TSE reporting tool, EFSA's Data Collection Framework (DCF) and MicroStrategy).[13]
ZMD – AMR sub-group	Supports all aspects of data collection activities relating to AMR, for which annual reporting is an obligation according to EU legislation. The sub-group reviews the EFSA contribution to the annual report on AMR on animals and meat, as well as technical documents (data model, reporting manuals and guidance documents for reporting).
ZMD – WGS sub-group	As this sub-group was set up only recently (2023), activities in 2023 were mainly at planning phase.
FCD network	One of the oldest networks (first established in 2007), this network supports all aspects of ongoing and future data collection activities on food consumption data. These activities are often related to MS level initiatives within the EU Menu Project framework, harmonising dietary survey methodology across the Union. Regular updates are provided on the EFSA European Food Consumption Database. As of 2022 this includes updated data and new data from pre-accession countries.[14]
FCM network	Exchange of information, knowledge and research updates in the field of risk assessment for food contact materials (FCM) at EU and national level. Inputs into a shared database of FCM related projects developed by EFSA (R4EU database).[15]
GMO network	Exchange of information and updates in the field of risk assessment for genetically modified organisms (GMO) at EU and national level. This includes EFSA mandates, scientific projects and events and, to the extent relevant, selected applications for placing on the market of GMOs. The GMO topic is tightly regulated and underscored by the basic principle of independence of EFSA and the Scientific Panel. This means that there is no direct feedback from the network to a scientific opinion, but only to consultations. As such, the network has consulted on the risk assessment of plants obtained by on New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) and by cisgenesis/intragenesis.
PSN network	Exchange of information and updates in the field of pesticide risk assessment at EU and national level. This includes feedback to the latest Administrative Guidance for the processing of applications for regulated products, which was revised in 2021 in response to the EU Transparency Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2019/1381). It also includes exchanges on practical aspects such as, for example, on data requirements on micro-organisms and co- formulants; a common database and an online platform to facilitate sharing, access and re-use of information on chemicals from different EU Agencies/institutions; organisation of online training for MS representatives on the new way of handling targeted consultations.
PSN – Iuclid sub-group	This sub-group works on all aspects of cooperation and governance of IUCLID for pesticides. IUCLID is a specific tool managed by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) for data preparation, electronic submission and management of pesticide dossiers by means of the ECHA Cloud platform.

[13] The EFSA tools are available at : https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/resources/data-collection-tse
[14] A description of the EFSA activities on food consumption data collection is available at: https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/data-report/food-consumption-data
[15] EFSA's assessment tools and resources, including the R4EU database, are available at: https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/science/tools-and-resources

Network/ sub-group	Overview of inputs provided to EFSA
	The sub-group was set up in late 2021 and meets frequently to provide feedback, follow-up and support material/training on technical and organisational topics/issues related to the IUCLID system.
EREN network	Exchange of information, insights and knowledge on potential emerging risks. The network identifies and analyses a number of signals on emerging risks (more than 50 per year) and characterises those with prominent evidence (at least half of them) in mini-dossiers, e.g. briefing notes or short issues. Other inputs include feedback on functionalities of EFSA's Emerging Risk Analysis Platform (a new platform to support the identification and characterisation process for emerging risks), and the development of a newsletter of emerging risk updates (since November 2023).
NANO network	Exchange of information, best practices, guidelines and insights on the risk assessment of nanotechnologies in food and feed. This includes contributions on the status of implementation of the EFSA Nano Guidances; information in the field of nanotechnology, new scientific developments, and emerging issues; information on various projects and initiatives at EU and national level, including those of ECHA; identification of experts in the field of nanotechnologies.
CEN network	This network differs from the others in that the core activity is on risk communication and facilitating cooperation in public information campaigns. As such, it covers a wide range of communication topics which are often set around EFSA's scientific outputs (for the 300 scientific opinions annually produced by EFSA). The network contributes to coordinated communication on EFSA's scientific outputs via pre-notification of materials ahead of publication. The network also provides inputs and insights on knowledge, methodologies and tools; these include improving the way to reach target audiences, following also the recommendations of the EU Transparency Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2019/1381), via the development of an EU framework for coordinated communication.

Source: Analysis of individual networks/sub-groups based on desk research, interviews (EFSA) and feedback from survey respondents (network/sub-group respondents and other participants).

3.2 Has each network/sub-group enhanced collaboration between EFSA and the Member States in the risk assessment activities?

Collaboration between EFSA and the Member States in the risk assessment activities is understood to encompass different forms of engagement amongst network/sub-group participants, both within formal and informal network meetings and other activities (such as training and conferences). Generally, for all networks/sub-groups, the following types of activities are identified as providing relevant occasions for engagement amongst participants:

1. Collaboration/coordination in data collection
2. Exchange of data/information
3. Exchange of expertise and best practices
4. Participation in exercises
5. Participation in joint projects

6. Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
7. Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
8. Other forms of collaboration/activities (e.g. training and conferences).

The extent to which collaboration between EFSA and the Member States in enhanced is determined by: (i) the frequency and nature of engagement within each network/sub-group; (ii) the effectiveness of each network/sub-group in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration; and, (iii) whether there is scope for improvements (if any). Thus, this EQ is addressed through a synthetic overview of the findings from the analysis of the evidence base for JC.4 to JC.10 (see below and the sub-sections which follow).

Key findings are presented below as follows:

	EQ2: Has each network/sub-group enhanced collaboration between EFSA and the Member States in the risk assessment activities
	Key findings
	2.1 How often have the networks/sub-groups' relevant stakeholders engaged within and outside the networks?
JC.4	Engagement on formal activities is mainly occasional across all networks/sub-groups. Just over half of participants that responded to the survey engage once or twice per year. However, a quarter of participant respondents engage more frequently, i.e. at least once per trimester. The frequency of meetings varies, from one to two meetings per year (and in a few cases more than two meetings), depending on the remit of each network/sub-group and actual needs. Both EFSA staff and participants consider the current frequency of network/sub-group meetings to be sufficient. Physical meetings are generally appreciated more than online meetings; since 2023, hybrid meetings have become standard policy for EFSA. This is greatly appreciated by most participants, as well as EFSA staff, as hybrid meetings provide more flexibility and enable a wider number of network/sub-group participants to attend, including for example, alternates and other experts. In terms of other activities, across most networks, participants' highest levels of engagement with other participants in their network are in the context of two types of formal network activities: exchange of data/information; and, exchange of expertise and best practices.
JC.5	Across all networks/sub-groups, the frequency and nature of engagement outside the network/sub-group meetings tends to be lower than that for formal network activities. Generally, the more active participants are in the network's formal activities, the more actively involved they are in collaborations outside of the network. Although it is not always possible to attribute the initiation of these collaborations to the network, clearly the existence of the network enables interaction between participants that can foster and support other forms of collaboration outside the formal network context.
	2.2 How effectively have the networks/sub-groups engaged with relevant stakeholders?
JC.6	All networks/sub-groups were found to be effective in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration between EFSA and MSs. Although the form of collaboration is shaped by the remit and objectives of each network/sub-group, some common patterns emerge. Networks/sub-groups are

	EQ2: Has each network/sub-group enhanced collaboration between EFSA and the Member States in the risk assessment activities
	Key findings
	generally most effective in enabling the exchange of data and information and the exchange of expertise and best practices, i.e. the two core activities on which they engage. Networks/sub-groups with data collection activities at their core are also considered to be effective in carrying out this activity. According to two-thirds of participants that responded to the survey, a system exists in their country for interacting with relevant national experts in the context of their respective network/sub-group activities. In most cases, both the collection of inputs (from the country to EFSA) and dissemination of information (from EFSA to the country) takes place mainly via the FPs. However, according to one-third of participant respondents, either there is no system in place, or they did not know whether/how interaction takes place at national level.
JC.7	There is consensus amongst participants, EFSA staff and the other EU institutions that the networks/sub-groups are useful for participants' networking. Although some other networking opportunities exist at EU or international level, the EFSA networks/sub-groups provide a unique and irreplaceable role in fostering collaboration between MSs, as well as with EFSA, towards common goals. That said, networking is not a core objective or task of the sub-groups, as these tend to have specific objectives; rather, networking falls more generally under the remit of the 'parent' networks (e.g. AHAW and ZMD networks).
	2.3 Are there any opportunities to enhance collaboration?
JC.8	Participants reported a high level of collaboration between their respective network/sub-group and other EFSA networks/sub-groups, as well as EFSA panels, networks of other EU agencies and EURL networks. Nonetheless, in practice, both the current and future level of collaboration with these other networks tends to vary, depending on the remit of each network/sub-group.
JC.9	Collaboration between EFSA and the MSs is considered to be effective and useful (***JC.6/JC.7***) and participants are satisfied that suggestions for improvements in collaboration are taken on board. The more persistent issues relate to administrative and technical challenges, such as the use of MS Teams which is constraining the communication and exchange between participants due to the need to switch between accounts to use the EFSA channel. According to both participants and EFSA there is potential to improve future collaboration between EFSA and MSs as well as with other networks. Some examples of suggestions for improvement in collaboration relate to potential future legislative developments resulting in new needs for data collection and new mandates for EFSA. Some other examples relate to strengthening collaboration with other EU agencies and/or other scientific platforms and fora in which MSs participate. New areas of collaboration with MSs are opened up by the EU Transparency Regulation for dedicated consultation with MSs; and by opportunities for the networks to advise on or leverage the potential of diverse technological advances (e.g. citizen science and artificial intelligence) which can play a role in the further development and harmonisation of methodologies for data collection and risk assessment.
JC.10	Overall, staff from EFSA and the other EU institutions find that risk assessment activities are more effective and efficient with the networks/sub-groups than without them; although one third of respondents could not answer the question.

3.2.1 How often have the networks/sub-groups' relevant stakeholders engaged within and outside the networks? (JC.4/J.5)

Frequency and nature of engagement within the network/sub-group: number of meetings (online vs physical); other networking activities (such as training and conferences). ***(JC.4)***

Across all networks/sub-groups, just over half (52 %) of network participants that responded to the survey are occasionally engaged with other participants in the context of formal network activities, i.e. once or twice per year. However, almost a quarter of participants engage more frequently with other participants, i.e. at least once per trimester.

The frequency of meetings varies by network and sub-group, depending on the remit of each network/sub-group and actual needs. Overall, during the 2021-2023 period, each network met once or twice per year, and in a few cases even met three times per year (e.g. PSN-Iuclid sub-group). Meetings mainly took place over a period of one or two days. Both EFSA staff and participants consider the current frequency of network/sub-group meetings to be sufficient.

The period covered by this study was affected by the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, meetings were held mostly online in 2021 and 2022. From 2022, meetings started in some cases to be held in hybrid form, i.e. combining physical presence and attendance online. Since 2023, the hybrid format has become standard policy for EFSA meetings.

Participants and EFSA appreciate the hybrid format, as it provides more flexibility and enables a wider number of network/sub-group participants to attend, including for example alternates and other experts. The hybrid meetings are usually held where EFSA is located (Parma, Italy). A few networks have varied the location of meetings, for example, where a key activity is taking place on a topic area (e.g. the 2023 meeting of the ZMD network which took place in Paris, France; the GMO network meeting in 2023 was held in Prague, Czech Republic). Some other networks (e.g. EREN network) are also considering varying the location of their meetings at the request of participants.

Both network participants and EFSA staff generally consider physical or hybrid meetings to be more effective than online meetings. Physical and hybrid meetings enable closer interaction between participants, including during social events organised around the meetings (coffee breaks, dinner). In some cases, the physical presence is required due to the format of meetings, e.g. in the case of the PPS network the meeting constitutes a workshop. There is a tendency for other networks/sub-groups to progressively include workshops as part of their meetings, in some cases with breakout sessions (e.g. PLH network). For the more complex networks it is important to allow for online attendance, so as to enable broader coverage of the network topics. For example, in the case of the ChemMonDC network, the online part of the meeting allows coverage of all four domains under the network's remit.

In terms of other activities, across most networks, participants' highest levels of engagement with other participants in their network are in the context of two types of formal network activities: exchange of data/information; and, exchange of expertise and best practices. In these areas, participants have a strong incentive for collaboration. This is particularly strong when it comes to regulated areas necessitating a high level of interaction between EFSA and national bodies for risk assessment, which has been reinforced after the EU Transparency

Regulation that came into force from March 2021. This is the case, for example, with the PSN network. Participants' engagement in other types of formal activities depends on the extent to which these are important for the remit of each network/sub-group. For instance, in networks for which data collection is an important element of their remit (e.g. ZMD, ChemMonDC and PPS networks), participants are highly engaged with other participants in collaboration/coordination for this purpose.

In several networks/sub-groups, participants also engage with others in trainings and conferences, whether these are organised within or outside the network (e.g. Better training for Safer Food (BTSF) training). Other activities, outside those of the formal network/sub-group, which may provide an opportunity for some of the network/sub-groups participants to interact include the DG SANTE's EU Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCoPAFF Committee), as well as DG SANTE expert Working Groups, the EURL networks, networks of other EU agencies, various scientific conferences and other scientific platforms, for example, the European Platform on Animal Welfare and the Council of Europe's European Committee for Food Contact Materials and Articles.

The development of a collaborative environment among network/sub-group participants is also evidenced by the increasing proactiveness in suggesting topics for the meeting agendas. While EFSA officers typically initiate the topics for discussion, increasingly discussion topics are initiated by participants. The topics range, based on the remit of each network/sub-group, from issues of current interest, to EFSA mandates and the various data/information needs and reporting obligations.

It is noted that sub-groups tend to be set up for specific tasks, which are often related to a specific mandate. Outside their core task, networking between participants is considered to be relatively limited, as this is not one of their stated objectives; networking in more general terms is a central objective of the 'parent' networks (e.g. AHAW and ZMD networks).

More details on the level and type of engagement and collaboration activities per network/sub-group are provided in **Table 0-3**.

Table 0-3: Level and type of engagement and collaboration activities, by network/sub-group, during the 2021-23 period

Network/ sub-group	Collaboration activities
AHAW network	The AHAW network met twice per year between 2021 and 2023 (one meeting for the AH group and one meeting for the AW group), i.e. a total of six times. Participants mainly engage in exchanging data/information as well as expertise and best practices during formal network activities (e.g. meetings). Other important formal network activities, during which participants engage with others, are collaboration/coordination in data collection, and participation in exercises. Other opportunities to interact exist outside the network. Many of the AW network participants are also members of the European Platform on Animal Welfare which holds two meetings per year; some MSs form alliances to promote animal welfare issues (e.g. Scandinavian countries, Germany, and the Netherlands have formed a Welfare Alliance). BTSF training is another opportunity.

Network/ sub-group	Collaboration activities
	The exchange of data/information and expertise, best practices, and collaboration/coordination in data collection within the network, are considered effective; participation in exercises and joint projects is reported to be somewhat effective.
AH sub-group on *E. multilocularis*	The sub-group met once per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. three times in total. Engagement is considered sufficient and effective for the purposes of the sub-group, which requires only three MSs + Northern Ireland to report on *E. multilocularis*.
AH sub-group One Health surveillance	The sub-group met once in 2022 (first meeting) and twice in 2023. Participants engage with each other mainly occasionally (once or twice per year) within formal network activities, but outside of network meetings they engage rather frequently as MSs work together in consortia around specific topics. Overall, participants consider engagement to be effective. Since the sub-group was set up, some 23 countries have received a grant (seven of which as single beneficiaries, and 16 as members of consortia) under the EU4Health programme 2021-2027 for the early detection of pathogens for humans in animals and the environment.
AW sub-group NCPs	The sub-group met once per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. three times in total. Engagement is mainly for the exchange of expertise, best practices, data and information. Participants tend to engage with the same frequency both within and outside network activities and overall consider engagement to be effective. There is also strong collaboration with the AW group. Networking opportunities also exist outside of the sub-group with the European Platform on Animal Welfare, and the networks of the EU Reference Centres for animal welfare (EURCAW).
MRA network	The sub-group met once per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. three times in total. Participants engage mainly occasionally (once or twice per year) with other network participants, both within and outside of the formal network activities. Engagement is mainly for exchanging data/information as well as expertise and best practices, and is overall considered to be effective, with meeting agendas developed over time into small conferences. Some back-to-back meetings with the ZMD network also take place, as there is some overlap/adjacent topics at scientific level. Other networking opportunities do not exist through any other similar structures set up at EU level.
BSE-TSE network	The network met once per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. three times in total. Participants engage occasionally and mostly within formal network activities, but the current level of engagement is considered effective. Even though BSE-TSE is not considered to be of high current interest, there is no other opportunity outside the network for experts to exchange scientific information on this topic.
PLH network	The network met twice in 2023, and once per year in 2022 and 2021, i.e. a total of four times. Participants engage mainly occasionally (once or twice per year), within formal network activities, for the exchange of expertise and best practices, as well as the exchange of data/information and participation in exercises. The latest meeting included a workshop with breakout session on various current topics on ways to improve EFSA's

Network/ sub-group	Collaboration activities
	risk assessment activities in plant health. The current level of engagement is generally regarded as effective.
PPS network	As the network was only set up in 2022, it held its first two meetings in 2023. Participants engage with each other mainly occasionally (once or twice per year) within formal network activities, for the exchange of expertise and best practices, as well as to exchange data/information. Meetings are organised as workshops, in which EFSA is training MSs to use a new sampling methodology that is mandatory as from 2024; this methodology is a big change for those countries previously using non-statistical methods for sampling. The feedback from participants is helpful for improving and updating the EFSA tools supporting MSs in planning and designing pest surveys. The current level of engagement is generally regarded as effective. The network is the only platform for exchanging knowledge and experience in statistically sound and risk-based plant pest surveys at EU level, to build up capacity and standardise the methodological framework.
ChemMonDC network	The network met once a year in the 2021-2023 period, i.e. held three meetings in total. There is frequent interaction between participants and the current level of engagement is considered effective, with key focus on the data collection activities. An additional training meeting is held annually to prepare participants for the upcoming data collection phase, to which officers in charge of data collection at national level are invited to attend. The network is considered to have established the status of a yearly update forum on all matters related to chemical monitoring for food and feed. Some other networking opportunities in the field exist through the network of NRLs. This allows some information exchange and collaboration between MS laboratory experts. The network on multi-annual national control plans (MANCP) managed by DG SANTE, the SCoPAFF and the Euroresidue conference also provide relevant networking/exchange venues on the topics covered by ChemMonDC as these work in parallel with some degree of interaction with the network.
ZMD network	The network met once per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. a total of three times. The need to be involved in this network throughout the year is high, as tasks are related to a regulatory obligation to report data and there are always activities around data collection, validation and reporting, both at EFSA and at national level. In addition to meetings, the network offers information sessions for members, e.g. when introducing new data requirements or guidelines. The network also collaborates with its sub-groups and other EU agencies such as the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC). Outside formal network activities, participants may engage only occasionally. Overall, the current level of engagement is considered effective.
ZMD – FBO sub-group	The sub-group did not have a meeting on its own between 2021 and 2023. The (fourth) joint meeting of ECDC's Food and Waterborne Diseases (FWD) Network and EFSA's Zoonoses Network (WGS and FBO sub-groups) took place in 2023. Even though its own activities are limited, there is collaboration with other networks/sub-groups, as well as with ECDC. Thus, depending on need, there is collaboration with the ZMD-WGS sub-group; the network of data providers to EFSA's One Health WGS system; networks coordinated by DG SANTE (network of the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) contact points, and the network of

Network/ sub-group	Collaboration activities
	Crisis coordinators); and, networks in the public health sector. Overall, the current level of engagement is considered sufficient.
ZMD – TSE sub-group	The sub-group met twice (2022 and 2023) during the 2021-2023 period. There is frequent interaction between participants as the sub-group runs data collection all year and the recommended frequency to participants for sending data is on a monthly basis. Although the BSE-TSE network may potentially offer similar networking opportunities, there is no interaction at present. This is because the network focuses on risk assessment, whereas the sub-group focuses on data collection. Nevertheless, the current set-up does not cause problems for participants, although it has caused confusion in the past for some FPs when nominating participants.
ZMD – AMR sub-group	The AMR sub-group met once per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. a total of three times. The sub-group sometimes also sets up webinars to discuss specific topics, especially for new participants (e.g. tools for reporting AMR data and harmonised procedures for monitoring AMR). There is frequent interaction between participants as the sub-group runs data collection related to the implementation of EU legislation on the harmonised monitoring of AMR in food-producing animals. There is also a lot of collaboration with other EFSA networks, the EURL-AMR network, networks from other EU agencies (EMA's European Surveillance of Veterinary Antimicrobial Consumption (ESVAC) network on antimicrobial consumption in animals; ECDC), and the EFSA panels (BIOHAZ). The JIACRA[16] initiative is a joint project of ECDC, EMA and EFSA to report jointly on antimicrobial consumption and AMR in animals and humans.
ZMD – WGS sub-group	This sub-group was only recently set up and two meetings were held in 2023. There is collaboration with other EFSA networks (notably, the main ZMD network) and with other EU agencies. Some of the data providers are the NRLs (members of the EURL), and there is a joint advisory board that typically meets once per year with participation from EFSA, the EURL and the ECDC. Similar networking opportunities also exist to a large extent in ECDC's FWD Network; interagency network meetings take place as whole genome sequencing forms part of One Health. Given some overlap of the sub-group's participants with those of the EFSA ZMD network, their annual meetings will be held jointly (back-to-back) from 2024.
FCD network	Two meetings were held (one in 2022 and one in 2023) in the 2021-2023 period. The network has been effective in enabling the exchange of scientific knowledge, expertise and best practices on methodologies applied for food consumption surveys with the ultimate aim of supplying EFSA's Food Consumption Database with relevant data. Outside the network, participants have networking opportunities in other fora and collaborative projects, such as the European Food Information Resource (EuroFIR), [17] and the International Network of Food Data Systems (INFOODS)[18] organised within the FAO. Also, the various International Conferences on Dietary Assessment Methods (ICDAM); a significant

[16] Joint inter-agency antimicrobial consumption and resistance analysis (JIACRA). JIACRA reports available at: https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1002/(ISSN)1831-4732.antimicrobial-consumption-and-resistance
[17] https://www.eurofir.org/about_eurofir/
[18] https://www.fao.org/infoods/infoods/en/

Network/ sub-group	Collaboration activities
	number of network members actively participated in the June 2023 conference.
FCM network	Two meetings were held during the 2021-2023 period, one in 2022 and one in 2023. In addition to meetings, there is a shared platform for interaction within the network. Active collaboration projects among MSs were also initiated thanks to the facilitation provided by the network, e.g., the joint activities on rubber, of the national food safety agencies of France (ANSES) [19] and Germany (BfR). [20] The interactions between participants are considered effective in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and coordination in data collection. Other relevant networking opportunities (outside the remit of EFSA) are the participation in the Commission's expert working groups and in the Council of Europe's European Committee for Food Contact Materials and Articles (CD-P-MCA).[21]
GMO network	The GMO network met twice per year in 2023 and 2022, and once in 2021, i.e. a total of five times. Participants in the network engage occasionally (once or twice per year), mainly for the exchange of data/information, as well as in the exchange of expertise and best practices on national risk assessments. This allows a systematic cataloguing of activities at national level and prevents duplications. Similar networking opportunities exist to some extent in the EU Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (Genetically Modified Food and Feed and Environment). Some of the network participants also participate in other meetings of international organisations (e.g. OECD). Some network members collaborate, e.g. for joint publications. The more active participants in the network tend also to be more actively involved outside of the network. The current level of engagement is generally regarded as effective.
PSN network	The PSN met once in 2023, and twice in 2022 and 2021, i.e. a total of five times. The 2022 and 2023 meetings were held as 'open' meetings in a pilot carried out for the first time by PSN. It was possible for interested stakeholders (non-members of the network) to register and participate as observers. Collaboration in risk assessment activities in this network occurs on a regular basis. The EU Transparency Regulation endowed EFSA with new responsibilities that also involve cooperation with MSs, particularly in the intake phase of risk assessment dossiers where MSs play a pivotal role (study planning and providing advice to applicants); consequently, the network provides an important platform to exchange and discuss existing problems and specificities of risk assessment in the complex area of pesticides. At a practical level, utilising online platforms (SharePoint) has significantly improved and streamlined processes for the exchange of documents and comments within the network. There is no cooperation with other networks as this network works quite independently (though some members do sit in multiple networks). Conversely, there are contributions from other panels and WGs, particularly on emerging issues like nano-pesticides, with guest speakers enriching discussions within meetings. Meetings of the Commission's SCoPAFF are also a place for interaction with and among MSs, for

[19] French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES): https://www.anses.fr/en
[20] German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR): https://www.bfr.bund.de/de/start.html
[21] https://www.edqm.eu/en/food-contact-materials-and-articles-activities

Network/ sub-group	Collaboration activities
	example, in the context of the Committee's WG on Post Approval Issues (section pesticide legislation), and zonal work sharing/evaluation.
PSN – Iuclid sub-group	The IUCLID sub-group had eight meetings (separate from the main PSN network) between 2021 and 2023. After the use of IUCLID was introduced in 2021, there has been a need for frequent interaction, including through meetings, to resolve the issues related to the tool. In addition to plenary meetings, smaller working parties on specific issues are also organised within the sub-group. Other networking opportunities include an annual workshop jointly held by EFSA and ECHA, and an OECD forum which consists of an expert panel on IUCLID that meets once a year to discuss IUCLID documents and adapt them to international standards. Additionally, at the level of EFSA, there are weekly meetings with technical experts of ECHA for IUCLID technical development. All these activities provide an important platform for knowledge exchange and continuous improvement of the IUCLID tool.
EREN network	The EREN met twice per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. a total of six times. The level of interaction, by employing a participatory approach to facilitate early exchange of topic information, collective use of expertise and sharing of methodologies, is considered effective. An important ongoing project is the development of an online platform (Emerging Risk Analysis Platform, ERAP) to streamline the reporting and analysis of emerging risks. EREN has become a recognised group for engagement on emerging risks and their drivers in topics of mutual interest with other EU agencies such as the EEA and the ECDC, with international organisations such as the WHO and FAO, and with third countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Similar network opportunities exist with the WHO-INFOSAN network. In addition, EFSA manages a sister network of stakeholders (StaDG-ER) [22] that also discusses items of potential emergency and informs EREN. Outside the network, participants participate in satellite projects such as FoodSafeR and HOLiFOOD that are funded by the EU. Collaboration between network participants involves various activities for the exchange of expertise, data and information, and there is the will to further improve collaboration. An important ongoing project is the development of an online platform (Emerging Risk Analysis Platform, ERAP) to streamline the reporting and analysis of emerging risks.
NANO network	The NANO network met once per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. a total of three times. The number and frequency of network meetings is considered sufficient by EFSA for the current scope of the network. Participants engage occasionally (once or twice per year), mainly within formal network activities, for the exchange of expertise and best practices, as well as the exchange of data/information. There is a lot of collaboration with networks of other EU agencies such as EMA, ECHA, JRC, US FDA and OECD since they take part in network meetings as observers. The current level of engagement is generally regarded as effective.
CEN network	The CEN met twice per year between 2021 and 2023, i.e. a total of six times. In addition to the network meetings, three support meetings took place in 2021 and two support meetings took place in 2022. Given the

[22] EFSA Stakeholder Discussion group on Emerging Risks (StaDG-ER): https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/29th-meeting-efsa-stakeholder-discussion-group-emerging-risks-stadg-er

Network/ sub-group	Collaboration activities
	risk communication remit of this network, collaboration is frequent, with participants also interacting in between network meetings on a continuous basis using a variety of communication platforms, including a WhatsApp group for immediate, day-to-day communication. EFSA communications are shared in advance with network members together with scientific opinions. An online teleconference via MS Teams is used for interested MSs for very sensitive opinions. Overall, there is a well-established and frequent level of interaction between participants, both within and outside the network. The network does not communicate with the scientific EFSA networks since their remits are very different. However, the network works closely with FP networks. Focus groups were created under the network to improve the coordination of communication with FP networks. Other similar networking opportunities exist through the groups on coordinated communication (which involve CEN and FPs), and through the International Risk Communication Liaison Group (IRCLG), which is similar to the CEN, but active at international level (and less formal).

Source: Analysis of individual networks/sub-groups based on desk research, interviews (EFSA) and feedback from survey respondents (network/sub-group respondents and other participants).

Frequency and nature of engagement outside the network/sub-group meetings and other networking activities (such as training and conferences): measure the number and nature of collaborations between EFSA and the MS, outside the network ***(JC.5)***

Across all networks/sub-groups, the frequency and nature of engagement outside the network/sub-group meetings tends to be lower than that for formal network activities. Nearly a fifth of participants that responded to the survey never engage with other participants outside the formal network context. When they do engage with other participants outside the network, this tends to be mostly for the same types of activities as within the formal network context, i.e. exchange of data/information and exchange of expertise and best practices.

Some collaborations outside the formal network were identified. These take place between EFSA and the MSs, and amongst MSs. Although it is not always possible to attribute the initiation of these collaborations to the network, clearly the existence of the network enables interaction between participants that can foster and support other forms of collaboration outside the formal network context. Generally, the more active participants in the network's formal activities tend to be also more actively involved in collaborations outside of the network. More details on the collaboration activities per network/sub-group are provided above in **Table 0-3**.

It is noted that sub-groups operate independently of the networks, although initially being established out of them. Currently, there is little reason for interaction between the sub-groups and the 'parent' network. For example, the AHAW network sometimes interacts with its sub-groups, and there is some exchange from the sub-groups to the general network (rather than the other way round). Sometimes the main network is consulted to provide expertise, e.g. the AH group (AHAW network) was consulted by the One Health sub-group to identify the right members for it. A similar pattern is identified for the other networks that have sub-groups, notably the ZMD network and its four sub-groups.

3.2.2 How effectively have the networks/sub-groups engaged with relevant stakeholders? (JC.6/JC.7)

Perceived effectiveness of the networks/sub-groups' in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration between EFSA and MSs. Extent to which a system is available within the MSs for network/sub-group participants to: collect inputs for the various network/sub-group activities; disseminate information obtained from the various network/sub-group activities. ***(JC.6)***

All networks/sub-groups were found to be effective in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration between EFSA and MSs. Details of the forms of collaboration and exchange activities vary by network/sub-group, as summarised in **Table 0-3** above. The activities are defined according to the remit and objectives of each network/sub-group as set out in its ToR (***Annex IV***). Nonetheless, some common patterns emerge. Most networks/sub-groups are most effective in enabling the exchange of data and information and the exchange of expertise and best practices; this is perceived by both participants and EFSA staff. These are the same two types of formal network activities as those for which participants are the most highly engaged with other participants. For other types of activities, the extent of effectiveness mirrors the extent to which these activities are important for the remit of each network/sub-group. For example, for networks that involve an important element of collaboration for data collection (e.g. ZMD and ChemMonDC), the network is perceived to be effective in enabling this collaboration.

Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of participants indicated that a system exists in their country for interacting with relevant national experts in the context of their respective network/sub-group activities. For just over half of participants the collection of inputs and dissemination of information takes place mainly via the FPs; for others it takes place via another system. For the remaining one-third of participants, either there is no system in place, or they did not know whether/how interaction takes place.

Usefulness of networks/sub-groups for participants' networking; extent to which networking opportunities exist elsewhere. Examples (if any) where networks/sub-groups have played an important and irreplaceable role in collaboration between EFSA and MS. ***(JC.7)***

Overall, there is consensus amongst participants, EFSA staff and the other EU institutions that the networks/sub-groups are useful for participants' networking. Over 80 % of participants that responded to the survey said that their network/sub-group has an important networking impact. Similarly, EFSA staff respondents consider networks/sub-groups to be useful for EFSA from a networking point of view. Respondents thought the networks/sub-groups were useful across all activities to the extent these were relevant/applicable to each network/sub-group.

The usefulness of the networks for participants' networking is also determined by the extent to which other, similar, networking opportunities exist elsewhere. According to nearly 60 % of participants, no other similar networking opportunities exist. Although some other occasions and structures set up at EU or international level are identified by the remaining 40 % of participants, the EFSA networks/sub-groups provide a unique opportunity to foster collaboration between MSs towards a common goal.

The most frequently mentioned opportunities are: relevant expert and working groups set up at EU level (e.g. European Commission; other EU agencies such as ECDC, ECHA, EMA; European Council); networks of other EU agencies, the EURL and NRL networks; EU training programmes (e.g. BTSF) and EU partnerships e.g. under the Horizon Europe/Horizon 2023

programme. Non-EU opportunities were also identified, e.g. OECD, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), and FAO expert groups and networks.

Furthermore, according to an important share of participants (44 %), their respective network/sub-group has played an important and irreplaceable role in collaboration between EFSA and MSs. Such examples were identified by participants of every network/sub-group.

Many of the examples provided by participants refer to identifying new topics and emerging risks, for which they value the exchange of expertise and information with other MSs and with EFSA. For instance, the importance of collaboration in EREN is reflected in signalling to EFSA potentially emerging risks; examples include epizootic haemorrhagic disease (EHDV) emergence in Europe; perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) found in organic eggs; and, bat-borne Issyk-Kul virus in EU. Also, participants from "smaller" countries indicate they often receive "triggers" from other MSs' findings/studies which help them to expand their work (e.g. MRA network: *Listeria monocytogenes* in vegan ready-to-eat foods). Pan-European communication campaigns are considered an example of irreplaceable collaboration in the case of the CEN network. Further examples of such collaboration accomplishments per network/sub-group are provided in **Table 0-6** (section 3.4.2 below).

3.2.3 Are there any opportunities to enhance collaboration? (JC.8 to JC.10)

Extent of collaboration with other networks (within EFSA and with those of other Agencies) and/or the EFSA Panels: current collaboration and future opportunities for collaboration/synergies. ***(JC.8)***

Overall, participants reported a high level of collaboration between their respective network/ sub-group and other EFSA networks/sub-groups, as well as EFSA panels, networks of other EU agencies and EURL networks. Participants were even more positive on opportunities for future collaboration/synergies with these other networks.

Nonetheless, participant responses suggest that both the current and future level of collaboration with other networks tends to vary, depending on the remit of each network/sub-group, as also illustrated per network/sub-group in **Table 0-3** above (current collaboration activities) and **Table 0-4** (opportunities for future collaboration).

Extent and nature of suggestions for improvements in collaboration received by the networks/sub-groups from participants and relevant stakeholders. Examples of suggestions for improvements in collaboration; examples where networks/sub-groups have not followed up suggestions. ***(JC.9)***

Overall, the level and form of collaboration during the 2021-2023 period is considered to be effective and useful (***JC.6/JC.7***). Also, participants are satisfied that suggestions for improvements in collaboration between MSs and EFSA are taken on board.

Very few (nine out of the 346 participants that responded to the survey) thought that their respective network/sub-group has not followed up suggestions for improvements in collaboration. Their comments mostly refer to suggestions on technical issues. For instance, suggestions made to the ChemMonDC network on the burden of submission and on the criteria for rejecting/accepting submitted data were not accepted; several topics brought up by the MRA network ended up as self-tasks for the BIOHAZ panel; suggestions to improve IUCLID, e.g. through a task management tool such as code.europa.eu, were not taken on board.

A more general observation made by participants is that standard frameworks and stereotypes exist, including on administrative procedure, which limit the acceptance of all

suggestions. At the communication level, the use of MS Teams is also considered to make exchange between participants difficult because it is necessary to switch between MS Teams accounts to use the EFSA channel. There are also regulatory constraints in using MS Teams; e.g. the German government does not allow their employees to use it. Also, when information is disseminated by EFSA via email, there is limited opportunity for exchange because there are too many people in the list to foster discussion. The development of a communication platform that is easier to use for network/sub-group participants has been discussed by EFSA in some cases, but there are in-house limitations on the applications EFSA is allowed to use.

Although current collaboration is generally considered satisfactory, according to both participants and EFSA, some examples of suggestions for future improvement in collaboration were identified. These examples are provided below in **Table 0-4**.

In some cases, examples relate to potential future legislative developments resulting in new needs for data collection and new mandates for EFSA. For example, EFSA does not yet carry out monitoring activities on animal welfare, as is the case in animal health and for some sub-groups of AHAW and other networks (e.g. ZMD network). Nonetheless, the opportunity may arise in the future with the adoption of legislation and the development of animal welfare indicators, resulting in new collaboration opportunities to perform such data collection.

Some other examples relate to strengthening collaboration with EU agencies and/or other scientific platforms and fora in which MSs participate. Generally, there is currently limited collaboration with EFSA networks, EFSA panels, or with networks of other EU agencies. However, there is potential for collaboration with all these fora in the future. For example, in 2023, the AH group explored collaboration with the ZMD network in the form of a common session, and also with the EREN. This was because there may be some overlap between the AH group and the above-mentioned networks regarding participants and knowledge. Some of the networks/sub-groups reported similar initiatives recently taken to explore synergies.

EFSA sometimes shares specific EFSA opinions relevant for network/sub-group members; these tend to be in very specific areas to avoid overloading members given that EFSA produces over 300 opinions per year. EFSA opinions need to be independent and science-based; the networks/sub-groups cannot have an impact on EFSA opinions due to the different political standpoints of members. Nonetheless, potentially, the networks/sub-groups could provide help regarding technical inputs. The EU Transparency Regulation has also opened the possibility for dedicated consultation with MSs, which can be facilitated by the network/sub-group activities.

New areas of collaboration with MSs also become available due to technological advances. These can play a role in the further development and harmonisation of methodologies, such as the use of citizen science and artificial intelligence in risk assessment. Some of the networks/sub-groups, e.g. the PLH network, see the potential for more collaboration and knowledge exchange with MSs, as well as between networks/sub-groups, on these topics.

Perceived added value of networks/sub-groups: whether concerned actors deem that risk assessment activities are more effective/efficient with the networks/sub-groups than without them. **(JC.10)**

Staff from EFSA and the other EU institutions find that risk assessment activities are, overall, more effective and efficient[23] with the networks/sub-groups than without them (n=31 out of 47 respondents). None of the respondents indicated that risk assessment is less effective with the networks/sub-groups, and only one respondent indicated that it is less efficient (although being more effective than without the networks/sub-groups). About a third of respondents (n=15) did not answer this question.

Table 0-4: Selected examples of future opportunities to enhance collaboration activities by network/sub-group

Network/ sub-group	Opportunities to enhance collaboration activities
AHAW network	**AH group**: The potential for future collaboration with other EFSA networks and EFSA panels was identified. In 2023 EFSA explored collaboration with the ZMD network in the form of a common session, and also with the EREN. The AH group is organising informal meetings from 2024. These will be held when needed (probably every quarter) to allow all relevant experts to be able to participate in attending, for example, relevant webinars, including experts outside the AH group. Interest is high with 91 people expressing interest in attending. About 70 % of those expressing interest so far are network participants, while 30 % are non-participants, but with some association with network members, e.g. colleagues coming from the same member organisations.
AH sub-group on *E. multilocularis*	*No specific opportunities identified.*
AH sub-group One Health surveillance	There is little collaboration with networks of other EU agencies or EFSA panels, but more could be done in the future. For example, there could be opportunities for joint meetings (ideally, physical) of the sub-group with ECDC networks (i.e. once data have been collected).
AW sub-group NCPs	*No specific opportunities identified.*
MRA network	*No specific opportunities identified.*
BSE-TSE network	BSE-TSE monitoring and management is very specific and done differently from other animal diseases; overlap between participants of this network and the AHAW network/sub-groups is very limited at the moment. Nonetheless, in the future, some synergies could be explored for exchanging experience on data collection. Also, there could be potential collaboration with the ECDC, in case they cover in the future diseases in humans transmitted from BSE-TSE.
PLH network	There is currently no collaboration with other EFSA networks/sub-groups or networks of other EU agencies. The most common areas for collaboration are production systems and trade. In these areas, knowledge can be developed that is potentially useful for the other networks. Some collaboration (in terms of exchange of information) could take place with EREN and CEN.

[23] The following definitions were provided in the survey:
Effective = the network/sub-group plays a positive role in supporting the risk assessment activities.
Efficient = the network/sub-group's involvement leads to savings in total time and money required for the risk assessment activities.

Network/ sub-group	Opportunities to enhance collaboration activities
	There is potential for more collaboration with the EFSA Panel on Plant Health since topics overlap. There could be more interaction, e.g. by inviting network members to the Panel plenary or the other way around. The Panel Chair and Vice Chairs were invited to the 2nd network meeting in 2023, and will also be invited to the 2024 network meetings; network members actively attend PLH Panel plenary meetings since these are open to observers. There will be more opportunities for collaboration with MSs in developing and harmonising methodology, e.g. on the use of citizen science and artificial intelligence in risk assessments. Also, in the context of dedicated consultations of MSs conducted under the EU Transparency Regulation (e.g. planned consultation on an upcoming EFSA opinion on bark beetle species.
PPS network	As this network deals with a very specific topic, there is no collaboration with other networks (EFSA or other EU agencies). The only opportunity identified is with the statistical approach for animal surveillance; an expert from the EFSA unit in charge of the AH network has already been invited to a meeting of the PPS network.
ChemMonDC network	There are already interactions with other fora, but synergies with data collection carried out by DG SANTE and with parallel networking opportunities in the field could possibly be strengthened in the future if relevant to the work of the network.
ZMD network	*No specific opportunities identified.*
ZMD – FBO sub-group	*No specific opportunities identified.*
ZMD – TSE sub-group	If in the future there was a consideration of putting together risk assessment and data collection for BSE-TSE, the TSE sub-group and the BSE-TSE network would have to work together. In case of crisis, the sub-group would potentially have to collaborate with ECDC. However, since crises are rare in this field, this is not considered very likely.
ZMD – AMR sub-group	*No specific opportunities identified.* There may be a need for more meetings, given that in the past this network held to the two meetings per year. This will depend on needs raised by data collection (if such needs are identified). For example, the sub-group plans to arrange a webinar in 2024 on how to report the new *E.coli* variant, and on how to collect and report harmonised data for the baseline survey on MRSA in pigs to be implemented in 2025.
ZMD – WGS sub-group	Starting from 2024, one meeting per year is planned in conjunction (back-to-back) with the main ZMD network meeting since the majority of participants are the same. Opportunities to increase collaboration with ECDC's networks exist. EFSA and ECDC have recently drafted a protocol of response to outbreaks, which will be discussed in an online meeting in 2024. There is also scope to bring together the networks of the two sister agencies (EFSA and ECDC) every two to three years.
FCD network	*No specific opportunities identified.*

Network/ sub-group	Opportunities to enhance collaboration activities
FCM network	*No specific opportunities identified.*
GMO network	Currently there is limited collaboration with other EFSA networks, networks of other EU agencies and EFSA panels. The potential for greater collaboration in the future was identified. For instance, the GMO legislation and EFSA guidance are over 20 years old, whereas protein safety has evolved with scientific advances in this field. Risk assessment therefore requires some adjustments (e.g., on enzymes assessment, novel food, etc.). In these areas, there could be common elements to share and exchange with other EFSA networks.
PSN network	The initiative to hold open network meetings in 2022 and 2023, to which external observers and stakeholders could participate upon registration, increased collaboration and added valuable insights to the discussion. This brought more transparency to the work of the network. In the future, it may be beneficial to expand the network to include other stakeholders (e.g., companies, associations, and NGOs) to bring in varied expertise and perspectives. There is currently no cooperation with other EFSA networks as there is some degree of unawareness regarding the activities of other networks. There could though be opportunities in the future.
PSN – Iuclid sub-group	*No specific opportunities identified.*
EREN network	A cycle involving one meeting in Parma plus one meeting in a different MS each time is being actively considered as a means to offer better networking possibilities. It would be useful to engage with the UK as there are many developments in the area of emerging risks and there were participants from the UK in EREN in the past. There are also opportunities to join forces on foresight with the EU Agencies network, specifically with agencies providing scientific advice. This would be in line with the more systemic approach to drivers and needs in identifying emerging risks, which is being followed across the EU.
NANO network	There is currently no collaboration with other EFSA networks, or EFSA Panels, because the network is focused on a specific topic and this type of collaboration is not foreseen in its ToR. EFSA indicated that if the network were to be developed further it could be linked to EFSA's risk assessment activities and the EFSA panels. Potential synergies also exist with the EREN and the FCM network, as these networks sometimes discuss topics relevant for NANO.
CEN network	A past recommendation has been to create a platform in which CEN, national FPs and other relevant actors on communication can participate more easily. For now, the WhatsApp group is considered more active and easier to use for network participants. EFSA is also encouraging MSs to work in clusters, where possible, for shared communication activities.

Source: Analysis of individual networks/sub-groups based on desk research, interviews (EFSA) and feedback from survey respondents (network/sub-group respondents and other participants).

3.3 Has each network/sub-group satisfied the overarching objectives outlined in Article 2 of the EFSA MB Decision

The overarching objectives of Article 2 of the EFSA MB Decision are outlined in **Text box 0-1** below.

Text box 0-1: Overarching objectives set out in Article 2 of the EFSA MB Decision

EFSA MB Decision Article 2: *"Definition and role of networks: The aim of the networks is to support EFSA and the Member States in carrying out the Authority's mission in accordance with the established standards of scientific excellence, transparency and responsiveness foreseen in the GFL Regulation. These include inter alia:*

1. *facilitating the **development of a scientific cooperation framework by the coordination of activities;***
2. *the **exchange of information;***
3. *the **development and implementation of joint projects**; and,*
4. *the **exchange of expertise and best practices** in the fields within the Authority's mission."*

The extent to which each network/sub-group satisfied the overarching objectives outlined in Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision is determined by the comparison of the objectives of Art. 2 with objectives in the individual network/sub-group ToRs and objectives/outcomes stated in their annual reports; and, the perceived effectiveness of the networks/sub-groups in satisfying the overarching objectives of Art. 2. This EQ is therefore addressed through a synthetic overview of the findings from the analysis of the evidence base for JC.11 to JC.12 (see below and the sub-sections which follow).

Key findings are presented below as follows:

	EQ3: Has each network/sub-group satisfied the overarching objectives outlined in Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision?
	Key findings
JC.11	The objectives set out in Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision are not relevant for all networks/sub-groups. For many networks/sub-groups, participation in exercises and joint projects is not relevant, while for other networks/sub-groups data collection is not relevant.
JC.12	The overarching objectives set out in Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision are considered to be satisfied to the extent they are relevant for each network/sub-group. The extent to which the overarching objectives of Art. 2 are fulfilled is also linked to the extent to which each network/sub-group fulfils its individual objectives: see also ***JC.6*** (EQ2.2) and ***JC.13*** (EQ4.1).

3.3.1 How well have the networks/sub-groups fulfilled the overarching objectives? (JC.11/JC.12)

Compare objectives of Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision with objectives in ToRs and objectives/outcomes stated in annual reports. ***(JC.11)***

The comparison of the overarching objectives of Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision with the objectives of each network/sub-group indicates that these are not relevant for all networks/ sub-groups. For instance, for many networks/sub-groups, participation in exercises and joint projects is not relevant, while for others, data collection is not relevant.

Perceived effectiveness of the networks/sub-groups in satisfying the overarching objectives of the MB Decision (see also JC.6). ***(JC.12)***

An analysis of the extent to which the objectives of each network/sub-group meet the objectives of the EFSA MB Decision was performed for each network/sub-group. Results are presented in **Table 0-5** below. Results indicate that **the overarching objectives set out in Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision are covered to the extent they are relevant**. For example, the BSE-TSE network, as is the case for other networks, did not implement joint projects as this is not a direct objective in the network's ToR.

It is noted that the extent to which the overarching objectives of Art. 2 are fulfilled is also linked to the extent to which each network/sub-group fulfils its individual objectives: see also ***JC.6*** (EQ3.2) and ***JC.13*** (EQ3.4).

Table 0-5: Analysis of objectives of each network [(a)] vis-à-vis the objectives of Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision (2021-2023 period)

Network/ sub-group	Extent to which Art. 2 (EFSA MB Decision) objectives are fulfilled
AHAW network	The **AW network** fulfilled most objectives of Art. 2, except the development and implementation of joint projects (objective 3). This objective would be fulfilled if the AW segment had monitoring activities on animal welfare. The **AH network** has satisfied the overarching objectives of Art. 2. Participation in exercises is considered useful, and joint projects are considered very useful.
MRA network	The MRA network fulfilled all objectives of Art. 2 to some extent. Mainly objectives 1 and 2 have been fulfilled by facilitating scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration between MSs and EFSA. This network promotes scientific cooperation by bringing together relevant organisations within its framework.
BSE-TSE network	The BSE-TSE network has somewhat fulfilled the objectives outlined in Art. 2 that are relevant to this network: objective 2 has been fully fulfilled and objective 4 to some extent.
PLH network	The PLH network fulfilled objectives 1, 2, and 4 of Art. 2. The network has demonstrated effectiveness in collaborating and coordinating data collection, as well as in exchanging information among MSs. Full collaboration in data collection occurs when MSs have adequate resources and sufficient time. Objective 3 has not been fulfilled because participation in joint projects is not applicable to this network's scope (as is the case for other networks).
PPS network	The PPS network fulfilled objectives 1, 2, and 4 of Art. 2. Objective 3 is not applicable to this network because its primary goal is to educate MSs on a specific methodology rather than to engage in joint projects. Nonetheless, EFSA actively considers MS opinions and adapts tools as necessary, which can be viewed as a form of collaborative effort resembling a joint project.

Network/ sub-group	Extent to which Art. 2 (EFSA MB Decision) objectives are fulfilled
ChemMonDC network	The ChemMonDC network fulfilled objectives 1, 2, and 4 of Art. 2. The fulfilment of objective 3 is somewhat nuanced depending on what is viewed to be a "joint project". The continuous operation, revision and training related to the chemical monitoring data collection system can be viewed as an ongoing project within the network. The network primarily focuses on effective data collection rather than extensive scientific discussions.
ZMD network	The ZMD network has fulfilled all objectives of Art. 2. Nevertheless, there seems to be some room for improvement in terms of participation in joint projects (objective 3), as is the case for other networks as well.
FCD network	The FCD network fulfilled all objectives of Art. 2, as they are aligned with the network's core objectives and activities. Objectives 1, 2 and 4 are part of the founding mission of FCD network, while objective 3 is exemplified by the EU Menu Project and contributions to the Food Consumption database.
FCM network	The FCM network fulfilled all objectives of Art. 2, as they are aligned with the network's own objectives and activities.
GMO network	The GMO network is different from other networks that engage in regular data collection, hence most of the objectives of Art. 2 are less relevant for the GMO network. Nonetheless, the GMO network has generally somewhat fulfilled all objectives of Art. 2. The exchange of expertise and best practices, collaboration and coordination in data collection, and the exchange of data/information have room for improvement. However, at the same time, these face challenges due to the stringent regulatory framework and divergent viewpoints within the field.
PSN network	The PSN fulfilled all objectives of Art. 2, as they are aligned with the network's own objectives and activities.
EREN network	EREN has fulfilled objectives 1, 2, and 4 of Art. 2, which are interconnected to some extent, as EFSA and MS colleagues collaborate closely on emerging risks. Objective 3 is somewhat fulfilled, with a project idea proposed by EFSA and MSs through the FPs set to be launched in 2024 and to be coordinated by the MSs. This could potentially develop into a joint project.[24]
NANO network	The NANO network fulfilled all objectives of Art. 2 to some extent. Progress is underway regarding participation in joint projects (objective 3). Notably, an EFSA-initiated project in 2023 has evolved into a currently active 5-year project. This is led by the JRC, supported by an EFSA grant and coordinated by a consortium of Art. 36 organisations. Additionally, participants from various MSs within the NANO network are contributing to the establishment of NRLs for nanotechnology, showcasing enhanced collaborations facilitated by the network.
CEN network	The CEN fulfilled all objectives of Art. 2 to the extent these are relevant for the network's tasks. EFSA communications and MS communications staff work closely and effectively on relevant issues to ensure coordination of messages and preparedness among partners ahead of publication of outputs. On the other hand, the aspects of data collection/coordination and exchange of data/information are only partially applicable to the scope of this network.

[24] This project involves tailor-made activities on creating a community of knowledge on potential toxicological aspects of food supplements that are in place on the EU market, particularly on plant-based substances.

(a) For the analysis of the sub-group objectives versus Article 2 of the EFSA MB Decision overarching objectives please refer to the main 'parent' network summary in this Table.

Source: Analysis of individual networks/sub-groups based on desk research, interviews (EFSA) and feedback from survey respondents (network/sub-group respondents and other participants).

3.4 Has each network/sub-group met their individual targets, as laid down in their ToR?

Each network/sub-group is established to meet specific objectives in line with its remit, as set out in its ToR. The individual objectives of each network/sub-group are listed in ***Annex III*** **(Q19)** and summarised in ***Annex IV***.

The extent to which each network/sub-group met its individual targets during the 2021-2023 period is assessed through their perceived effectiveness in satisfying their objectives; the accomplishments and successes of each network/sub-group; and, the extent to which shortcomings (if any) are identified. Thus, this EQ is addressed through a synthetic overview of the findings from the analysis of the evidence base for JC.13 to JC.15 (see below and the sub-sections which follow).

Key findings are presented below as follows:

	EQ4: Has each network/sub-group met their individual targets, as laid down in their ToR?
	Key findings
	4.1 How well have the networks/sub-groups fulfilled their intended objectives?
JC.13	The analysis of networks/sub-groups demonstrates that most of the objectives set out for each network/sub-group are being fulfilled. The level of fulfilment varies by network/sub-group, and this partly reflects the extent to which the objectives are relevant. In particular, for complex networks (AHAW, ChemMonDC, ZMD) the objectives set out in the network's ToR are not always relevant for the sub-groups; in most cases there are no specific ToR setting out the sub-groups' specific objectives; sub-groups contribute to some of the overall network objectives.
	4.2 What are the key accomplishments/successes of the networks/ sub-groups during the evaluation period?
JC.14	Many key accomplishments are identified for each and every network/sub-group. Networking, sharing information and data, knowledge, experience and best practices, getting information on upcoming EFSA activities (such as scientific opinions) and addressing specific questions are considered to have been largely successful for all networks/sub-groups.
	4.3 Do the networks/sub-groups have any significant shortcomings?
JC.15	Overall, few shortcomings are identified and these are either technical i.e. related to a specific topic, or organisational/process-related. A common shortcoming is that many members/participants of the networks/sub-groups are not as proactive as intended. This is mainly attributed partly to the participant nomination process, which is done at national level with the support of the FPs, and partly to the lack of resources and/or available expertise in some countries. In the case of sub-groups which have specifically defined tasks, these do not

	EQ4: Has each network/sub-group met their individual targets, as laid down in their ToR?
	Key findings
	require the same level of proactiveness as a network that has continuous activities for the exchange of data/information.

3.4.1 How well have the networks/sub-groups fulfilled their intended objectives? (JC.13)

Perceived effectiveness of the networks/sub-groups in satisfying the network objectives as stated in their ToRs. ***(JC.13)***

Overall, the analysis of networks demonstrates that **most of the objectives set out in the ToR of each network (*Annex IV*) are being fulfilled**. Both participants and EFSA reported that objectives were fulfilled either fully or partially. In very few cases (AHAW, ChemMonDC, and BSE/TSE networks) a minority (one to four participant respondents) indicated that a small number of the objectives are not fulfilled (**Annex II**).

The **level of fulfilment varies by network/sub-group, and this partly reflects the extent to which objectives are relevant**. For example, the AHAW network effectively comprises two segments, one on animal health (AH) and one on animal welfare (AW). Objectives are set out in the AHAW ToR for the network as a whole, but some of the objectives are only relevant for the AH or AW segment. Similarly, it has been hard during the study to identify the objectives of some sub-groups, as these are not clearly set out in specific ToR for the sub-groups or are confined within the broader network objectives. Also, in practice, not all objectives listed in the ToR of a network have the same importance in terms of relevance.

As already observed, the variety of network/sub-group purposes affects not only their format (size and complexity), but also the frequency of interaction, level of engagement and nature of contributions, in line with the remit and objectives of each network/sub-group. The findings do not indicate any correlation between network/sub-group size or complexity and performance in meeting objectives.

3.4.2 What are the key accomplishments/successes of the networks/sub-groups during the evaluation period? (JC.14)

Identified accomplishments/successes of each network/sub-group. ***(JC.14)***

All networks/sub-groups consider networking, sharing information and data, knowledge, experience and best practices, getting information on upcoming EFSA activities (such as scientific opinions) and addressing specific questions to have been largely successful during the 2021-2023 period. Despite the fact that, due to the disruptions caused by Covid-19, meetings were held online in 2021 and continued to be online in many cases in 2022, networking activities continued almost without interruption.

Beyond this generally positive outcome, select examples of key accomplishments and successes of the networks/sub-groups is provided for each network/sub-group in **Table 0-6 below**. Overall, **many key accomplishments were identified during the 2021-2023**

period for each and every network/sub-group. The list is particularly extensive for certain networks/sub-groups (e.g. EREN; CEN networks).

Table 0-6: Select examples of key accomplishments by network/sub-group during the 2021-2023 period

Network/ sub-group	Key accomplishments
AHAW network	• Creating two new sub-groups on animal health data reporting on diseases for which EFSA holds a recurrent mandate: Avian influenza and ASF • Harmonising databases and data collection • Raising awareness on projects, grants and information on ongoing projects • Open consultation on methodological guidance for Farm to Fork Strategy • Identification of the main welfare indicators on farms and at slaughter for different species • Information on animal-based welfare measures in slaughterhouses for beef cattle • Lumpy skin disease (LSD): vaccination and post vaccination activities • ASF): management of outbreaks, disease reporting • Collaboration on highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)
AH sub-group on *E. multilocularis*	• The sub-group's task is specific to the preparation of the annual *E. multilocularis* surveillance reports, which it has done successfully • The approach has evolved over time, improving quality and speed (2023 publication published three months earlier compared to 2022) • Double data submission avoided (synergy with data collection on zoonoses) • Draft EFSA report used for national purposes by the MSs
AH sub-group One Health	• Identification of ten priority diseases to target in One Health Surveillance and prioritisation of zoonotic diseases at EU level • Preparing for One Health surveillance grant projects (EU4Health programme) • Coordinated surveillance system under the One Health approach for cross-border pathogens that threaten the Union, including options for sustainable surveillance strategies for priority pathogens • Harmonisation of surveillance approaches among MSs to make information comparable and meaningful • Collaboration between EFSA and ECDC for data collection
AW sub-group NCPs	• Listing and discussing animal welfare risks for the various species of food-producing animals • Exercises on different animal species, such as animal-based measures at slaughter to monitor on-farm welfare of different animal species • Provision of data/information to EFSA (examples: a scientific opinion of EFSA needed four sets of information and at least two to three of the sets were retrieved from the sub-group; in 2023 EFSA needed data on fur animals and in a few weeks the sub-group made the data available) • Preparatory data collected at slaughterhouses for EFSA scientific opinions • Discussion on new EFSA scientific opinions and MS tools (e.g. classyfarm in IT)

Network/ sub-group	Key accomplishments
	• Improving harmonisation through discussion, e.g. on certificate of competence for slaughterhouses
MRA network	• Initiates microbiological risk assessment associated with the consumption of a broad spectrum of foods • Identification and sharing of emerging risks (e.g. plant-based milk alternatives; raw milk vending machines; emerging salmonella subtypes; *Taenia solium*) • Predictive modelling and environmental monitoring e.g., of *listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods (approaches, methods and different products simulated by different MSs) • Occurrence of *Campylobacter* in food • Contribution to EFSA scientific opinions • Avoidance of duplicated work • Publication of the annual reports of the MRA network
BSE-TSE network	• Inputs into the BSE-TSE report and into scientific opinions in the BSE/TSE field • Information updates on the merging issue of CWD • Exchange of information on the draft amendments to the WOAH Terrestrial Animal Health Code • Quick expert assistance/feedback in the event of a scientific/technical question • Brings together EURL, WOAH, the Commission and MSs • Trainings provided
PLH network	• Contributed to methodology for horizon scanning for emerging risks, from prioritising to development of searchable dashboard • Training MSs in the interpretation and use of EFSA quantitative risk assessment with uncertainty analysis • *Xylella fastidiosa*: prepared documents on surveillance, detection methods, and projects to support MS activities for this plant pest • Development of survey tools such as plant pest survey cards • Risk based estimate of system sensitivity tool (RİBESS): this tool is useful to plan statistically sound and risk-based surveys for plant pests • *Scolytinae* database in support of pest group categorisation • Commodity risk assessment and promoting risk communication efforts • Feedback on how to integrate citizen science data and artificial intelligence in plant health risk assessment
PPS network	• Annual report of the PPS Network • Training and feedback on the use of EFSA pest survey toolkit (RiPEST): information exchange about planning of statistically based surveys; guided practical exercises/training to use EFSA tools, on the basis of realistic scenarios • Harmonisation of PPS at MS level: introduction of mathematical models in sampling; improved knowledge on statistically, risk-based sample size for PPS • Knowledge of *Xylella fastidiosa* surveillance and plant pest survey cards (*see PLH network above*) • Updated insect and spider pest categorisation • Promotes the added value of "One health" for plant health
ChemMonDC network	• Scientific reports on pesticides residues and on veterinary medicine residues

Network/ sub-group	Key accomplishments
	• Providing guidance and support for data collection, analysis and reporting • Harmonisation/standardisation of data reporting; alignment and understanding of coding samples • Evaluation of the data collection process
ZMD network	• Harmonisation in the collection, validation, and analysis of data reported • Review of reporting guidance documents, reports, tools and data • Reducing the length of the reports while increasing the quality of reported data • Updating the AMR and FBO data model • Avian influenza data reporting: successful cooperation in revision of data before publications of reports • Prioritisation of issues based on the availability of harmonised data • Adaptation of terminology and verification rules used in accordance with legislation • Clearer definition of terms for FBO data and of zoonotic agents
ZMD – FBO sub-group	• Production of FBO annual report • Clearer definition of terms for FBO data • Close collaboration in the collection and reporting process
ZMD – TSE sub-group	• Timely data submission to the annual TSE data collection, in accordance with the legislation deadline; monthly reporting of data • Engagement in the consultation process of the annual TSE EU Summary Report and coordination of necessary data corrections • Participation in feedback surveys, providing, *inter alia*, suggestions for continuously improving the TSE reporting tool and to achieve harmonised monitoring data • Full support whenever needed regarding data submission
ZMD – AMR sub-group	• The EU Summary Reports on AMR in zoonotic and indicator bacteria from humans, animals and food • Advising EFSA in reviewing data collection tools on AMR monitoring following evolution of EU legislation (e.g., data model, catalogues, guidance documents) • Identifying issues and opportunities for harmonised monitoring and reporting for MSs and other reporting countries, including practical difficulties in implementing new provisions of EU legislation (e.g., monitoring AMR in imported meat) • Exchanging experiences in monitoring and/or surveillance programme design and in laboratory methods Manual for reporting on zoonoses and zoonotic agents, within the framework of Directive 2003/99/EC, and on some other pathogenic microbiological agents • Managing the transition to external contracts for the report • Reducing the length of the reports while improving the quality of reported data • Contribution to CarbaCamp project (EURL for AMR) • Review of the Technical specifications for a baseline survey on the prevalence of *methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in pigs • Alerting MSs to the emergence of Carbapenem-resistance in *E. coli* from food producing animals; informing MSs on the issue of *E. marmotae*

Network/ sub-group	Key accomplishments
	• Including graphical reports in the form of story maps and dashboards
ZMD – WGS sub-group	• Portal for data collection and other improvements to WGS data collection tools • Bringing experts together in the discussion on data quality and harmonisation • Contributions to improve the WGS system • Developing and releasing the molecular workflows
FCD network	• Launch and completion of the EU Menu Project (significant contribution to success of the project) • Update of the EFSA Comprehensive European Food Consumption Database • Evaluation of data methods and tools for the preparation of EU Menu phase 2 • More generally, the collection of harmonised food consumption data, used in harmonised risk assessments
FCM network	• Work on specific materials for risk assessments; e.g., on the safety of the substance styrene, exchanges on non-intentionally added substances (NIAS), dedicated WG on coatings between different MSs, etc. • The creation and update of the database of projects that could be relevant for risk assessments in the area of FCM • Sharing & discussing activities of EFSA, Council of Europe's European Committee for Food Contact Materials and Articles, European Commission and MSs • Training sessions during in person meetings
GMO network	• NGTs: developments, discussions, opinions, dissemination of information, guidance for risk assessment and national approaches • Synthetic biology developments and implications for risk assessment • Assessing safety-by-design in novel plant breeding techniques by comparing native gene-based modification with classical breeding • Development of criteria for risk assessment of plants produced by targeted mutagenesis, cisgenesis and intragenesis • Updating the guidance documents according to changes that have occurred in the field of GMOs • Exchange on developments in protein safety assessment of present and future GM plants • Exchange on the challenges associated with new governance techniques in the context of proposed new EU legislation • Scientific opinion on new developments in biotechnology applied to animals • Potential impact of teosinte on Bt maize cultivation in the EU
PSN network	• The creation and update of the administrative guidance for the processing of applications for regulated products • The overview of Guidance Documents to be revised in the medium and long-term was an important milestone to set the workplan in the next years • Fostered the understanding of the implementation of the new Transparency Regulation measures • Enhanced collaboration with ECHA • Alignment between national competent authorities responsible for the authorisation process of plant protection products and those

Network/ sub-group	Key accomplishments
	responsible for ECHA's harmonised classification and labelling (CLH) process
PSN – Iuclid sub-group	• Contributed to improve several tools and resources for the quality of dossiers submitted via IUCLID, such as lists of rules for data filtering and validation, and a "mini-manual" for PPP microorganisms' dossier submissions • Provision of support material for applicants, updates on new versions of the tool and next steps • Allowing MSs and industry to raise and discuss issues
EREN network	• Contributed to the business analysis for the development of an EFSA Emerging Risks Analysis Platform (ERAP) centralising all EFSA activities for the analysis of emerging issues; participated in the testing of ERAP's prototype • Preparation of online systems such DEMETER, etc. • Collaboration on different EU projects (HOLiFOOD, FoodSafeR, etc.) • Engaging with the sister network of stakeholders' discussion group on emerging risk (StaDG-ER) • Sharing of information across the various relevant EU agencies: e.g. joint event of EREN/EIONET/StaDG-ER • Identifies and analyses more than 50 signals per year on potential emerging risks, with at least half of the most prominent characterised in mini-dossiers • Food supplements risks monitoring and identification of health risks • Study on drivers of emergence of diseases • Monitoring issues raised by the increase of fish parasites • Follow-ups on food safety of seaweed: an important topic for northern Europe extensively updated over time • Identifying health and safety risks of food fraud • Identification of food risk in view of changing consumer habits, such as chemical and microbiological risk of smoothies, or plant-based cheese • New hypervirulent *Listeria monocytogenes* serovar 4H reported • Stakeholder involvement for issues on plastics • *Bacillus cytotoxcicus*: shared information from France triggered further investigations which in turn were presented at EREN • ASF outbreak identified in wild boar in Northern Italy raises risk level for Western Europe
NANO network	• Identifying priority research needs e.g. by discussing data gaps • Discussing divergent views with specific EU MSs to promote exchange and alignment • EFSA "Guidance on the risk assessment of nanomaterials to be applied in the food and feed chain: human and animal health" (update on EFSA Nano Guidance implementation) • Procedure of nanotoxicity determination • Providing expertise on physicochemical characterisation in EU countries • Promoting cooperation among MSs and sister agencies via contributions to the design of the new EFSA Project NAMs4NANO[25] • Trainings for network participants

[25] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/art36grants/article36/gpefsamese202201-nams4nano-integration-new-approach-methodologies-results

Network/ sub-group	Key accomplishments
CEN network	• General preparedness and alignment on communication messages and approaches on sensitive topics with divergent views (e.g., bisphenol A; titanium dioxide; glyphosate)[26] • Contributed to proposals for the development of an EU framework for coordinated communication • European campaigns (EUChooseSafeFood)[27] • Hot topic calls including the development of national communication activities based on EFSA scientific opinions • Key country issues, and communication labs during the network meetings • Joint communication campaigns (e.g. hazard vs risk mini campaign; communication campaign on swine pest) • Communication on the World Food Safety Day (7th June)

Source: Analysis of individual networks/sub-groups based on desk research, interviews (EFSA) and feedback from survey respondents (network/sub-group respondents and other participants).

3.4.3 Do the networks/sub-groups have any significant shortcomings? (JC.15)

Identified shortcomings, if any. Reasons for shortcomings: nomination process for network/sub-group members; member turnover; other reasons. ***(JC.15)***

Overall, few shortcomings were identified during the 2021-2023 period. The few shortcomings identified were either technical (e.g. the approach to a specific topic was criticised) or organisational/process-related. The extent and nature of shortcomings tends to vary per network/sub-group, e.g. for those of a technical nature they are related to the topic area. Furthermore, sub-groups tend to have specifically defined tasks which do not require the same level of proactiveness as networks which have continuous activities for the exchange of data and information. On the other hand, some common themes were identified for shortcomings that are process-driven, as usually these processes are common to all networks/sub-groups.

A common shortcoming or weakness perceived by EFSA coordinators and participants is that many members/participants of the networks/sub-groups are not as proactive as intended. Ideally, the networks/sub-groups are set up to foster an open exchange and collaboration by all members/participants. However, some countries tend to be less "vocal" during the meetings, or less proactive in suggesting or presenting topics for discussion. This is attributed partly to the participant nomination process, which is done at national level with the support of the FPs (**Text box 0-2**), and partly to the lack of resources and available expertise in some countries. Although most FPs did not identify any difficulties (and many FPs did not provide an answer), for those FPs that find it difficult to identify relevant experts, it depends on the networks/sub-group. It appears to be more challenging for certain networks due to lack of expertise on certain specific subjects in some MSs (e.g. AW segment of the AHAW network, AHAW One Health sub-group, GMO network, NANO network, PSN-Iuclid sub-group), BSE/TSE

[26] Including for example contribution to an infographic on EFSA's role in the risk assessment process of pesticides: https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Glyphosate-infographic.pdf
[27] https://campaigns.efsa.europa.eu/EUChooseSafeFood/#/

network and CEN network). Occasionally, the feedback provided may also be limited due to insufficient capacity, or due to language limitations.

To improve the nomination process, FPs suggested that EFSA could play a more active supporting role through the development of guidelines and/or criteria to identify the required profile of experts (according to 24 out of 31 FPs that responded to the survey), or even a more active involvement in the expert selection process (7 FPs).It is noted that the evaluation focused on challenged with the nomination process at national level, rather than internally at the level of EFSA.

Text box 0-2: EFSA network/sub-group member/participant nomination process

According to Art. 5 of the Decision of the EFSA Management Board in 2021, each network is composed of organisations with expertise in the fields covered by the relevant network. Each network is made up of participants that mainly work in public administration in their respective country. This means participants to each network are typically selected based on their scientific qualifications, expertise and experience in the relevant field. They are expected to be knowledgeable and have a strong background in the areas they cover. The selection of members and participants is coordinated by the Advisory Forum Secretariat. The Advisory Forum appoints member organisations, and it is up to the organisation to nominate the participant with the support of the national FPs. This process is the same for all networks/sub-groups. Usually there is one participant and one alternate; in some cases, there are several alternates per MS.

This lack of proactiveness is considered to constrain to some extent the effectiveness of the collaboration. Overall, the composition of the networks and sub-groups suggests that the expertise and knowledge of individual members may vary; the effectiveness of the network as a whole depends on the collective expertise and active collaboration of its members.

3.5 Is the topic of each network/sub-group of current interest and/or efficient in addressing it?

The extent to which each network/sub-group is following a topic of current interest, and is efficient in addressing it, is determined by the relevance of their remit to health/safety risks and developments over the 2021-2023 period; and, each network's/sub-group's agility in responding to relevant emerging food safety challenges and crises during the period. Efficiency also depends on the extent to which the funding mechanisms for the networks/sub-groups' operations are sufficient and sustainable. Thus, this EQ is addressed through a synthetic overview of the findings from the analysis of the evidence base for JC.16 to JC.22 (see below and the sub-sections which follow).

Key findings are presented below as follows:

EQ5: Is the topic of each network/sub-group of current interest and/or efficient in addressing it?

key findings

5.1 To what extent did the scope of the networks/sub-groups remain relevant to health/safety risks and developments over the implementation period?

	EQ5: Is the topic of each network/sub-group of current interest and/or efficient in addressing it?
	key findings
JC.16	Relevance to health/safety risks and scientific developments is linked to the priorities identified in EFSA's Strategy (2027). Networks/sub-groups engage in activities that contribute to EFSA's current strategic objectives, albeit to varying extents depending on their remit and activities undertaken.
JC.17	There is consensus amongst participants and EFSA staff that the topics covered by their respective networks/sub-groups have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments in their remit over the 2021-2023 period.
JC.18	Only two of the 346 participants that responded to the survey thought that the topics covered by their respective network/sub-group lacked relevance to risks and developments that occurred over the 2021-2023 period. In both cases, the examples identified do not indicate a failure or lack of efficiency in addressing the topic, but simply that the topic is considered to be politically sensitive (GMOs) or not of current acute interest (BSE-TSE).
	5.2 How agile are the networks/sub-groups in responding to relevant emerging food safety challenges and crises?
JC.19	Across all networks/sub-groups, there is consensus amongst participants and EFSA staff that their respective networks/sub-groups are able to respond promptly to emerging health/safety challenges and crises.
JC.20	The majority of the 346 participants that responded to the survey did not identify any failures for their network/sub-group to cover current or emerging health and safety challenges. Only 22 respondents indicated perceived failures; a key reason why failures were identified relates to their network's/sub-group's remit, which does not cover the identification of emerging risks. The EREN network was indicated to be more suitable for this role although, the lack of readily available data was considered to constitute a key challenge for reacting "promptly".
	5.3 Are the funding mechanisms sufficient and sustainable for the networks/sub-groups' operations?
JC.21	The EFSA networks are funded by the EFSA budget which is funded by the European Union. Networks only need a small proportion of the EFSA Units' annual budget to cover the travel expenses for participants attending physical meetings. During the 2021-2023 period, the earmarked budget per network/sub-group was underused as meetings were mostly online (due to Covid-19), and hybrid meetings started on a systematic basis only from 2023.
JC.22	The current use of network participants' and network coordinators' time for formal network/sub-group activities in the current format is considered to be sustainable in the medium to long-term (next 3-5 years) across all networks/sub-groups covered by the evaluation. If demands change, for example through a different format for conducting activities and more frequent exchanges, then this may increase the workload both for EFSA coordinators and participants. Nonetheless, all networks/sub-groups are making efforts to avoid overloading participants and to maintain an acceptable level of participant engagement.

3.5.1 To what extent did the scope of the networks/sub-groups remain relevant to health/safety risks and developments over the implementation period? (JC.16 to JC.18)

Comparison of the topics covered by the networks/sub-groups to the priorities/strategy set by EFSA. ***(JC.16)***

The extent to which the topics covered by the networks/sub-groups are relevant to health/safety risks and developments over the 2021-2023 period is linked to the extent to which their activities fulfil the priorities identified in EFSA's strategic objectives **Text box 0-**.

Text box 0-3: EFSA strategic objectives (EFSA Strategy 2027)

EFSA's work is influenced by the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy, a key part of the Green Deal, as well as by the Transparency Regulation, which gives EFSA more tasks, but also more resources to carry out its tasks. EFSA's job of communicating risks has become even more important in the past years. To reflect this EFSA came up with the following three key objectives in EFSA's strategy 2027:

1. **Strategic Objective 1**: Deliver trustworthy scientific advice and communication of risks from farm to fork:
   - **Expected outcome**: Increased relevance and improved reputation of EFSA's scientific advice; and increased relevance and improved reputation of EFSA's risk communication

2. **Strategic objective 2**: Ensure preparedness for future risk analysis needs:
   - **Expected outcome**: Increased risk analysis capabilities (knowledge, expertise, methodologies and data) to maintain relevance for the future

3. **Strategic objective 3**: Empower people and ensure organisational agility:
   - **Expected outcome**: Improved reputation of EFSA as an accountable institution and an attractive employer

If these objectives are fulfilled, it is expected to result in the following impacts:

- Public health ensured, that takes account of the environment, animal health and welfare, and plant health.
- Trust sustained in a food safety system that ensures a high level of protection for human health and consumers' interests.

The comparison of the areas covered by each network's/sub-group's activities against the current strategic objectives set by EFSA indicates that all networks/sub-groups engage in activities that **contribute to EFSA's current strategic objectives and priorities**. In particular:

- **Strategic objective 1**: The activities covered by the networks/sub-groups involve sharing their experts' knowledge with EFSA. As experts in their field, network participants have the knowledge and skills needed to deliver trustworthy scientific advice and communication to EFSA. This is found to work very well (***JC.1***; ***JC.6/JC.7***), even though the level of involvement could be improved so that more participants are proactive (***JC.15***).
- **Strategic objective 2**: The regular meetings held and other formal network/sub-group activities (***JC.4***) contribute to knowledge exchange and to the analysis and discussion of new developments and risks, thus staying on top of developments on the topics covered by each network/sub-group.

- **Strategic objective 3**: Most networks/sub-groups tend to be very active in terms of providing support and training to participants thus empowering them to be involved in many different activities. This enhances the organisational agility and outreach of EFSA. The outreach to other organisations, both at national and international level, improves visibility for EFSA.

View of key stakeholders as to the relevance of topics covered by networks/sub-groups: extent to which health/safety risks and developments were related to the content of each network/sub-group over the 2021-2023 period. Reasons for lack of relevance. ***(JC.17)***

Across all networks/sub-groups, there is consensus amongst participants and EFSA staff that the topics covered by their respective networks/sub-groups have been relevant to health/ safety risks and scientific developments in their remit over the 2021-2023 period. Very few participants indicated only partial relevance. The relevance of the topics covered by network/ sub-group is summarised in **Table 0-7**.

In the very few cases where the feedback from participants and EFSA staff indicates partial relevance, this is mainly due to the rapid developments of the knowledge base in the scientific area covered by the network/sub-group against the fact that the network/sub-group acts on specific pre-determined topics mandated to EFSA by the European Commission.

Table 0-7: Relevance of topics covered by each network/sub-group to health/safety risks, developments and emerging issues (2021-23 period)

Network/ sub-group	Relevance to health/safety risks, developments and emerging issues
AHAW network	The **AW group** identifies and follows well topics of current interest/emerging issues. An example of an issue identified early is mass culling as a result of an animal disease outbreak (e.g. recent avian influenza outbreaks). Although able to respond promptly to emerging issues, the multitude of emerging health/safety challenges and rapid developments in the knowledge base in this scientific area constrain its ability. The **AH group** is able promptly to respond to emerging risks and crises, but this ability is constrained by the fact that it only meets once per year, which makes it difficult to identify and discuss hot topics. The new informal meetings for the AH group planned from 2024 are expected to fill the gap.
AH sub-group on *E. multilocularis*	The *E. multilocularis* sub-group addressed topics that have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements. The sub-group is considered to possess the capability to promptly address emerging health/safety challenges and crises. This is an important achievement against the context that *E. multilocularis* is considered to be one of the 'neglected' diseases.
AH sub-group One Health surveillance	The OH sub-group is linked to grant agreements with specific workplans and deliverables, which were only contracted at the end of 2023. The topics addressed by the OH surveillance sub-group have been very relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements; the sub-group is considered to possess the capability to promptly address emerging health/safety challenges and crises. Once projects are underway and surveillance results are delivered, EFSA will know how well emerging risks were identified. A reprioritisation exercise that will be

Network/ sub-group	Relevance to health/safety risks, developments and emerging issues
	carried out mid-2025 may lead to changes in the focus of the surveillance activities that will be reflected in changes to the grant contracts.
AW sub-group NCPs	The topics addressed by the NCP sub-group have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements and the sub-group possesses the capability to promptly address emerging health/safety challenges and crises, specifically on the protection of animals at the time of killing.
MRA network	The topics covered by the MRA network have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments in its remit. The MRA network picked up new/emerging issues – e.g. salmonella serovars, raw milk vending machines and plant-based milk alternatives. The MRA network possesses the capability, to varying degrees, to promptly address emerging health/safety challenges and crises, even though this might not be part of its objectives according to EFSA. The MRA network's capability to respond promptly is somewhat constrained by the many emerging health and safety challenges it faces, the need to respond to specific mandates from the Commission, and the rapid evolution of scientific knowledge in this area.
BSE-TSE network	The topics covered by the BSE-TSE network have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments, and the BSE-TSE network possesses the capability to promptly address emerging health/safety challenges and crises. The network is a valuable platform for sharing information on emerging issues, such as CWD. Despite the rarity of BSE cases, the network remains relevant by promptly addressing new challenges such as CWD.
PLH network	The topics covered by the PLH network have been very relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments in their remit, and the network is considered able to react promptly to emerging health/safety challenges and crises. The challenge of limited data availability in the field of plant health, due to the extensive range of potential plant pest risks, may be an area for improvement to increase the network's ability to act promptly.
PPS network	The topics addressed by the PPS network have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements, and the network possesses the capability to promptly address emerging health/safety challenges and crises. The network is improving its ability to react promptly by developing a methodology to detect and respond to 20 priority pests at an early phase of invasion in the EU (this methodology is focused on surveillance for known emerging risks, not identifying entirely new ones).
ChemMonDC network	Staying relevant to emerging risks is not a primary focus for the ChemMonDC network, as it operates within an established workflow where data collection occurs too late for immediate use in emerging health/safety challenges. When new risks emerge, MSs are responsible for addressing and reporting them.
ZMD network	The topics addressed by the ZMD network have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements, and it possesses the capability promptly to address emerging health/safety challenges and crises. The network's limited focus on EC-mandated topics, the presence of numerous emerging health and safety challenges in its scientific area,

Network/ sub-group	Relevance to health/safety risks, developments and emerging issues
	and the constraint of collecting data only once a year, may complicate an immediate response.
ZMD – FBO sub-group	The topics addressed by the FBO sub-group have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements. The sub-group possesses the capability promptly to address emerging health/safety challenges and crises to the extent that this falls under its remit. The sub-group's role focuses on advising collaboration practices and reporting general FBO data. For quick responses requiring sequencing data, the WGS sub-group is best suited to address emerging health/safety challenges promptly.
ZMD – TSE sub-group	The topics addressed by the TSE sub-group have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements. The sub-group possesses the capability promptly to address emerging health/safety challenges and crises. Although the monthly frequency of data collection is not a mandatory requirement of the legislation, it is designed to pick up any early warning signs. There is some internal reflection at present on whether frequency should be reduced in the future.
ZMD – AMR sub-group	The topics addressed by the AMR sub-group have been very relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements, and the sub-group possesses the capability promptly to address emerging health/safety challenges and crises. By definition, the sub-group follows up emerging trends. For instance, it recently reviewed a new mechanism of resistance in *Campylobacter* and provided feedback for legislative review based on member discussions.
ZMD – WGS sub-group	The topics addressed by the WGS sub-group have been very relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements. This sub-group exists by definition for responding to crises which is the main scope of the sub-group. However, as it is relatively new, there may be potential for further development.
FCD network	Emerging risks are not very relevant for this network, due to the functioning of food consumption data collection which is slow and expensive. This makes it a challenge to find a system where it would be possible to renew consumption data more frequently to keep up with emerging risks. However, network participants remain informed about emerging risks through various channels.
FCM network	The network is committed to addressing not only current, but also emerging risks and issues, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of relevant topics. The network actively liaised with experts to identify emerging risks, and incorporated the information collected within its discussion. An example of this proactive approach is represented the network's engagement with German researchers on microplastic pollution, where their findings sparked valuable discussions and presentations within the FCM network.
GMO network	The topics addressed by the GMO network have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements. The network's ability promptly to address emerging health/safety challenges is to some extent constrained by e.g. the rapid developments of the knowledge-base in this scientific area. Another factor is that GMO risk assessment rarely requires a prompt response to safety challenges.

Network/ sub-group	Relevance to health/safety risks, developments and emerging issues
PSN network	The PSN does not have a direct role/remit regarding emerging risks. Nonetheless, topics are chosen due to their relevance and current interest. For example, the significance of co-formulants has emerged in recent years, underscoring the pressing need for the PSN's involvement in addressing related challenges.
PSN – Iuclid sub-group	The IUCLID sub-group deals more with technical issues rather than emerging risks. Nevertheless, dealing with all issues in the IUCLID tool swiftly and effectively is crucial for the smooth functioning of the tool. However, EFSA outlined that there are technical timelines required to implement any requested changes, which impact the promptness of response.
EREN network	The main task of this network is to deal with emerging risks. The topics covered by the EREN have been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments in their remit, and the network is able to respond to emerging health/safety challenges and crises. A challenge the network encounters is the need for data collection to support action against emerging risks. This is an area where there is scope for improvement, for the network to further increase its ability to act promptly.
NANO network	The topics covered by the NANO network have been very relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments in their remit. The ability promptly to address emerging health/safety challenges and crises is not fully relevant to the network, since its primary focus is to support activities related to risk assessment rather than specifically targeting emerging risks. The network's ability to respond promptly to emerging risks, if needed, could be further improved.
CEN network	The topics addressed by the CEN have been very relevant to health/safety risks and scientific advancements, and the network is able promptly to address emerging health/safety challenges and crises. Even though technically the network has the role of a professional department for communication, and it is not a first-line institution responding to health risks, it contributes to improve response. For example, the network contributed to the update of EFSA's crisis communication guidelines in 2022/2023.

Source: Analysis of individual networks/sub-groups based on desk research, interviews (EFSA) and feedback from survey respondents (network/sub-group respondents and other participants).

Examples (if any) where the network/sub-group has failed to cover current health/safety risks. ***(JC.18)***

Only two of the 346 participants that responded to the survey thought that the topics covered by their respective network/sub-group lacked relevance. Thus, very few examples were provided where the networks/sub-groups were not considered to cover current health/safety risks. These examples have to do with the nature of the topics in the remit of their network/ sub-group. For instance, a participant of the GMO network indicated that the topic of GMOs in the EU is a political issue rather than a scientific/safety issue, and topics are constrained by the European Commission mandates which are underpinned by the tight legislation in this field. Another participant from the BSE-TSE network indicated that the TSE situation is stable, therefore the question of relevance is less appropriate for this network. Thus, neither of the examples identified indicate a lack of efficiency in addressing the topic or a failure to cover current health/safety risks.

3.5.2 How agile are the networks/sub-groups in responding to relevant emerging food safety challenges and crises? (JC.19/JC.20)

Extent to which each network/sub-group, as established by (1) its ToR and (2) its functioning, has the ability to remain relevant by responding promptly to emerging food safety challenges and crises. Reasons for lack of agility. ***(JC.19)***

Across all networks/sub-groups, there is consensus amongst participants and EFSA staff that their respective **networks/sub-groups are able to respond promptly to emerging health/safety challenges and crises**.

Although a relatively large number of participants did not answer this question (49 out of 346 that responded to the survey), only nine participants indicated that their networks are not able to respond promptly. Reasons identified by these respondents are mainly due to the rapid development of the knowledge base in the scientific area covered by the network/sub-group against the fact that the network/sub-group acts on specific pre-determined topics mandated to EFSA by the European Commission. Inability to respond promptly was also partly due to the many emerging health/safety challenges and crises in the scientific areas covered by networks/sub-groups.

The identification of, and prompt response to, emerging risks is not as relevant for all networks/sub-groups. For example, in the case of the BSE-TSE network, the TSE situation is stable which means there are fewer emerging risks to be identified; even in this case, any relevant emerging issues were promptly identified during the 2021-2023 period (e.g. CWD). Responding promptly to emerging health challenges is also less relevant in the case of the FCD network. Here data collection aims to monitor trends over time and is too costly for more frequent reporting. Several other networks focusing on data collection activities indicated that the frequency of data collection does not allow a prompt response (e.g. ZMD network: data are collected once a year).

Examples (if any) where the network/sub-group has failed to respond to emerging food safety challenges and crises. ***(JC.20)***

Only 22 of the 346 participants that responded to the survey could recall any notable example(s) where the network/sub-group has not covered current or emerging health/safety risks and challenges in its remit. However, the examples actually provided do not allow the identification of any systemic failures. The small number of negative responses were justified by participants mostly in that their network's/sub-group's remit does not cover the identification of emerging risks, and that the EREN network is more suitable for this role. Participants from the EREN network indicated that the lack of data and the process to identify and collect relevant data takes time, and this constitutes the main obstacle for reacting "promptly".

3.5.3 Are the funding mechanisms sufficient and sustainable for the networks/ sub-groups' operations? (JC.21/JC.22)

Methods of funding of networks (as a whole, with any nuances by network/sub-group). ***(JC.21)***

The EFSA networks are funded by the EFSA budget which is funded by the European Union. The budget is covered by the responsible EFSA Unit. The budget earmarked for all networks during the 2021-2023 period was EUR 634 760, of which EUR 307 246 was actually used,

some 48.4 % of the planned budget. The low rate of use during the period is mainly due to the unspent budget in 2021 and the partially unspent budget in 2022, the two years that were affected by the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (**Figure 0-2**). More information on the budget and use rate per network/sub-group during the 2021-23 period is provided in ***Annex IV***.

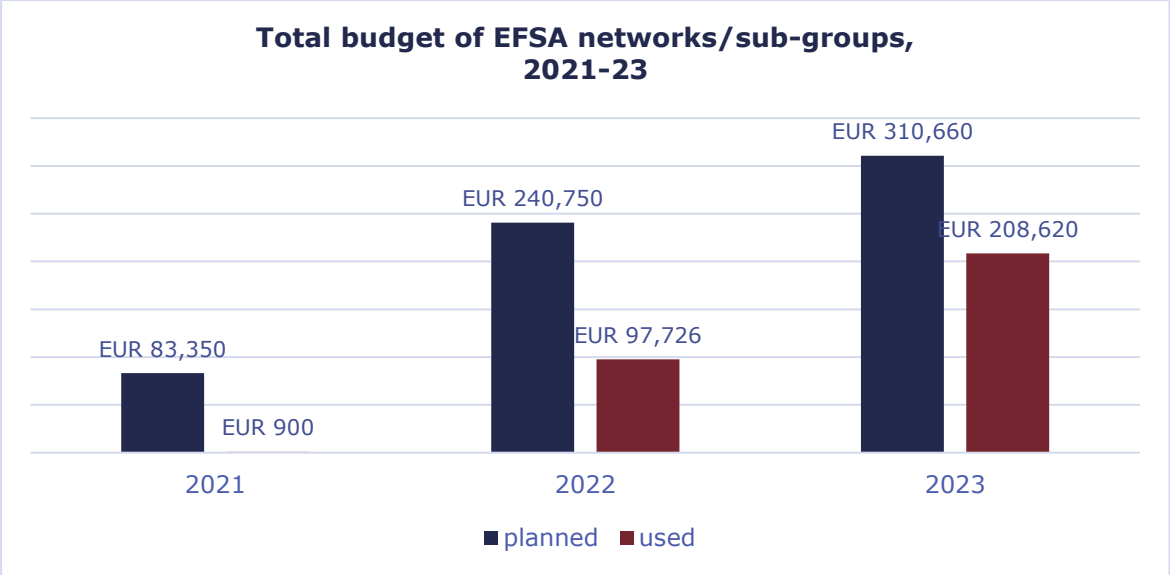

Figure 0-2: Total budget of EFSA networks/sub-groups, 2021-2023 (EUR)

Note: 2021 budget includes network on Novel Foods which was discontinued in 2023.

Source: Based on the annual reports of activities of EFSA networks for 2021, 2022, 2023 (draft).

Networks only need a small proportion of the EFSA Units' annual budget. The budget mainly covers the reimbursement of expenses for participants attending physical meetings. As during the 2021-2023 period meetings were mostly online (due to the disruptions caused by the lingering Covid-19 pandemic), and hybrid meetings started being introduced on a systematic basis only from 2023, the earmarked budget per network/sub-group was under-used.

Extent to which contributions (time provided by MSs; EFSA coordination) are considered to be sustainable. ***(JC.22)***

There is consensus amongst participants, EFSA coordinators and the FPs across all networks/sub-groups, that the current use of network participants' time for formal network/ sub-group activities, in the current format, is sustainable in the medium to long-term (e.g. in the next 3-5 years). All but one EFSA coordinator considered the use of their time for the network activities to be sustainable.

In some cases it was noted that it might become necessary to increase the time available to EFSA coordinators to work on network issues if demands increase. For example, setting up a platform to communicate permanently with the network participants may increase the workload for the EFSA coordinator. Similarly, demands may increase for participants if more frequent exchange becomes necessary in a different format, e.g. if participants are requested to be involved in further activities.

The nature of participation in EFSA networks/sub-groups is different from participation in EFSA's expert Working Groups (WGs). Networks are made of representatives of MSs (as well

as non-EU countries with observer status), representing their country and are only reimbursed for travel expenses to participate in the network/sub-group meetings. This distinguishes them from WGs which are composed of individual experts contributing on their own capacity and paid for their time. Thus, all networks/sub-groups are making efforts to avoid overloading participants with tasks that are not considered necessary. The aim is to maintain participant engagement within formal activities to a level that is considered acceptable by participants and which best serves the purpose and objectives of the networks/sub-groups.

Several best practices were identified in terms of initiatives taken by some of the networks/ sub-groups to stimulate participation and further exchanges among participants and to improve efficiencies; select examples are provided in

Table 0-8 below. These best practices point to potential lessons to learn for other networks/sub-groups.

An important area where improvements have been made during the 2021-2023 period is in terms of encouraging more active participation in meetings, which are a core activity of the networks/sub-groups as also noted in section 3.2. One such improvement is the generalised introduction of hybrid meetings. The hybrid format is deemed to be more efficient than online or physical meetings only. They are considered to be better for networking (including social networking), which fosters a participatory approach and encourages participants to be more interactive in providing feedback, whilst ensuring enlarged participation. In some cases, varying the location of meetings away from EFSA's base in Parma, to other locations selected for their relevance to the network's/sub-group's work, contributed to a more active response. For example, it provided the opportunity to invite a wider range of experts from the host country which stimulated more active discussion during the meeting.

The level of interaction is also improved by employing a participatory approach to facilitate early exchange of topic information with participants ahead of meetings (such as though online surveys as e.g., in the case of EREN). Other efforts to improve interaction include the use of online platforms for document exchange (e.g. FCM network); and, the integration of simulation exercises, training and workshops (e.g. PPS network, PLH network). Furthermore, some networks/sub-groups work on adjacent topics and/or there is overlap between participants. In such cases, some scope for improving collaboration and exploring synergies through joint activities was identified. For example, some joint (back-to-back) meetings have started taking place between networks/sub-groups (e.g. AW groups and NCP sub-group; MRA and ZMD networks).

Finally, in terms of improving efficiencies at the level of coordination, EFSA noted a new initiative of training for 'community coordinators'. The community brings together the coordinators of all EFSA-recognised communities, not just scientific networks/sub-groups. This training is seen as an excellent opportunity to get ideas on how to stimulate communities, which may be of benefit to network/sub-group coordinators.

Table 0-8: Selected examples of initiatives taken by some networks/sub-groups to improve collaboration and efficiencies (2021-2023 period)

Network/ sub-group	Selected initiatives
AHAW: AH sub-group on *E. multilocularis*	In 2023, the sub-group's annual report was published three months in advance compared to previous years, which EFSA and the Commission appreciated in terms of efficiency. Thanks mainly to changes at technical level, the report is expected to be delivered even earlier in 2024.
AHAW: AW sub-group NCPs	The AW group of AHAW and the NCP sub-group meetings in 2022 and 2023 were run back-to-back – i.e. there was a common session and a separate session since about a third of participants are common between AW and NCP.
MRA network	Back-to-back meetings are organised with the ZMD network, as there is some overlap/adjacent topics at scientific level.
PLH network	The latest meeting (December 2023) included a workshop with breakout sessions which provided the opportunity to collect feedback on various current topics of interest.
PPS network	The network meetings, which extend over two days, are organised as workshops: they involve 0.5 day for presentations and then 1.5 days for training participants. This meets the needs of this network to provide training to participants on the new sampling methods to be used on a compulsory basis for plant pest surveillance.
ChemMonDC network	The network has been conducting surveys to evaluate the data collection process and to provide feedback to MSs and attendees based on survey outcomes. Also, at the end of meetings, a small survey is sent out to evaluate the meeting itself.
ZMD – WGS sub-group	Annual meetings to be held jointly (back-to-back) as from 2024, given some overlap of the sub-group's participants with those of the EFSA ZMD network.
FCM network	A shared platform is used for interaction within the network. This serves as a hub for communication and collaboration among members, facilitating exchanges beyond traditional email correspondence. The platform enables more dynamic interaction by providing access to various documents and resources shared among members. This centralised space enhances efficiency and promotes collaboration, allowing members to engage more effectively and to access necessary materials in a timely manner.
PSN network	The initiative to hold open network meetings, to which external experts and stakeholders can participate upon registration, was taken to improve collaboration with other stakeholders. Expanded networking opportunities encompass engagement with universities, and a concerted effort to foster collaboration with a broader spectrum of partners, including institutes, technical collaborators and experts. According to EFSA, integrating feedback from 'external' stakeholders adds valuable perspectives, enriches with diverse insights the discussion, and brings more transparency to the work of the network.
PSN – Iuclid sub-group	Due to the recent introduction of the use of IUCLID in 2021, there is a need for frequent interaction. In addition to several meetings during the year (eight meetings held during 2021-2023, separate from the main PSN network), smaller working parties on specific issues are also organised

Network/ sub-group	Selected initiatives
	within the sub-group, which contribute to enhance knowledge exchange and continuous improvement of the IUCLID tool.
EREN network	The network is trying to make the onboarding of new participants smoother. This is important because once participants are more involved, they tend to be more interested to contribute, to present and to be more active/engage more. EFSA has also strengthened links with international organisations that have observer status, such as WHO and FAO, to improve collaboration, as well as to raise interest amongst organisations from non-EU countries. Also, to improve the participatory approach, online surveys prior to meetings gather participant suggestions for topic prioritisation, i.e. a suggested categorisation of emerging risks.
CEN network	Given the risk communication remit of this network, there is need for frequent collaboration. This includes a WhatsApp group for immediate, day-to-day communication; and, for communications on very sensitive topics, an online teleconference via MS Teams with interested MSs.

Source: Analysis of individual networks/sub-groups based on desk research, interviews (EFSA) and feedback from survey respondents (network/sub-group respondents and other participants).

4 Conclusions

The evaluation of the performance of EFSA networks/sub-groups during the 2021-2023 period has overall found positive outcomes and impacts across the 22 judgement criteria that were applied for addressing the five evaluation questions. The findings are based on feedback collected from a large number of network/sub-group participants and other stakeholders (426 responses out of over 1 400 targeted by the survey), interviews with the EFSA coordinators of the 22 networks/sub-groups, and extensive desk research and review of documents relevant to the work of the networks/sub-groups during this period.

The networks/sub-groups have enhanced the work of EFSA with their knowledge base, providing useful valuable inputs and support to enhance exchange on the scientific methodology for risk assessment across the activities that are relevant/applicable to each network/sub-group (***EQ1***). The activities commonly undertaken by nearly all networks/sub-groups are the exchange of data/information and collaboration in data collection. Their outputs include exercises and data/information that are incorporated in EFSA's work. Occasionally, where relevant and depending on their remit, the networks/sub-groups may contribute with inputs to scientific/technical reports (under GFL Art. 31 mandates) and, more rarely, scientific opinions (Art. 29 GFL mandates).

The networks/sub-groups have enhanced collaboration between EFSA and the MSs in the risk assessment activities (***EQ2***). All networks/sub-groups were found to be effective in enabling scientific knowledge exchange between EFSA and MSs, particularly, in their core activities of exchanging data and information, as well as expertise and best practices. Although some other networking opportunities exist at EU or international level, networks/sub-groups play a unique and irreplaceable role in fostering collaboration between MSs and with EFSA towards common goals.

The networks/sub-groups have effectively engaged with relevant stakeholders. Engagement on formal activities is mainly occasional across all networks/sub-groups. It takes place mainly during the formal network/sub-group meetings, as well as in the context of exchange of data/ information, and the exchange of expertise and best practices. The frequency of formal meetings varies, in most cases from one to two per year, but can also be higher depending on the remit of each network/sub-group and actual needs. The systematic introduction of hybrid meetings across all networks/sub-groups, in line with EFSA's standard policy, is greatly appreciated by most participants. Hybrid meetings provide the opportunity for a wider number of network/sub-group participants to attend, including alternates and other experts.

Participants engage less outside the formal network/sub-group activities. Generally, the more active participants in the network's/sub-group's formal activities tend to be also more actively involved in collaborations outside of the network/sub-group. However, collaborations outside the network/sub-group cannot be systematically attributed to the networking established in formal network/sub-group activities.

It is noted that networking is not a core objective or task for sub-groups, as these tend to have specific objectives. Networking falls more generally under the remit of the 'parent' networks (e.g. AHAW and ZMD networks). By their nature, sub-groups' specifically defined tasks do not require the same level of proactiveness as a network with continuous activities for the exchange of data/information.

The networks/sub-groups have fulfilled most of the objectives laid down in their ToRs and many key accomplishments are identified for each and every network/sub-group (***EQ4***). Networking, sharing information and data, knowledge, experience and best practices, getting information on upcoming EFSA activities (such as scientific opinions) and addressing specific questions are considered to have been largely successful for all networks/sub-groups. Where objectives are only partly fulfilled this tends to be due to their relevance. For example, sub-group objectives are not always explicitly defined in line with the specific remit of the sub-groups, but align with the broader remit of the 'parent' network (AHAW, ChemMonDC, ZMD). Overall, few shortcomings are identified, and these are either technical, i.e. related to a specific topic, or organisational/process-related.

In meeting their objectives, the networks/sub-groups have largely satisfied the overarching objectives outlined in Art. 2 of the EFSA MB Decision, to the extent these are relevant for the remit of each network/sub-group (***EQ3***). For many networks/sub-groups, participation in exercises and joint projects is not relevant, while for other networks/sub-groups data collection is not relevant.

The networks/sub-groups have dealt with topics of current interest and have been efficient in addressing them (***EQ5***). The scope of the topics addressed by the networks/sub-groups remained relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments over the 2021-2023 period. As such, the network/sub-group activities are considered to be a good fit and serve well EFSA's strategic objectives as laid down in its strategy to 2027. The networks/sub-groups have proven to be able to respond promptly to relevant emerging food safety challenges and crises, even though the identification of emerging risks is not a core objective for some networks/sub-groups. The EREN network was indicated to be more suitable for this role. More generally, the lack of readily available data was considered to constitute a challenge in reacting "promptly".

Furthermore, the requirement for funding the networks/sub-groups forms a relatively minor share of the EFSA budget, as this covers mostly participants' travel expenses for attending in-person meetings. The budget earmarked for all networks during the 2021-2023 period was EUR 634 760, of which 48.4 % was actually used as meetings were mostly online in 2021 and 2022 due to Covid-19, and hybrid meetings started on a systematic basis only from 2023. The other major cost component is the use of network participants' time (as well as EFSA coordinators' time) for formal network/sub-group activities. This is considered to be sustainable in the medium to long-term (next 3-5 years) if maintained in the current format. All networks/sub-groups are making efforts to avoid overloading participants and to maintain an acceptable level of participant engagement.

Despite the overall positive findings, certain areas for improvements were identified:

1. Networks/sub-groups tend to engage less with other EFSA networks/sub-groups, as well as EFSA panels, networks of other EU agencies and EURL networks (***EQ2***).

    - Opportunities to improve the level of collaboration with other networks were identified, depending on the remit of each network/sub-group. For example, there may be opportunities for networks with adjacent topic areas (e.g. between the various EFSA networks and sub-groups involved in the animal health field) to enhance collaboration by engaging in some common activities

or through the development of clusters allowing them to exchange on certain common topics and on best practices.

- Opportunities could also be enhanced by potential future legislative developments resulting in new needs for data collection and new mandates for EFSA; the EU Transparency Regulation increasing the need for dedicated consultation with MSs; and, opportunities for the networks to advise on or leverage the potential of diverse emerging technological trends, such as citizen science or artificial intelligence, for use in risk assessment.

2. A common shortcoming in terms of interaction within formal activities is that many participants of the networks/sub-groups are not as proactive as intended (***EQ4***). This is attributed partly to the participant nomination process, which is done at national level with the support of the FPs, and partly to the lack of resources and/or available expertise in some countries, as well as some practical challenges.

    - The process for the nomination of participants was commonly identified as an area to be improved, since it is quasi-systematically related to participant proactiveness. According to FP feedback, EFSA's support would be helpful, for example by developing guidelines and/or criteria to assist FPs with identifying the required optimal profile of experts for participation in the networks. Although the evaluation focused on the nomination process at national level, the process may also need to be reviewed internally at the level of EFSA, to the extent that simplification may be required.

    - Efforts are made in many cases for other improvements to the level of interaction. These include by employing a participatory approach to facilitate early exchange of topic information with participants well ahead of meetings (such as though online surveys as e.g., in the case of EREN), and through the integration of workshops, practical exercises and training (e.g. PPS and PLH networks) (***EQ5***). In this context, the exchange and sharing of best practices among the network/sub-group coordinators (see point 1. above) could extend to the experience gained from existing initiatives to enhance the active involvement of participants. Participant proactiveness can also be encouraged by supporting the network/sub-group representatives at national level, for example by providing guidance on their role and function to ensure higher visibility.

    - At a practical level, challenges for participant interaction are posed by the use of MS Teams and/or email, which constrain dynamic and frequent exchange. Some networks/sub-groups are making efforts to address this through technical advances such as the use of online platforms to facilitate document exchange.

3. Currently, the mechanism for the collection of national-level inputs and for the dissemination of the information and knowledge gained through the networks/sub-groups back to the MSs is not well established in all MSs. In most cases it takes place via the FPs and in some cases no mechanism is in place. It is therefore worth exploring with MSs the potential for setting up a systematic approach to cover both the collection of inputs and the dissemination of information at national level.

Although the process of setting up the networks/sub-groups was not explicitly covered by the evaluation questions, this issue was identified while conducting the evaluation. It is apparent that the 22 EFSA networks/sub-groups are diverse and that some networks/sub-groups are more complex than others. Throughout the evaluation, a variety of formats, frequency of interaction, level of engagement and nature of contributions could be observed in line with the remit and objectives of each network/sub-group. The size and complexity of the networks/ sub-groups depends on their purpose, with some networks being particularly large (e.g. EREN, AHAW, PSN). The evaluation findings do not indicate any correlation between network/ sub-group size or complexity and performance, as all networks/sub-groups were found to effectively meet their objectives and to enable collaboration between EFSA and MSs. Nonetheless, it is also clear that the structure of the networks and the process for making sub-groups has evolved over time in an *ad hoc* manner, and that there are no defined criteria for EFSA's decision to set up a new network versus a sub-group within an existing network, nor for discontinuing any networks/sub-groups. Furthermore, sub-groups work independently of the 'parent' networks:

- In some networks there are historic reasons (e.g., networks that merged and the work continued in groups). For example, the AHAW network is technically split into two groups which work independently from each other (AH and AW). This raises the question of whether they should be formally split into two separate networks to the extent this would be considered a more useful/practical setup.
- On the other hand, sub-groups allow for specific competences, for example in relation to data collection needs raised by the evolving EU legislation and mandates received from the European Commission, hence the decision to form sub-groups within the AHAW, ZMD and PSN networks. This raises the question of whether some sub-groups can become independent networks and whether some could be merged to explore synergies.

It might therefore be helpful for EFSA to review the framework for the process of setting up the networks/sub-groups in the future. This might include establishing criteria for defining their time/length scope and the process to be followed for discontinuing any of the established networks/subgroups. Given that the sub-groups have been created under networks, there may be scope to explore putting in place a two-tier approach: networks with overarching objectives and a long-lasting duration, with sub-groups focused on a specific time limited need.

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Acronyms/Abbreviations

AF	Advisory Forum
AHAW	Animal Health (AH) and Animal Welfare (AW)
AMR	Antimicrobial Resistance
ASF	African Swine Fever
BSE/TSE	Bovine/Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy
BTSF	Better Training for Safer Food
CA(s)	competent authorities
CEN	Communication Expert Network
ChemMonDC	Chemical Monitoring Data Collection
CWD	Chronic Wasting Disease
DCF	Data Collection Framework
DG SANTE	Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (EC)
EC	European Commission
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Control
ECHA	European Chemicals Agency
EEA	European Environment Agency
EFSA	European Food Safety Authority
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EMA	European Medicines Agency
EP	European Parliament
ERAP	Emerging Risk Analysis Platform
ESVAC	European Surveillance of Veterinary Antimicrobial Consumption
EQ	Evaluation Question
EREN	Emerging Risks Exchange
EU	European Union
EURCAW	EU Reference Centres for animal welfare
EURLs	European Reference Laboratories
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (of the United Nations)
FBO	Foodborne Outbreaks
FCD	Food Consumption Data
FCM	Food Contact Material
FDA	Food and Drug Administration (United States)
FP(s)	Focal Point(s)
FWD	Food and Waterborne Diseases
GMO(s)	Genetically modified organisms
GFL	General Food Law (Regulation)
IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention
IRCLG	International Risk Communication Liaison Group
JC	Judgement Criteria
JIACRA	Joint inter-agency antimicrobial consumption and resistance analysis
JRC	Joint Research Centre
MANCP	Multi-annual national control plans
MB	Management Board (EFSA)
MRA	Microbiological Risk Assessment
MRL(s)	Maximum Residue Level(s)
MS(s)	Member State(s)
NANO	Nanotechnologies

NF	Novel Foods
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NGTs	New Genomic Techniques
NRLs	National Reference Laboratories
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OH	One Health
PFAS	Perfluoroalkyl substances
PLH	Plant Health
PPS	Plant Pest Surveillance
PSN	Pesticide Steering Network
RA	Risk assessment
RASFF	Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed
RC	Risk Communication
RM	Risk Management
SCoPAFF	Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed
StaDG-ER	EFSA Stakeholder Discussion group on Emerging Risks
ToR	Terms of Reference
WG	Working Group
WGS	Whole Genome Sequencing
WHO	World Health Organization
WOAH	World Organisation for Animal Health
ZMD	Zoonoses Monitoring Data

Annex I: Approach to the evaluation questions (EQs)

An overview of the EQs and their sub-questions, as well as criteria and sources to address them, is provided in the Table below.

Table Annex I-1 Approach to addressing the evaluation questions (EQs)

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Sub-question	Judgement criteria	*Theme*	Data sources
1. Has each network (and its sub-group(s), when applicable) enhanced the work of EFSA?	1.1 Does the knowledge base of each network/sub-group provide valuable inputs to EFSA?	JC.1. Opinions on the **usefulness** of the support provided to EFSA by each network/sub-group, in terms of: a. collection of data from MSs and/or harmonisation of data collection b. exchange of data/information c. technical/scientific reports d. exercises e. joint projects f. scientific opinions (Art. 29 GFL mandates) g. other activities (to be defined). JC.2. Number of Publications and Reports: track the number of **scientific and technical reports** which the networks/sub-groups have contributed to (support to EFSA's work under GFL Article 31 mandates). JC.3. **Examples** (if any) of other valuable inputs provided to EFSA during the 2021-23 period, in terms of the above activities, by network/sub-group.	*Effectiveness* *Relevance* *Impact*	Desk research. Survey (EFSA/COM staff; EFSA scientific Panels). Interviews (network coordinators).
2. Has each network/sub-group enhanced collaboration between EFSA and the Member States in the risk assessment activities?	2.1 How often have the networks/sub-groups' relevant stakeholders engaged within and outside the networks?	JC.4. Frequency and nature of engagement **within** the network/sub-group: number of meetings (online vs physical); other networking activities (such as training and conferences). JC.5. Frequency and nature of engagement **outside** the network-sub-group meetings and other networking activities (such as training and conferences): measure the number and nature of collaborations between EFSA and the MSs, outside the network.	*Effectiveness* *Impact*	Desk research. Survey (network participants). Interviews (network coordinators).
	2.2 How effectively have the networks/sub-groups engaged with relevant stakeholders?	JC.6. Perceived **effectiveness** of the networks/sub-groups' in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration between EFSA and MSs. Extent to which a system is available within the Member States for network/sub-group participants to: collect inputs for the various	*Effectiveness* *Impact*	Survey (network participants; EFSA scientific Panels). Interviews (network coordinators).

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Sub-question	Judgement criteria	*Theme*	Data sources
		network/sub-group activities; disseminate information obtained from the various network/sub-group activities. JC.7. **Usefulness** of networks/sub-groups for for participants' networking; extent to which networking opportunities exist elsewhere. Examples (if any) where networks/sub-groups have played an important and irreplaceable role in collaboration between EFSA and MSs.		
	2.3 Are there any opportunities to enhance collaboration?	JC.8. Extent of collaboration with other networks (within EFSA and with those of other Agencies) and/or the EFSA Panels: current collaboration and future opportunities for collaboration/synergies. JC.9. Extent and nature of **suggestions** for improvements in collaboration (if any) received by the networks/sub-groups from participants and relevant stakeholders. Examples of suggestions for improvements in collaboration; examples where networks/sub-groups have not followed up suggestions. JC.10. Perceived added value of networks/sub-groups ➔ whether the concerned actors deem that risk assessment activities are more **effective/efficient** with the networks/sub-groups than without them.	*Relevance* *Effectiveness* *Efficiency*	Desk research. Survey (network participants; EFSA scientific Panels). Interviews (network coordinators).
3. Has each network/sub-group satisfied the overarching objectives relevant to all networks outlined in Article 2 of the Decision?	3.1 How well have the networks/sub-groups fulfilled the overarching objectives?	JC.11. **Compare objectives** of Article 2 of the MB Decision with objectives in ToRs and objectives/outcomes stated in annual reports. JC.12. Perceived **effectiveness** of the networks/sub-groups in satisfying the overarching objectives of the MB Decision (see also J.6).	*Effectiveness* *Relevance*	Desk research. Survey (network participants; EFSA scientific Panels). Interviews (network coordinators).

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Sub-question	Judgement criteria	*Theme*	Data sources
4. Has each network/sub-group met their individual targets in the past three years, as laid down in their terms of reference (ToR)?	4.1 How well have the networks/sub-groups fulfilled their intended objectives?	JC.13. Perceived effectiveness of the networks/sub-groups in satisfying the **network objectives** as stated in their ToRs.	*Effectiveness* *Relevance*	Desk research. Survey (network participants). Interviews (network coordinators).
	4.2 What are the key accomplishments/ successes of the networks/sub-groups during the evaluation period?	JC.14. Identified **accomplishments/successes** of each network/sub-group. JC.15. Identified **shortcomings**, if any. Reasons for shortcomings: nomination process for network/sub-group members; member turnover; other reasons.	*Effectiveness* *Relevance*	Desk research. Survey (network participants/FPs). Interviews (network coordinators).
	4.3 Do the networks/sub-groups have any significant shortcomings (if any)?			
5. Is the topic of each network/ sub-group of current interest and/or efficient in addressing it?	5.1 To what extent did the scope of the networks/sub-groups remain relevant to health/safety risks and developments over the implementation period?	JC.16. **Compare the topics** covered by the networks/sub-groups to the priorities/strategy set by EFSA. JC.17. View of key stakeholders as to the **relevance** of topics covered by networks/sub-groups: extent to which health/safety risks and developments were related to the content of each network/sub-group over the 2021-23 period. Reasons for lack of relevance. JC.18. Examples (if any) where the network/sub-group has failed to cover current health/safety risks.	*Relevance*	Desk research. Survey (network participants; EFSA scientific Panels). Interviews (network coordinators).
	5.2 How agile are the networks/sub-groups in responding to relevant emerging food safety challenges and crises?	JC.19. Extent to which each network/sub-group, as established by (1) terms of reference and (2) functioning, has the **ability to remain relevant** by responding promptly to emerging food safety challenges and crises. Reasons for lack of agility. JC.20. Examples (if any) where the network/sub-group has failed to respond to emerging food safety challenges and crises.	*Effectiveness* *Efficiency*	Desk research. Survey (network participants; EFSA scientific Panels). Interviews (network coordinators).

Evaluation Question (EQ)	Sub-question	Judgement criteria	*Theme*	Data sources
	5.3 Are the funding mechanisms sufficient and sustainable for the networks/sub-groups' operations?	JC.21. Methods of **funding** of networks (as a whole, with any nuances by network/sub-group) JC.22. Extent to which contributions (time provided by MSs; EFSA coordination) are considered to be sustainable.	*Sustainability* *Efficiency*	Desk research. Survey (network participants/FPs). Interviews (network coordinators).

Annex II: Outcome of data collection activities

The sections below summarise the consultation activities undertaken during the study and their outcome. More specifically, the aim of the activities undertaken was to inform the data collection and analysis to address the evaluation questions (EQs).

II.1 Online survey

II.1.1 Survey methodology and process

The **aim** of the survey was to collect feedback on the operation of the networks and sub-groups during the 2021-2023 period, so as to provide relevant information and data that supplements the evidence base collected from other sources (desk research and interviews) for the purposes of the study.

Target group: the survey was addressed to participants of the networks/sub-groups, representing the relevant Member State organisations that are members of networks and sub-groups, as well as organisations with observer status. The latter include: organisations from EEA and pre-accession countries; the European Commission, other EU agencies and EU Reference Laboratories (EURLs); and, international organisations. In addition, the survey was addressed to EFSA staff from the scientific units that are familiar with the work of the networks/sub-groups. In total, these groups comprised around 1 400 experts that were targeted by the survey.

The **questionnaire** used for the survey is based on the judgement criteria used for analysis of the evaluation questions (EQs). The questionnaire was developed during the inception phase of the study and was informed by the consultation undertaken with EFSA during preliminary interviews. The survey was uploaded on the online survey platform (Qualtrics) following EFSA approval.

The survey was launched on 18 January 2024 for one week and was extended three times to 16 February. Overall, the survey remained open for one month. Once the survey was closed, validation checks were performed to ensure the data were internally consistent. **A total of 426 valid replies were received.**

The analysis of the survey findings below takes into account the number of responses for each network. In the case of one network (PSN) and the eight sub-groups, the number of responses is too limited to allow meaningful quantitative analysis and graphical presentation per sub-group. The relatively low participant response rate from the sub-groups is partly due to their size (number of participants tends to be lower than for networks) and partly to the fact that some participants (especially those from smaller countries) attend more than one sub-group and/or the 'parent' network.[28]

II.1.2 Profile of respondents

The profile of respondents is presented graphically in the figures below.

Over 80 % of the 426 respondents to the survey are participants in the networks/sub-groups (*n=346*). The profile of the remaining respondents is well balanced in relation to the other target groups: 30 responses were received from EFSA staff (of which: 24 coordinators; and 6 other staff); 17 from the European Commission, other EU agencies and EURLs; and 31 responses from the Focal Points.

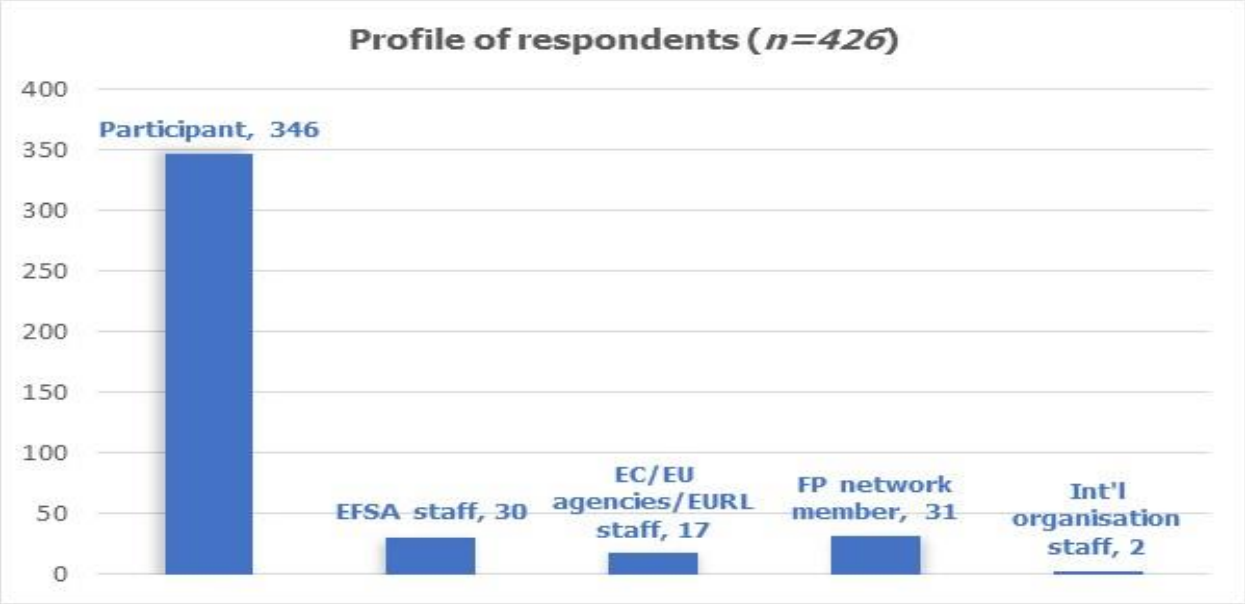
Participants represent mostly network member countries (83 %), with the remainder representing mostly countries with observer status (15 %). Seven of the responding participants represent organisations with observer status (EU institutions/international organisations); it is noted that not all networks have observers from the EU institutions/international organisations.

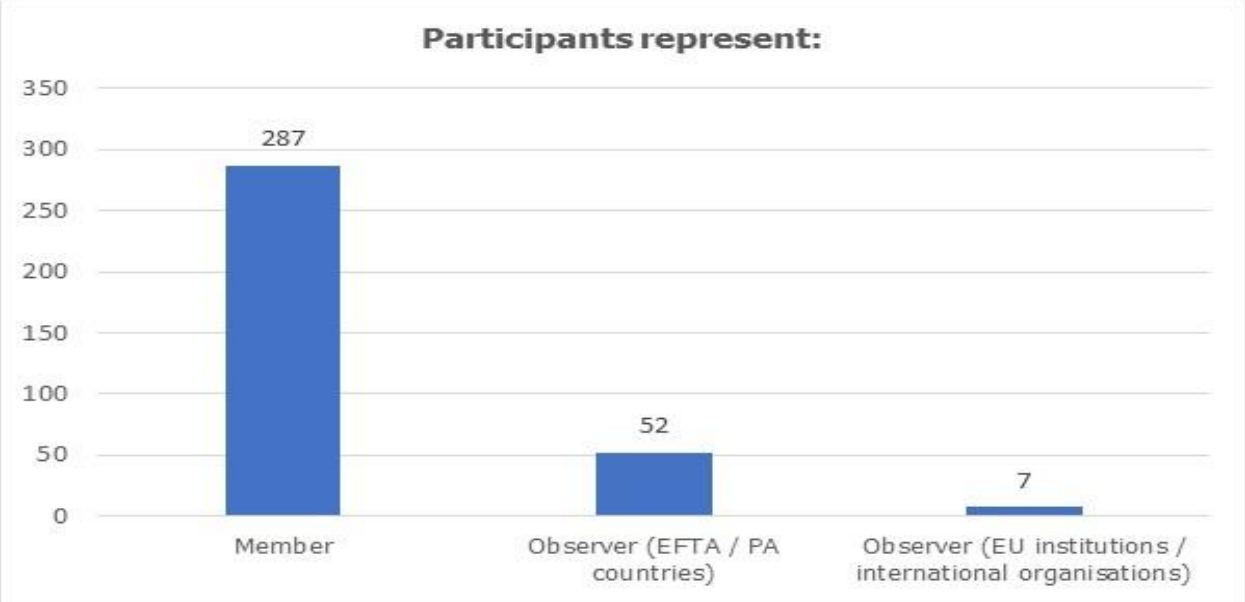
[28] The one survey has to be completed separately for each network/sub-group. Thus, for participants attending more than one sub-group and/or the 'parent' network, the survey had to be completed more than once.

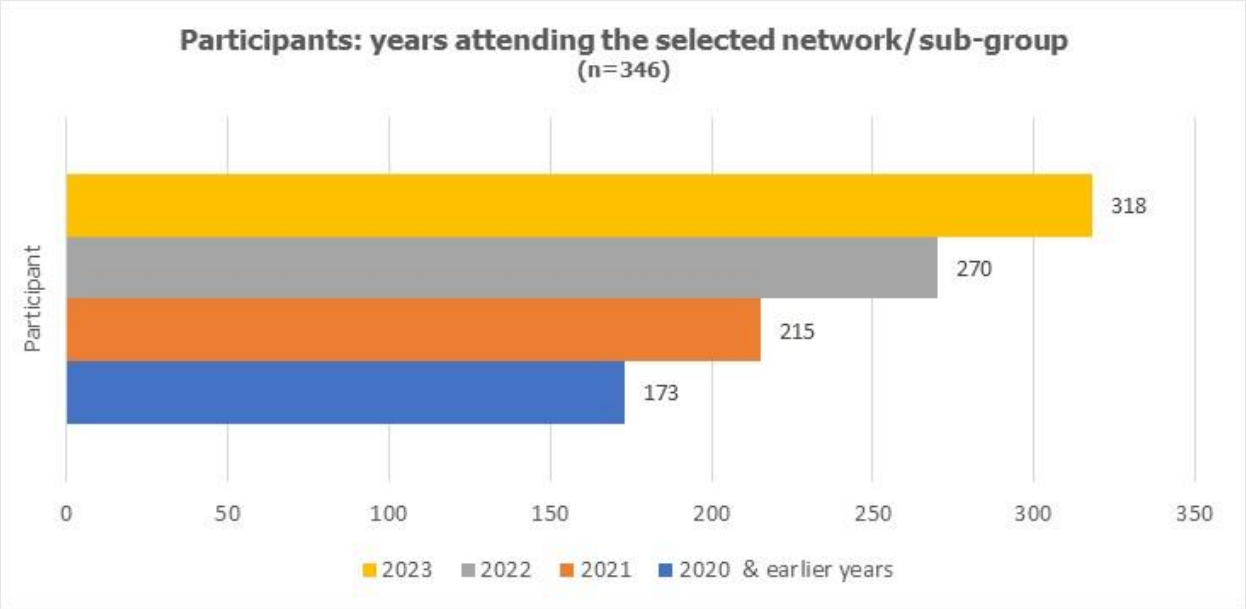
The **majority of participants** that responded to the survey have been attending their respective networks/sub-groups over the last three years, i.e. **the entire period covered by the study (2021-23)**. Over 90% of these respondents were participants in 2023, 78 % in 2022, and over 60 % in 2021; half of them were participants in 2020 and earlier years.

In line with the representation of network member countries, participants come mainly from EU-27 Member States (*n=293*). Responses have been received from participants from **all 27 Member States**. In addition, nearly all countries with observer status responded to the survey (*n=53*).

Q1 to Q9: Identity of respondents






Participants: years attending the selected network/sub-group
(n=346)
Participant
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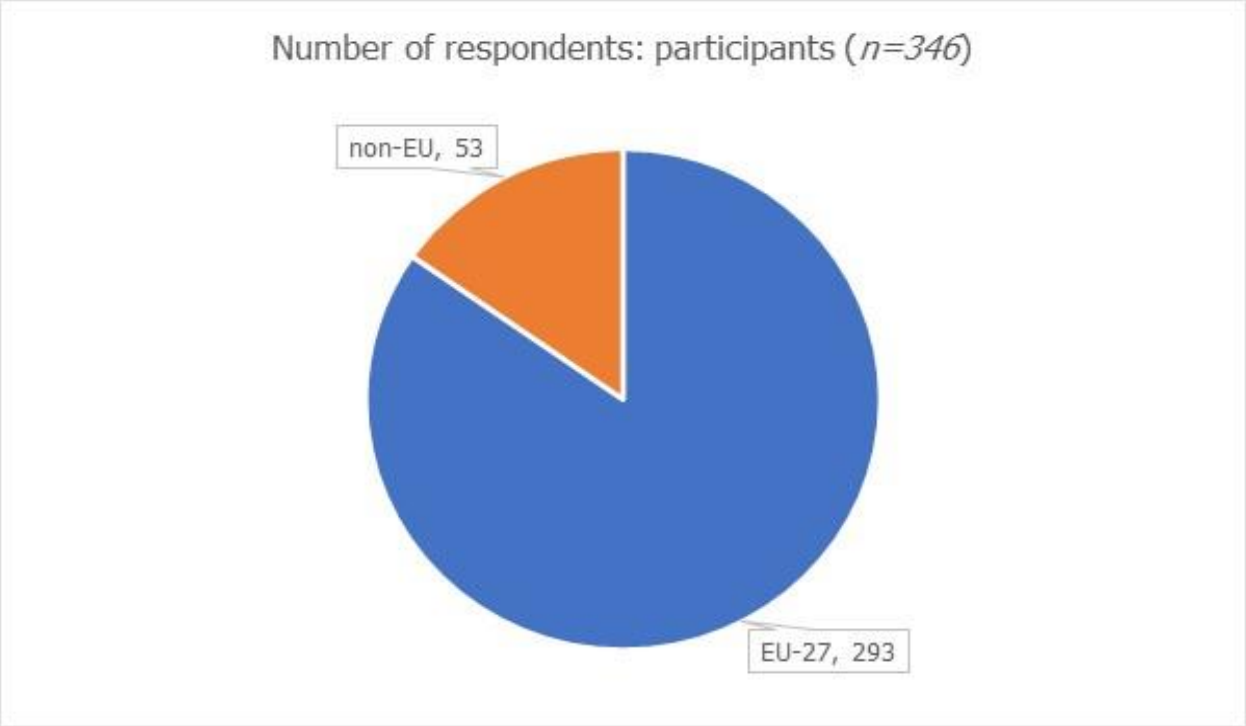
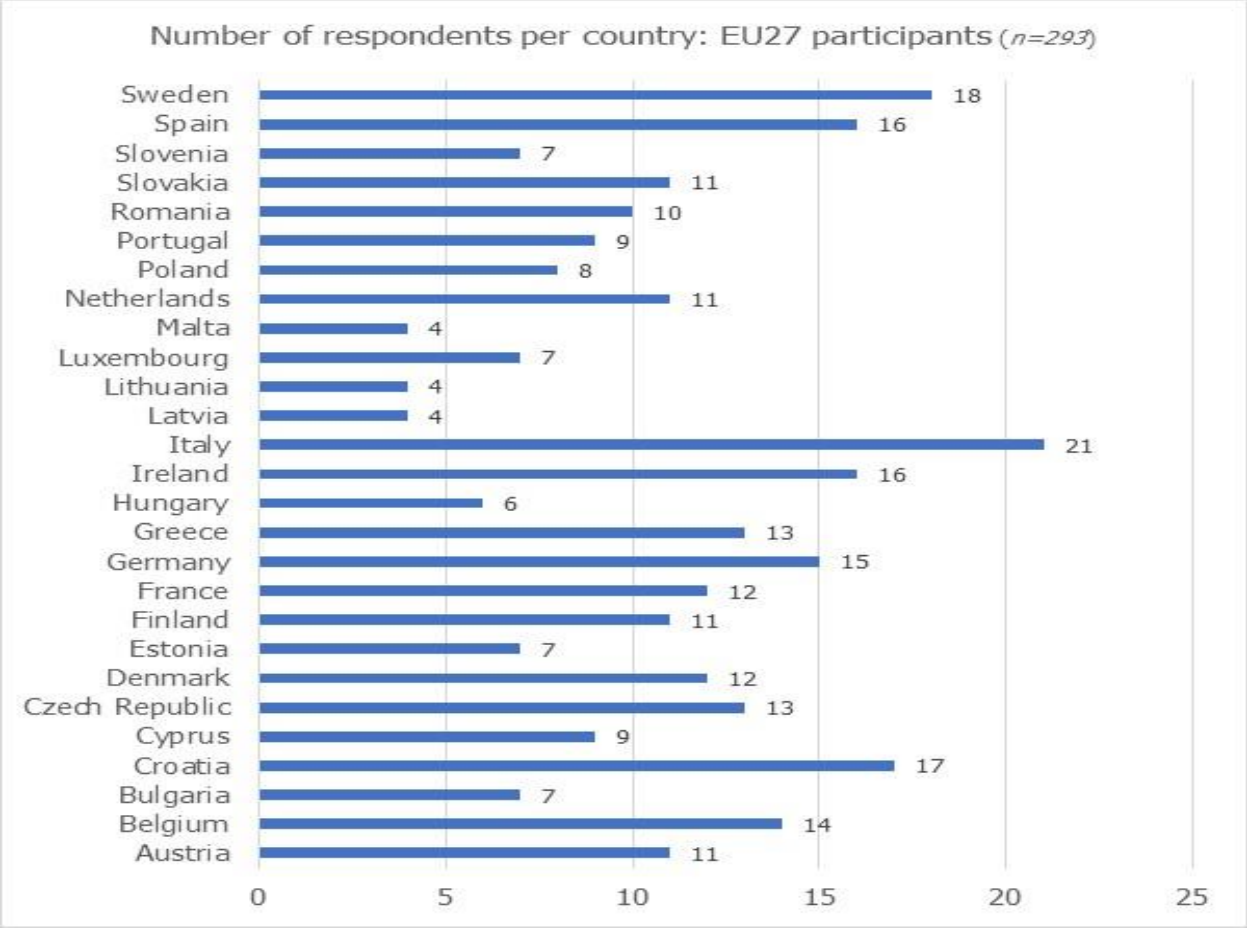
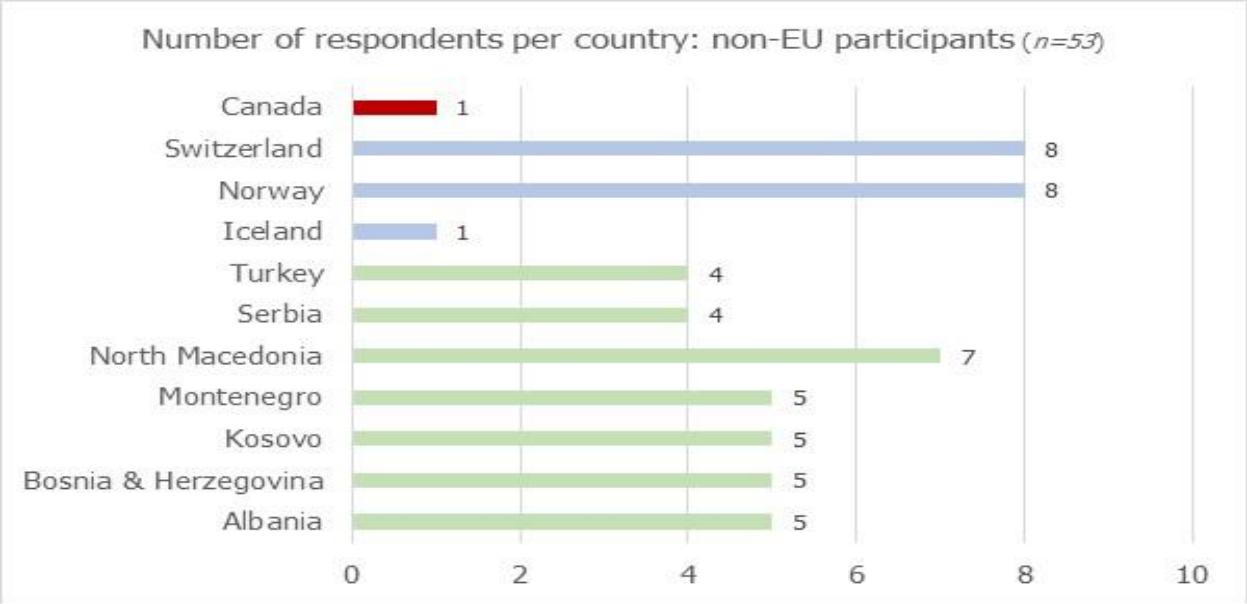
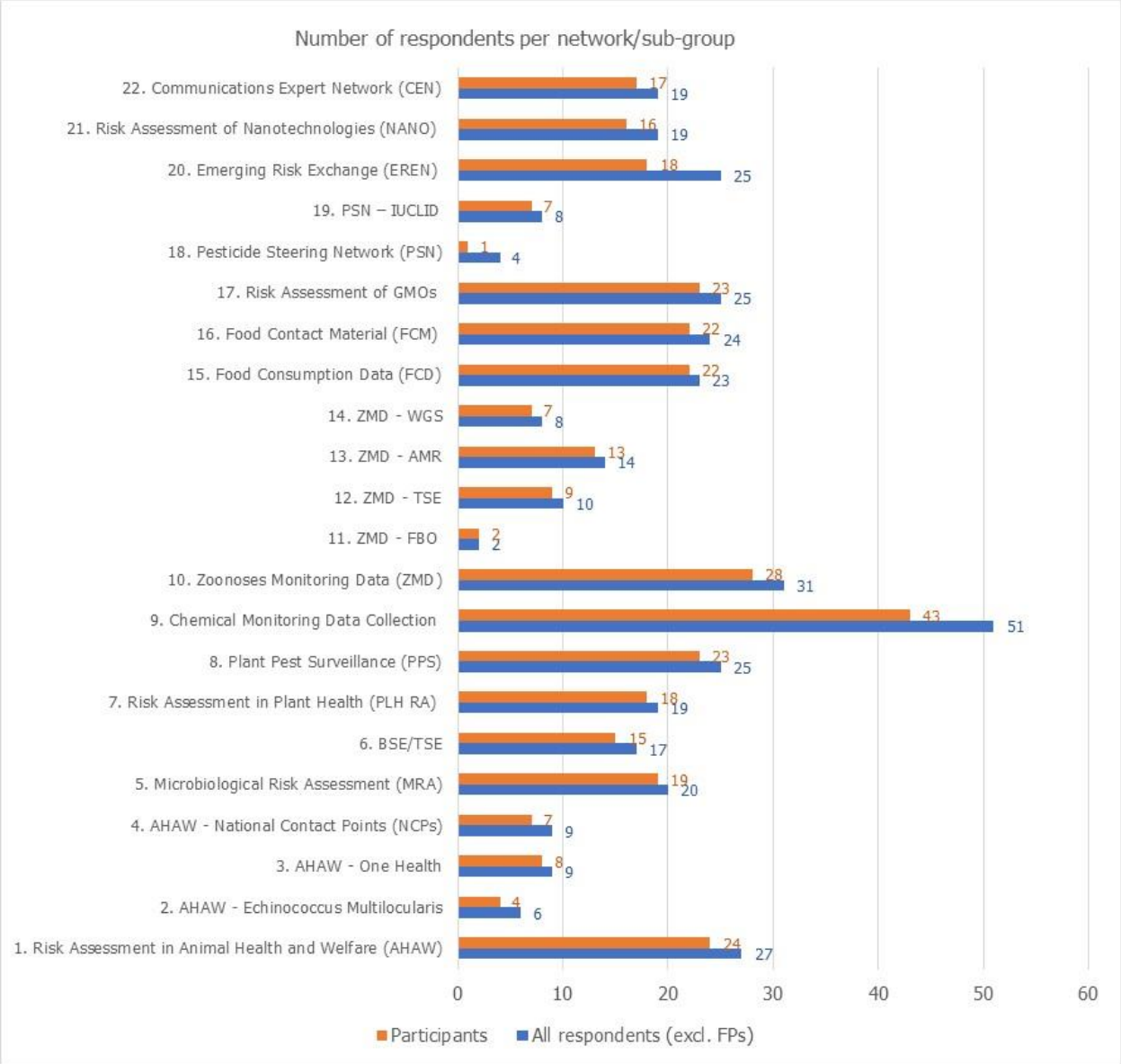
270
215
173
0
50
100
150
200
250
300
350
2023
2022
2021
2020 & earlier years


Number of respondents: participants (n=346)
non-EU, 53
EU-27, 293


Number of respondents per country: EU27 participants (n=293)
Sweden 18
Spain 16
Slovenia 7
Slovakia 11
Romania 10
Portugal 9
Poland 8
Netherlands 11
Malta 4
Luxembourg 7
Lithuania 4
Latvia 4
Italy 21
Ireland 16
Hungary 6
Greece 13
Germany 15
France 12
Finland 11
Estonia 7
Denmark 12
Czech Republic 13
Cyprus 9
Croatia 17
Bulgaria 7
Belgium 14
Austria 11
0 5 10 15 20 25


Number of respondents per country: non-EU participants (n=53)
Canada 1
Switzerland 8
Norway 8
Iceland 1
Turkey 4
Serbia 4
North Macedonia 7
Montenegro 5
Kosovo 5
Bosnia & Herzegovina 5
Albania 5
0 2 4 6 8 10



II.1.3 Engagement with other participants

Respondents were asked a series of questions on the nature, level and frequency of their engagement with other participants of their network, both within formal and informal network meetings and other occasions (such as training and conferences). The following types of activities are identified as relevant for networks/sub-groups:

1. Collaboration/coordination in data collection
2. Exchange of data/information
3. Exchange of expertise and best practices
4. Participation in exercises
5. Participation in joint projects
6. Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
7. Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
8. Other forms of collaboration/activities

The findings are presented below per network and per type of activity. The findings are presented for **participants** only, as this is the most relevant group for this analysis.

Engagement with other participants is analysed in the set of figures which follow.

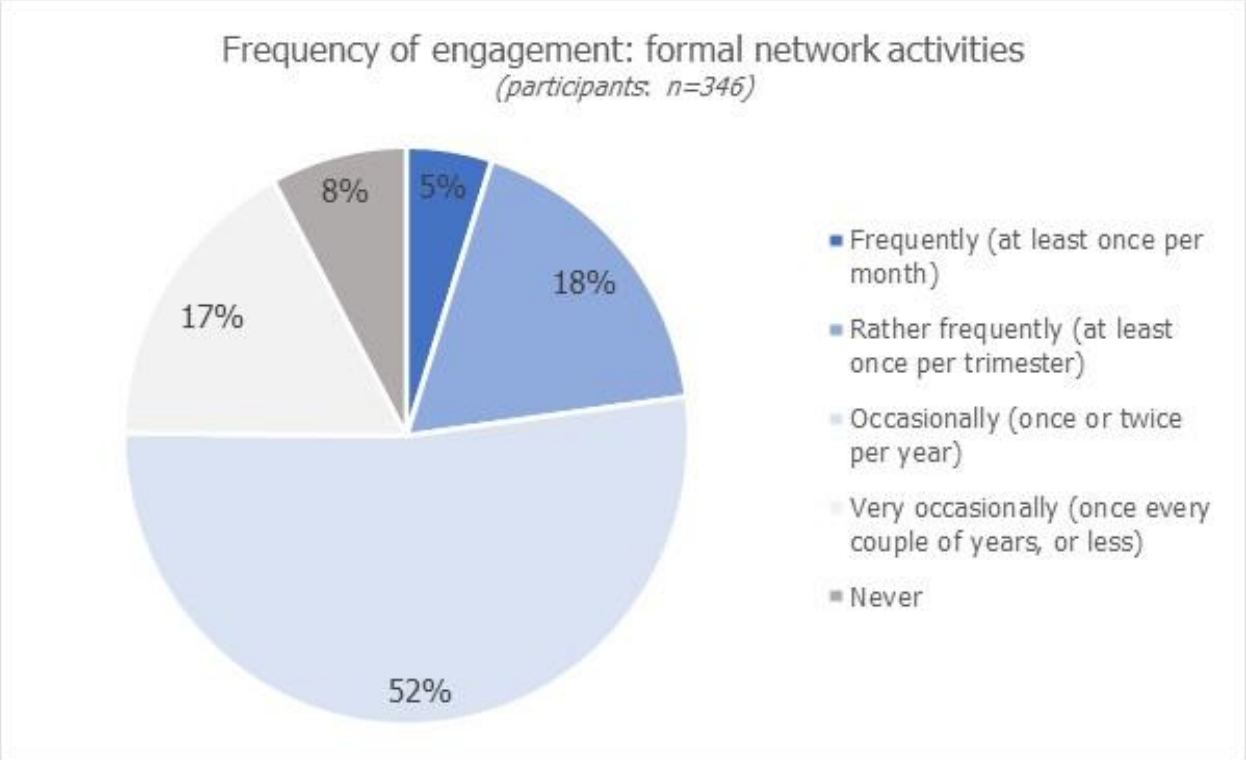
Across most networks, participants' **highest levels of engagement** with other participants in their network are in the context of two types of formal network activities: **exchange of data/information**; and, **exchange of expertise and best practices**. For other types of formal activities, the level of engagement with other participants depends on the extent to which these activities are important for the remit of each network/sub-group. For instance, in networks for which data collection is an important element of their remit, participants indicate they are highly engaged with other participants in collaboration/coordination for this purpose. Examples include the following networks: Zoonoses Monitoring Data (ZMD); Chemical Monitoring Data Collection; and, Plant Pest Surveillance (PPS).

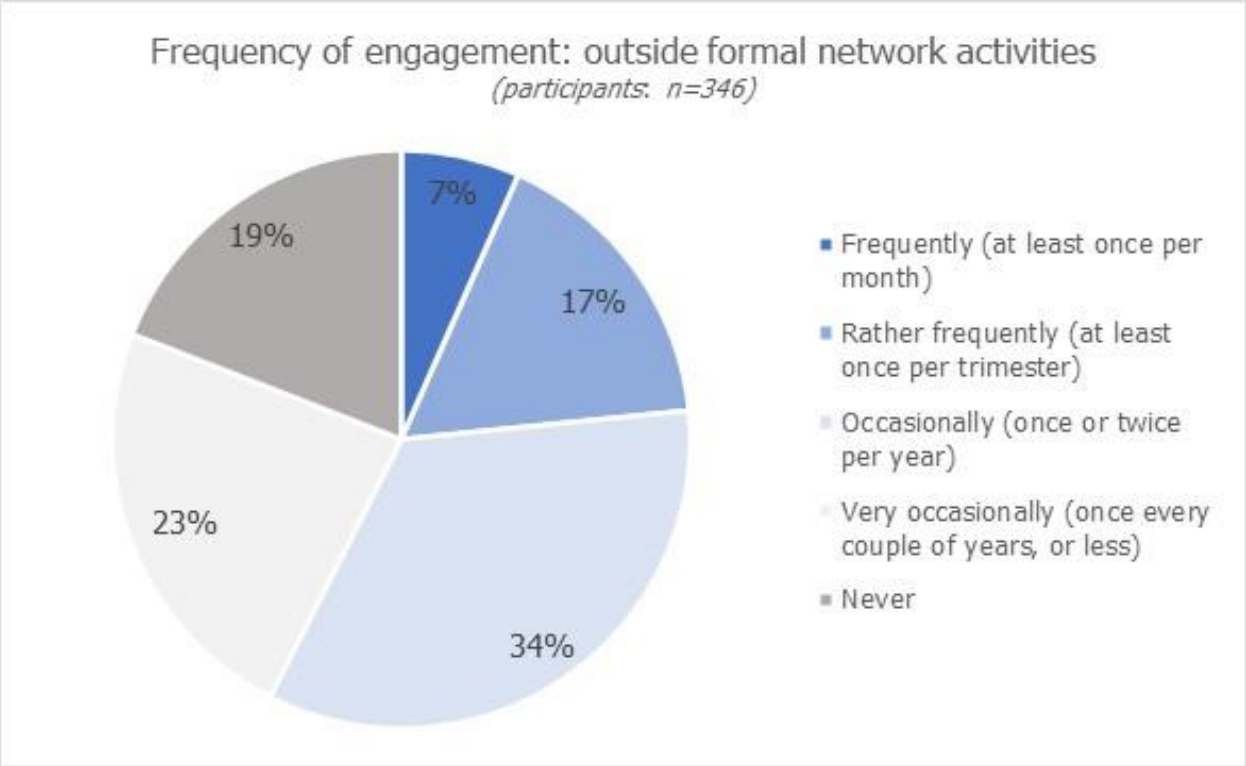
Almost **a quarter of participants frequently engage** with other participants in the context of formal network activities, i.e. they engage at least once per trimester (18 %) or at least once per month (5 %). The majority of participants are more occasionally engaged with other participants, i.e. once or twice per year (52 %), or once every couple of years (17 %); while 8% of participants indicated that they never engage with other participants.

Overall, participants are **less engaged with other participants outside the formal network context**. When they do engage with other participants outside the network, this tends to be mostly for the same types of activities as within the formal network context, i.e. exchange of data/information and exchange of expertise and best practices. The frequency of engagement with other participants for activities outside the network is more or less similar to that within formal network activities. However, a higher proportion of participants (19 %) never engage with other participants in activities outside the formal network context.

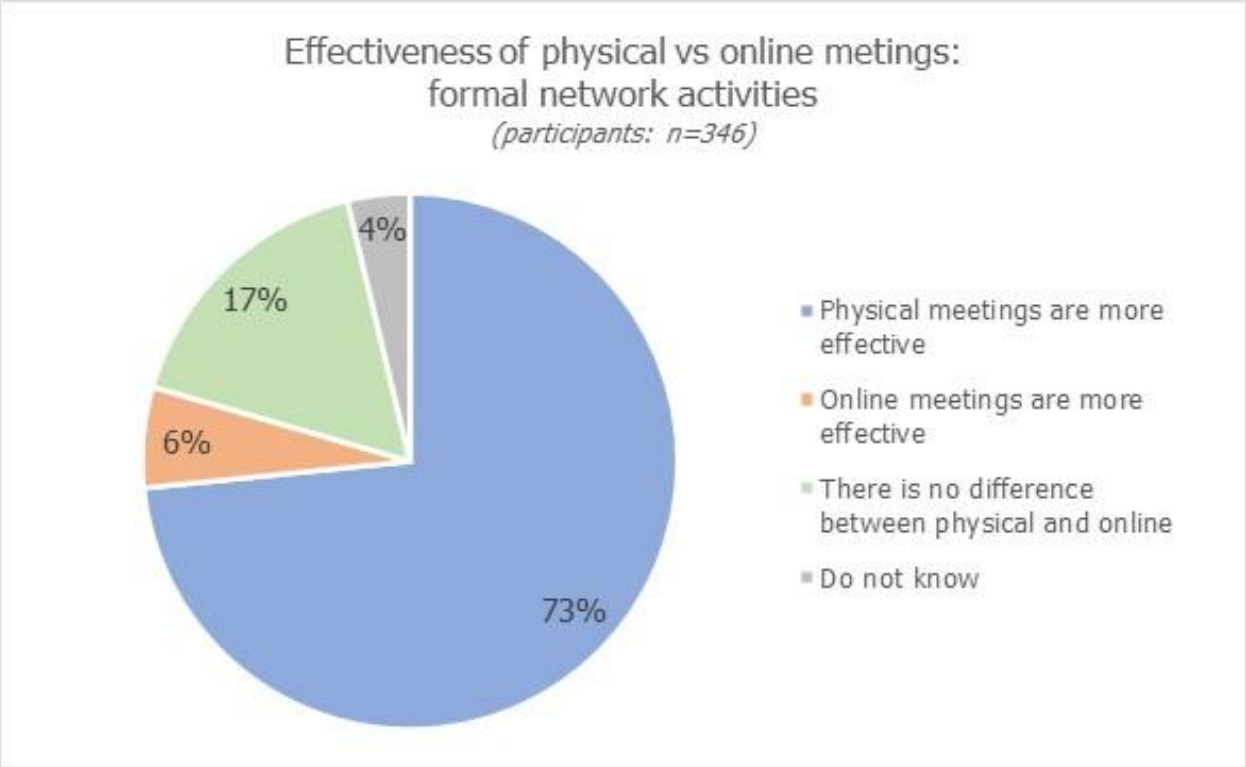
The majority of participants consider **physical meetings** to be **more effective than online meetings** for enhancing networking between members, both within and outside the context of formal network activities. In the case of formal network meetings, only 10 % of participants consider online meetings to be more effective; there is no difference between physical and online meetings for 20 % of participants.

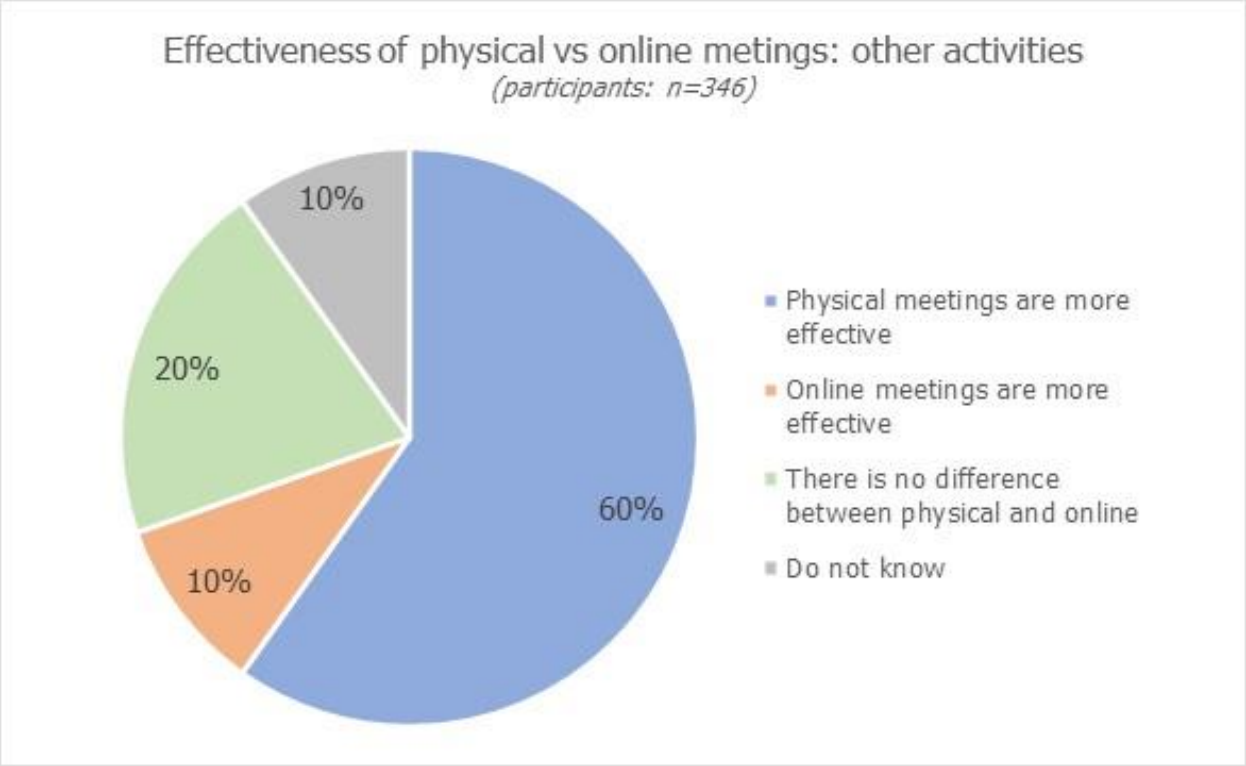
Q11/Q13: How frequently have you engaged with other network participants, within/outside the formal network meetings and other activities (such as training and conferences)?



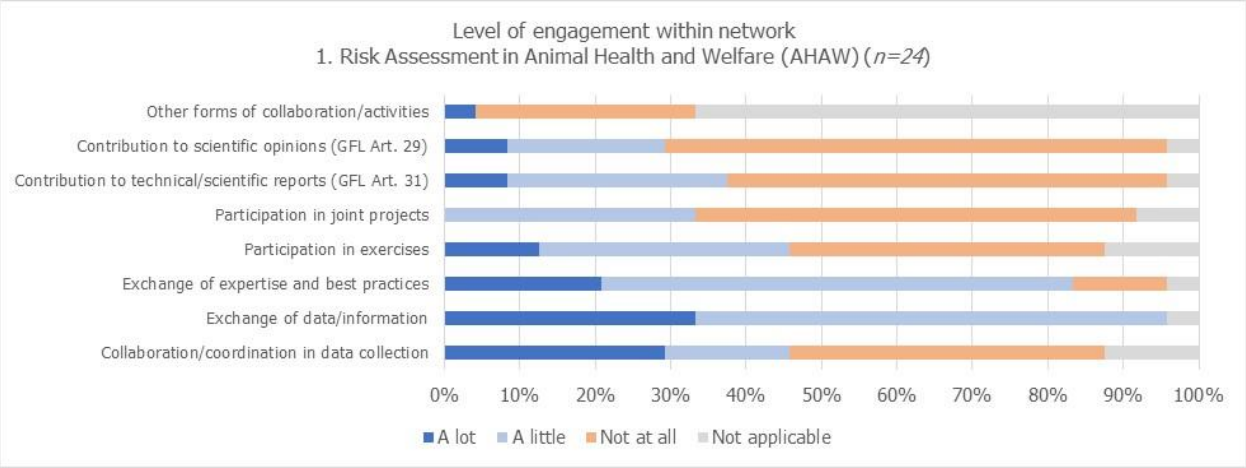


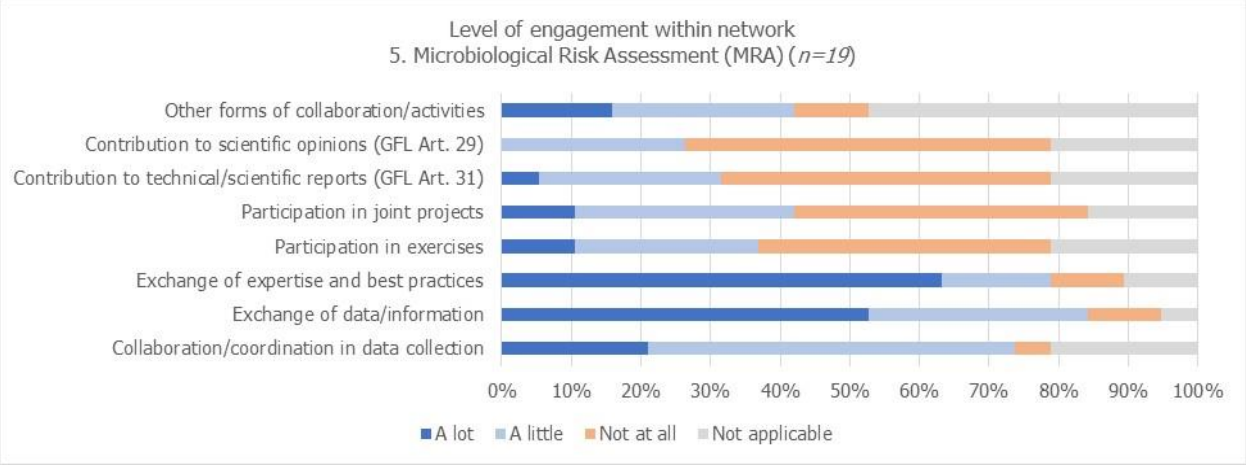
Q14: To what extent do you consider physical meetings to be more or less effective than online meetings for enhancing networking between members, whether within or outside formal network activities?

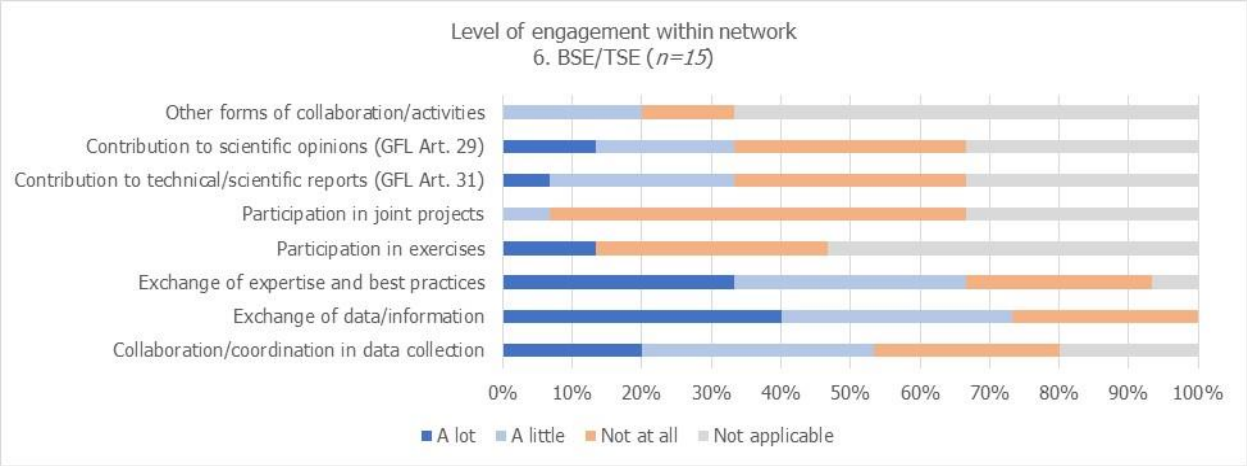




Q10: What is the nature of engagement you have had with other network participants, within the formal network meetings and other activities?






Level of engagement within network
6. BSE/TSE (n=15)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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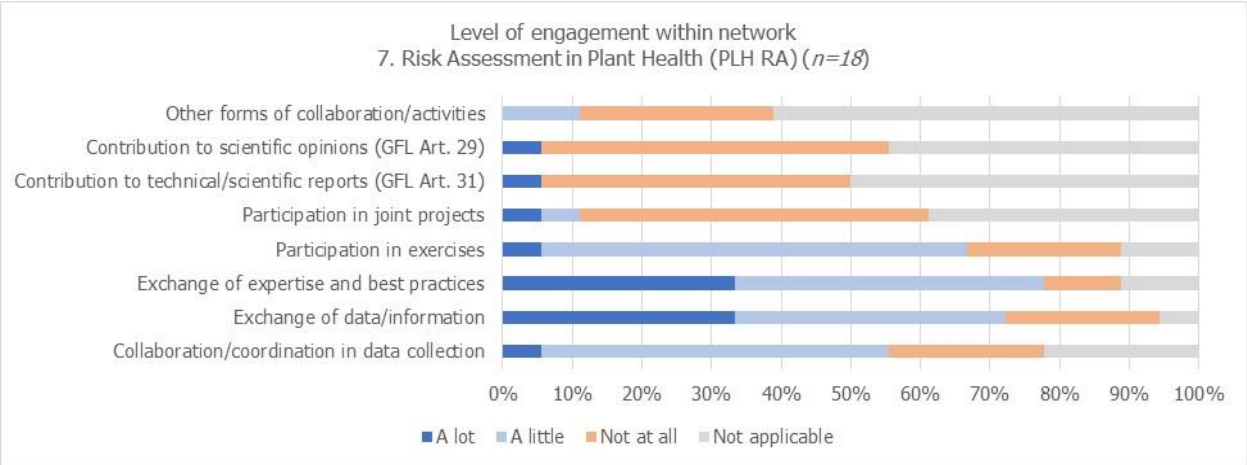
Level of engagement within network
7. Risk Assessment in Plant Health (PLH RA) (n=18)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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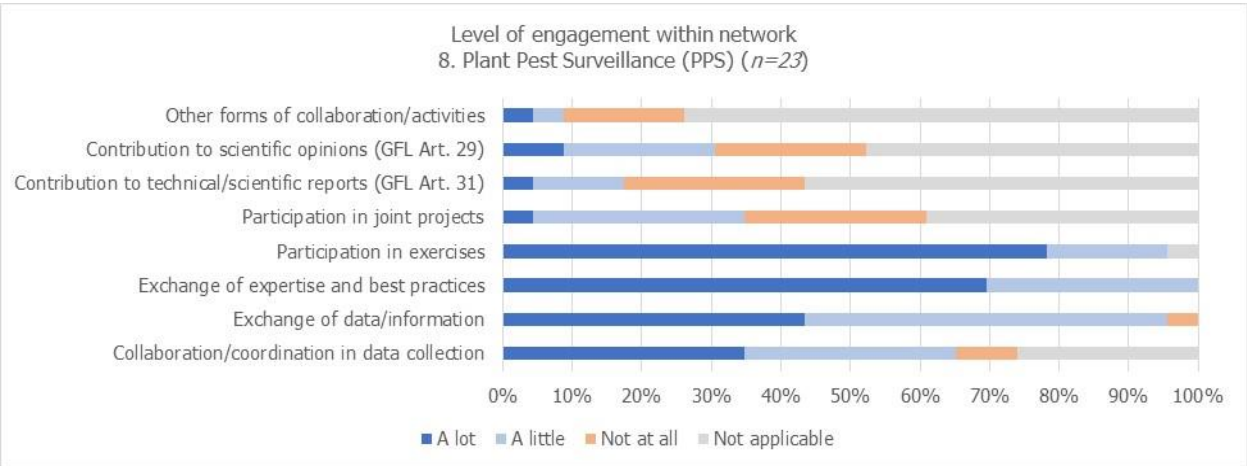
Level of engagement within network
8. Plant Pest Surveillance (PPS) (n=23)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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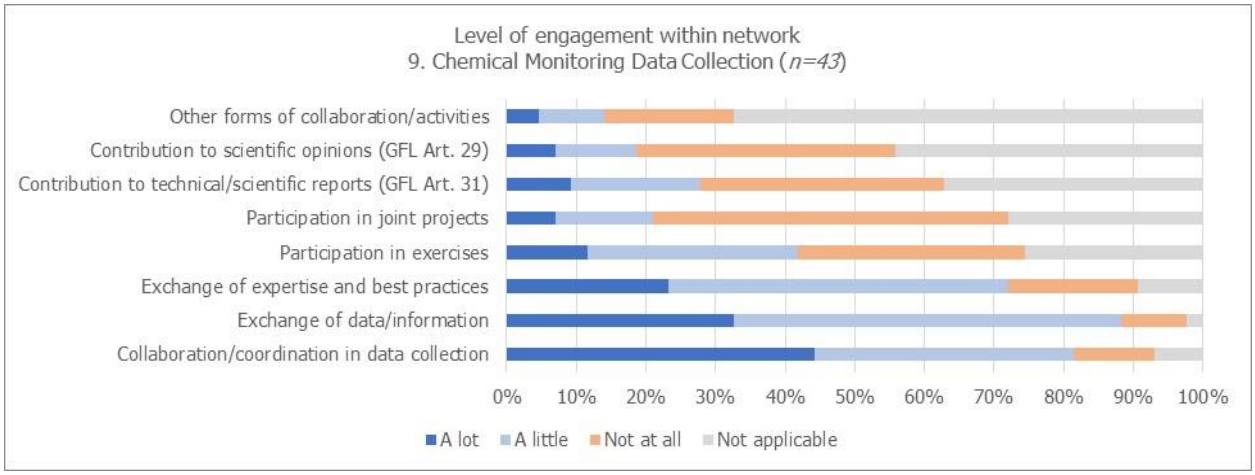
Level of engagement within network
9. Chemical Monitoring Data Collection (n=43)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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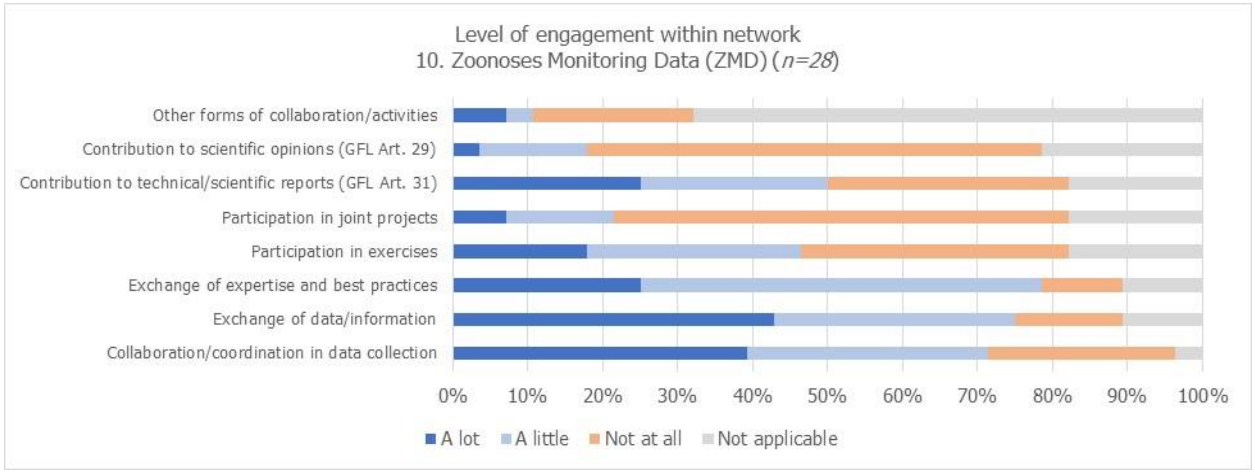
Level of engagement within network
10. Zoonoses Monitoring Data (ZMD) (n=28)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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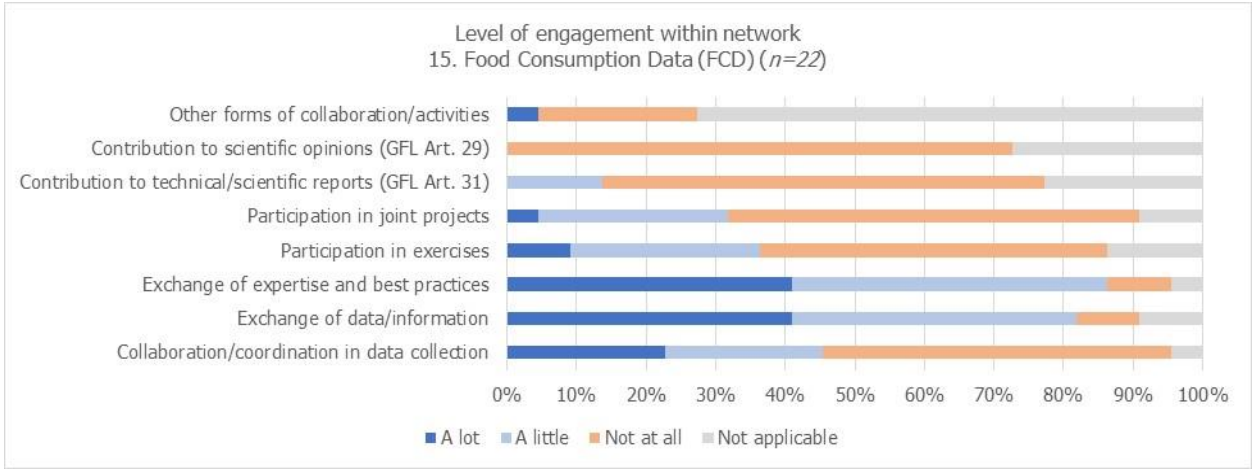
Level of engagement within network
15. Food Consumption Data (FCD) (n=22)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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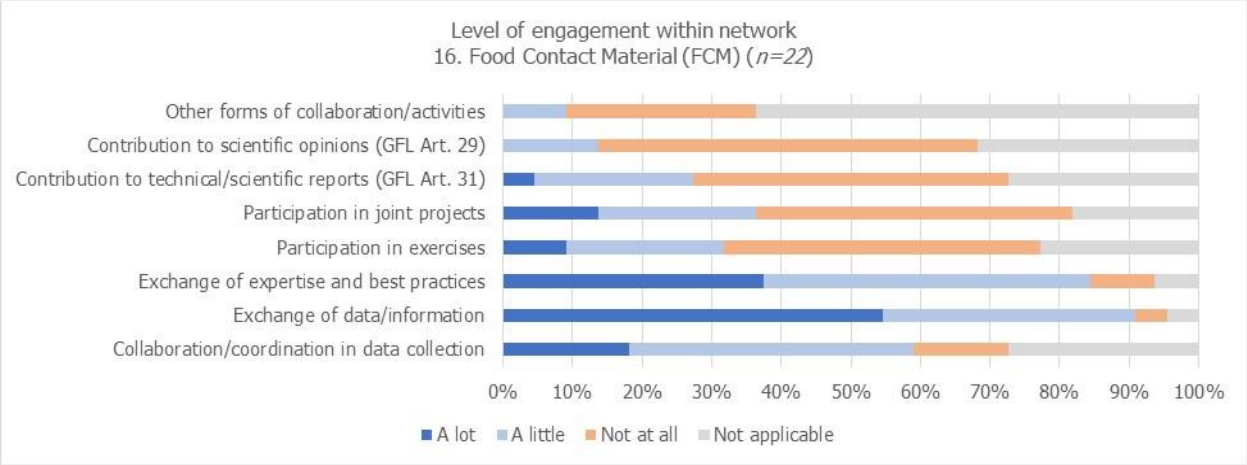
Level of engagement within network
16. Food Contact Material (FCM) (n=22)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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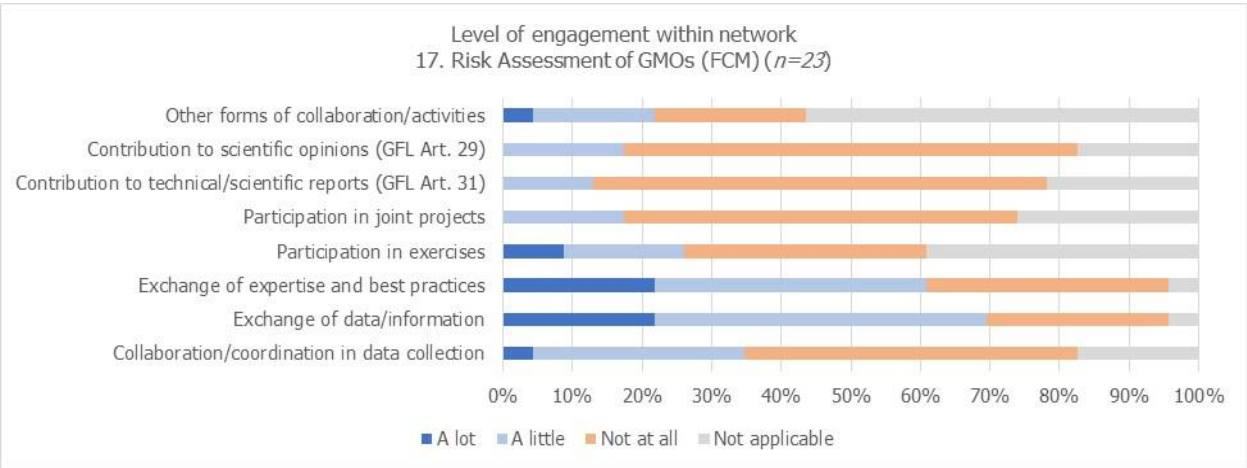
Level of engagement within network
17. Risk Assessment of GMOs (FCM) (n=23)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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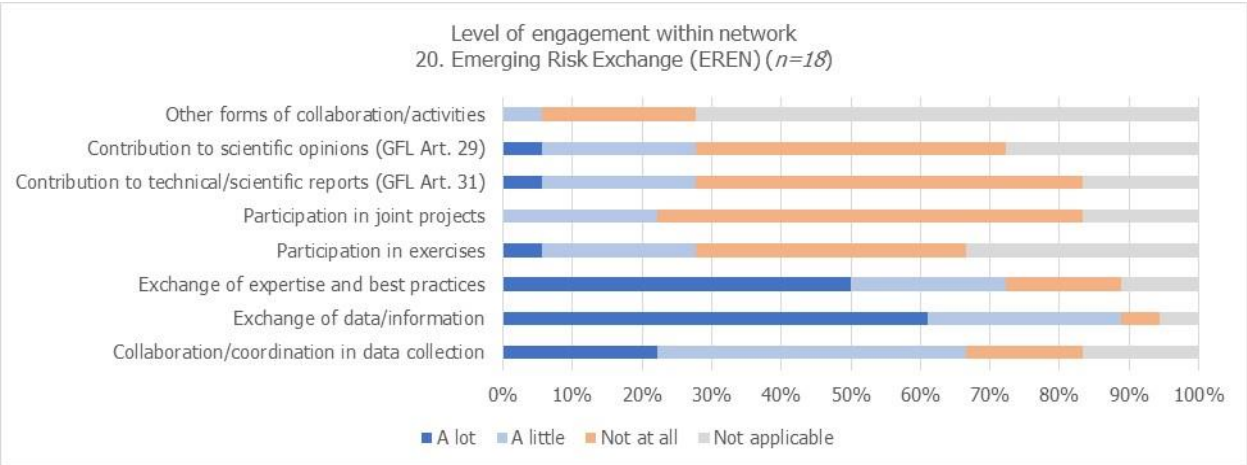
Level of engagement within network
20. Emerging Risk Exchange (EREN) (n=18)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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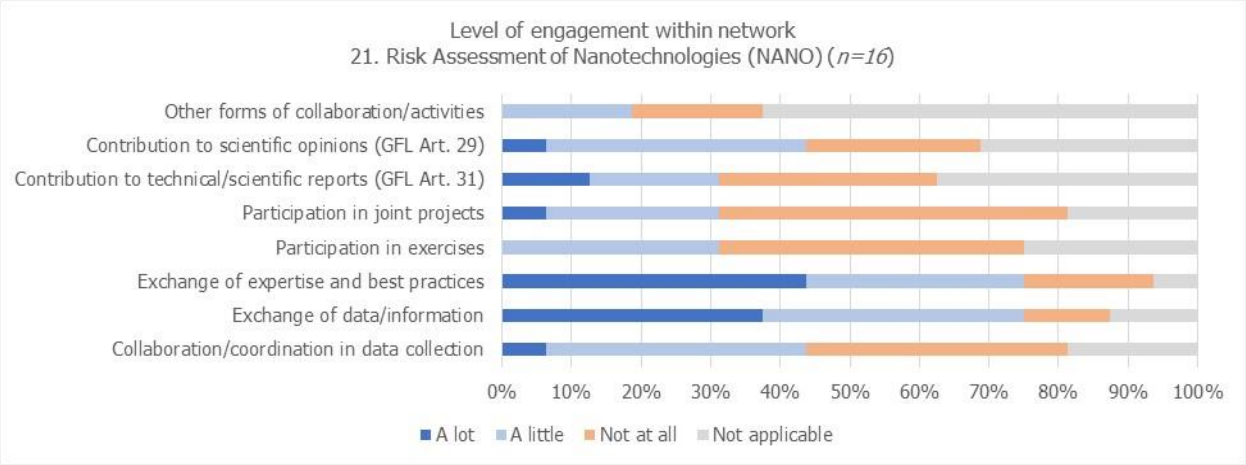
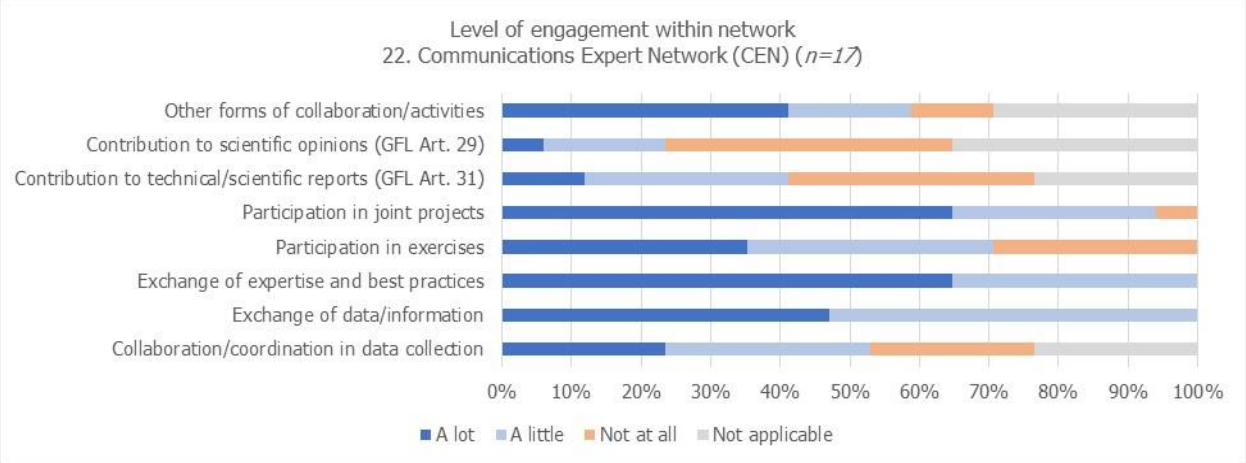
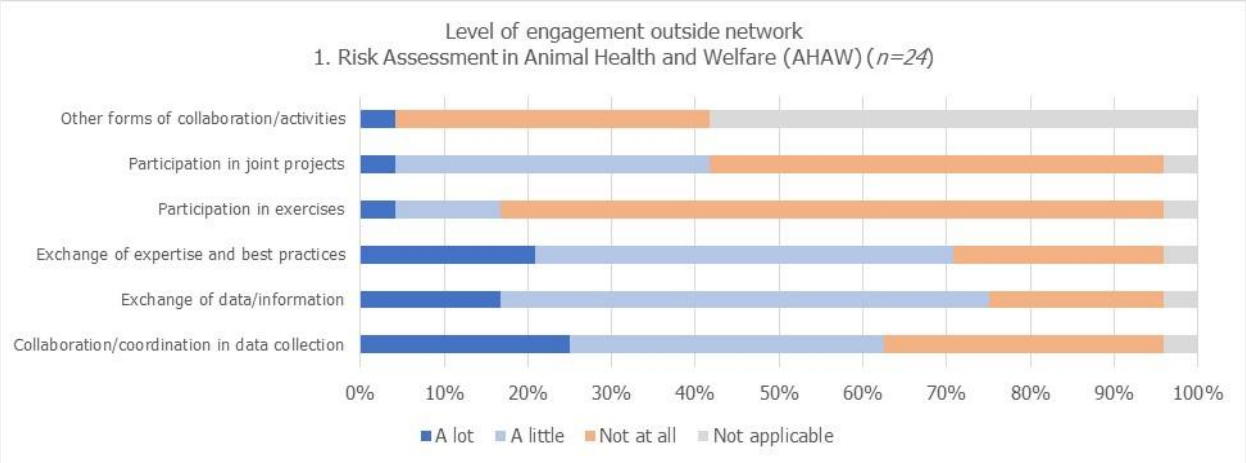
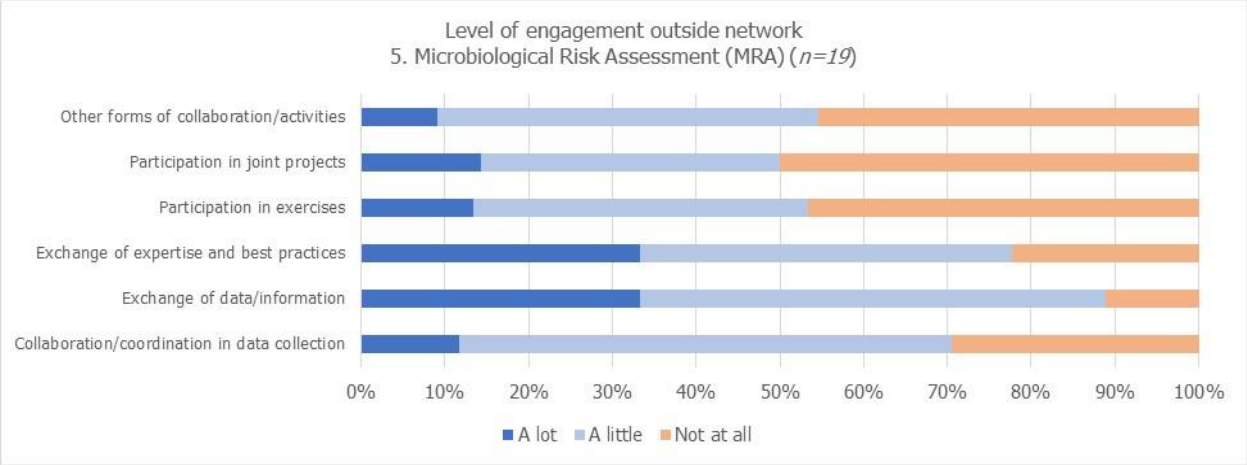




Q12: What is the nature of engagement you have had with other network participants, outside the formal network meetings and other activities?




Level of engagement outside network
5. Microbiological Risk Assessment (MRA) (n=19)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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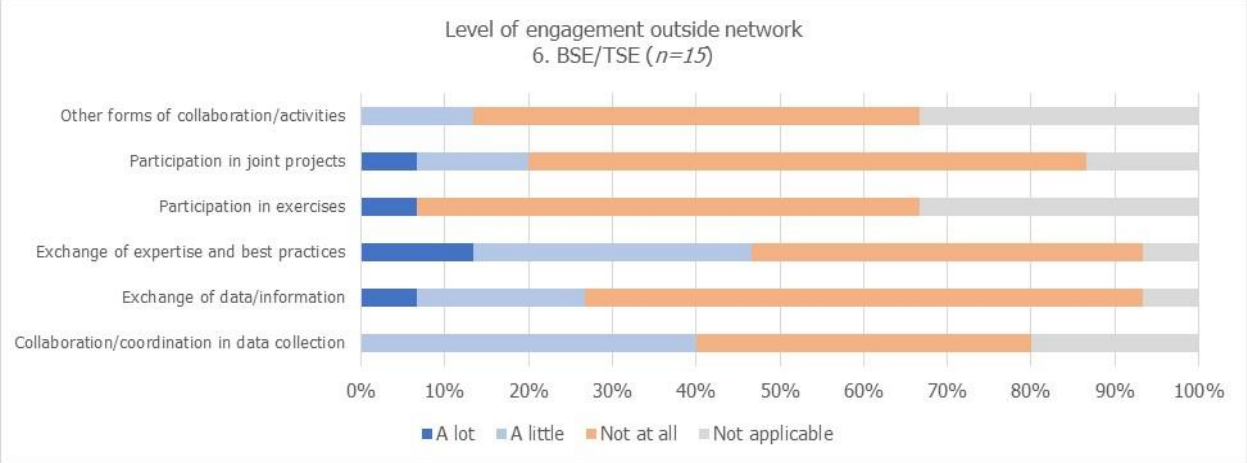
Level of engagement outside network
6. BSE/TSE (n=15)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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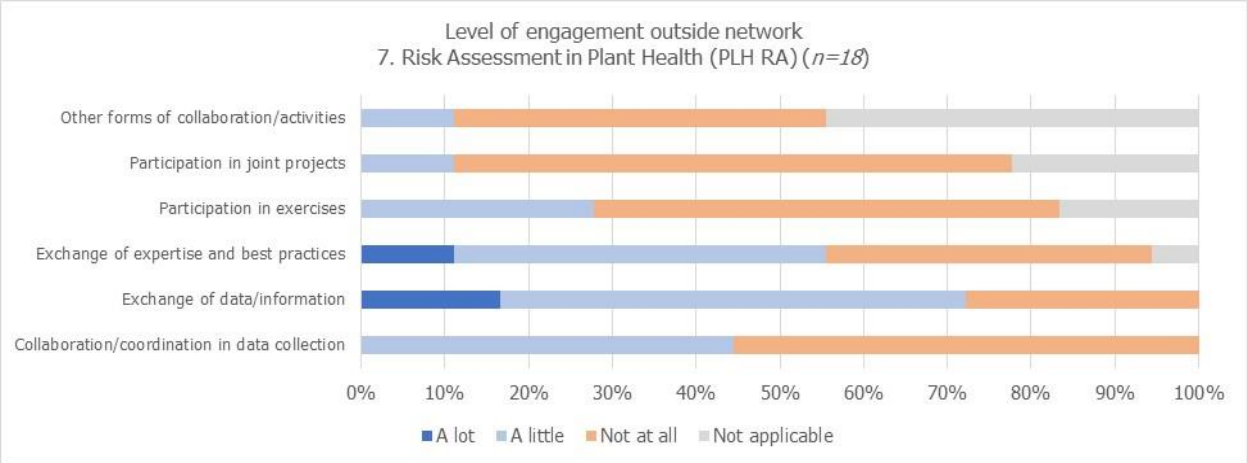
Level of engagement outside network
7. Risk Assessment in Plant Health (PLH RA) (n=18)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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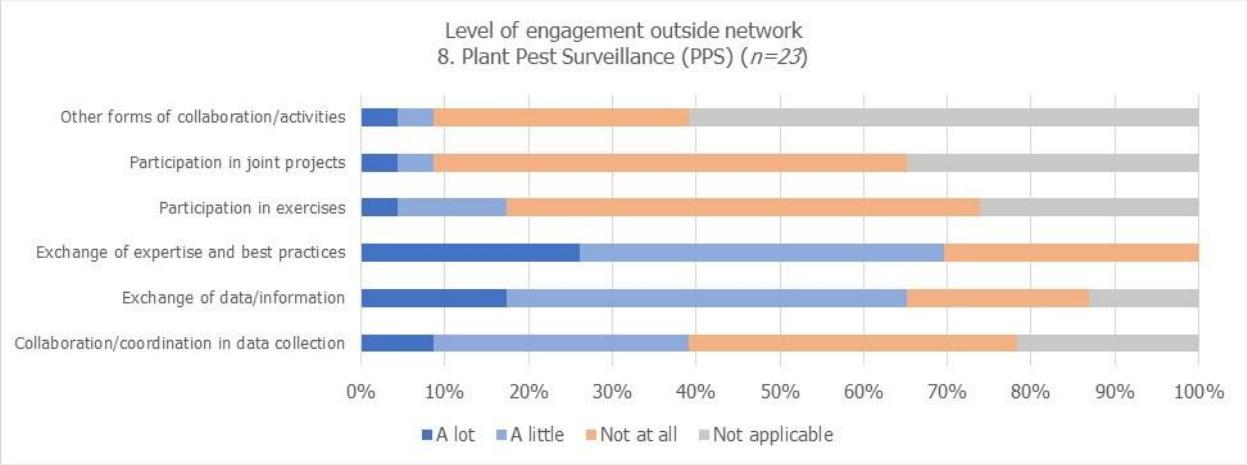
Level of engagement outside network
8. Plant Pest Surveillance (PPS) (n=23)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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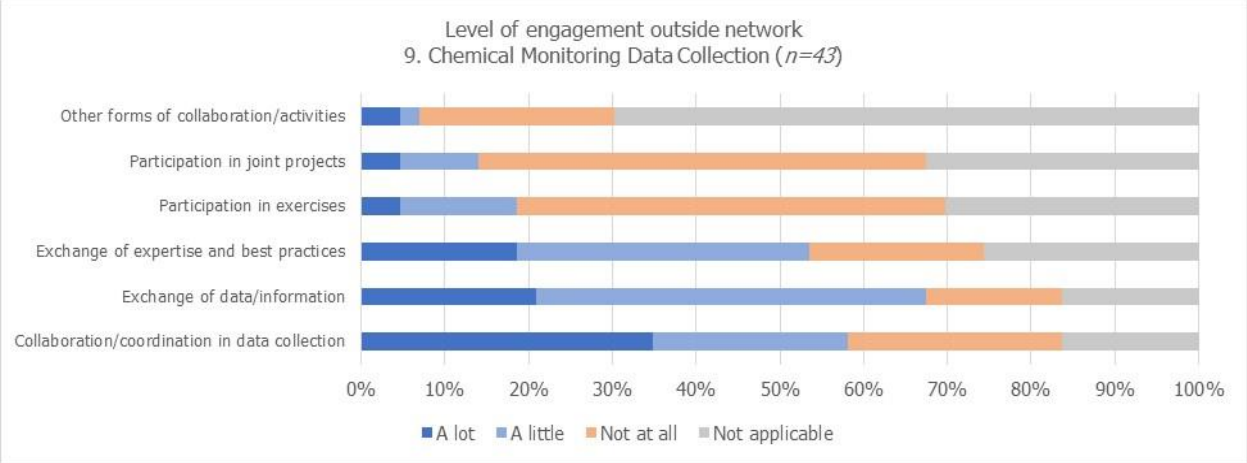
Level of engagement outside network
9. Chemical Monitoring Data Collection (n=43)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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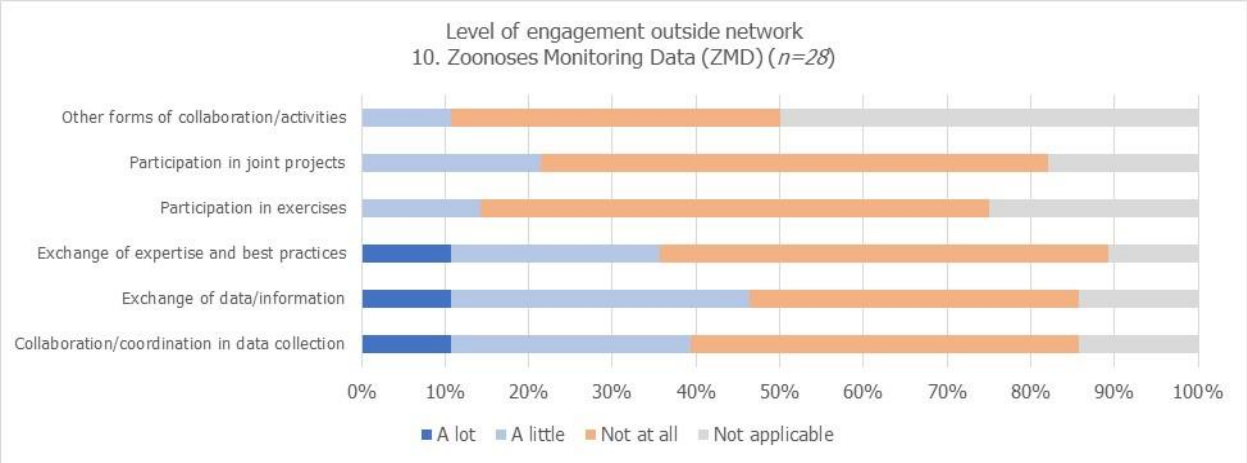
Level of engagement outside network
10. Zoonoses Monitoring Data (ZMD) (n=28)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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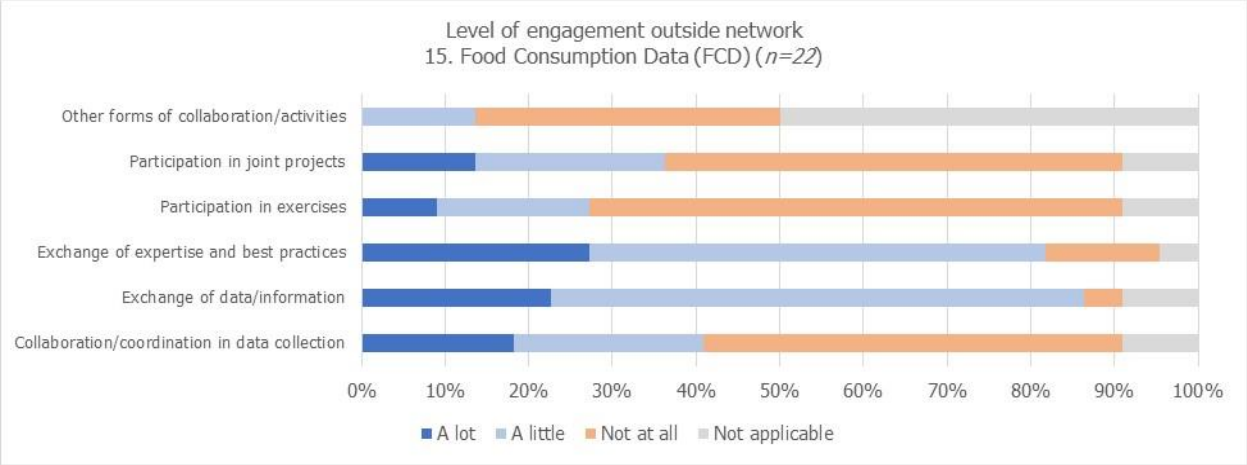
Level of engagement outside network
15. Food Consumption Data (FCD) (n=22)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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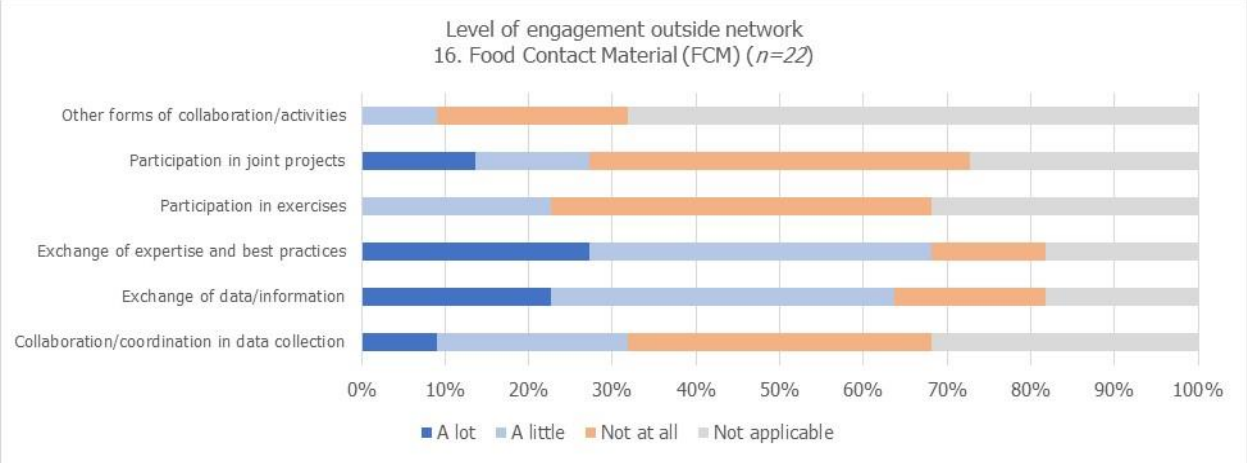
Level of engagement outside network
16. Food Contact Material (FCM) (n=22)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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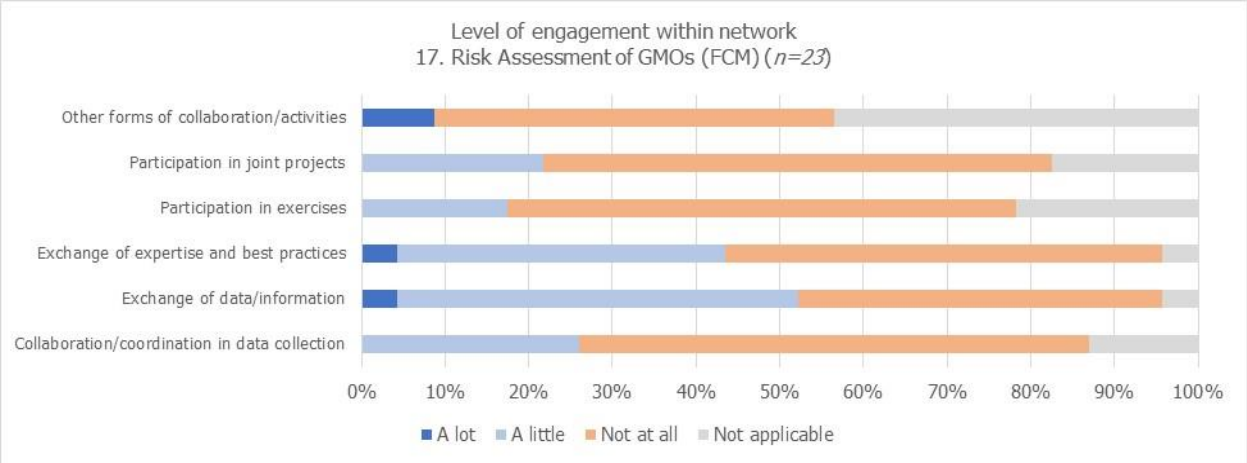
Level of engagement within network
17. Risk Assessment of GMOs (FCM) (n=23)
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
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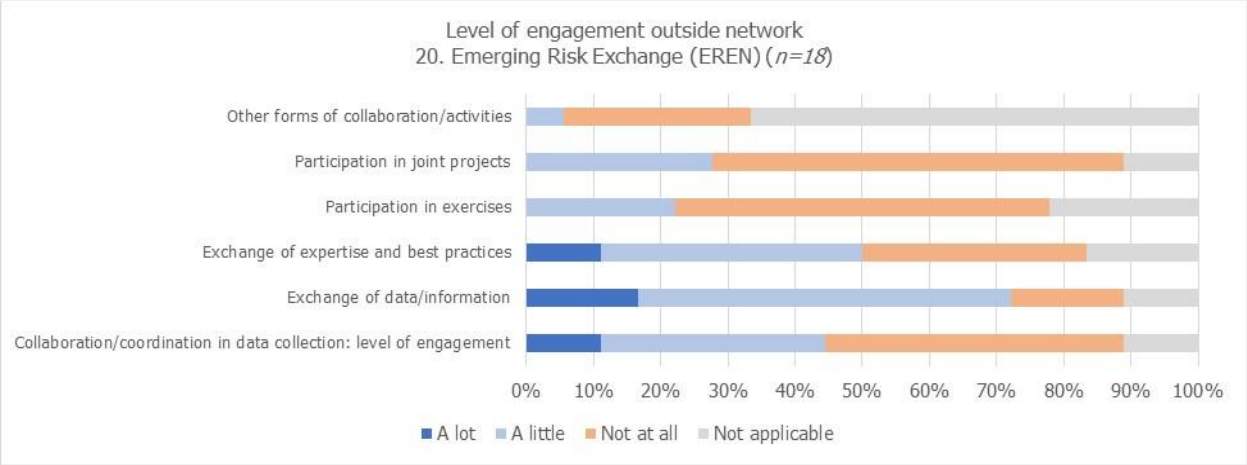
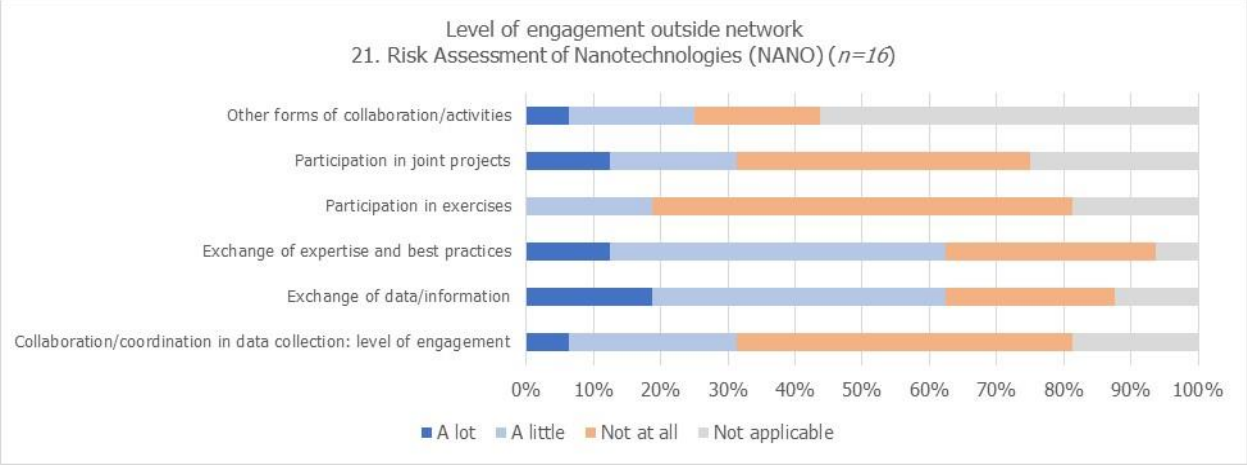
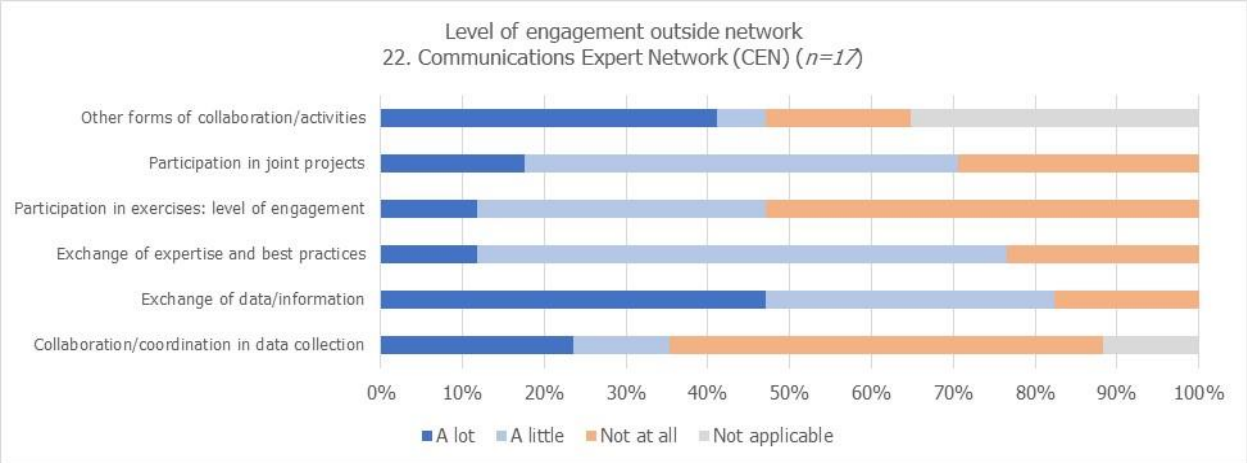


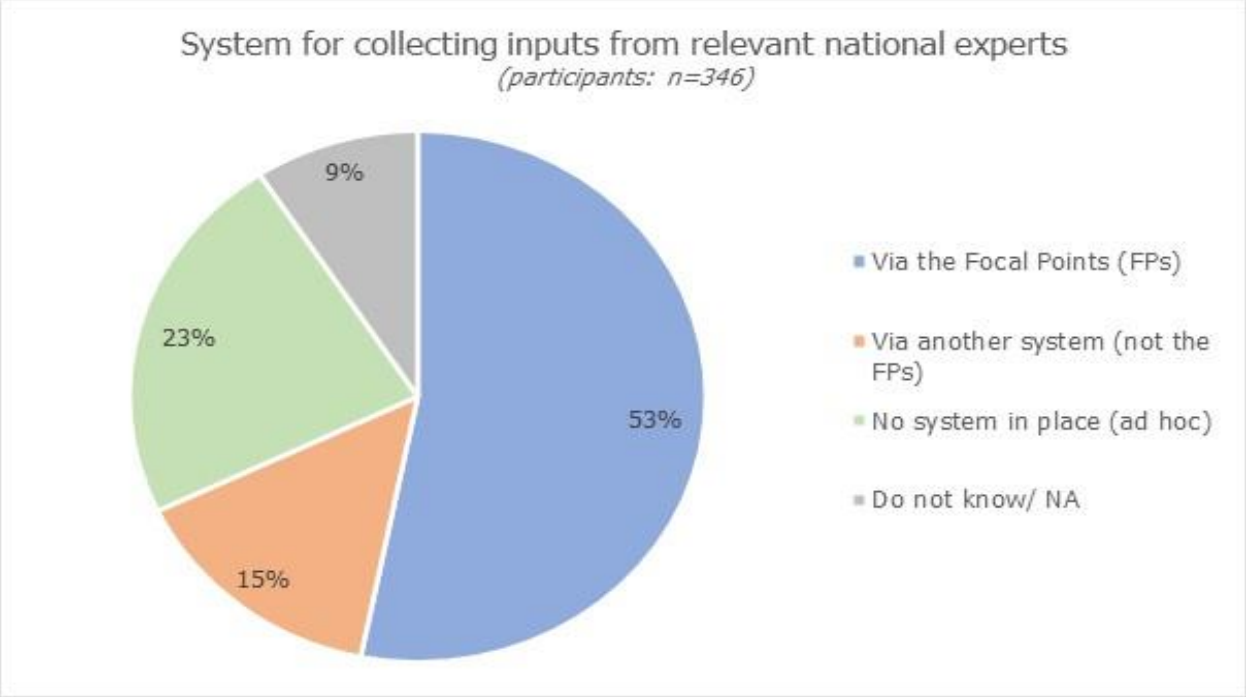


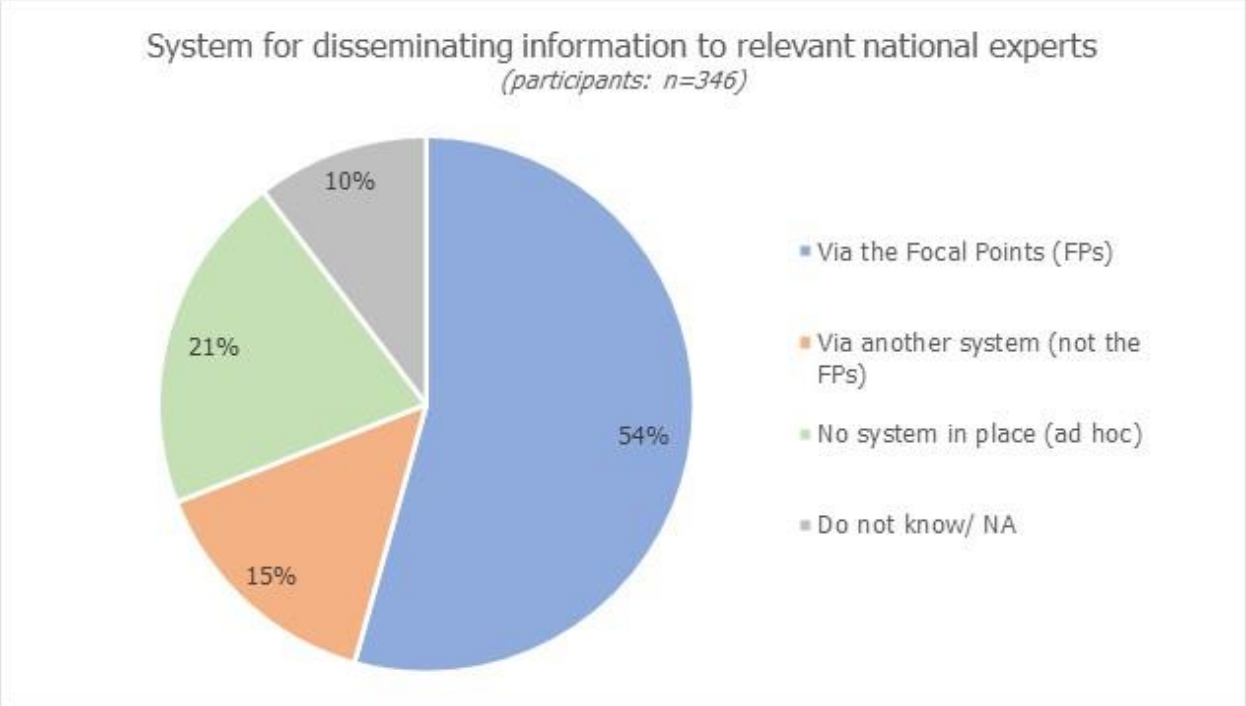


II.1.4 Systems in place

Participants were asked whether a system exists in their country for interacting with relevant national experts in the context of their respective network/sub-group activities. Over half of participants indicated that this takes place mainly via the Focal Points, both for collecting inputs (53 % of respondents) and for disseminating information (54 %). In addition, 15 % of respondents indicated that both the collection of inputs and dissemination of information takes place via another system. Around a fifth of respondents said that there is no system in place for collecting inputs (23 %), or for disseminating information (21 %). A further 9 % or 10 % of respondents indicated that they did not know how interaction could take place, or that this is not applicable in their case.

Q16: To what extent is there a system available within your country that allows you to: Collect inputs from relevant national experts for the various network/sub-group activities; Disseminate information obtained from the various network/sub-group activities to relevant national experts?





II.1.5 Network effectiveness

Participants were asked a series of questions about the effectiveness of their respective network/sub-group in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration between Member States and EFSA. This covered all the forms of collaboration and activities identified in earlier sections. The findings are shown graphically below per network and per type of activity.

Across most networks, **participants** indicated that their network is **most effective** in enabling **exchange of data/information** and **exchange of expertise and best practices**. These are the same two types of formal network activities as those for which participants are the most highly engaged with other participants. For other types of activities, the extent of effectiveness reflects the level of engagement with other participants. This mirrors the extent to which these activities are important for the remit of each network/sub-group. For example, for networks that involve an important element of collaboration for data collection, participants tend to indicate that the network is effective in enabling this collaboration (e.g. ZMD and Chemical Monitoring Data Collection).

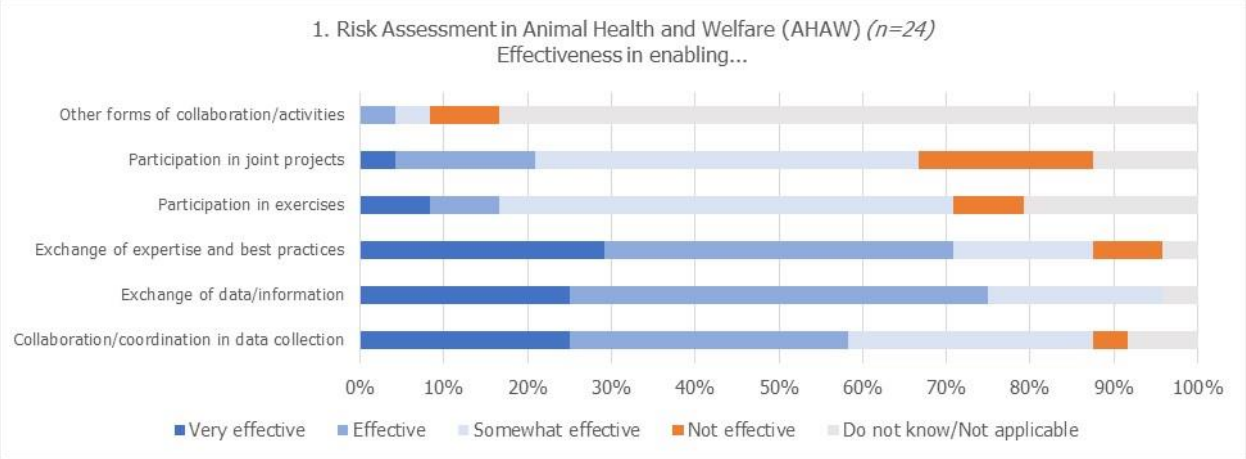
Staff from **EFSA and the other EU institutions** were also asked a series of questions on the effectiveness of the networks. According to this group of respondents, overall, **risk assessment activities are more effective and efficient[29] with the networks/sub-groups than without them** (*n=31 out of 47 respondents*). None of the respondents indicated that risk assessment is less effective with the networks/sub-groups, and only one respondent indicated that it is less efficient (although being more effective than without the networks/sub-groups). About a third of respondents (*n=15*) could not answer this question.

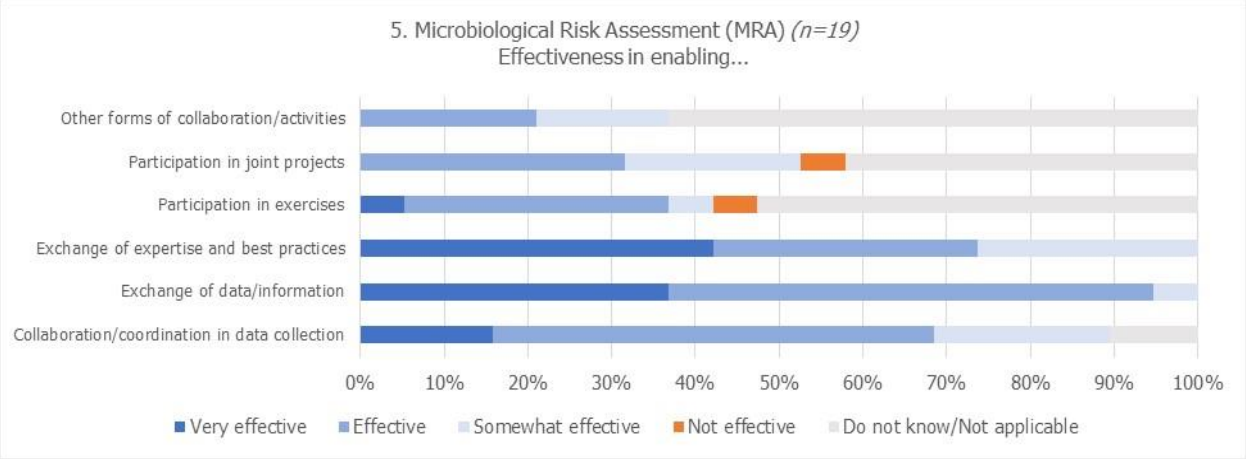
EFSA and the other EU institutions identified several **factors that hinder the network/sub-group's effectiveness and usefulness**. Mostly though, effectiveness is hindered by a perceived lack of control over the process of participant identification. Specific issues include the lack of expertise in some countries (identified as a factor by 32 respondents), participant turnover i.e. changes (28 participants), participant profile (27 respondents), and the participant nomination process via FPs (22 respondents).

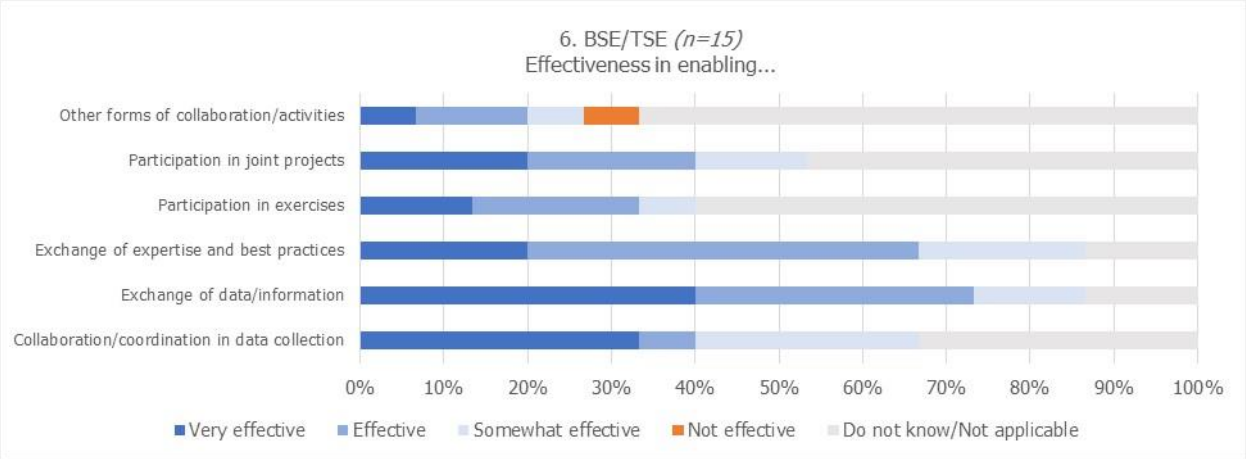
Focal Points were asked a series of questions on the challenges they face in identifying relevant participants for the networks/sub-groups. The difficulty of identifying relevant experts depends on the networks/sub-group. However, most FPs did not identify any difficulties and a substantial number did not provide an answer. Overall, it appears to be more challenging for certain networks, including the AHAW One Health network, the risk assessment of GMOs, the NANO network, PSN-Iuclid, the BSE/TSE network and the CEN. The factors that make difficult the identification and selection of relevant experts include finding experts who are available/willing to participate (according to 19 out of 31 FPs); constraints in the number of experts in the fields covered by EFSA's remit e.g. in small countries and in some fields (16 FPs); not having a full overview over experts available in the country for each topic (11 FPs); and, frequent changes in the staff that are competent in the fields covered by EFSA's remit in the country (10 FPs). A majority of FPs thought that the identification and selection of relevant experts in the future could be facilitated by EFSA making available some guidelines/criteria for the required profile of experts (24 out of 31 FPs), and/or EFSA getting more actively involved in the expert selection process (7 FPs).

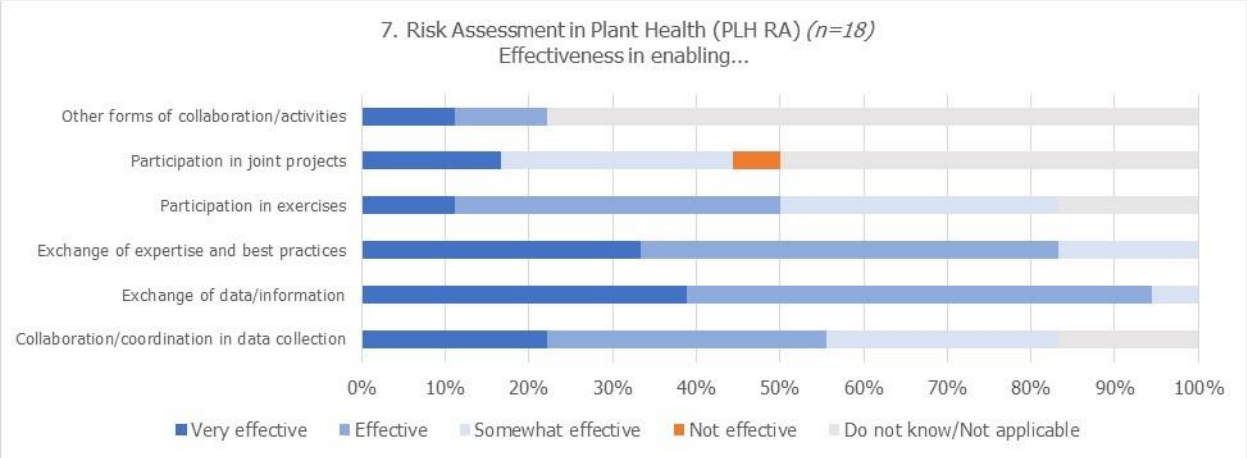
[29] The following definitions were provided in the survey:
Effective = the network/sub-group plays a positive role in supporting the risk assessment activities
Efficient = the network/sub-group's involvement leads to savings in total time and money required for the risk assessment activities

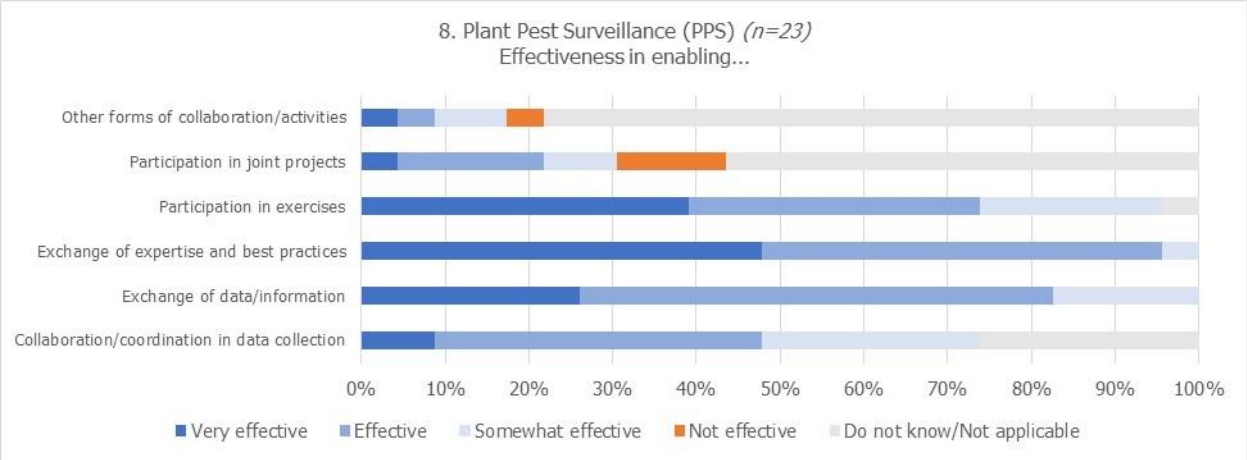
Q15: In your view, how effective has the network/sub-group been in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration between Member States and EFSA?

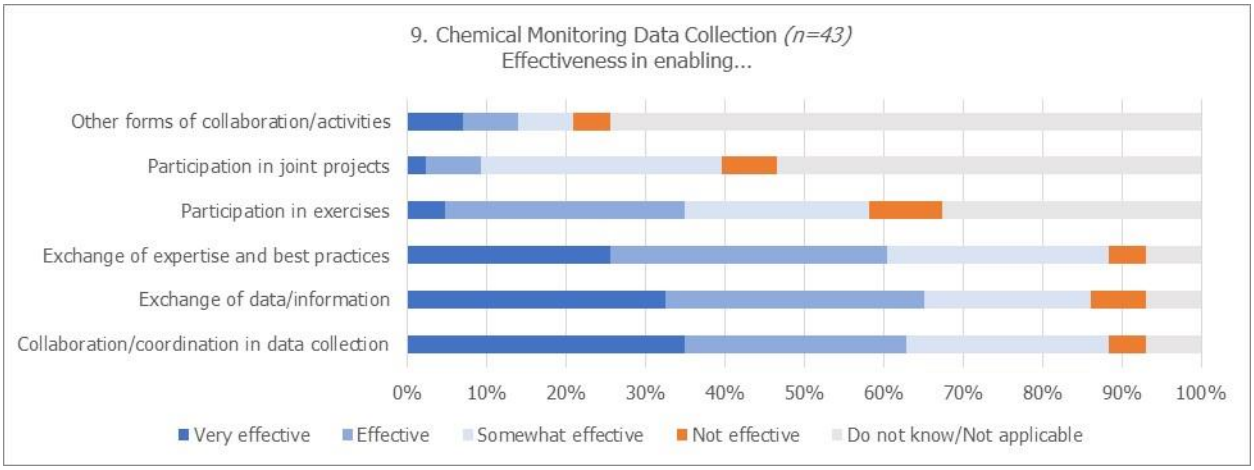


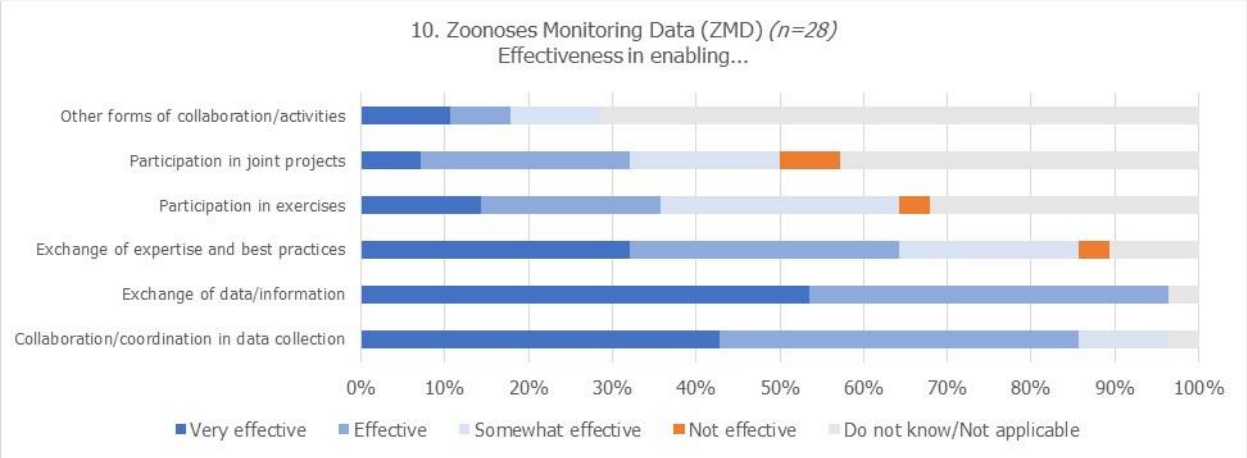


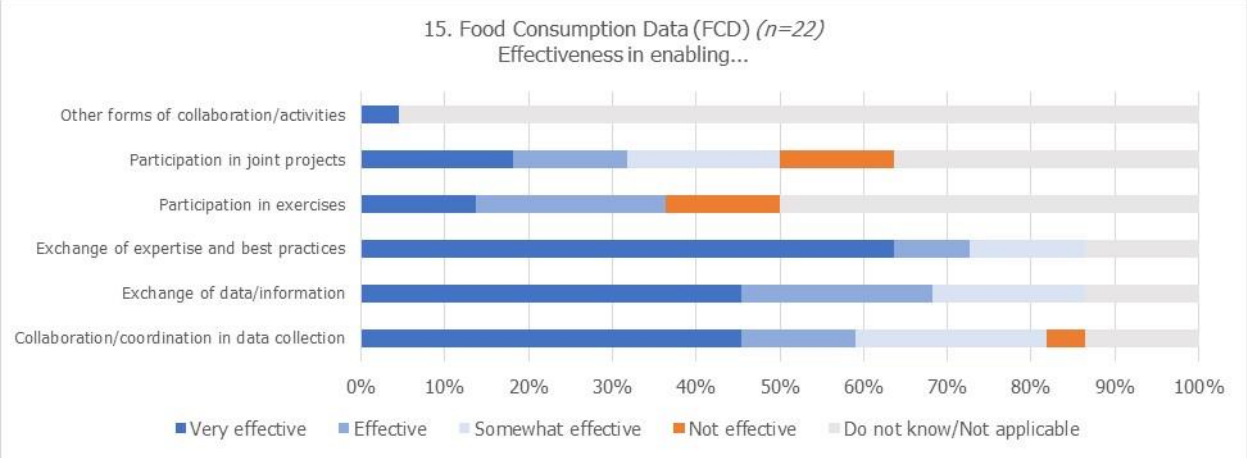


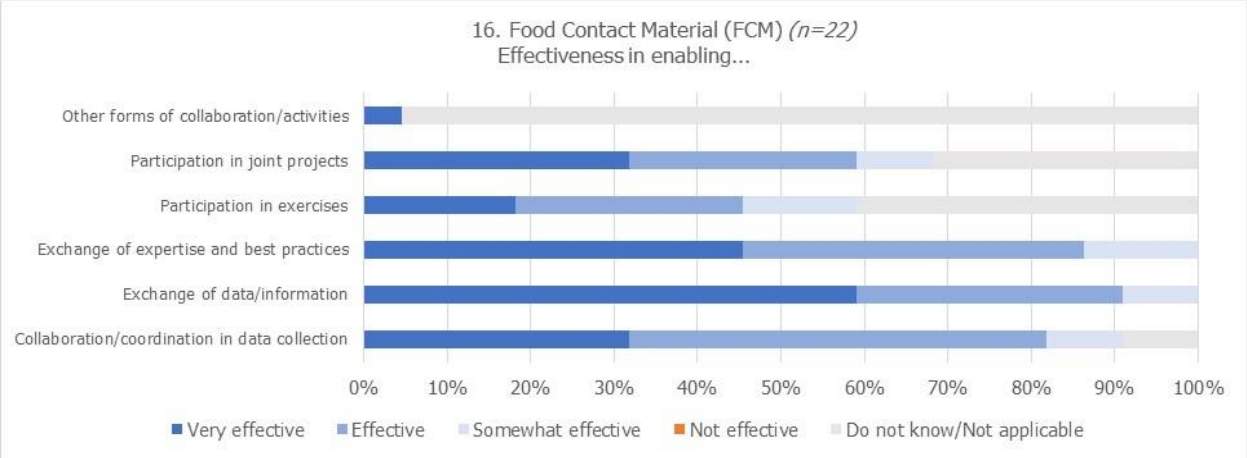

7. Risk Assessment in Plant Health (PLH RA) (n=18)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable

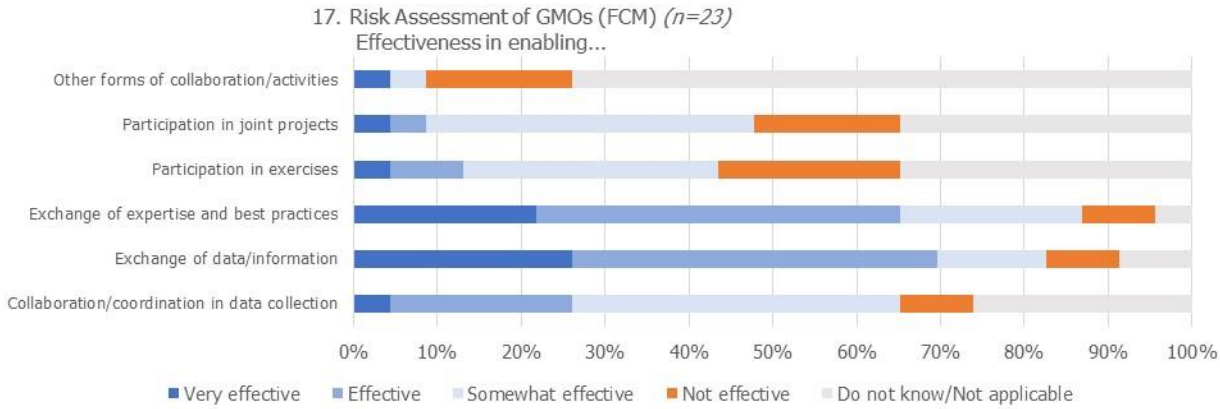

8. Plant Pest Surveillance (PPS) (n=23)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable

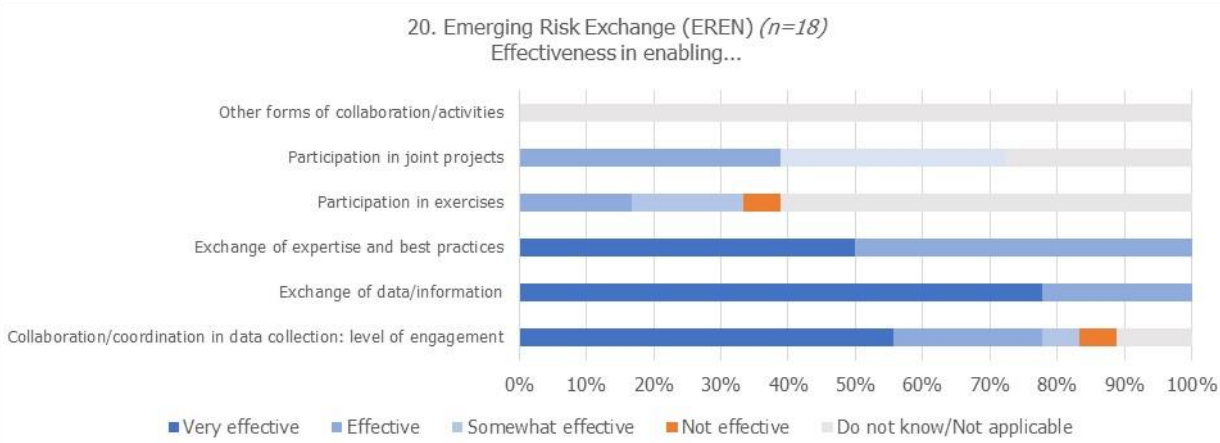

9. Chemical Monitoring Data Collection (n=43)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable

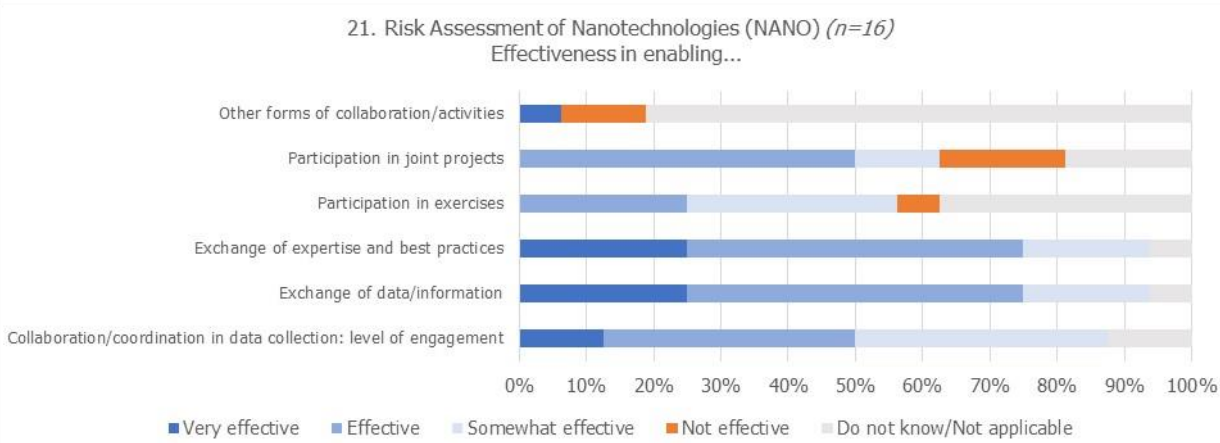

10. Zoonoses Monitoring Data (ZMD) (n=28)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable

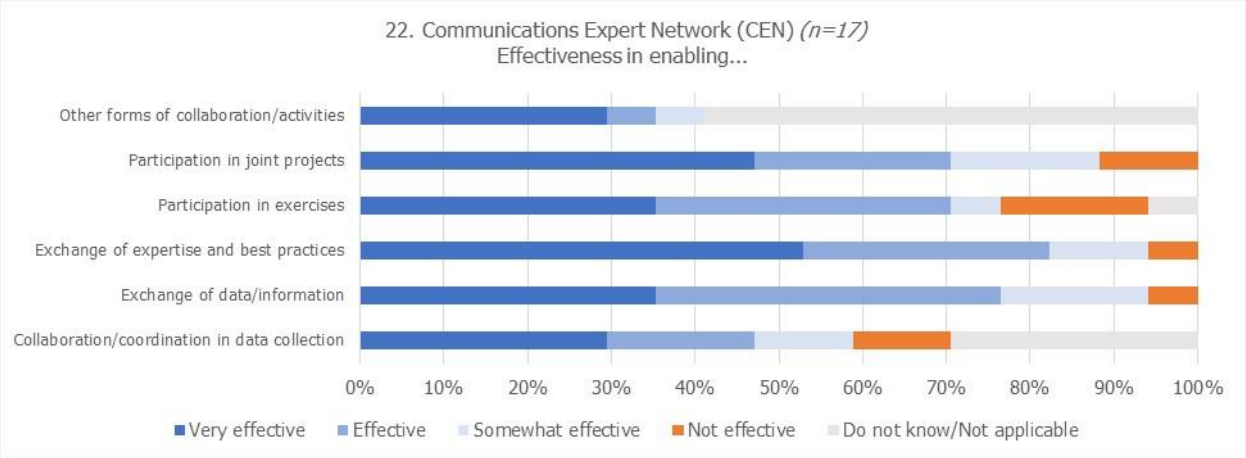

15. Food Consumption Data (FCD) (n=22)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable


16. Food Contact Material (FCM) (n=22)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable

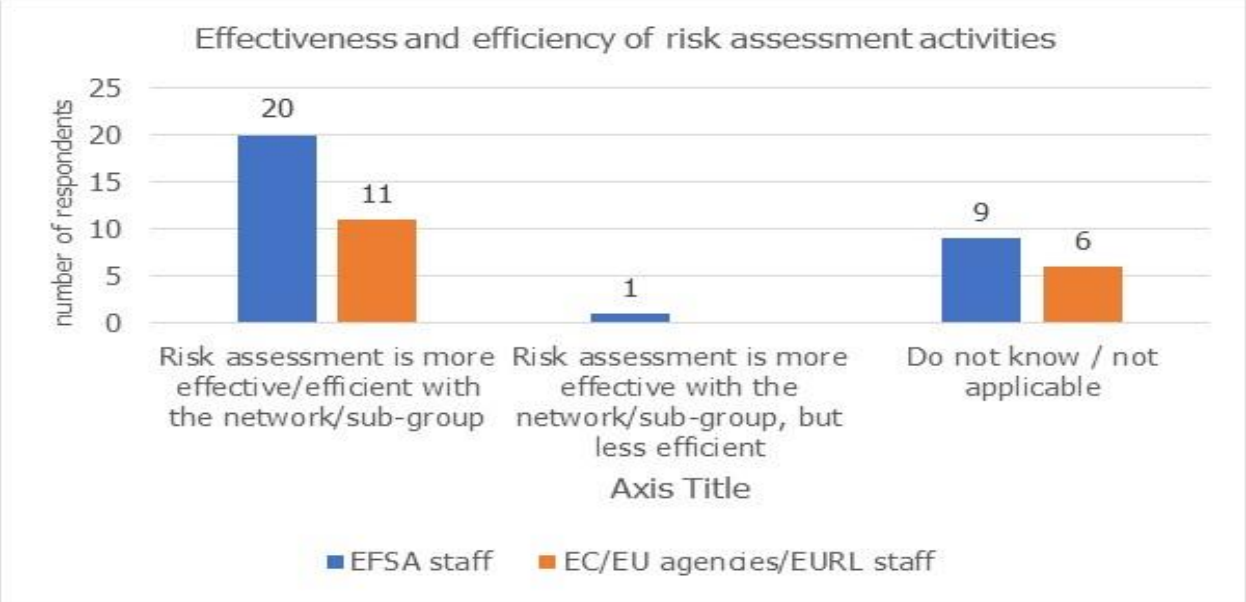

17. Risk Assessment of GMOs (FCM) (n=23)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable


20. Emerging Risk Exchange (EREN) (n=18)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection: level of engagement
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable

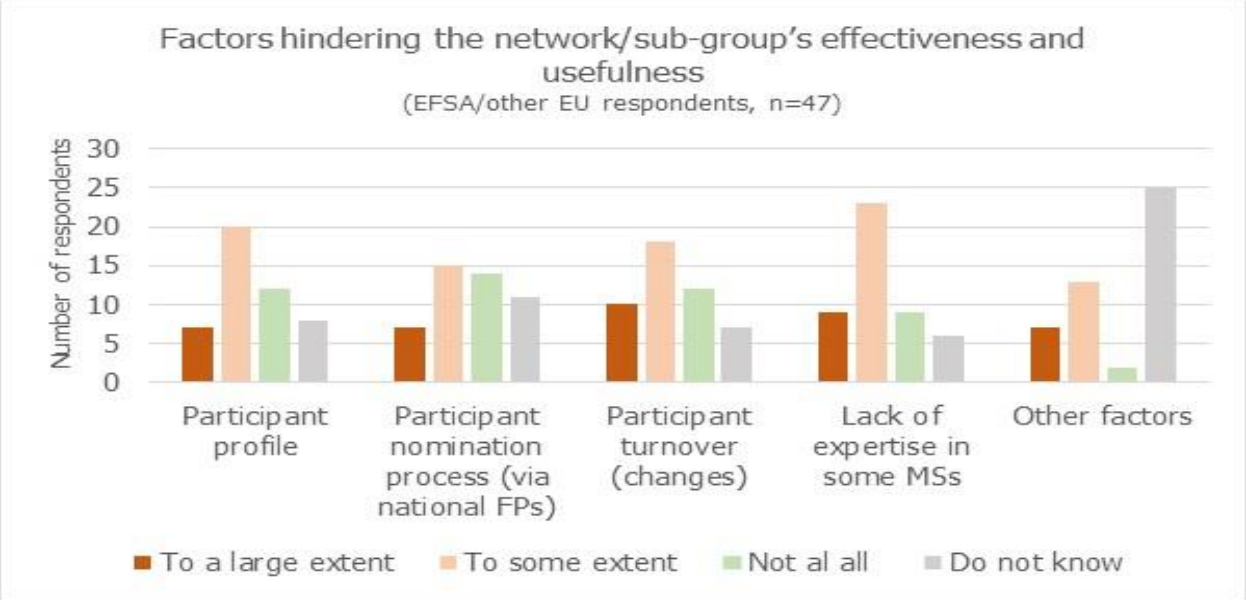

21. Risk Assessment of Nanotechnologies (NANO) (n=16)
Effectiveness in enabling...
Other forms of collaboration/activities
Participation in joint projects
Participation in exercises
Exchange of expertise and best practices
Exchange of data/information
Collaboration/coordination in data collection: level of engagement
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very effective
Effective
Somewhat effective
Not effective
Do not know/Not applicable



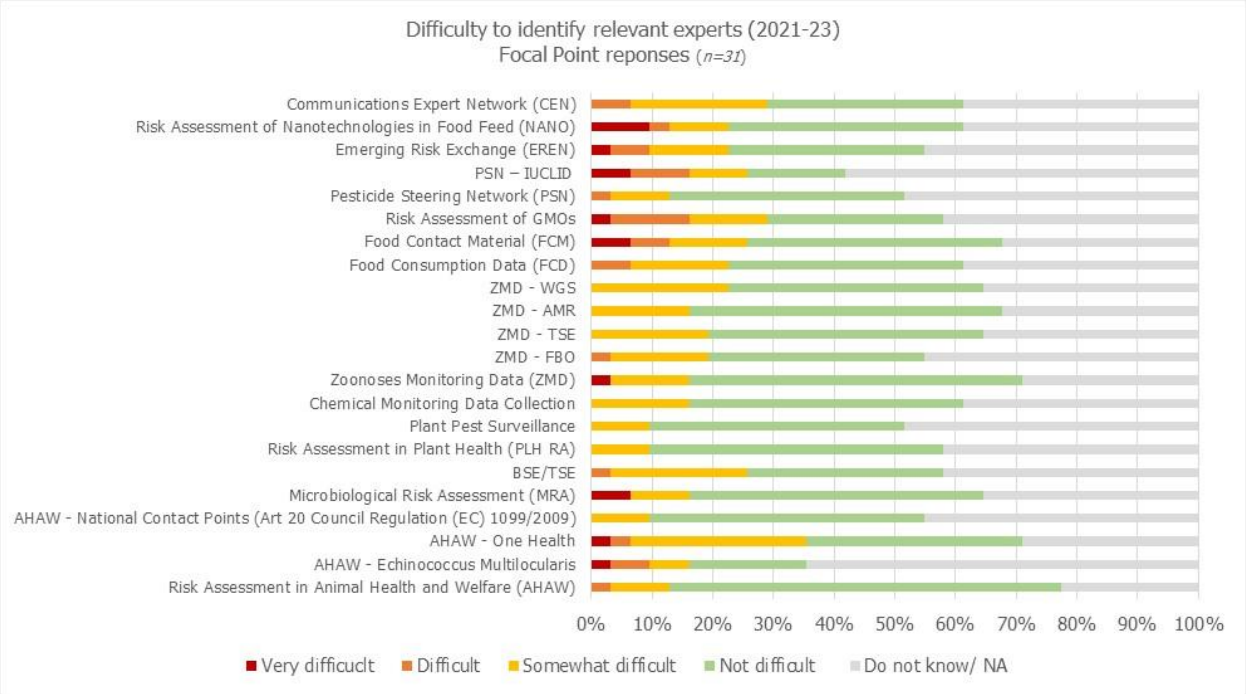
Q31 (EFSA/COM): From your point of view, overall, are risk assessment activities more effective and efficient with the network/sub-group than without it?



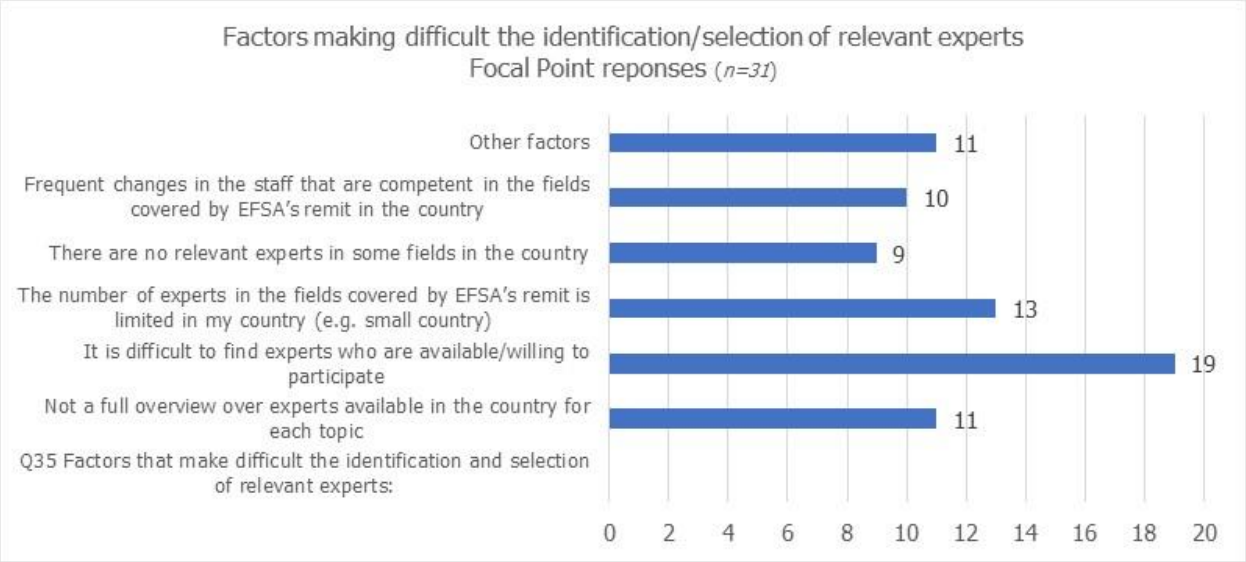
Q33 (EFSA/COM): To what extent do the following factors hinder the network/sub-group's effectiveness and usefulness? - Participant profile; Participant nomination process (via national Focal Points); Participant turnover (changes); Lack of expertise in some MSs; Other factors



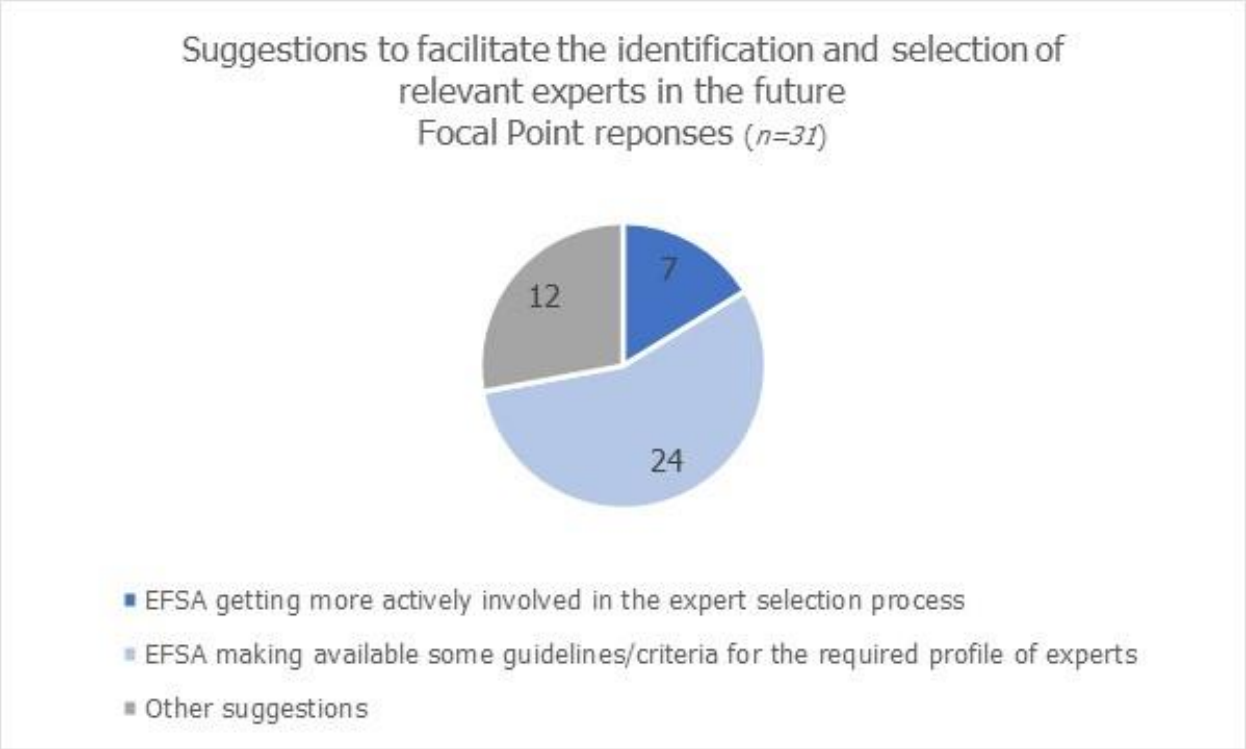
Q34 (FPs): To what extent did you find it difficult to identify relevant experts for the different networks/sub-groups during the 2021-23 period?



Q35 (FPs): What are the factors that make difficult the identification and selection of relevant experts for the different networks/sub-groups?



Q36 (FPs): Would any of the following suggestions facilitate the identification and selection of relevant experts for the different networks/sub-groups in the future?



II.1.6 Network usefulness

Participants, EFSA and the other EU institutions were asked questions on the usefulness of the networks/sub-groups. The questions for participants focused on the usefulness of the networks/sub-groups from a networking point of view. The questions for EFSA and the other EU institutions focused on the networks/sub-groups' usefulness both from a networking point of view and for their work, in terms of the networks/sub-groups' involvement in the collaboration activities identified in earlier sections. Findings are presented graphically below.

Overall, participants consider their respective networks/sub-groups to be useful for them from a networking point of view. **Over 80 % of participants score their network's/sub-**

group's networking impact as useful or very useful. For only 3 % of respondents, their network/sub-group is not useful for networking purposes.

Similarly, **EFSA staff respondents** consider networks/sub-groups to be **useful for EFSA from a networking point of view**. No respondents consider them not useful, although four respondents did not express an opinion. Similarly, **EFSA staff and staff from other EU institutions** indicated that **networks/sub-groups are overall very useful or useful for their work** (*n=45 out of 47 respondents*). None of the respondents indicated that the networks/sub-groups are not useful, and only two respondents did not express an opinion. Respondents thought the networks/sub-groups were useful across all activities to the extent these were relevant/applicable to each network/sub-group.

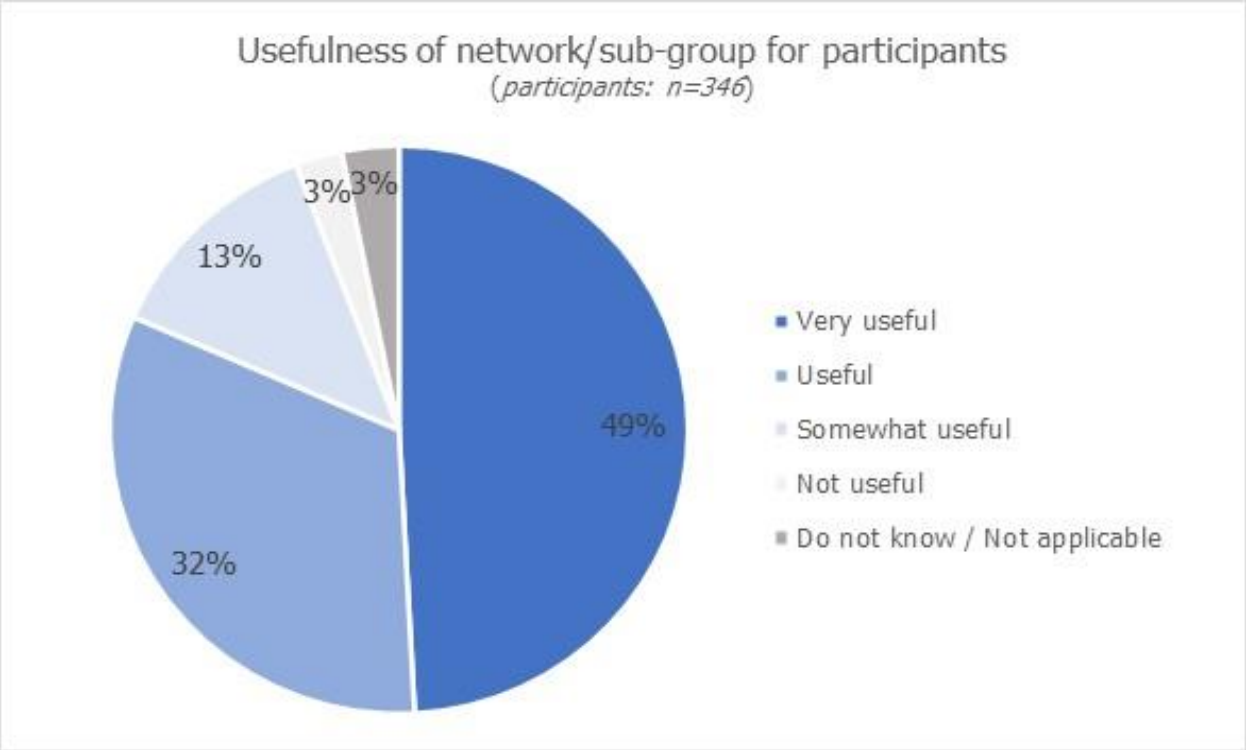
The **usefulness of the networks for participants' networking** is also determined by the **extent to which other similar networking opportunities exist elsewhere**. According to the majority of participants (58 %), no other similar networking opportunities exist through any similar structures set up at EU level. On the other hand, for 42 % of respondents there are other similar networking opportunities, although only 10 % of respondents indicated that these opportunities exist elsewhere to a large extent. The most frequently mentioned opportunities were relevant expert and working groups set up at EU level (e.g. European Commission; other EU agencies such as ECDC, ECHA, EMA; European Council), and also networks of other EU agencies, the EURL and NRL networks. EU training programmes (e.g. BTSF) and EU partnerships e.g. under the Horizon Europe/Horizon 2023 programme were also frequently mentioned. Non-EU opportunities were also identified, e.g. OECD, OIE, and FAO expert groups and networks.

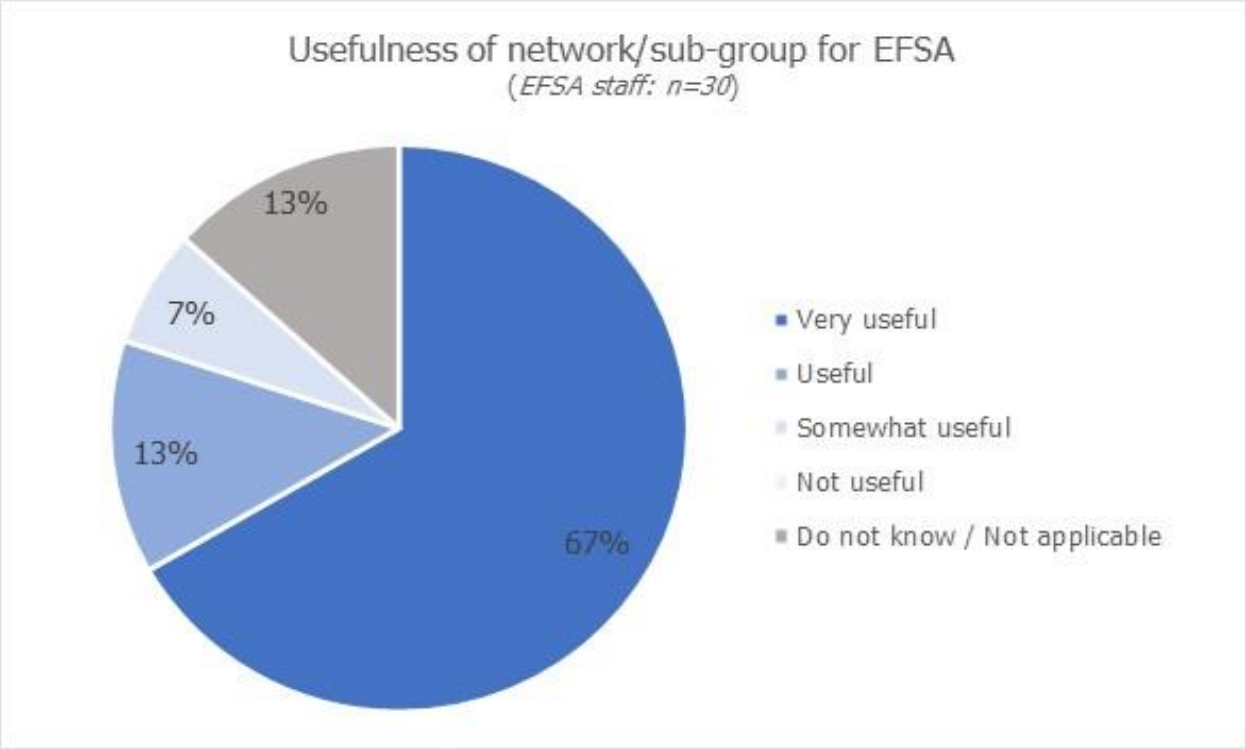
Participants also reported a high level of collaboration with other EFSA networks/sub-groups, as well as networks of other EU agencies and EFSA panels. Participant responses suggest that the **level of collaboration with other networks tends to vary, depending on the remit of each network/sub-group**.

Another indicator of network/sub-group usefulness is that 44 % of participants indicated that their respective **network/sub-group has played an important and irreplaceable role in collaboration between Member States and EFSA**. Furthermore, only nine participants thought that their respective network/sub-group has not followed up suggestions for improvements in collaboration between Member States and EFSA.

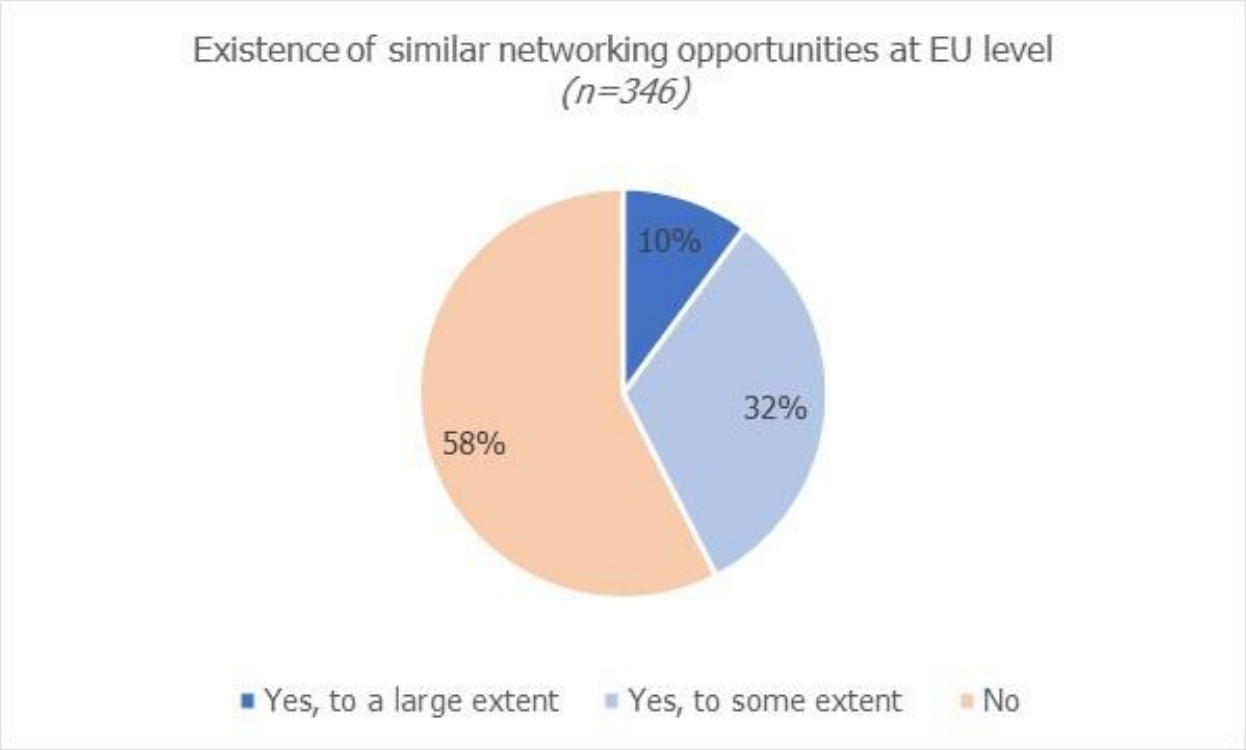
Finally, according to a large majority of participants, the **topics** covered by their respective networks/sub-groups have been **relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments** in their remit over the 2021-2023 period. Only two participants indicated that the topics covered by the networks are not relevant, and 13 indicated that they are somewhat relevant. Similarly, a large majority of participants believe that their respective networks/sub-groups are **able to respond promptly to emerging health/safety challenges and crises**. Only nine participants indicated that their networks are not able to respond promptly, although 41 indicated that they are only somewhat able to respond promptly; a relatively large number of respondents (49) did not answer this question. Reasons identified by these respondents for the lack of relevance or inability to respond promptly are mainly due to the rapid developments of the knowledge-base in the scientific area covered by the network/sub-group against the fact that the network/sub-group acts on specific pre-determined topics mandated to EFSA by the European Commission. Inability to respond promptly was also partly due to the many emerging health/safety challenges and crises in the scientific area. Only 22 of the 346 participants could think of any notable example(s) where the network/sub-group has not covered current or emerging health/safety risks and challenges in its remit, although only very few examples were actually provided.

Q17: To what extent is the network/sub-group useful for you as a participant from a networking point of view? To what extent is the network/sub-group useful for EFSA from a networking point of view?

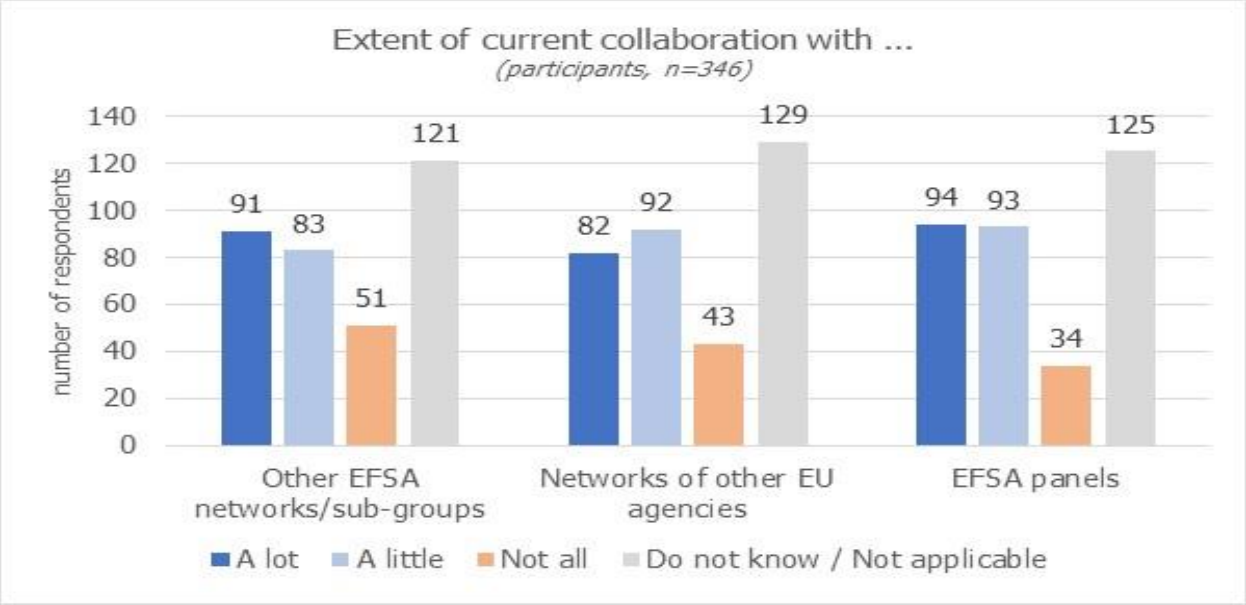




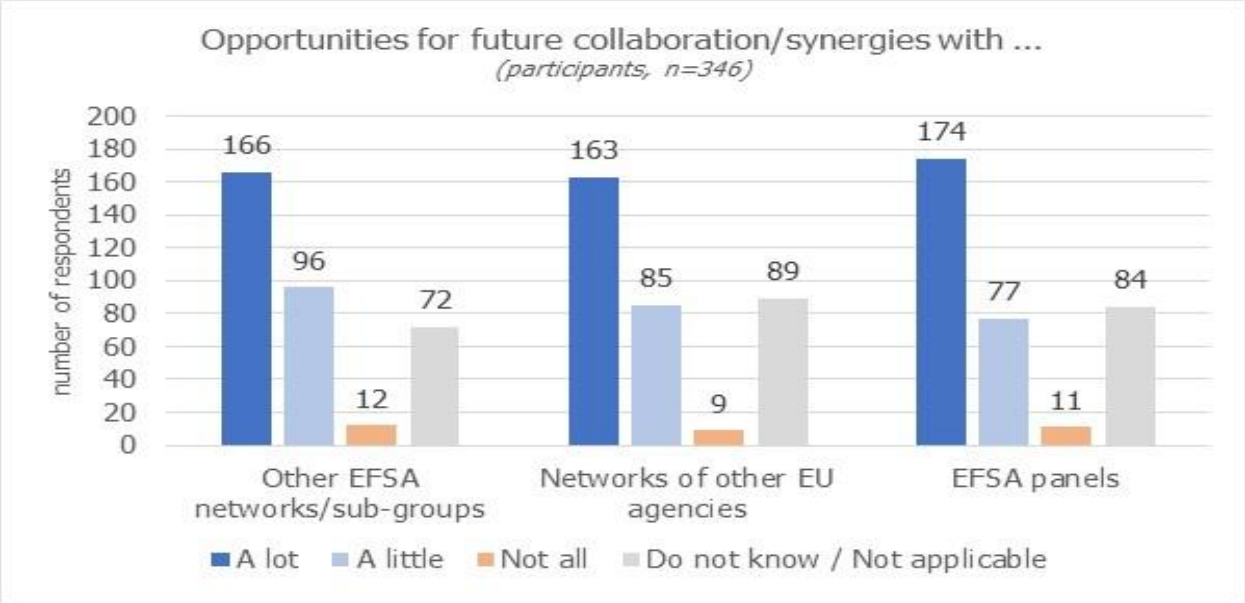
Q18: Do similar networking opportunities exist through similar structures set up at EU level?



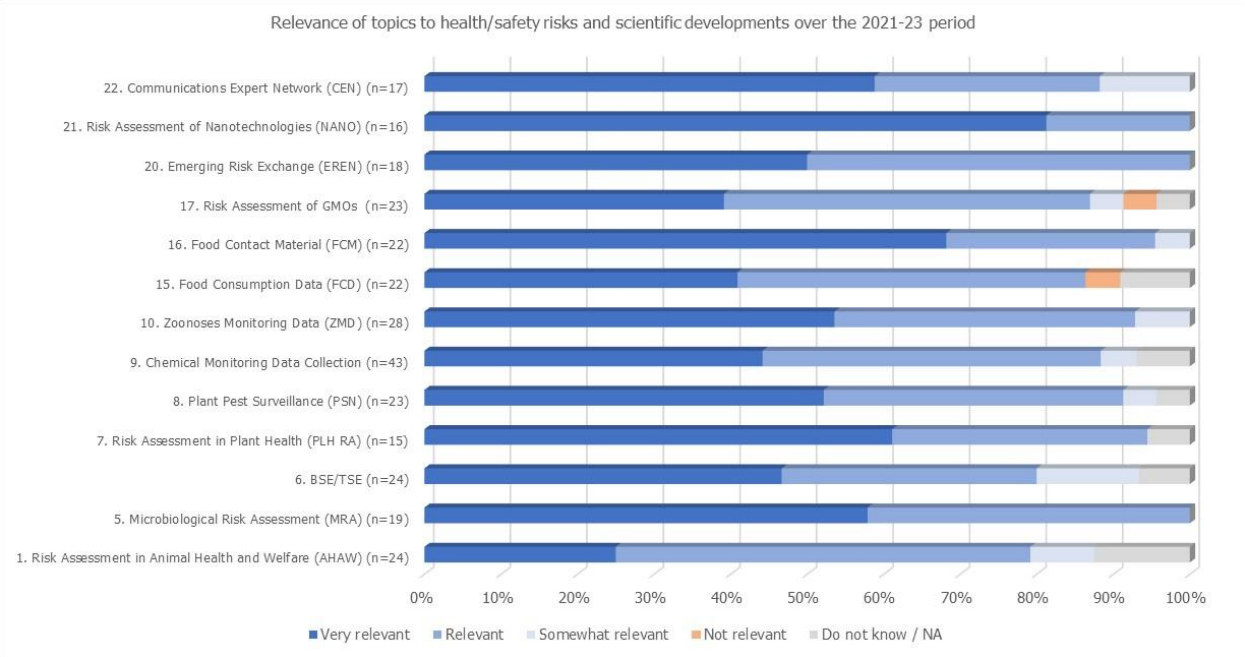
Q20: To what extent is there currently collaboration between this network/sub-group and the following? - Collaboration with other EFSA networks/sub-groups; Collaboration with networks of other EU agencies; Collaboration with EFSA panels



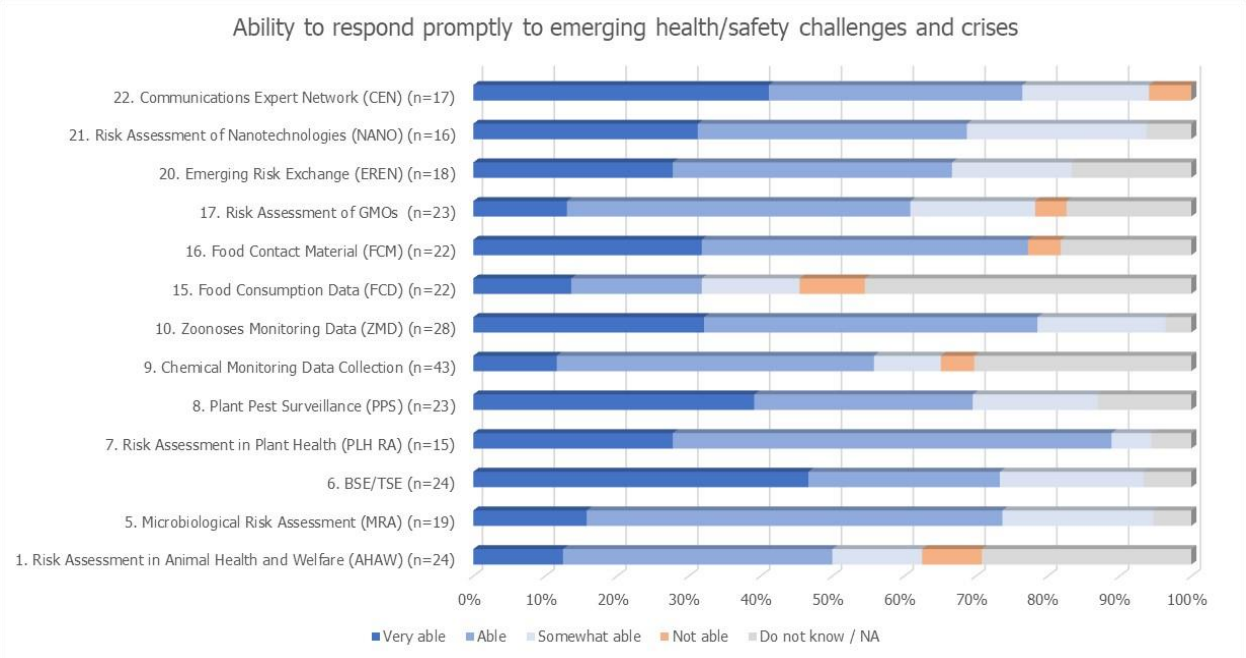
Q21: In your view, to what extent are there opportunities for future collaboration/synergies between this network/sub-group and the following? - Collaboration/synergies with other EFSA networks/sub-groups; Collaboration/synergies with networks of other EU agencies; Collaboration/synergies with EFSA panels



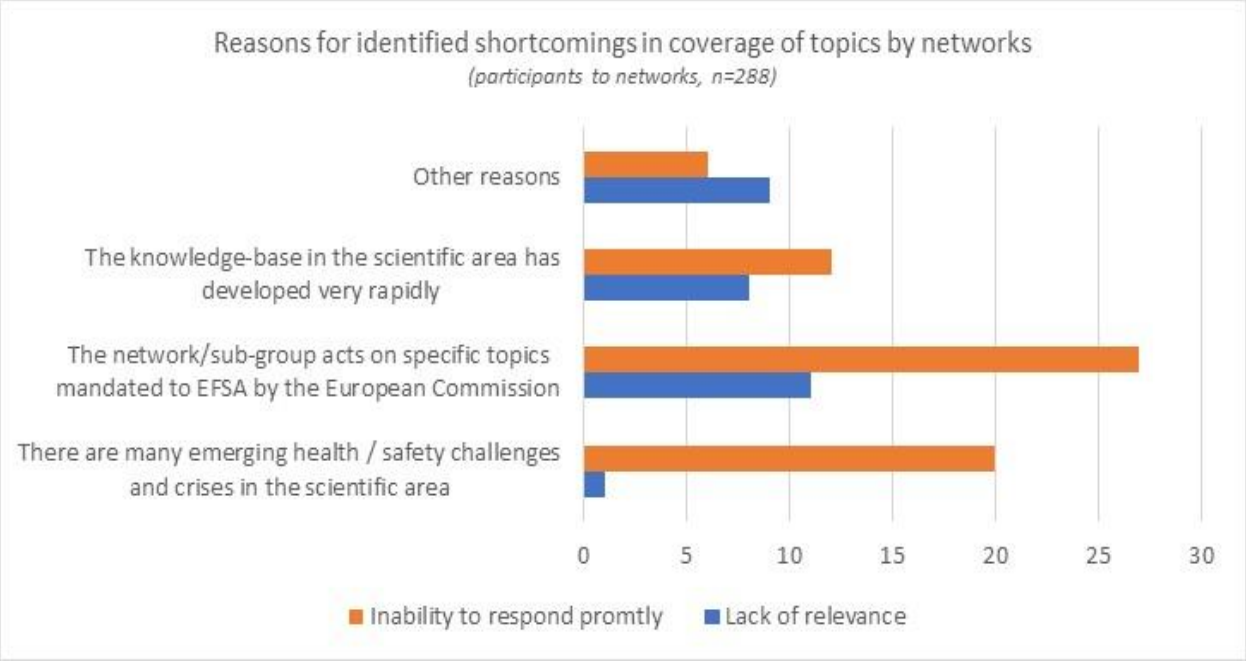
Q25: In your view, to what extent have the topics covered by the network/sub-group been relevant to health/safety risks and scientific developments in their remit over the 2021-2023 period?



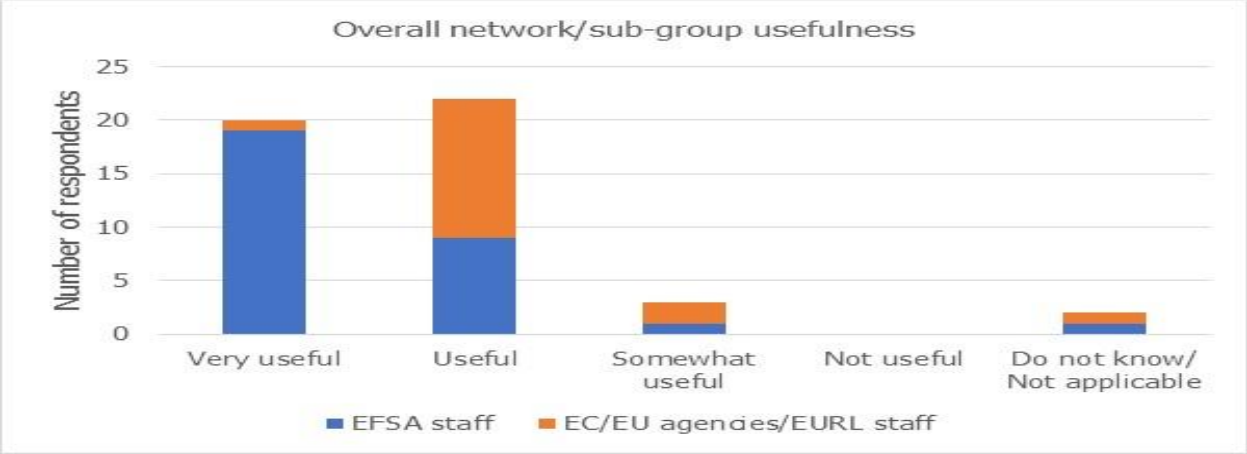
Q27: In your view, to what extent is the network/sub-group able to respond promptly to emerging health/safety challenges and crises?

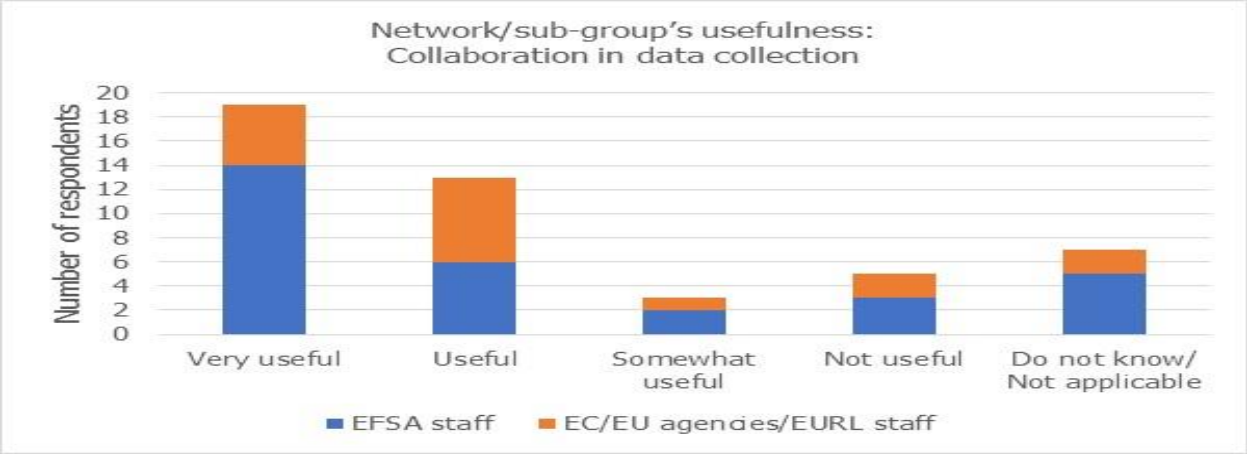


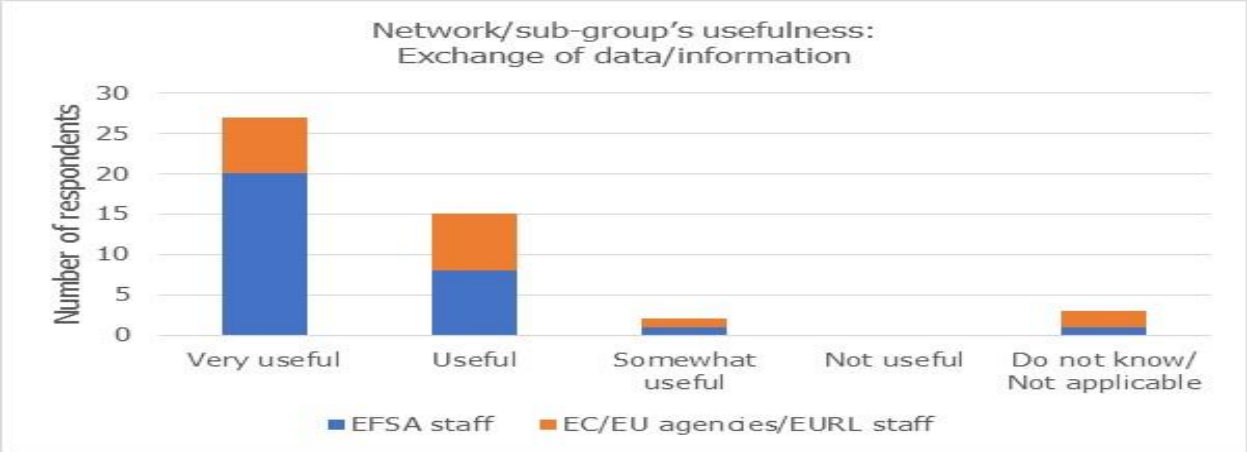
Q26/Q28: What are the reasons why the topics covered by the network/sub-group are not as relevant? What are the reasons why the network/sub-group has not been able to respond promptly to emerging health/safety challenges and crises?

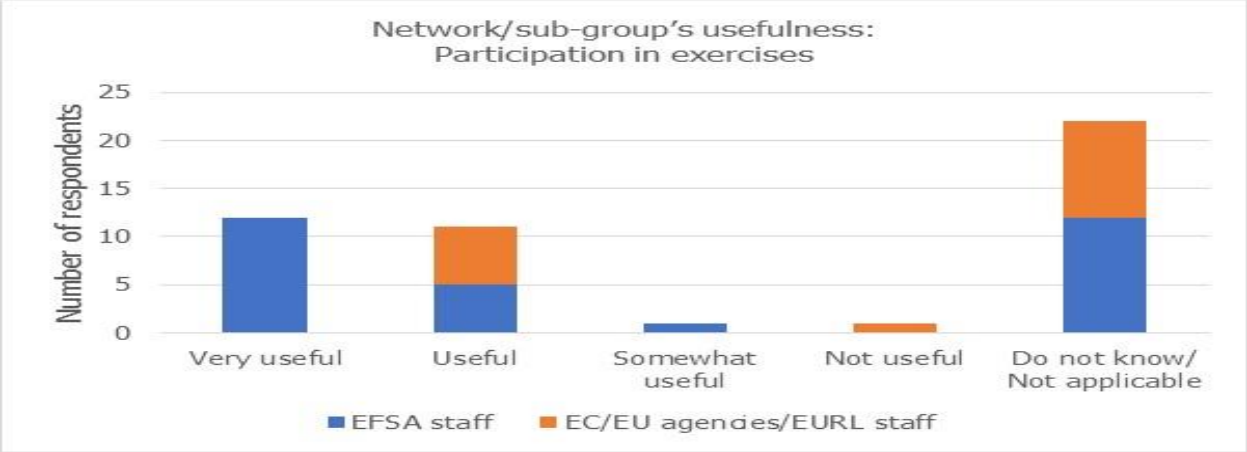


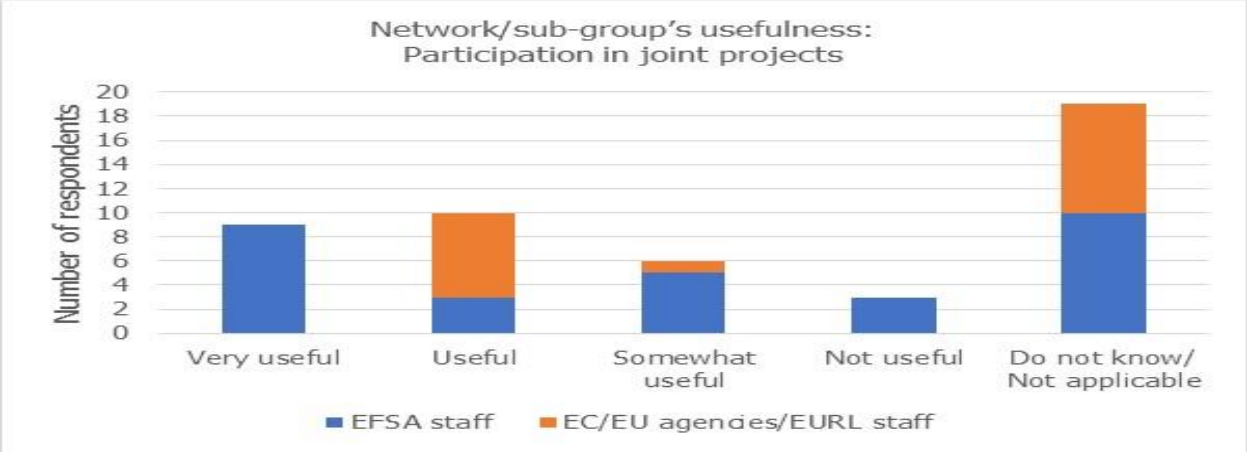
Q32: (EFSA/COM): To what extent has the network/sub-group's involvement in the various activities been useful for your work?

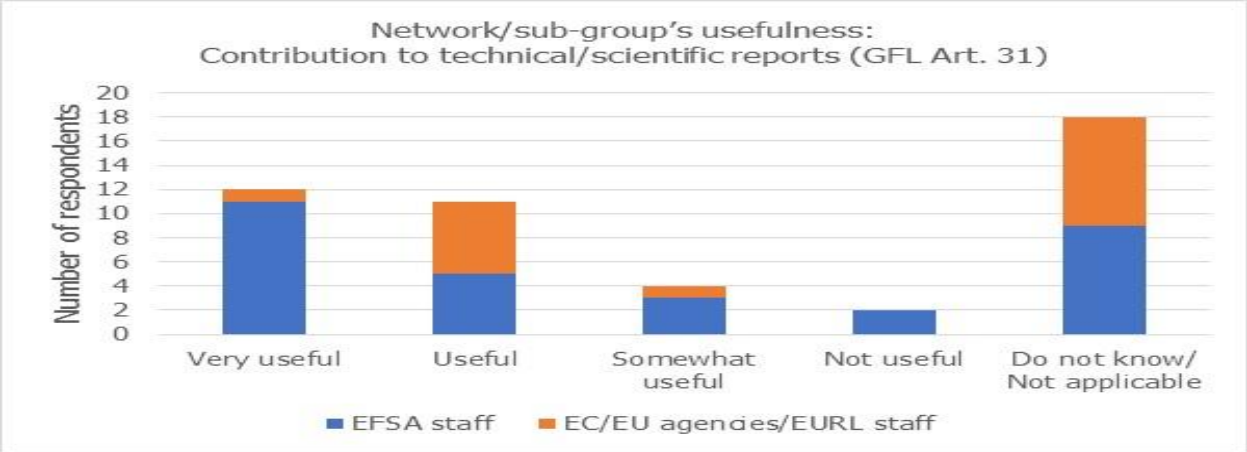


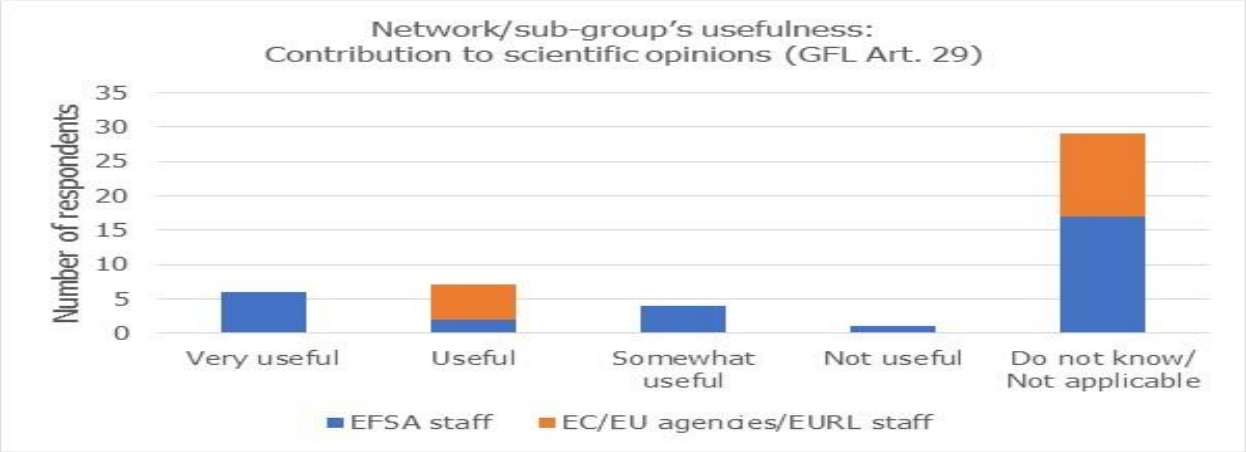





Network/sub-group's usefulness:
Participation in exercises
Number of respondents
25
20
15
10
5
0
Very useful
Useful
Somewhat useful
Not useful
Do not know/ Not applicable
EFSA staff
EC/EU agencies/EURL staff


Network/sub-group's usefulness:
Participation in joint projects
Number of respondents
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
Very useful
Useful
Somewhat useful
Not useful
Do not know/ Not applicable
EFSA staff
EC/EU agencies/EURL staff


Network/sub-group's usefulness:
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)
Number of respondents
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
Very useful
Useful
Somewhat useful
Not useful
Do not know/ Not applicable
EFSA staff
EC/EU agencies/EURL staff



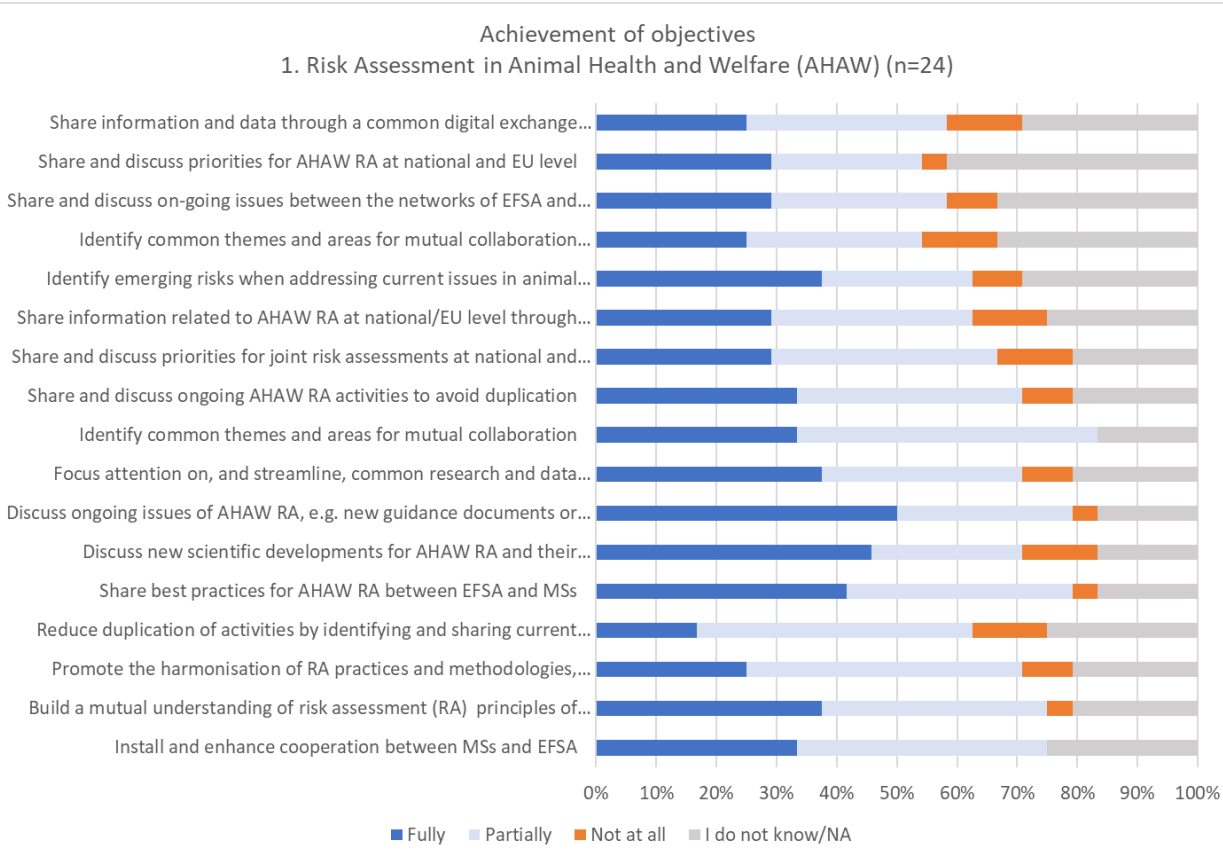
II.1.7 Achievement of objectives

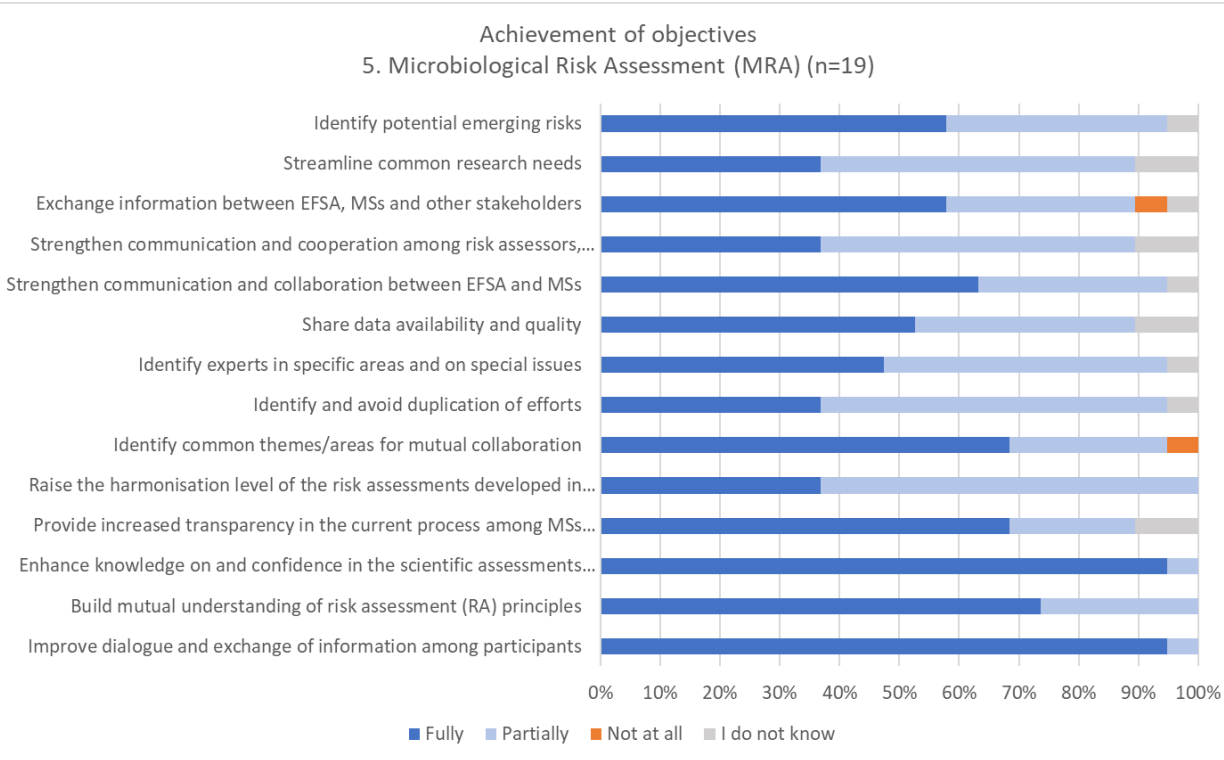
Participants were asked to score the extent to which each of the objectives set for their respective network/sub-group were achieved during the 2021 to 2023 period.

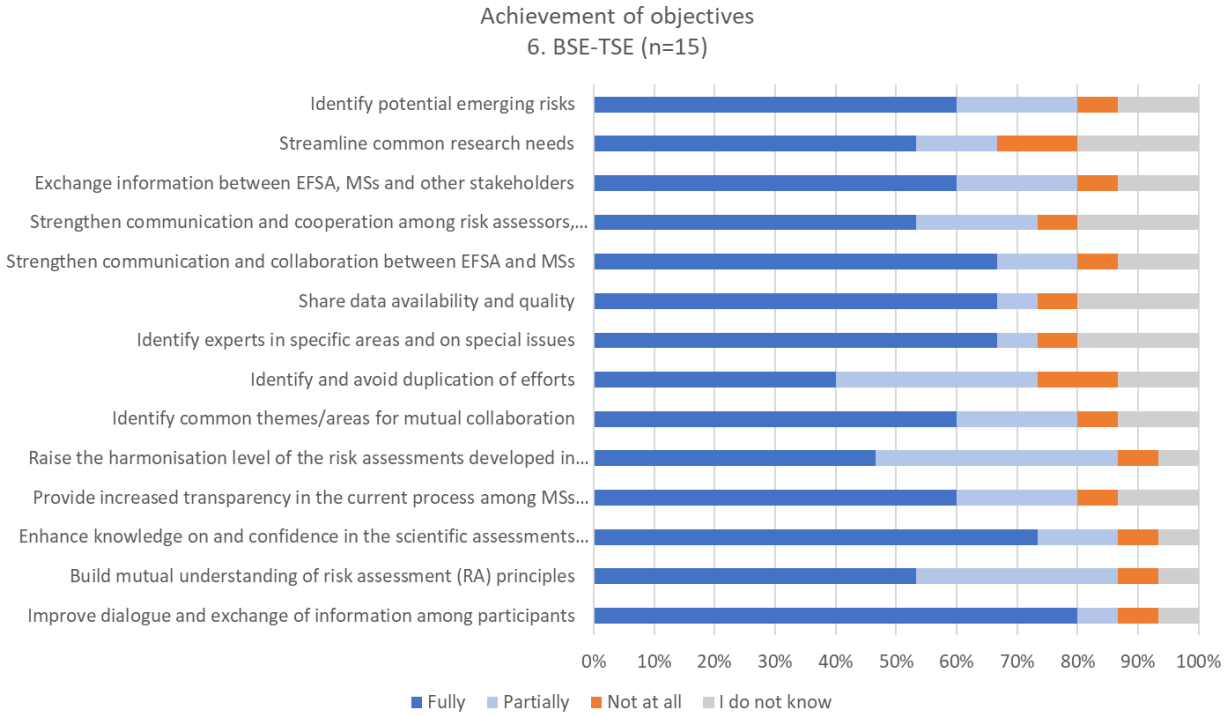
Overall, across all networks, participants reported that objectives were fulfilled either fully or partially. In very few cases, up to four respondents did not consider the objectives to be fulfilled. This was notably the case for three networks:

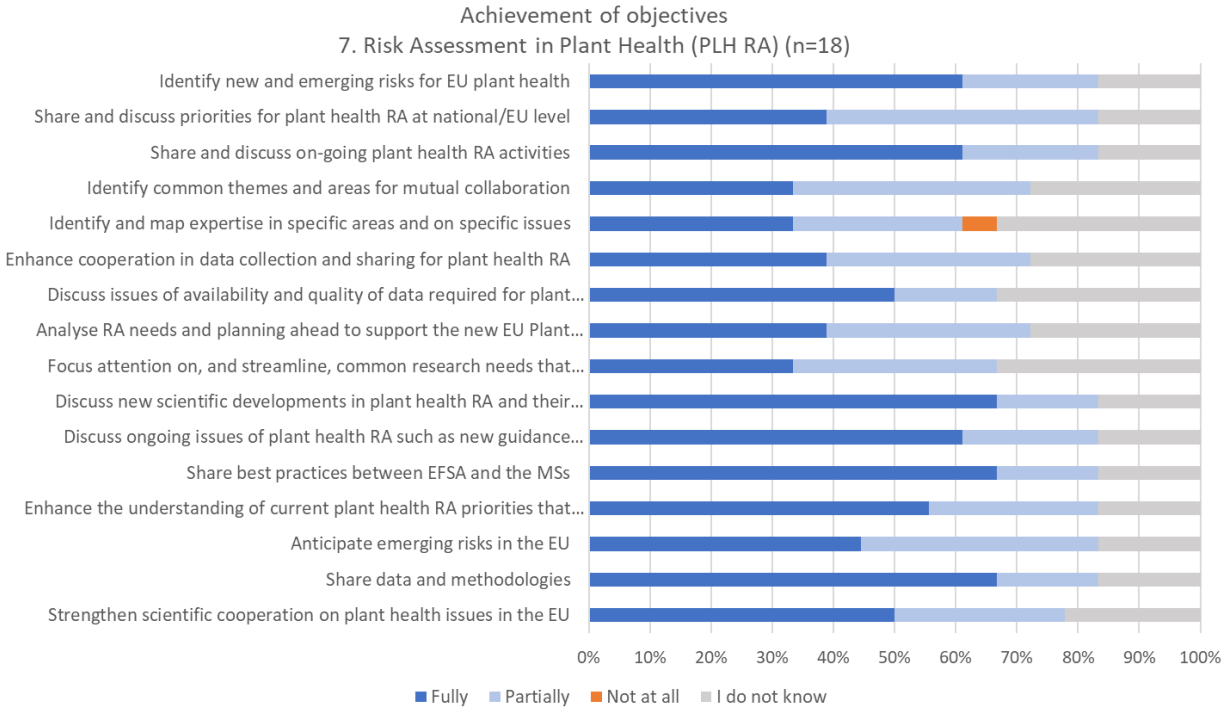
- AHAW network: depending on the objective, one to three out of 24 respondents did not consider most of the objectives to be fulfilled.
- BSE/TSE network: depending on the objective, one to two out of 15 respondents did not consider most of the objectives to be fulfilled.
- Chemical Monitoring Data Collection networks: depending on the objective, one to four out of 43 respondents did not consider most of the objectives to be fulfilled.

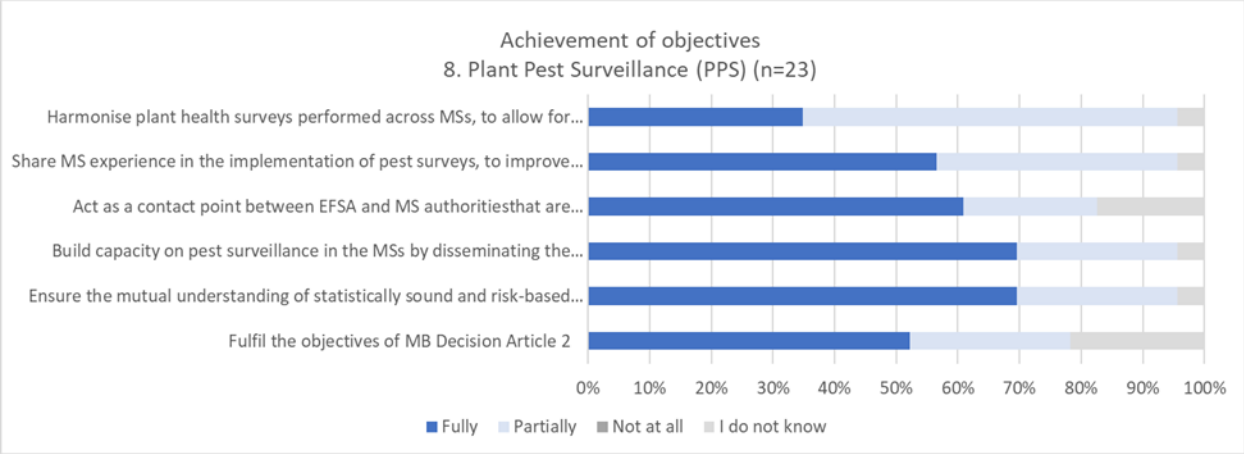
The survey findings on the achievement of the objectives per network and per objective are provided below.

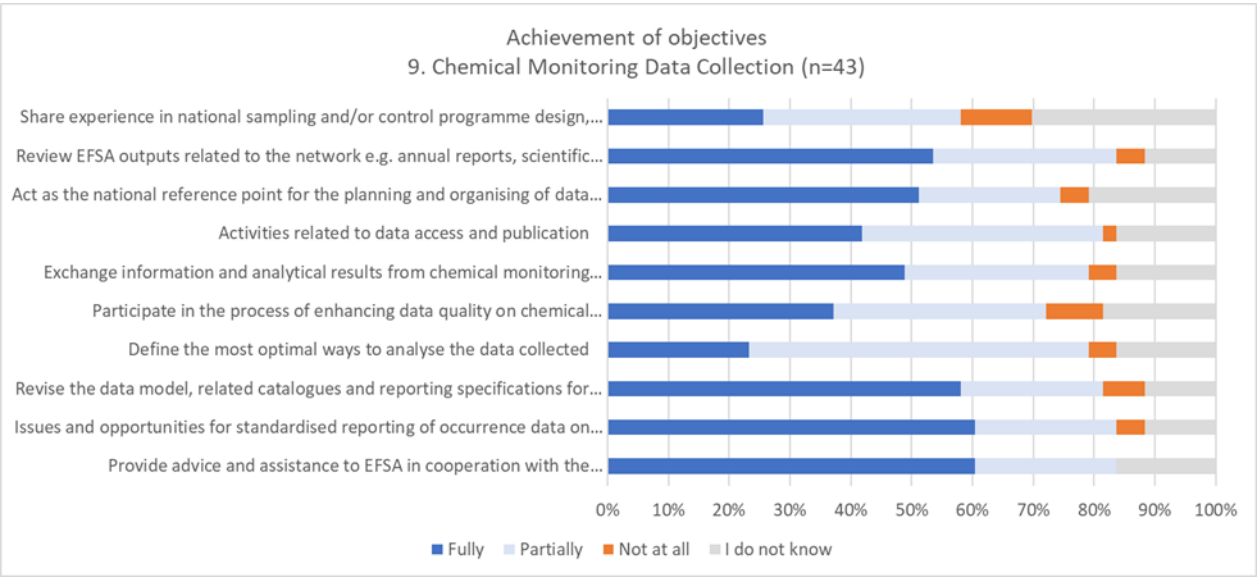

Achievement of objectives
1. Risk Assessment in Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW) (n=24)
Share information and data through a common digital exchange...
Share and discuss priorities for AHAW RA at national and EU level
Share and discuss on-going issues between the networks of EFSA and...
Identify common themes and areas for mutual collaboration...
Identify emerging risks when addressing current issues in animal...
Share information related to AHAW RA at national/EU level through...
Share and discuss priorities for joint risk assessments at national and...
Share and discuss ongoing AHAW RA activities to avoid duplication
Identify common themes and areas for mutual collaboration
Focus attention on, and streamline, common research and data...
Discuss ongoing issues of AHAW RA, e.g. new guidance documents or...
Discuss new scientific developments for AHAW RA and their...
Share best practices for AHAW RA between EFSA and MSs
Reduce duplication of activities by identifying and sharing current...
Promote the harmonisation of RA practices and methodologies,...
Build a mutual understanding of risk assessment (RA) principles of...
Install and enhance cooperation between MSs and EFSA
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully
Partially
Not at all
I do not know/NA

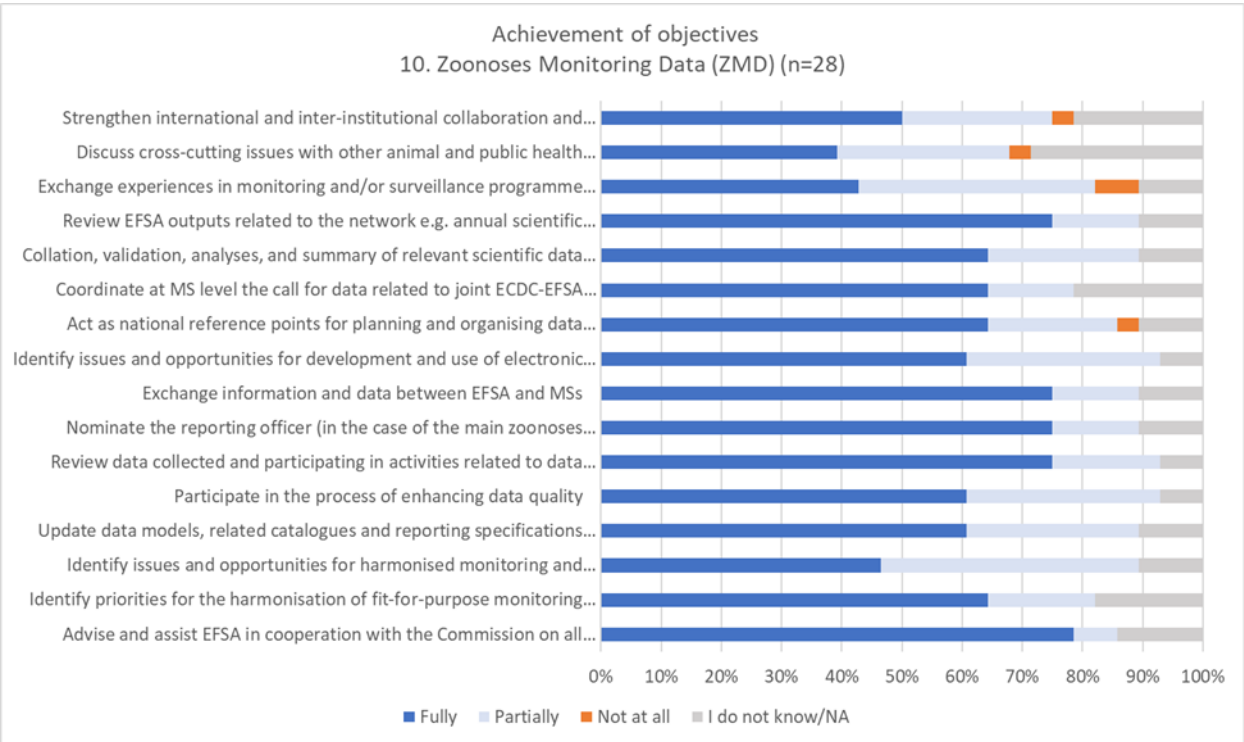

Achievement of objectives
5. Microbiological Risk Assessment (MRA) (n=19)
Identify potential emerging risks
Streamline common research needs
Exchange information between EFSA, MSs and other stakeholders
Strengthen communication and cooperation among risk assessors,...
Strengthen communication and collaboration between EFSA and MSs
Share data availability and quality
Identify experts in specific areas and on special issues
Identify and avoid duplication of efforts
Identify common themes/areas for mutual collaboration
Raise the harmonisation level of the risk assessments developed in...
Provide increased transparency in the current process among MSs...
Enhance knowledge on and confidence in the scientific assessments...
Build mutual understanding of risk assessment (RA) principles
Improve dialogue and exchange of information among participants
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully
Partially
Not at all
I do not know

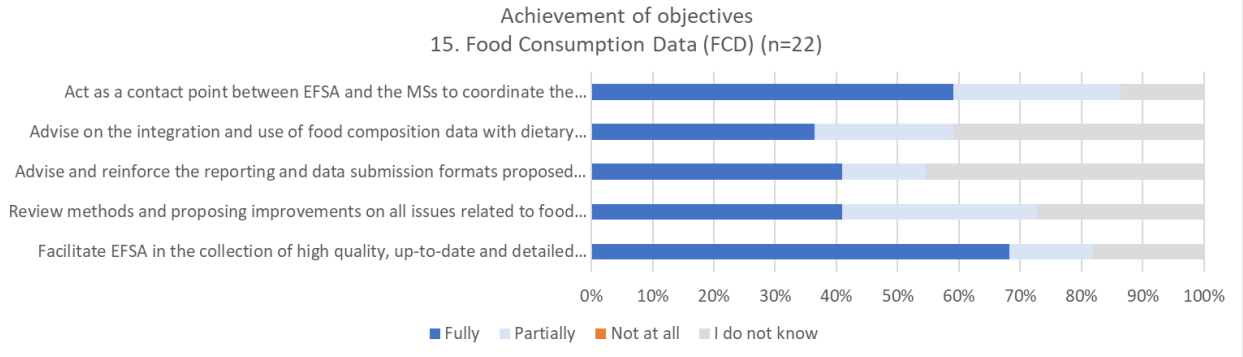

Achievement of objectives
6. BSE-TSE (n=15)
Identify potential emerging risks
Streamline common research needs
Exchange information between EFSA, MSs and other stakeholders
Strengthen communication and cooperation among risk assessors,...
Strengthen communication and collaboration between EFSA and MSs
Share data availability and quality
Identify experts in specific areas and on special issues
Identify and avoid duplication of efforts
Identify common themes/areas for mutual collaboration
Raise the harmonisation level of the risk assessments developed in...
Provide increased transparency in the current process among MSs...
Enhance knowledge on and confidence in the scientific assessments...
Build mutual understanding of risk assessment (RA) principles
Improve dialogue and exchange of information among participants
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully
Partially
Not at all
I do not know

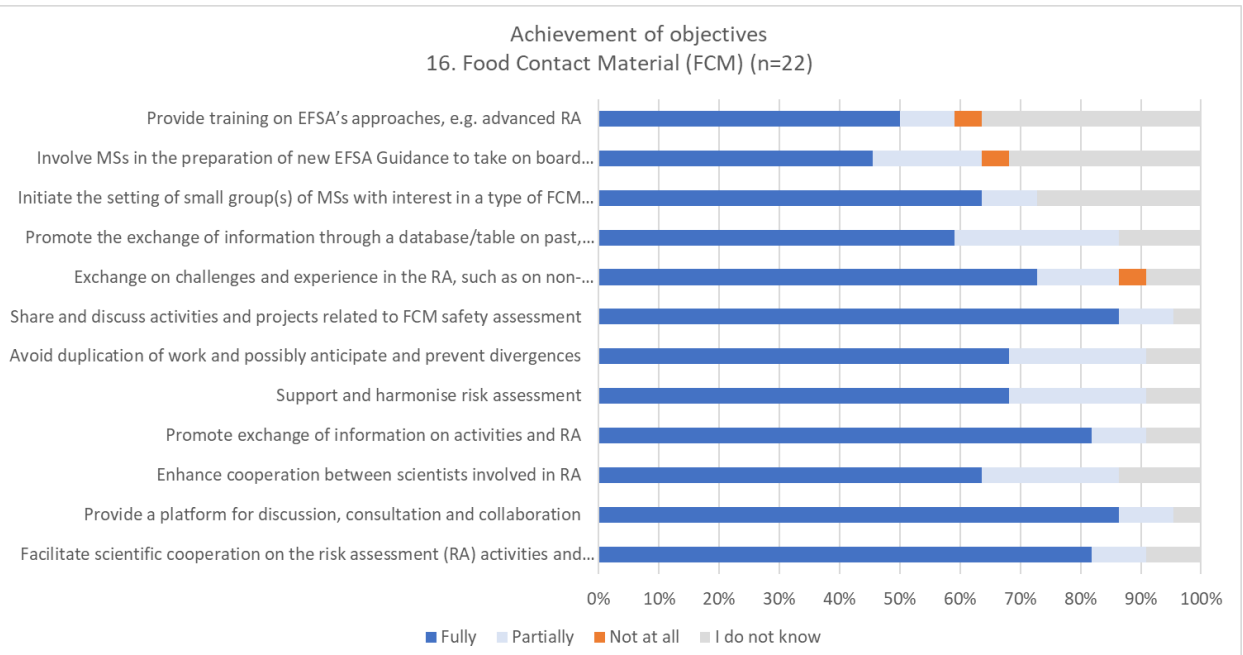

Achievement of objectives
7. Risk Assessment in Plant Health (PLH RA) (n=18)
Identify new and emerging risks for EU plant health
Share and discuss priorities for plant health RA at national/EU level
Share and discuss on-going plant health RA activities
Identify common themes and areas for mutual collaboration
Identify and map expertise in specific areas and on specific issues
Enhance cooperation in data collection and sharing for plant health RA
Discuss issues of availability and quality of data required for plant...
Analyse RA needs and planning ahead to support the new EU Plant...
Focus attention on, and streamline, common research needs that...
Discuss new scientific developments in plant health RA and their...
Discuss ongoing issues of plant health RA such as new guidance...
Share best practices between EFSA and the MSs
Enhance the understanding of current plant health RA priorities that...
Anticipate emerging risks in the EU
Share data and methodologies
Strengthen scientific cooperation on plant health issues in the EU
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully
Partially
Not at all
I do not know

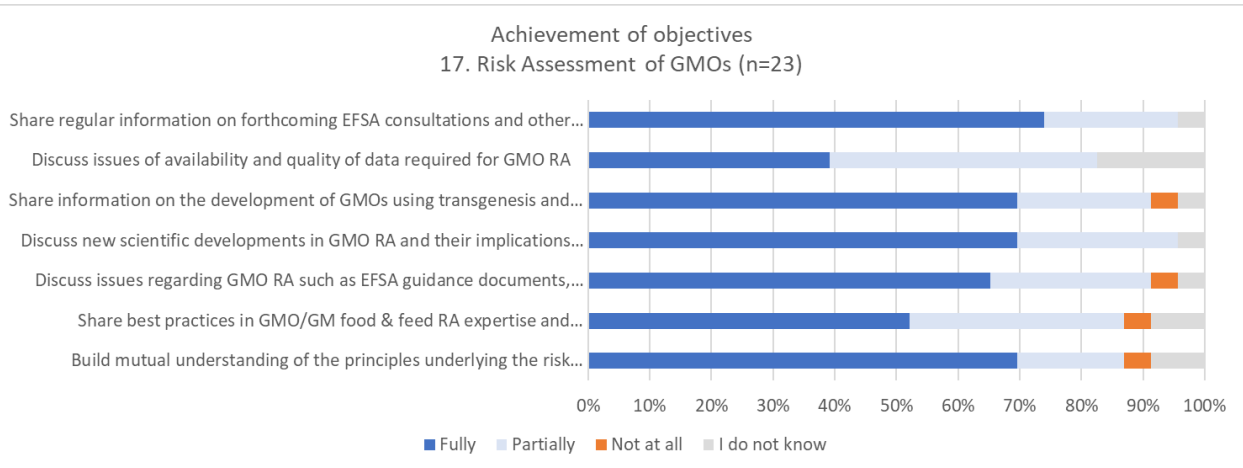

Achievement of objectives
8. Plant Pest Surveillance (PPS) (n=23)
Harmonise plant health surveys performed across MSs, to allow for...
Share MS experience in the implementation of pest surveys, to improve...
Act as a contact point between EFSA and MS authoritiesthat are...
Build capacity on pest surveillance in the MSs by disseminating the...
Ensure the mutual understanding of statistically sound and risk-based...
Fulfil the objectives of MB Decision Article 2
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully Partially Not at all I do not know

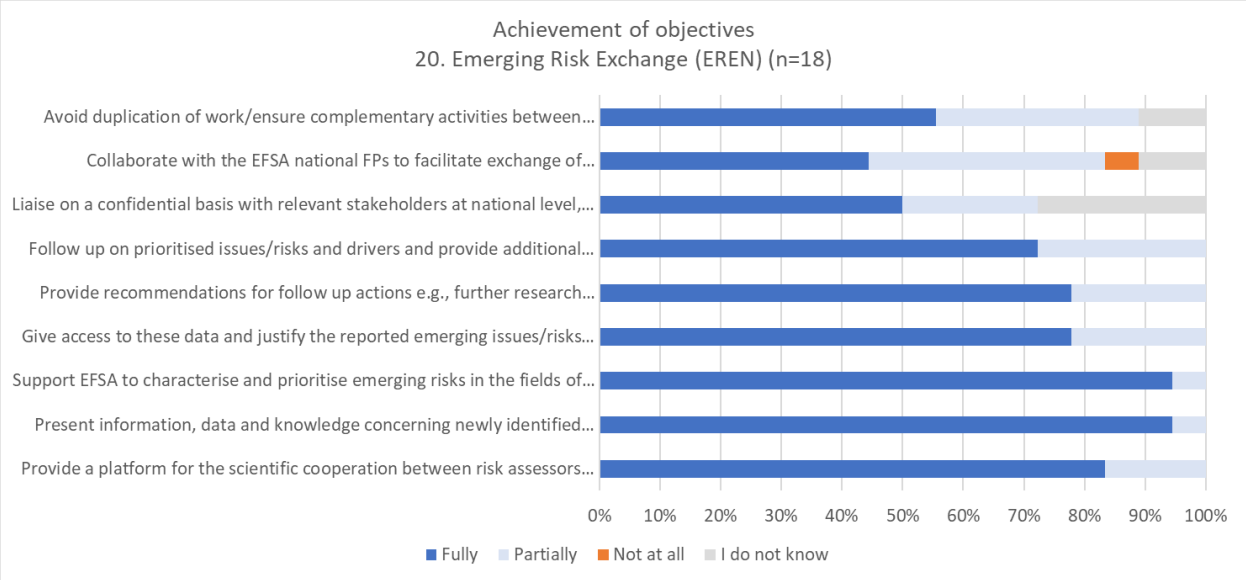

Achievement of objectives
9. Chemical Monitoring Data Collection (n=43)
Share experience in national sampling and/or control programme design,...
Review EFSA outputs related to the network e.g. annual reports, scientific...
Act as the national reference point for the planning and organising of data...
Activities related to data access and publication
Exchange information and analytical results from chemical monitoring...
Participate in the process of enhancing data quality on chemical...
Define the most optimal ways to analyse the data collected
Revise the data model, related catalogues and reporting specifications for...
Issues and opportunities for standardised reporting of occurrence data on...
Provide advice and assistance to EFSA in cooperation with the...
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully Partially Not at all I do not know

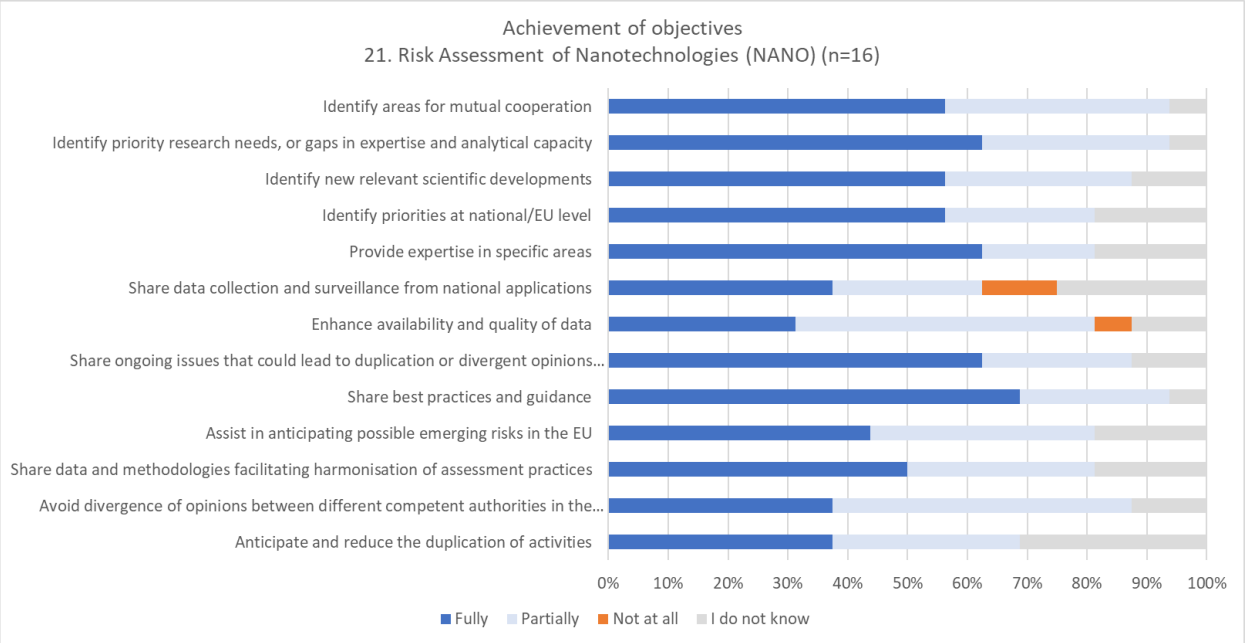

Achievement of objectives
10. Zoonoses Monitoring Data (ZMD) (n=28)
Strengthen international and inter-institutional collaboration and...
Discuss cross-cutting issues with other animal and public health...
Exchange experiences in monitoring and/or surveillance programme...
Review EFSA outputs related to the network e.g. annual scientific...
Collation, validation, analyses, and summary of relevant scientific data...
Coordinate at MS level the call for data related to joint ECDC-EFSA...
Act as national reference points for planning and organising data...
Identify issues and opportunities for development and use of electronic...
Exchange information and data between EFSA and MSs
Nominate the reporting officer (in the case of the main zoonoses...
Review data collected and participating in activities related to data...
Participate in the process of enhancing data quality
Update data models, related catalogues and reporting specifications...
Identify issues and opportunities for harmonised monitoring and...
Identify priorities for the harmonisation of fit-for-purpose monitoring...
Advise and assist EFSA in cooperation with the Commission on all...
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully Partially Not at all I do not know/NA

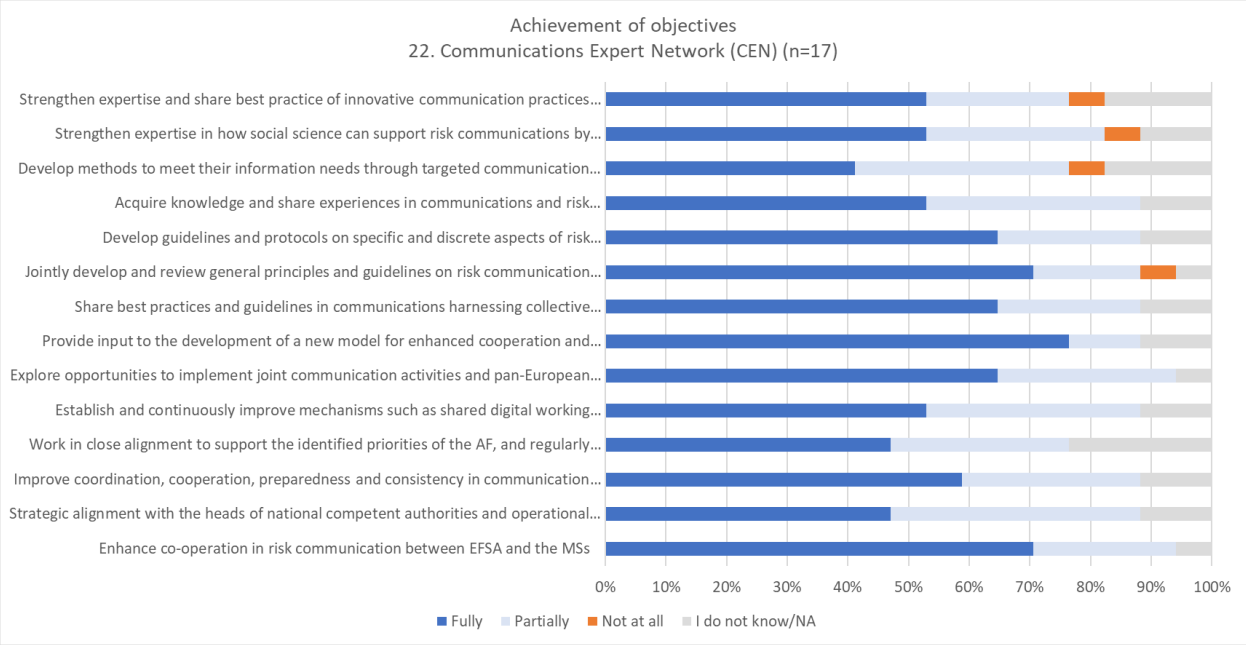

Achievement of objectives
15. Food Consumption Data (FCD) (n=22)
Act as a contact point between EFSA and the MSs to coordinate the...
Advise on the integration and use of food composition data with dietary...
Advise and reinforce the reporting and data submission formats proposed...
Review methods and proposing improvements on all issues related to food...
Facilitate EFSA in the collection of high quality, up-to-date and detailed...
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully Partially Not at all I do not know


Achievement of objectives
16. Food Contact Material (FCM) (n=22)
Provide training on EFSA's approaches, e.g. advanced RA
Involve MSs in the preparation of new EFSA Guidance to take on board...
Initiate the setting of small group(s) of MSs with interest in a type of FCM...
Promote the exchange of information through a database/table on past,...
Exchange on challenges and experience in the RA, such as on non-...
Share and discuss activities and projects related to FCM safety assessment
Avoid duplication of work and possibly anticipate and prevent divergences
Support and harmonise risk assessment
Promote exchange of information on activities and RA
Enhance cooperation between scientists involved in RA
Provide a platform for discussion, consultation and collaboration
Facilitate scientific cooperation on the risk assessment (RA) activities and...
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully Partially Not at all I do not know


Achievement of objectives
17. Risk Assessment of GMOs (n=23)
Share regular information on forthcoming EFSA consultations and other...
Discuss issues of availability and quality of data required for GMO RA
Share information on the development of GMOs using transgenesis and...
Discuss new scientific developments in GMO RA and their implications...
Discuss issues regarding GMO RA such as EFSA guidance documents,...
Share best practices in GMO/GM food & feed RA expertise and...
Build mutual understanding of the principles underlying the risk...
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully Partially Not at all I do not know


Achievement of objectives
20. Emerging Risk Exchange (EREN) (n=18)
Avoid duplication of work/ensure complementary activities between...
Collaborate with the EFSA national FPs to facilitate exchange of...
Liaise on a confidential basis with relevant stakeholders at national level,...
Follow up on prioritised issues/risks and drivers and provide additional...
Provide recommendations for follow up actions e.g., further research...
Give access to these data and justify the reported emerging issues/risks...
Support EFSA to characterise and prioritise emerging risks in the fields of...
Present information, data and knowledge concerning newly identified...
Provide a platform for the scientific cooperation between risk assessors...
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully
Partially
Not at all
I do not know

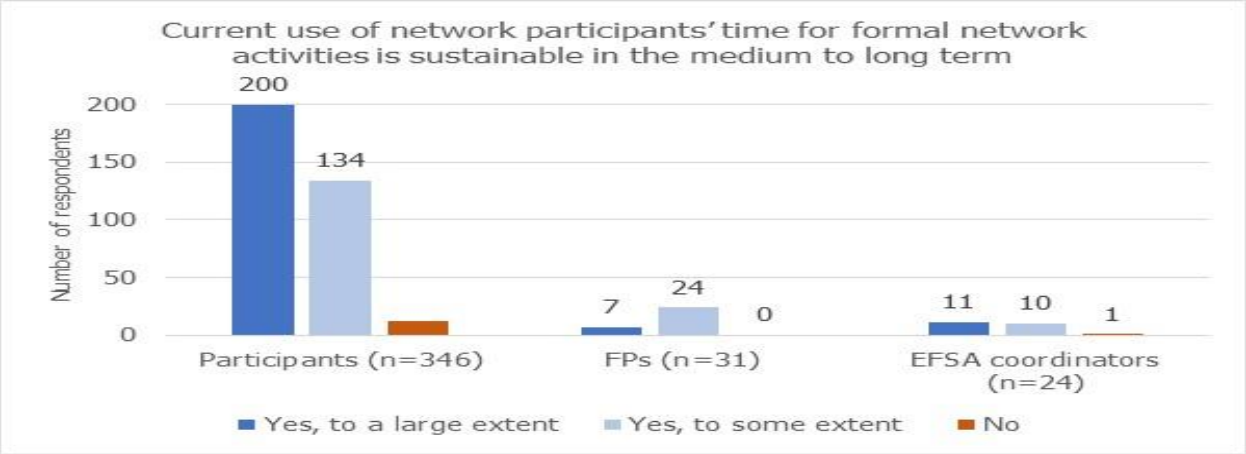

Achievement of objectives
21. Risk Assessment of Nanotechnologies (NANO) (n=16)
Identify areas for mutual cooperation
Identify priority research needs, or gaps in expertise and analytical capacity
Identify new relevant scientific developments
Identify priorities at national/EU level
Provide expertise in specific areas
Share data collection and surveillance from national applications
Enhance availability and quality of data
Share ongoing issues that could lead to duplication or divergent opinions...
Share best practices and guidance
Assist in anticipating possible emerging risks in the EU
Share data and methodologies facilitating harmonisation of assessment practices
Avoid divergence of opinions between different competent authorities in the...
Anticipate and reduce the duplication of activities
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Fully
Partially
Not at all
I do not know



II.1.8 Sustainability

Participants, EFSA coordinators and the FPs were asked whether the current use of network participants' time for formal network/sub-group activities is sustainable in the medium to long-term (e.g. in the next 3-5 years). Almost all participants (97 %) consider the current use of their time for these activities to be sustainable. Only 12 participants did not consider it to be sustainable; six of these were from countries with observer status, and four were from the Chemical Monitoring Data Collection network. All FPs considered the use of participants' time to be sustainable. All but one coordinator considered the use of their time for the network activities to be sustainable.

Q30 (participants)/Q37 (FPs): In your view, is the current use of your [participants'] time for formal network activities sustainable in the medium to long term (e.g. in the next 3-5 years)? Q30 (coordinators): In your view, is the current use of your time as a coordinator for formal network activities sustainable in the medium to long term (e.g. in the next 3-5 years)?



II.2 Interviews

II.2.1 Preliminary interviews

During the inception phase of the study (November to December 2023), five preliminary interviews were held with selected EFSA network coordinators and/or Heads of Unit (HoU) involved in some of the networks/sub-groups, as follows:

1. AHAW network chairs (AH and AW)
2. PSN network/sub-group chairs
3. CSO chief scientist
4. BIOHAW HoU
5. NIF HoU

The aim of these interviews was to gain a better understanding of the operations and performance of the networks/sub-groups, especially for networks with more complex structures and several sub-groups. The feedback from these interviews fed into refining the study methodology as well as the tools used for the data collection via the survey and main phase interviews, i.e. the survey questionnaire and the interview guides.

II.2.2 Main phase interviews

In addition to the preliminary interviews and the survey, further in-depth information on the operation of each network/sub-group during the 2021-2023 period was collected via interviews with each of the network and sub-group coordinators.

In total 22 interviews were carried out, i.e. with each of the coordinators of the 14 networks and the 8 sub-groups. The topic guide for the interviews was based on the refined analytical approach to the EQs and the preliminary analysis that was carried out for each network/sub-group on the basis of desk research.

The interviews took place in parallel to the survey, in January and February 2024, and were always held once the coordinator had submitted their response to the survey. The notes of the interviews were validated by the interviewees, with findings incorporated in the analysis of each network/sub-group.

Annex III: Survey questionnaire and interview guide

III.1 Survey questionnaire

III.1.1 Introduction

This survey takes place in the context of a study carried out for EFSA by S&P Global Commodity Insights in collaboration with Areté on the **Evaluation of EFSA networks**. The networks are set up by EFSA to foster scientific cooperation of scientific organisations in EU Member States (MSs). This includes coordinating activities, facilitating information exchange, developing and implementing joint projects, and sharing expertise and best practices in areas that fall under EFSA's jurisdiction, as specified in EFSA's Founding Regulation, the General Food Law (Regulation (EC) No 178/2002) as amended by the Transparency Regulation (EU) No 1381/2019.

The study seeks to analyse the activities of each scientific network (and its sub-group(s), when applicable) **during the 2021 to 2023 period** to assess their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, adequacy, and impact in improving the work of EFSA. It furthermore aims to check the alignment with the overarching objectives shared across all networks, as defined in Article 2 of the Decision of the EFSA Management Board (MB), and to analyse whether the specific goals of each network specified in their respective ToRs have been achieved.

The evaluation is the **first review of the networks' operation**, and forms part of a requirement set out in Article 4.4 of the MB Decision: *"EFSA shall evaluate the work of each network at least every three years beginning in 2021 on the basis of the criteria outlined in Paragraph 1 of this Article. EFSA shall report the outcome of such evaluations of networks to the Management Board and the Advisory Forum. Based on the evaluation reports for each network, the Advisory Forum shall recommend non-binding either the continuation or discontinuation of each network and the Management Board shall decide whether a particular network should be continued or discontinued*." In this context, the outputs of this study will help inform any decisions to be made on the future of the networks.

This survey is addressed to network participants, EFSA staff, officials from the European Commission, other EU agencies, EU Reference Laboratories, international organisations with the role of observers, and Member State Focal Points. The questionnaire covers different aspects for each of those categories of respondents. Overall, the survey contains questions covering:

I. **Respondent's profile**

II. **Network performance (2021-23 period)**

The survey should take up to 30 minutes to complete per network or sub-group; though some extra time may be required for preparing your answers prior to completing the survey online and/or if you are responding to the questions for more than one network/sub-group.

III.1.2 Instructions for completion

- The survey is designed for responding per network/sub-group. Please select the **main network or sub-group** relevant to your role, to complete the survey. If more than one network or sub-group is relevant to your role, please repeat the survey for each network or sub-group (i.e. selecting a different network or sub-group each time). You can complete the survey for as many networks or sub-groups relevant to your role, as you wish. *[This instruction is not applicable to Focal Points]*
- A pdf document is provided to assist the preparation of your answers, but **only answers submitted online can be processed**.
- **Text boxes** are provided in this questionnaire to allow you to write your answers to 'open' questions. Please note that a limit of 200 characters (about 40 words) applies per text box.
- We generally recommend completing the survey online in one session.
- Please do not select the "Submit" button on the "End of survey " page until you are sure you have completed the survey.

Please complete this survey **before 26 January 2024**.

In the case of any queries, please contact: XXX

Uploading of supporting documents

If you have any explanations and/or examples to substantiate your answers, please include this in the comment box that is provided under some questions. To this end, you may also upload supporting documents. A document uploading facility is provided for this purpose at the end of the survey.

You may also send any further comments you may have at XXX

Glossary of key terms used in this *questionnaire*

Network: The scientific networks are set up by EFSA to foster cooperation of scientific organisations in EU Member States (MSs). This includes coordinating activities, facilitating information exchange, developing and implementing joint projects, and sharing expertise and best practices in areas that fall under EFSA's jurisdiction, as specified in Article 22(7) and Article 23(g) of EFSA's Founding Regulation, the General Food Law (GFL: Regulation (EC) No 178/2002) as amended by the Transparency Regulation (EU) No 1381/2019.

Network participants: The experts participating in the networks/sub-groups, coming from organisations that have either "member" or "observer" status. The same wording is used in the survey to refer to the participants themselves, i.e. "***member***" refers to a participant from an organisation that has "member" status and "***observer***" refers to a participant from an organisation that has "observer" status.

III.1.3 Note on the processing of personal data in the context of this survey

Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, is applicable to the present survey. In accordance with Article 15 of the Regulation, the following information is provided:

- The aim of this survey is to collect data for a study conducted for EFSA by S&P Global in collaboration with Areté ('Contractor').
- The outcomes of this survey will be used by EFSA's contractor to carry out research, on behalf of EFSA, on the work of the scientific networks and sub-group(s) of EU Member States operating in the fields within the Authority's mission during the 2020 to 2023 period. The results of this research will feed into EFSA's evaluation of each individual network.
- The data collected and further processed are: the identification details provided in the survey (i.e. name, title, organisation, work email), the answers to survey questions. The online submission of the survey contribution also implies the processing of the sender's IP address exclusively for technical purposes.
- This survey is organised by EFSA's contractor by means of Qualtrics. A secure environment is being used for the collection, storage and processing of the data. For the purposes of the study, the answers to survey questions will be used in an **anonymised** and **aggregate** form; no personal information (i.e. name, title, organisation, work email) will be disclosed during the study. The survey answers collected are kept as long as needed for the purpose of the study and the data will not be used for any other purpose.
- As a survey respondent, you have the right to access your data and to rectify them by sending your request to XXX. If you require any further information on the use of your personal data, you may also contact the contractor's manager for this study (XXX) or EFSA (XXX).
- You have the right to lodge a complaint regarding the processing of your personal data in the context of this survey with the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS complaints form). You may also contact EFSA's data protection officer for clarification or assistance - DataProtectionOfficer@efsa.europa.eu.

III.1.4 Questions

1. Respondent's profile

PQ1: Are you:

a. *A participant of an EFSA scientific network/sub-group, at any point during the 2021-23 period, representing an organisation with member/observer status?*
b. *A member of staff of EFSA?*
c. *A member of staff of the European Commission, other EU agencies, EU Reference Laboratories?*
d. *A member of staff of an international organisation?*
e. *A member of the Focal Point network? → if selected, the respondent is directed to Section C.*

1. Please enter the country that your organisation is located in:
2. Please enter your first name:
3. Please enter your surname:
4. Please enter your email address:
5. Please enter the official name of your organisation, both in English and in the national language:

   Name in English:

   Name in national language:

6. Please enter a link to your organisation's webpage:
7. FOR Network participants: Please select **the main EFSA scientific network and/or sub-group that is relevant to your role** *(i.e. the main network/sub-group for which you are replying to this survey):*

   1. Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW)
   2. AHAW - Echinococcus Multilocularis Subnetwork
   3. AHAW - One Health subgroup
   4. AHAW - National Contact Points established under Art 20 Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009
   5. Scientific Network for Microbiological Risk Assessment (MRA)
   6. Scientific Network on BSE/TSE
   7. Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Plant Health (PLH RA)
   8. Scientific Network on Plant Pest Surveillance
   9. Scientific Network on Chemical Monitoring Data Collection
   10. Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data
   11. Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data - FBO subgroup
   12. Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data - TSE subgroup
   13. Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data - AMR subgroup
   14. Scientific Network on Zoonoses Monitoring Data - WGS subgroup
   15. Scientific Network on Food Consumption Data (FCD)
   16. Scientific Network on Food Contact Material (FCM)
   17. Scientific Network for Risk Assessment of GMOs (Environmental Risk Assessment and Food and Feed)
   18. Pesticide Steering Network (PSN)

19. Pesticide Steering Network – IUCLID subgroup
20. Scientific Network on Emerging Risk Exchange (EREN)
21. Scientific Network on Risk Assessment of Nanotechnologies in Food Feed (NANO)
22. Communications Expert Network (CEN)

8. FOR Network participants: Have you been a **participant (member/observer) of the selected network/sub-group during the 2021-23 period**:

- Yes, member
- Yes, observer (from one of the EU-27 Member States, EFTA countries and pre-accession countries)
- Yes, observer (from the European Commission, other EU agencies, EU Reference Laboratories, international organisations)

9. FOR Network participants: Please select **the years during which you have been a member/observer of the selected network/sub-group** during the 2021-23 period: *(Please select all that apply)*

2023
2022
2021
2020 and earlier years

9.1 If '2020 and earlier years': please specify since when you have been a member of this network/sub-group

At the end of this section, it is possible to download the survey questionnaire tailored the respondent's profile (.pdf version). The file is made available for consultation purposes only.

Please, note that only answers submitted online can be processed.

2. Network performance (2021 – 2023 period)

Questions for network participants

*In the following pages, we are asking you a series of questions about the **performance of the network or sub-group you have selected during the 2021-2023 period**. Please answer the questions bearing in mind the experience you have from the selected network/sub-group for responding to this survey.*

10. What is the nature of engagement you have had with other network participants, within the formal network meetings and other activities (such as training and conferences)? *(please indicate level of engagement)* JC.4

Other activities: please specify

	A lot	**A little**	**Not at all**	***Not applicable***
Collaboration/coordination in data collection				
Exchange of data/information				
Exchange of expertise and best practices				
Participation in exercises				
Participation in joint projects				
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)				
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)				
Other forms of collaboration/activities (*please specify*)				

11. How frequently have you engaged with other network participants, within the formal network meetings and other activities (such as training and conferences)? JC.4

- ☐ Frequently (at least once per month)
- ☐ Rather frequently (at least once per trimester)
- ☐ Occasionally (once or twice per year)
- ☐ Very occasionally (once every couple of years, or less)
- ☐ Never

12. What is the nature of engagement you have had with other network participants, outside the formal network meetings and other activities? *(please select all that apply and indicate level of engagement)* JC.5

Other activities: please specify

	A lot	A little	Not at all	*Not applicable*
Collaboration/coordination in data collection				
Exchange of data/information				
Exchange of expertise and best practices				
Participation in exercises				
Participation in joint projects				
Other forms of collaboration/activities (*please specify*)				

13. How frequently have you engaged with other network participants, outside the formal network meetings and other activities? JC.5

- ☐ Frequently (at least once per month)
- ☐ Rather frequently (at least once per trimester)
- ☐ Occasionally (once or twice per year)
- ☐ Very occasionally (once every couple of years, or less)
- ☐ Never

14. To what extent do you consider **physical meetings** to be more or less effective than online meetings for enhancing networking between members, whether within or outside formal network activities? *(Please select the response)* JC.4/JC.5

	Physical meetings are more effective	There is no difference between physical and online	Online meetings are more effective	*Do not know*
Formal activities, within the network/sub-group				
Other activities, outside the formal network/sub-group activities				

15. In your view, how **effective** has the network/sub-group been in enabling scientific knowledge exchange and collaboration between Member States and EFSA? *Please score for each of the following forms of collaboration listed below.* JC.6/JC.12

	Very effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not effective	*Do not know/ Not applicable*
Collaboration/coordination in data collection					
Exchange of data/information					

Exchange of expertise and best practices					
Participation in exercises					
Participation in joint projects					
Other forms of collaboration (*please specify*)					

Other forms of collaboration: please specify

16. ONLY FOR MS PARTICIPANTS (NOT EFSA/EC/other institutions): To what extent is there a system available within your country that allows you to: (JC.6)

	This takes place via the Focal Points (FPs)	**This takes place via another system (not the FPs)**	**There is no system in place (it happens only on ad hoc basis)**	***Do not know/ Not applicable***
Collect inputs from relevant national experts for the various network**/sub-group** activities				
Disseminate information obtained from the various network/sub-group activities to relevant national experts				

17. To what extent is the network/sub-group **useful** for you as a participant from a **networking** point of view? *Please score the network/sub-group's networking impact* for you as a participant (JC.7)

- ☐ Very useful
- ☐ Useful
- ☐ Somewhat useful
- ☐ Not all useful
- ☐ Do not know/not applicable

18. Do similar networking opportunities exist through similar structures set up at EU level? *If yes, please explain in what other EU context similar networking opportunities may also exist* (JC.7/J.10)

- ☐ Yes, to a large extent
- ☐ Yes, to some extent
- ☐ No

18.1 Please identify example/s (if any) of networking opportunities that may exist elsewhere.

19. Can you think of any **notable example/s**, where the network/sub-group: *(please select all that apply)* JC.7/JC.8

- ☐ Has played an important and irreplaceable role in collaboration between Member States and EFSA?
- ☐ Has not followed up suggestions for improvements in collaboration between Member States and EFSA?
- ☐ No, I can't think of any notable examples

19.1 If yes: Please identify example/s (if any) and describe briefly how networks/sub-groups have (in the identified example/s) played an important and irreplaceable role in collaboration and/or has not followed up suggestions for improvements in collaboration.

20. To what extent is there currently collaboration between this network/sub-group and the following: (JC.9)

	A lot	**A little**	**Not at all**	***Not applicable***
Collaboration with other EFSA networks/sub-groups				
Collaboration with networks of other EU agencies				
Collaboration with EFSA panels				

21. In your view, to what extent are there opportunities for future collaboration/synergies between this network/sub-group and the following: (JC.9)

	A lot	**A little**	**Not at all**	***Not applicable***
Collaboration/synergies with other EFSA networks/sub-groups				
Collaboration/synergies with networks of other EU agencies				
Collaboration/synergies with EFSA panels				

22. FOR EACH NETWORK/SUB-GROUP, SPECIFIC QUESTION ON **NETWORK OBJECTIVES AS STATED IN THEIR TORS** OBJECTIVES (JC13): see Q22 per network

23. Thinking about the network objectives that you identified as 'fulfilled' in the previous question (Q22), where has the network/sub-group been **particularly successful** during the 2021-23 period? *Please indicate below briefly up to three specific examples of the main successes of the network/sub-group (in your view).* (JC.14)

Please identify example/s (if any) and describe briefly how the network/sub-group has been successful. *Example 1:*
Please identify example/s (if any) and describe briefly how the network/sub-group has been successful. *Example 2:*
Please identify example/s (if any) and describe briefly how the network/sub-group has been successful.

24. Thinking about the network objectives that you identified as 'not fulfilled' in the previous question (Q22), where has the network/sub-group **not** been **successful** during the 2021-23 period? *Please indicate below briefly up to three specific examples of the main shortcomings of the network/sub-group (in your view).* (JC.14)

Please identify example/s (if any) and describe briefly how the network/sub-group has not been successful. *Example 1:*
Please identify example/s (if any) and describe briefly how the network/sub-group has not been successful. *Example 2:*
Please identify example/s (if any) and describe briefly how the network/sub-group has not been successful.

25. In your view, to what extent have the topics covered by the network/sub-group been **relevant** to health/safety risks and scientific developments in their remit over the 2021-23 period? (JC.17)

- ☐ Very relevant
- ☐ Relevant
- ☐ Somewhat relevant
- ☐ Not relevant
- ☐ Do not know/not applicable

26. If somewhat relevant/not relevant: What are the **reasons** why the topics covered by the network/sub-group are not as relevant? *(please select all that apply)* (JC.17)

- ☐ The network/sub-group acts on specific topics mandated to EFSA by the European Commission
- ☐ There have been many health/safety risks over the 2021-23 period in the scientific area covered by the network/sub-group
- ☐ The knowledge-base in the scientific area covered by the network/sub-group has developed very rapidly
- ☐ Other reasons (*please specify*)

Other reasons: please specify

27. In your view, to what extent is the network/sub-group **able to respond promptly** to emerging health/safety challenges and crises? (JC.19)

- ☐ Very able
- ☐ Able
- ☐ Somewhat able
- ☐ Not able
- ☐ Do not know/not applicable

28. If somewhat able/not able: What are the **reasons** why the network/sub-group has not been able to respond promptly to emerging health/safety challenges and crises? *(please select all that apply)* (JC.19)

- ☐ The network/sub-group acts on specific topics mandated to EFSA by the European Commission
- ☐ There are many emerging health/safety challenges and crises in the scientific area covered by the network/sub-group
- ☐ The knowledge-base in the scientific area covered by the network/sub-group has developed very rapidly
- ☐ Other reasons (*please specify*)

Other reasons: please specify

29. Can you think of any **notable example/s**, where the network/sub-group has not covered current or emerging health/safety risks and challenges in its remit? JC.18/JC.20

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

29.1 If yes: Please identify example/s (if any) and describe briefly how networks/sub-groups have (in the identified example/s) not covered current or emerging health / safety risks and challenges in its remit.

30. In your view, is the current use of your time for formal network activities sustainable in the medium to long term (e.g. in the next 3-5 years)? (JC.22)

- ☐ Yes, to a large extent
- ☐ Yes, to some extent
- ☐ No

Q22: For network participants - per network (JC.13)

The following sections provide Q22 adapted for each network and sub-group.

In your view, to what extent has the **AHAW network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled*.

Objectives			**Fully**	**Partially**	**Not at all**	***I do not know***
Main objectives	To install and enhance **cooperation** between MSs and EFSA					
	To build a **mutual understanding of risk assessment (RA) principles** of animal health and welfare (AHAW) in a transparent way					
	To promote the **harmonisation of RA practices and methodologies**, including harmonisation of data collection					
	To **reduce duplication of activities** by identifying and sharing current priorities					
Specific objectives	Facilitate **harmonisation** of AHAW **RA practices and methodologies**	Sharing best practices for AHAW RA between EFSA and MSs				
		Discussing new scientific developments for AHAW RA and their implications on RA practices				
		Discussing ongoing issues of AHAW RA, e.g. new guidance documents or new opinions adopted				
		Focusing attention on, and the streamlining of, common research and data needs that support progress in AHAW RA				
	Achieve **synergies** in	Identifying common themes and areas for mutual collaboration				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
	AHAW **RA activities**	between EFSA and MSs, as well as between MSs				
		Sharing and discussing ongoing AHAW RA activities to avoid duplication				
		Sharing and discussing priorities for AHAW RA at national and EU level				
		Sharing of information related to AHAW RA at national/EU level and AHAW Network through a common digital exchange platform (e.g. Teams and/or SharePoint)				
		Identifying emerging risks when addressing current issues in animal health				
	Improve the **collaboration** between animal health and public health on **non-foodborne** **zoonotic** and potential zoonotic issues	Identifying common themes and areas for mutual collaboration				
		Sharing and discussing on-going issues between the networks of EFSA and the ECDC				
		Sharing and discussing priorities for joint risk assessments at national and EU level				
		Sharing of information and data through a common digital exchange platform (SharePoint); EFSA may entrust to the network certain tasks, in particular preparatory work for Scientific Opinions, scientific and technical assistance, and the collection of data				

In your view, to what extent has the **BSE-TSE network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives		**Fully**	**Partially**	**Not at all**	***I do not know***
Main objectives	To improve **dialogue and exchange of information** among participants				
	To build **mutual understanding** of risk assessment (RA) principles				
	To **enhance knowledge** on **and confidence** in the scientific assessments carried out in the EU				
	To provide increased **transparency** in the current process among MSs and EFSA				
	To raise the **harmonisation** level of the risk assessments developed in the EU				
Specific objectives	Identify common themes/areas for **mutual collaboration**				
	Identify and **avoid duplication of efforts**				
	Identify **experts** in specific areas and on special issues				
	Share data availability and quality				
	Strengthen communication and collaboration between EFSA and MSs				
	Strengthen communication and cooperation among risk assessors, risk managers and stakeholders (including national AF and FP members)				
	Exchange information between EFSA, Member States and other stakeholders				
	Streamline common research needs				
	Identify potential emerging risks				

In your view, to what extent has the **MRA network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To improve **dialogue and exchange of information** among participants				
	To build **mutual understanding** of risk assessment (RA) principles				
	To **enhance knowledge** on and confidence in the scientific assessments carried out in the EU				
	To provide increased **transparency** in the current process among MSs and EFSA				
	To raise the **harmonisation** level of RAs in the EU				
Specific objectives	Identify common themes/areas **for mutual collaboration**				
	Identify and **avoid duplication of efforts**;				
	Identify experts in specific areas and on special issues				
	Share data availability and quality				
	Strengthen communication and collaboration between EFSA and the EU Member States				
	Strengthen communication and cooperation among risk assessors, risk managers and stakeholders (including national AF and FP members)				
	Exchange information between EFSA, MSs and other stakeholders				
	Streamline common research needs				
	Identify potential emerging risks				

In your view, to what extent has the **EREN network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To provide a **platform for the scientific cooperation** between risk assessors of the MSs, EFSA, EC, and observers from other interested parties to assess newly identified emerging issues/risks and to enhance emerging risk identification methodologies				
Specific objectives	**Present information, data and knowledge** concerning newly identified emerging issues/risks or drivers identified through their respective scanning systems				
	Support EFSA to **characterise and prioritise emerging risks** in the fields of its mission				
	Give access to these data and justify the reported emerging issues/risks based on scientific evidence (based on standard template developed by EFSA)				
	Provide recommendations for follow up actions e.g., further research needs and possible joint projects among EREN members				
	Follow up on prioritised issues/risks and drivers and provide additional data on issues/risks discussed previously by EREN				
	Liaise on a confidential basis with relevant stakeholders **at national level,** to collect additional evidence on the emerging issues identified				
	Collaborate with the EFSA national FPs to facilitate exchange of information on emerging issues among MSs and to keep the link with the EFSA AF				
	Avoid duplication of work/ensure complementary activities between MSs, EFSA, and other existing EU systems involved in emerging risk identification process				
	Analyse possible emerging issues brought forward by EFSA satellite activities in specific areas of interest for EFSA (e.g. emerging chemicals, circular economy, new food/feed sources and production				

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
	techniques, food frauds and food safety, food supplements)				
	Provide advice on and share experiences on emerging risk identification methodologies and systems used at national level to identify emerging issues and risks				

In your view, to what extent has the **NANO network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To anticipate and **reduce the duplication** of activities					
	To **avoid divergence of opinions** between different competent authorities in the area of nano science and nanotechnologies					
	To **share data and methodologies** facilitating harmonisation of assessment practices					
	To **assist** in anticipating possible emerging risks in the EU					
Specific objectives	**Facilitate harmonisation** of methodologies	Sharing best practices and guidance				
		Sharing ongoing issues that could lead to duplication or divergent opinions between EU risk assessment bodies				
	Exchange information and data between EFSA and MS	Enhancing availability and quality of data				
		Sharing data collection and surveillance from national applications				
	Provide expertise in specific areas					

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
	Achieve synergies in activities	Identifying priorities at national/EU level				
		Identifying new relevant scientific developments				
		Identifying priority research needs, or gaps in expertise and analytical capacity				
		Identifying areas for mutual cooperation				

In your view, to what extent has the **PLH network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To strengthen **scientific cooperation** on plant health issues in the EU				
	To **share data and methodologies**				
	To **anticipate emerging risks** in the EU				
	To **enhance** the understanding of current plant health risk assessment (RA) priorities that may need to be addressed through EFSA				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Specific objectives	**Facilitate harmonisation of RA practices** and **methodologies** in plant health	Sharing best practices between EFSA and the MSs				
		Discussing ongoing issues of plant health RA such as new guidance developed or new opinions adopted				
		Discussing new scientific developments in plant health RA and their implications on RA practice				
		Focusing attention on and streamlining common research needs that support progress in plant health RA				
		Analysing RA needs and planning ahead to support the new EU Plant Health Law				
	Enhance exchange of information and **data** between EFSA and MSs	Discussing issues of availability and quality of data required for plant health RA purposes				
		Enhancing cooperation in data collection and sharing for plant health RA				
		Identifying and mapping expertise in specific areas and on specific issues				
	Achieve synergies in plant health RA activities	Identifying common themes and areas for mutual collaboration				
		Sharing and discussing on-going plant health RA activities				
		Sharing and discussing priorities for plant health RA at national/EU level				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		Identifying new and emerging risks for EU plant health				

In your view, to what extent has the **Plant Pest Surveillance network** fulfilled its objectives since its establishment late in 2022? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To fulfil the objectives of **MB Decision Article 2**				
Specific objectives	Ensure the **mutual understanding of statistically sound and risk-based surveys** in plant health, **sharing the developments of survey methodologies**, keeping the participants abreast of the **most recent and relevant progress** in the field of pest monitoring and surveillance				
	Build capacity on pest surveillance in the MSs by **disseminating the knowledge, expertise and best practice** of using the EFSA pest survey toolkit. In particular by **training the key players in charge of planning and executing surveys of quarantine pests in the MSs**, for initiating, preparing, designing, implementing and reporting of surveys of EU quarantine pests				
	Act as a **contact point between EFSA and MS authorities** that are competent in the field of planning and execution of specific surveys for EU quarantine pests				
	Share MS experience in the implementation of pest surveys, to improve current practices				
	Harmonise Plant Health surveys performed across MSs, to allow for comparison of pest surveys in time and space				

In your view, to what extent has the **CEN network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives			**Fully**	**Partially**	**Not at all**	***I do not know***
Main objectives	**To enhance co-operation in risk communication** between EFSA and the MSs					
Specific objectives	**Seamless cooperation** and **coordinated communication** in the EU	Strategic alignment with the heads of national competent authorities and operational cooperation with the respective heads of communication on issues relating to EU food safety				
		Improved coordination, cooperation, preparedness and consistency in communication between EFSA and Member States on all areas within EFSA's remit; in particular, in case of diverging views food outbreaks, and emerging risks				
		Working in close alignment to support the identified priorities of the AF, and regularly update the AF regarding issues, joint activities and identified areas for development in risk communications.				
		Establishing and continuously improving mechanisms such as shared digital working spaces, shared calendars and regular teleconferences between EFSA and MSs on relevant issues to facilitate coordinated communication and				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		coherence in information and messaging on EU food safety issues and emerging risks				
		Exploring opportunities to implement joint communication activities – including pan-European campaigns - with a focus on issues having the greatest public health impact and of priority to EFSA and the MSs				
		Providing input to the development of a new model for enhanced cooperation and coordination of communication across the EU in line with the aims of the Transparency Regulation and the subsequent General Plan for Risk Communication				
	Shared Best Practice	Sharing best practices and guidelines in communications harnessing collective expertise and promoting harmonised ways of working				
		Jointly developing and reviewing general principles and guidelines on risk communication and crisis communication				
		Developing guidelines and protocols on specific and discrete aspects of risk communication through ad hoc projects to address identified				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		information needs for target audiences and stakeholders (i.e., communicating on uncertainty, risk versus hazard etc.)				
	Skills and knowledge developed across MSs to facilitate and optimise Targeted Risk Communication	Acquiring knowledge and sharing experiences in communications and risk communications to understand better the risk perceptions of target audience				
		Developing methods to meet their information needs through targeted communication methodologies and tools				
		Strengthening expertise in how social science can support risk communications by sharing information and knowledge on public perception on food and feed safety, especially regarding controversial or sensitive topics (e.g., genetically modified organisms, bisphenol A, pesticides) or areas of priority for the EU (e.g., Antimicrobial Resistance)				
		Strengthening expertise and share best practice of innovative communication practices and tools – e.g., use of social media platforms and multi-media products				

In your view, to what extent has the **GMO network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To build **mutual understanding** of the principles underlying the risk assessment (RA) of GMOs between MSs and EFSA					
Specific objectives	**Enhance RA practices and methodologies**, and the **exchange of information** between EFSA and MSs	Sharing best practices in GMO/GM food & feed RA expertise and experiences				
		Discussing issues regarding GMO RA such as EFSA guidance documents, adopted EFSA opinions and RA of specific GMOs or GM food & feed				
		Discussing new scientific developments in GMO RA and their implications on RA practices, such as the development of GMOs with new genomic techniques				
		Sharing information on the development of GMOs using transgenesis and other techniques, and their consequences for RA				
		Discussing issues of availability and quality of data required for GMO RA				
		Sharing regular information on forthcoming EFSA consultations and other scientific cooperation activities in the field of GMO RA				

In your view, to what extent has the **Zoonoses monitoring data network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To **advise and assist EFSA** in cooperation with the Commission on all scientific and practical matters related to the collection, reporting and analysis of data on monitoring of zoonoses, zoonotic agents, microbiological contaminants and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in food, feed and animals, on foodborne outbreaks as well as of data on TSE in bovine animals, small ruminants and other species in the EU					
Specific objectives	**Data**	**Identifying priorities** for the harmonisation of fit-for-purpose monitoring approaches and for the collection of data on zoonoses, foodborne outbreaks, AMR and TSE of EU and international significance covered by the main network and the four specific subgroups				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for harmonised monitoring and reporting for MSs and other reporting countries				
		Updating data models, related catalogues and reporting specifications for MSs and other reporting countries, in particular for new data reporting requirements due to changes in the legislation				
		Participating in the process of **enhancing data quality**				
		Reviewing data collected and participating in activities related to data access and publication				
		Nominating the reporting officer (in the case of the main zoonoses network) and of the data providers (in the case of the TSE and WGS subgroups)				
		Exchanging information and data between EFSA and MSs.				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for development				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		and use of electronic reporting, analysis and visualisation tools and databases for the data collection				
		Acting as national reference points for planning and organising data collection activities and for the exchange of information at national level				
		Coordinating at MS level the call for data related to joint ECDC-EFSA assessments on foodborne events				
	Science	**Collation, validation, analyses, and summary** of **relevant scientific data** in its fields of competence				
		Reviewing EFSA outputs related to the network e.g. annual scientific reports, scientific and technical reports, guidance documents, reporting manuals and online reports				
		Exchanging experiences in monitoring and/or surveillance programme design and in laboratory methods				
		Discussing cross-cutting issues with other animal and public health networks of EFSA, EU Agencies (e.g. ECDC) and the relevant EU Reference Laboratories (EURL)				
		Strengthening international and inter-institutional collaboration and transdisciplinary knowledge transfer in the area of One Health Zoonoses data integration and interpretation				

In your view, to what extent has the **FCM network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To **facilitate scientific cooperation** on the risk assessment (RA) activities and approaches of mutual interest to the MSs, Norway and Iceland, Switzerland and EFSA					
Specific objectives	**Specifics**	Providing a platform for discussion, consultation and collaboration				
		Enhancing cooperation between scientists involved in RA				
		Promoting exchange of information on activities and RA				
		Supporting and harmonising risk assessment				
		Avoiding duplication of work and possibly anticipating and preventing divergences				
	Areas for cooperation	Sharing and discussing on activities and projects related to FCM safety assessment				
		Exchanging on challenges and experience in the RA, such as on non-intentionally added substances (NIAS)				
		Promoting the exchange of information through a database/table on past, current and future projects related to safety assessment of (substances used to manufacture) FCMs				
		Initiating, as far as needed, the setting of small group(s) of MSs with interest in a type of FCM (e.g. coatings, paper and boards) to share expertise, build common projects, contribute to and harmonise safety				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		assessment of a FCM type or substances of interest				
		Involving MSs in the preparation of new EFSA Guidance to take on board their expertise				
		Providing training on EFSA's approaches, e.g. advanced RA				

In your view, to what extent has the **ChemMonDC network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To provide **advice and assistance** to EFSA in cooperation with the Commission on all scientific and practical matters related to the collection, analysis and reporting of data on the results of chemical monitoring in food and feed where EFSA compiles the data and assesses the results of monitoring programmes conducted by the MSs and other reporting countries				
Specific objectives	**Issues and opportunities** for standardised reporting of occurrence data on chemical contaminants, residues and other regulated substances in food and feed				
	Revise the data model, related catalogues and reporting specifications for Member States and other reporting countries				
	Define the most optimal ways to analyse the data collected				
	Participate in the process of enhancing data quality on chemical substances in food and feed for the purpose of intake/exposure and compliance assessments				
	Exchange information and **analytical results** from chemical monitoring between				

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
	reporting countries and EFSA, and between the reporting countries				
	Activities related to **data access and publication**				
	Act as the **national reference point** for the planning and organising of data collections for chemical substances in food and feed				
	Review EFSA outputs related to the network e.g. annual reports, scientific and/or technical reports, guidance documents, reporting manuals and online reports				
	Share experience in national sampling and/or control programme design, laboratory methods, compliance assessment and follow-up actions				

In your view, to what extent has the **PSN network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled*. (JC.13)

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To **improve dialogue** among participants				
	To **build mutual understanding** of risk assessment (RA) principles				
	To **enhance knowledge** on and confidence in the scientific assessments carried out in the EU				
	To provide increased **transparency** in the current process among Member States and EFSA				
	To raise the **harmonisation** level of the RAs developed in the EU				
Specific objectives	**Plan, monitor, develop and improve** the RA and peer review process				
	Integrate the RA and MRL setting processes for coordinating and achieving				

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
	efficiency in the implementation of both regulatory frameworks				
	Coordinate with the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)				
	Give advice on prioritisation and risk assessors needs in the development and the updating of RA guidance documents				
	Ensure **the cooperation** and governance for IUCLID for pesticides				

In your view, to what extent has the **FCD network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled*. (JC.13)

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To facilitate EFSA in the **collection of high quality, up-to-date and detailed national food consumption data**, as well as the **collation of this information** into a pan-European food consumption database hosted by EFSA					
Specific objectives	To **provide a forum for exchange** of views between experts on methodologies for the collection and collation of food consumption and related data	Reviewing methods and proposing improvements on all issues related to food consumption data				
		Advising and reinforcing the reporting and data submission formats proposed by EFSA for the collection of harmonised food consumption data to maintain their suitability for purpose				
		Advising on the integration and use of food composition data with dietary information for the assessment of nutrient intake				
		Acting as a contact point between EFSA and the MSs to coordinate the collection of and accessibility to high quality, up-to-date and harmonised food consumption information				

In your view, to what extent has the **National Contact Points sub-group of the AHAW network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.

Objectives			**Fully**	**Partially**	**Not at all**	**I do not know**
Main objectives	To install and enhance **cooperation** between MSs and EFSA					
	To build a **mutual understanding of risk assessment (RA) principles** of animal health and welfare (AHAW) in a transparent way					
	To promote the **harmonisation of RA practices and methodologies**, including harmonisation of data collection					
	To **reduce duplication of activities** by identifying and sharing current priorities					
Specific objectives	Facilitate **harmonisation** of AHAW **RA practices and methodologies**	Sharing best practices for AHAW RA between EFSA and MSs				
		Discussing new scientific developments for AHAW RA and their implications on RA practices				
		Discussing ongoing issues of AHAW RA, e.g. new guidance documents or new opinions adopted				
		Focusing attention on, and the streamlining of, common research and data needs that support progress in AHAW RA				
	Achieve **synergies** in AHAW **RA activities**	Identifying common themes and areas for mutual collaboration between EFSA and MSs, as well as between MSs				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	I do not know
		Sharing and discussing ongoing AHAW RA activities to avoid duplication				
		Sharing and discussing priorities for AHAW RA at national and EU level				
		Sharing of information related to AHAW RA at national/EU level and AHAW Network through a common digital exchange platform (e.g. Teams and/or SharePoint)				

In your view, to what extent has the **Echinococcus multilocularis sub-group of the AHAW network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	I don't know
Main objectives	To install and enhance cooperation between MSs and EFSA					
	To build a mutual understanding of risk assessment (RA) principles of animal health and welfare (AHAW) in a transparent way					
	To promote the harmonisation of RA practices and methodologies, including harmonisation of data collection					
	To reduce duplication of activities by identifying and sharing current priorities					
Specific objectives	Facilitate harmonisation of AHAW RA practices and methodologies	Sharing best practices for AHAW RA between EFSA and MSs				
		Discussing new scientific developments for AHAW RA and				

		their implications on RA practices				
		Focusing attention on, and the streamlining of, common research and data needs that support progress in AHAW RA				
	Achieve synergies in AHAW RA activities	Sharing and discussing ongoing AHAW RA activities to avoid duplication				
	Improve the collaboration between animal health and public health on non-foodborne zoonotic and potential zoonotic issues	Identifying common themes and areas for mutual collaboration				
		Sharing of information and data through a common digital exchange platform (SharePoint); EFSA may entrust to the network certain tasks, in particular preparatory work for Scientific Opinions, scientific and technical assistance, and the collection of data				

In your view, to what extent has the **One Health sub-group of the AHAW network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.

Objectives			**Fully**	**Partially**	**Not at all**	***I do not know***
Main objectives	To install and enhance cooperation between MSs and EFSA					
Specific objectives	**Improve the collaboration between animal health and public health**	Identifying common themes and areas for mutual collaboration				
		Sharing and discussing on-going issues between the networks of EFSA and the ECDC				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
	on non-foodborne **zoonotic and potential zoonotic issues**	Sharing and discussing priorities for joint risk assessments at national and EU level				

In your view, to what extent has the **IUCLID sub-group of PSN** fulfilled its objectives since its establishment in late 2022? *Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.* (JC.13)

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To ensure the cooperation and governance for IUCLID for pesticides				
Specific objectives	Identify issues for IUCLID backlog or IUCLID project work				
	Provide input to IUCLID for Pesticides configuration, filtering rules, validation rules and report templates (aligning where possible with Biocides), contributing to the further development of features and tools which could automate pesticide dossier processing				
	Consider specific requirements for PPP dossiers				
	Participate in testing IUCLID releases				
	Channel all requests for changes coming from pesticides submissions to the OECD IUCLID User Group Expert Panel who is the body deciding on the IUCLID changes to be implemented				
	Channel all requests for changes and proposal for improvements before the relevant yearly release of IUCLID				
	Based on practical experiences using IUCLID, provide input to further refine the EFSA helpdesk support, IUCLID training materials and IUCLID implementation				
	Act as point of reference for all IUCLID related issues and proactively share the				

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
	information within the organisations of their country or organisation				
	Share experience on the "on the job practice" to contribute to the further development of common working procedures				

In your view, to what extent has the **Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) sub-group of the Zoonoses monitoring data network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To **advise and assist EFSA** in cooperation with the Commission on all scientific and practical matters related to the collection, reporting and analysis of data on monitoring of zoonoses, zoonotic agents, microbiological contaminants and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in food, feed and animals, on foodborne outbreaks as well as of data on TSE in bovine animals, small ruminants and other species in the EU					
Specific objectives	**Data**	**Identifying priorities** for the harmonisation of fit-for-purpose monitoring approaches and for the collection of data on zoonoses, foodborne outbreaks, AMR and TSE of EU and international significance covered by the main network and the four specific subgroups				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for harmonised monitoring and reporting for MSs and other reporting countries				
		Updating data models, related catalogues and reporting specifications for MSs and other reporting countries, in particular for new data reporting				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		requirements due to changes in the legislation				
		Participating in the process of **enhancing data quality**				
		Reviewing data collected and participating in activities related to data access and publication				
		Nominating the reporting officer (in the case of the main zoonoses network) and of the data providers (in the case of the TSE and WGS subgroups)				
		Exchanging information and data between EFSA and MSs.				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for development and use of electronic reporting, analysis and visualisation tools and databases for the data collection				
		Acting as national reference points for planning and organising data collection activities and for the exchange of information at national level				
		Coordinating at MS level the call for data related to joint ECDC-EFSA assessments on foodborne events				
	Science	**Collation, validation, analyses, and summary** of **relevant scientific data** in its fields of competence				
		Reviewing EFSA outputs related to the network e.g. annual scientific reports, scientific and technical reports, guidance documents, reporting manuals and online reports				
		Exchanging experiences in monitoring and/or surveillance programme design and in laboratory methods				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		Discussing cross-cutting issues with other animal and public health networks of EFSA, EU Agencies (e.g. ECDC) and the relevant EU Reference Laboratories (EURL)				
		Strengthening international and inter-institutional collaboration and transdisciplinary knowledge transfer in the area of One Health Zoonoses data integration and interpretation				

In your view, to what extent has the **Foodborne outbreaks (FBO) sub-group of the Zoonoses monitoring data network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To **advise and assist EFSA** in cooperation with the Commission on all scientific and practical matters related to the collection, reporting and analysis of data on monitoring of zoonoses, zoonotic agents, microbiological contaminants and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in food, feed and animals, on foodborne outbreaks as well as of data on TSE in bovine animals, small ruminants and other species in the EU					
Specific objectives	**Data**	**Identifying priorities** for the harmonisation of fit-for-purpose monitoring approaches and for the collection of data on zoonoses, foodborne outbreaks, AMR and TSE of EU and international significance covered by the main network and the four specific subgroups				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		Identifying issues and opportunities for harmonised monitoring and reporting for MSs and other reporting countries				
		Updating data models, related catalogues and reporting specifications for MSs and other reporting countries, in particular for new data reporting requirements due to changes in the legislation				
		Participating in the process of **enhancing data quality**				
		Reviewing data collected and participating in activities related to data access and publication				
		Nominating the reporting officer (in the case of the main zoonoses network) and of the data providers (in the case of the TSE and WGS subgroups)				
		Exchanging information and data between EFSA and MSs.				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for development and use of electronic reporting, analysis and visualisation tools and databases for the data collection				
		Acting as national reference points for planning and organising data collection activities and for the exchange of information at national level				
		Coordinating at MS level the call for data related to joint ECDC-EFSA assessments on foodborne events				
	Science	**Collation, validation, analyses, and summary** of **relevant scientific data** in its fields of competence				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		Reviewing EFSA outputs related to the network e.g. annual scientific reports, scientific and technical reports, guidance documents, reporting manuals and online reports				
		Exchanging experiences in monitoring and/or surveillance programme design and in laboratory methods				
		Discussing cross-cutting issues with other animal and public health networks of EFSA, EU Agencies (e.g. ECDC) and the relevant EU Reference Laboratories (EURL)				
		Strengthening international and inter-institutional collaboration and transdisciplinary knowledge transfer in the area of One Health Zoonoses data integration and interpretation				

In your view, to what extent has the **Transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) sub-group of the Zoonoses monitoring data network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To **advise and assist EFSA** in cooperation with the Commission on all scientific and practical matters related to the collection, reporting and analysis of data on monitoring of zoonoses, zoonotic agents, microbiological contaminants and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in food, feed and animals, on foodborne outbreaks as well as of data on TSE in bovine animals, small ruminants and other species in the EU					
Specific objectives	**Data**	**Identifying priorities** for the harmonisation of fit-for-purpose monitoring approaches and for				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		the collection of data on zoonoses, foodborne outbreaks, AMR and TSE of EU and international significance covered by the main network and the four specific subgroups				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for harmonised monitoring and reporting for MSs and other reporting countries				
		Updating data models, related catalogues and reporting specifications for MSs and other reporting countries, in particular for new data reporting requirements due to changes in the legislation				
		Participating in the process of **enhancing data quality**				
		Reviewing data collected and participating in activities related to data access and publication				
		Nominating the reporting officer (in the case of the main zoonoses network) and of the data providers (in the case of the TSE and WGS subgroups)				
		Exchanging information and data between EFSA and MSs.				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for development and use of electronic reporting, analysis and visualisation tools and databases for the data collection				
		Acting as national reference points for planning and organising data collection activities and for the exchange of information at national level				
		Coordinating at MS level the call for data related to joint				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		ECDC-EFSA assessments on foodborne events				
	Science	**Collation, validation, analyses, and summary** of **relevant scientific data** in its fields of competence				
		Reviewing EFSA outputs related to the network e.g. annual scientific reports, scientific and technical reports, guidance documents, reporting manuals and online reports				
		Exchanging experiences in monitoring and/or surveillance programme design and in laboratory methods				
		Discussing cross-cutting issues with other animal and public health networks of EFSA, EU Agencies (e.g. ECDC) and the relevant EU Reference Laboratories (EURL)				
		Strengthening international and inter-institutional collaboration and transdisciplinary knowledge transfer in the area of One Health Zoonoses data integration and interpretation				

In your view, to what extent has the **Molecular typing, based on whole genome sequencing (WGS) sub-group of the Zoonoses monitoring data network** fulfilled its objectives during the 2021 to 2023 period? Please score the extent to which each of the specific network objectives listed below has been fulfilled.

Objectives		Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
Main objectives	To **advise and assist EFSA** in cooperation with the Commission on all scientific and practical matters related to the collection, reporting and analysis of data on monitoring of zoonoses, zoonotic agents, microbiological contaminants and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in food, feed and animals, on foodborne outbreaks				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
	as well as of data on TSE in bovine animals, small ruminants and other species in the EU					
Specific objectives	**Data**	**Identifying priorities** for the harmonisation of fit-for-purpose monitoring approaches and for the collection of data on zoonoses, foodborne outbreaks, AMR and TSE of EU and international significance covered by the main network and the four specific subgroups				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for harmonised monitoring and reporting for MSs and other reporting countries				
		Updating data models, related catalogues and reporting specifications for MSs and other reporting countries, in particular for new data reporting requirements due to changes in the legislation				
		Participating in the process of **enhancing data quality**				
		Reviewing data collected and participating in activities related to data access and publication				
		Nominating the reporting officer (in the case of the main zoonoses network) and of the data providers (in the case of the TSE and WGS subgroups)				
		Exchanging information and data between EFSA and MSs.				
		Identifying issues and opportunities for development and use of electronic reporting, analysis and visualisation tools and databases for the data collection				
		Acting as national reference points for planning and organising data collection				

Objectives			Fully	Partially	Not at all	*I do not know*
		activities and for the exchange of information at national level				
		Coordinating at MS level the call for data related to joint ECDC-EFSA assessments on foodborne events				
	Science	**Collation, validation, analyses, and summary** of **relevant scientific data** in its fields of competence				
		Reviewing EFSA outputs related to the network e.g. annual scientific reports, scientific and technical reports, guidance documents, reporting manuals and online reports				
		Exchanging experiences in monitoring and/or surveillance programme design and in laboratory methods				
		Discussing cross-cutting issues with other animal and public health networks of EFSA, EU Agencies (e.g. ECDC) and the relevant EU Reference Laboratories (EURL)				
		Strengthening international and inter-institutional collaboration and transdisciplinary knowledge transfer in the area of One Health Zoonoses data integration and interpretation				

Additional questions for European Commission/EFSA/other EU agencies/EU Reference Laboratories/international organisations

Note: additional questions, on top of those for network participants and observers.

*In the following pages, we are asking you a series of questions about the **performance of the network or sub-group you have selected during the 2021-2023 period**. Please answer the questions bearing in mind the experience you have from the selected network/sub-group for responding to this survey.*

31. From your point of view, overall, are risk assessment activities more **effective** and **efficient** with the network/sub-group than without it?

Effective *= the network/sub-group plays a positive role in supporting the risk assessment activities*

Efficient *= the network/sub-group's involvement leads to savings in total time and money required for the risk assessment activities* JC.10

- ☐ Yes, risk assessment is more effective/efficient with the network/sub-group
- ☐ Yes, risk assessment is more effective with the network/sub-group, but less efficient
- ☐ Yes, risk assessment is more efficient with the network/sub-group, but less effective
- ☐ No, risk assessment is less effective/efficient with the network/sub-group
- ☐ Do not know/not applicable

32. Below we list the main activities of the networks/sub-groups. To what extent has the network/sub-group's involvement in these activities been **useful** for your work? *Please score the network/sub-group's usefulness per type of activity as well as its overall usefulness* (JC.1)

Network/sub-group activities	**Very useful**	**Useful**	**Somewhat useful**	**Not useful**	***Do not know/ Not applicable***
Collaboration in data collection					
Exchange of data/information					
Participation in exercises					
Participation in joint projects					
Contribution to technical/scientific reports (GFL Art. 31)					
Contribution to scientific opinions (GFL Art. 29)					
Other forms of collaboration (*please specify*)					
Overall network/sub-group usefulness					

Other forms of collaboration: please specify

33. To what extent do the following factors **hinder** the network/sub-group's effectiveness and usefulness? (JC.15)

Other factors: please specify

	To a large extent	**To some extent**	**Not at all**	***Do not know***
Member profile				
Member nomination process (via national Focal Points)				
Member turnover (changes)				
Lack of expertise in some MSs				
Other factors (*please specify*)				

Questions for Focal Points

*In the following pages, we are asking you a series of questions about the **identification of experts for the EFSA scientific networks/sub-groups during the 2021-23 period**.*

34. To what extent did you find it difficult to identify relevant experts for the different networks/sub-groups during the 2021-23 period? *Please indicate level of difficulty per network/sub-group.* (JC.15)

	Very difficult	**Difficult**	**Somewhat difficult**	**Not difficult**	***Do not know/ Not applicable***
Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW)					
AHAW - Echinococcus Multilocularis Subnetwork					
AHAW - One Health subgroup					

	Very difficult	Difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not difficult	*Do not know/ Not applicable*
AHAW - National Contact Points established under Art 20 Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009					
Scientific Network for Microbiological Risk Assessment (MRA)					
Scientific Network on BSE/TSE					
Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Plant Health (PLH RA)					
Scientific Network on Plant Pest Surveillance					
Scientific Network on Chemical Monitoring Data Collection					
Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data					
Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data - FBO subgroup					
Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data - TSE subgroup					
Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data - AMR subgroup					
Scientific Network on Zoonoses Monitoring Data - WGS subgroup					
Scientific Network on Food Consumption Data (FCD)					
Scientific Network on Food Contact Material (FCM)					
Scientific Network for Risk Assessment of GMOs (Environmental Risk Assessment and Food and Feed)					
Pesticide Steering Network (PSN)					
Pesticide Steering Network – IUCLID subgroup					
Scientific Network on Emerging Risk Exchange (EREN)					

	Very difficult	Difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not difficult	*Do not know/ Not applicable*
Scientific Network on Risk Assessment of Nanotechnologies in Food Feed (NANO)					
Communications Expert Network (CEN)					

35. What are the **factors that make difficult** the identification and selection of relevant experts for the different networks/sub-groups? *(please select all that apply)* (JC.15)

- ☐ There are no relevant experts in some fields in my country
- ☐ The number of experts in the fields covered by EFSA's remit is limited in my country (e.g. small country)
- ☐ There tend to be frequent changes in the staff that are competent in the fields covered by EFSA's remit in my country
- ☐ I do not have a full overview over experts available in my country for each topic
- ☐ It is difficult to find experts who are available/willing to participate
- ☐ Other factors (*please specify*)

Other factors: please specify

36. Would any of the following suggestions **facilitate** the identification and selection of relevant experts for the different networks/sub-groups in the future? *(please select all that apply)* (JC.15)

- ☐ EFSA making available some guidelines/criteria for the required profile of experts (whether generic or specific per network/sub-group)
- ☐ EFSA getting more actively involved in the expert selection process
- ☐ Other suggestions (*please specify*)

Other suggestions: please specify

37. In your view, is the current use of **network participants' time** for formal network activities sustainable in the medium to long term (e.g. in the next 3-5 years)? (JC.22)

- ☐ Yes, to a large extent
- ☐ Yes, to some extent
- ☐ No

III.2 Interview topic guide

*The following questions provided a **general topic guide** to ensure coverage of all the judgment criteria (JC) for feedback from **network/sub-group coordinators**:*

1. Explain further your opinion on the effectiveness of the network activities during the 2021-23 period vis á vis: a) each of the stated objectives (network ToR) (JC.6/JC.13); and, b) the objectives of Article 2 the MB Decision (JC.12).
2. Explain further your opinion on the usefulness of the network's support provided to EFSA during the 2021-23 period (JC.1). Provide examples (if any) of: a) valuable inputs provided to EFSA, in terms of the above network activities (JC.3); b) other accomplishments/successes of the network (JC.14).
3. Discuss the extent to which relevant stakeholder engagement within/outside the network is considered sufficient (JC.4; JC.5).
4. Provide examples (if any) of: a) other networking opportunities; and, b) where networks/sub-groups have played an irreplaceable role in collaboration between EFSA and MSs (JC.7).
5. Discuss suggestions for improvements in collaboration (if any) received from participants and relevant stakeholders. Provide examples of suggestions, e.g., how to improve collaboration to avoid any duplications/overlaps (JC.8). Discuss collaboration with other networks (within EFSA and with those of other Agencies) and/or the EFSA Panels, both currently and future opportunities for collaboration/synergies. (JC.9).
6. Provide examples (if any) where the network has **not followed up suggestions for improvements collaboration**, (JC.8). Provide examples of **other** identified **shortcomings** (if any), and reasons why (JC.15).
7. Discuss **relevance of topics** covered by the network during the 2021-2023 period vis á vis: a) health/safety risks and developments (JC.17); and, b) EFSA's strategic priorities (JC.16). Provide examples (if any) where the network has failed to cover health/safety risks, and explain reasons why lack of relevance is identified (JC.18).
8. Discuss ability of network to **remain relevant** vis á vis **emerging risks** (JC.19). Provide examples (if any) where the network has failed to identify and/or respond to emerging risks, and explain reasons why (JC.20).
9. Discuss the extent of time currently provided by EFSA for coordination (JC.21), **sustainability** of current participant contribution in time and any inefficiencies identified (JC.22).
10. Discuss, overall, the extent to which **risk assessment** is considered **more effective/efficient** with the network than without it, and reasons why (JC.10).

In addition, **specific questions** were addressed to each network/sub-group coordinator, to ensure coverage of gaps and other points that emerged from the desk research on each network/sub-group.

Annex IV: Background of the study

This Annex outlines the background and context of the study. It sets out the history of the networks, describes the various networks and their objectives and covers recent network activity.

IV.1 Background to EFSA and networks

EFSA plays a crucial role in safeguarding consumers from food-related risks by offering unbiased scientific advice. It addresses both existing and emerging food hazards, shaping EU laws and policies to ensure the protection of consumers along the food chain. EFSA's scope encompasses food and feed safety, nutrition, animal health and welfare, plant protection, and plant health. To fulfil its mission, EFSA gathers scientific data and expertise, delivers independent and current scientific advice on food safety matters, and effectively communicates its findings to the public. Collaborating with EU countries, international organisations, and stakeholders, EFSA aims to enhance trust in the EU's food safety system through the provision of reliable guidance (European Union, 2023).

In 2002, EFSA was established under **Regulation (EC) No 178/2002**, also known as the GFL Regulation, which was recently reformed by **Regulation (EU) No 1381/2019**. This regulatory framework empowers the Authority to foster scientific cooperation of scientific organisations in EU Member States (MSs) by using networks. This includes coordinating activities, facilitating information exchange, developing and implementing joint projects, and sharing expertise and best practices in areas that fall under EFSA's jurisdiction, as specified in Article 22(7) and Article 23(g) of EFSA's Founding Regulation.

To achieve these objectives, the EFSA Management Board made a **Decision in 2021** concerning the establishment and operation of EU networks of scientific organisations operating in the fields within the authority's mission, aiming to optimise the operational procedures of EFSA networks in alignment with the authority's remit and strategic goals.

EFSA establishes networks in collaboration with the Advisory Forum (AF), focusing on specific areas within its jurisdiction. The creation of new networks requires approval from the Management Board. Each network is established with a particular mandate and will be dissolved once its objectives have been achieved. The purpose of each network is to strengthen EFSA's activities by aligning with the overall objectives shared among all networks, while also fulfilling the specific targets defined in its Terms of Reference (ToR) (EFSA, 2021).

Already in its initial years following creation, EFSA began to engage with various experts from MS through working groups and ad hoc collaborations. As EFSA's responsibilities and the complexity of food safety challenges grew, there was a need for more structured collaboration. Consequently, EFSA began setting up some scientific networks. These initial networks aimed to contribute to a more integrated and effective European system of food/feed risk assessment and safety. Since the beginning, these networks focused on specific areas such as plant health, animal health, GMOs, chemical contaminants, and more. Thus, each of the early networks was dedicated to a particular domain of expertise, aiming to foster cooperation, knowledge exchange, and consistency in risk assessment methodologies.

EFSA's scientific networks have evolved over time to align with emerging challenges and new scientific developments. The structure and composition of the networks have been adapted to address the evolving needs of risk assessment and management in the field of food safety (EFSA, 2012).

As per Article 4.4 of the above Decision of the EFSA Management Board, EFSA is required to conduct evaluations of each network's work at least every three years, starting from 2021.

The outcomes of these evaluations have to be reported by EFSA to both the Management Board and the Advisory Forum.

Based on the results of the evaluation, the Advisory Forum will make non-binding recommendations regarding whether a network should be continued or discontinued. Ultimately, the decision to continue or discontinue a specific network will be made by the Management Board. This process aims to ensure a periodic and thorough assessment of each network's performance and its alignment with the defined criteria (EFSA, 2021).

IV.2 Overview of networks

An overview of the existing networks, including their objectives and mode of operation, is provided below.

IV.2.1 Existing networks

Currently, EFSA oversees a total of **14 networks and a further eight subgroups** which arise from three of these networks.

Table Annex IV-1 below sets out the establishment year of each existing network as well as the year of their initial meeting and total number of meetings until August 2023.

Table Annex IV-1: Establishment of current networks and their meetings

Network	Year of Establishment	Year of 1st meeting available on EFSA website	Total number of meetings until April 2024
AHAW network	2010	2010	23
MRA network	2007	2010 (4th)	23
BSE-TSE network	2006	2010 (5th)	18
PLH network	2010	2010	20
PPS network	2023	2023	2
ChemMonDC network	2018	2019	6
ZMD network	2004	2014 (30th)	41
FCD network	2007	2007 (2nd)	15
FCM network	2013	2014	10
GMO network	2010	2010	16
PSN network	2008	2010 (8th)	31
EREN network	2010	2010	30
NANO network	2010	2011	13
CEN network	2017*	2017	15

** estimated based on available information*

Source: Based on network ToRs, Annual Reports, and meetings.

IV.2.2 Network objectives

According to Article 2 of the Decision of the Management Board from 2021, the European networks of scientific organisations play a crucial role in supporting both EFSA and the MS in accomplishing the EFSA objectives. The networks also uphold the established standards of scientific excellence, transparency, and responsiveness as specified in the GFL Regulation.

Chaired by EFSA and supported by responsible EFSA Units, these European networks serve as facilitators of scientific cooperation within the fields encompassed by EFSA's mission. Their primary functions include four areas:

1. coordinating and aligning activities to optimise collaborative efforts;
2. facilitating the seamless flow of information among stakeholders;
3. partnering on joint projects that leverage collective expertise; and,
4. fostering the exchange of knowledge and best practices to enhance overall effectiveness and efficiency in safeguarding public health and ensuring food safety.

The networks aim to contribute significantly to the mission of EFSA and reinforce the authority's commitment to scientific excellence and public trust.

Beyond the general objectives set out in Article 2 of the MB Decision, each network has targeted objectives set out in its Terms of Refence (ToR). An overview of the specific objectives of the 14 existing networks is provided in **Table Annex IV-2**.

Table Annex IV-2: Overview of existing networks and their specific objectives

	Network	Specific objectives
1	**Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW)**	The AHAW network aims to establish and strengthen collaboration between EFSA and the MSs, which fosters a cooperative environment for exchanging knowledge and expertise in the domain. It seeks to facilitate a shared comprehension of risk assessment principles concerning animal health and welfare, while promoting transparency throughout the process. The network is also geared towards advancing the harmonisation of risk assessment practices and methodologies, including the standardisation of data collections. Moreover, it seeks to streamline activities by identifying and disseminating current priorities, thereby minimising duplication of efforts across the network's stakeholders (EFSA, 2023). The AHAW network consists of two groups with distinct areas of competence: **Animal Health (AH)** and **Animal Welfare (AW)**. In addition, ***three subgroups*** of this network are covered by the present evaluation (see below)**.**
2	***Echinococcus Multilocularis* sub-group (AH group of AHAW)**	The sub-group on *E. multilocularis* surveillance is comprised of the National Contact Points in the framework of EC Delegated Regulation (EU) 2018/772 of 21 November 2017 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 576/2013 of the EP and of the Council with regard to preventive health measures for the control of *E multilocularis* infection in dogs, and repealing Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1152/2011. The *E. multilocularis* parasite is present almost everywhere in Europe; those countries where it is not, (Norway, Finland, Ireland, and Northern Ireland - UK) have compulsory surveillance activities throughout the year to demonstrate its absence. The sub-group aims to establish and strengthen collaboration between EFSA and the MSs, which fosters a cooperative environment for exchanging knowledge and expertise in the animal health domain. This aim falls under the Commission's mandate to EFSA to support countries in designing the survey, collecting the data and validating methodological soundness, to demonstrate freedom from the disease i.e. prevalence below 1% at 95% confidence level.
3	**One Health (OH) surveillance sub-group (AH group of AHAW)**	The subgroup One Health (OH) surveillance was established under the framework of the EU 4 Health program (2021-2027). The EU4Health programme was adopted as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to reinforce crisis preparedness in the EU, aiming to protect people in the Union from serious cross-border threats to health. The programme provides direct grants (managed by HaDEA) for the early detection of pathogens for humans in animals and the environment. The Commission mandated EFSA to create the scientific framework for the grant programme. Consequently, EFSA set up the sub-group as a tool to implement a collaborative approach to identifying priority pathogens and developing coordinated surveillance programmes. The work of the One Health Surveillance sub-group builds on tools that have already been established by EFSA over recent years. There will be a data reporting platform managed by EFSA using existing tools; data generated by the participating countries between 2024 and 2026 will be collected via this platform.
4	**National Contact Points (NCPs) sub-group (AW group of AHAW**	The NCP sub-group was established at the request of the Commission to provide scientific support under Art 20 of Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing. The sub-group aims to establish and strengthen collaboration between EFSA and the MSs, which fosters a cooperative environment for exchanging knowledge and expertise in the domain of the protection of animal welfare at slaughter and killing. Participants act as the national reference point for the purposes of the Regulation. Although the NCP sub-group is separate from the AHAW general network because of its specific legislative framework, around a third of NCP sub-group participants are also in the AW part of the AHAW network.
5	**Scientific Network for**	The MRA network aims to identify common themes and opportunities for mutual collaboration among stakeholders working within the remit of microbiological risk assessments. Additionally, the network aims to prevent redundancy by recognising

	Microbiological Risk Assessment (MRA)	and avoiding duplication of efforts in the field of MRA. Facilitating the identification of microbiological risk assessment experts specialising in specific areas and unique issues is another crucial objective. The MRA network emphasises the sharing of data availability and quality to foster effective microbiological risk assessment practices. Strengthening communication and cooperation on microbiological risk assessment between EFSA, the MSs, and other stakeholders is a primary focus. This includes the promotion of collaboration among national AF and FP members. The network also highlights the importance of directing attention towards common research needs and streamlining efforts in that direction. Additionally, the MRA network aims to proactively identify potential emerging microbiological risks while addressing ongoing issues, thus contributing significantly to the overall risk assessment process (EFSA, 2021a).
6	**Scientific Network on BSE/TSE**	The BSE-TSE network plays a vital role in enhancing scientific cooperation within the realm of risk assessment for these diseases. The network is dedicated to identifying common themes and opportunities for mutual collaboration among relevant stakeholders. It also actively seeks to prevent duplication of efforts, ensuring efficient utilisation of resources. Another critical aspect of its mission involves the identification of experts with specific expertise and insights into special issues related to BSE-TSE. The network places significant emphasis on sharing data, to foster an environment of transparency and cooperation. Moreover, it aims to strengthen collaboration among risk assessors and risk managers, promoting a unified approach to addressing BSE-TSE challenges. The network actively facilitates the exchange of valuable information among EFSA, the MSs, and other stakeholders, including national AF and FP members, fostering smooth communication and collaboration. Additionally, it focuses on streamlining research efforts, directing attention to common research needs, and proactively identifying potential emerging risks while addressing current issues related to BSE-TSE (EFSA, 2021b).
7	**Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Plant Health (PLH)**	The PLH network aims to establish and strengthen cooperation between MSs and EFSA. The network seeks to foster a mutual understanding of risk assessment principles in the context of plant health, maintaining transparency throughout the process. Emphasising harmonisation, the network seeks to promote consistent risk assessment practices and methodologies, including the harmonisation of data collection efforts. By identifying and sharing current priorities, the network aims to minimise duplication of activities, streamlining efforts, and maximising efficiency. The network aim to serve as a valuable platform for sharing essential data and methodologies, fostering a dynamic exchange of information among all participants. By doing so, it facilitates the anticipation of emerging risks in the EU. It also promotes a comprehensive understanding of the current priorities in plant health risk assessment that may require EFSA's attention (EFSA, 2021h).
8	**Scientific Network on Plant Pest Surveillance (PPS)**	The main goal of the PPS network is to foster collaboration between EFSA and the MSs in order to create a knowledgeable community. The network intends to specialise in developing effective and statistically correct surveys for quarantine pests in EU MSs, as well as Iceland and Norway. Network members will serve as contact point and trainers for EFSA's plant health surveys within their respective countries. The creation and support of this network was requested by the European Commission (mandate M-2022-00069). The mandate calls for scientific and technical aid to MSs, along with training efforts regarding survey guidelines relevant to plant health in the EU, Iceland, and Norway. The network specifically aims to promote a shared understanding of statistically reliable and risk-based surveys in plant health. This includes exchanging advancements in survey methodologies and keeping participants informed about the latest progress in pest monitoring and surveillance. The Network also focuses on enhancing pest surveillance capabilities within MSs by disseminating expertise and best practices through the EFSA pest survey toolkit. Key stakeholders within MS institutions responsible for planning and executing surveys of quarantine pests will be trained for all stages of the survey process. Additionally, the network serves as a communication channel between EFSA and MSs' competent authorities

		engaged in planning and executing surveys for EU quarantine pests. It facilitates the exchange of experiences from MS' pest survey implementations to enhance current practices. Lastly, the Network aims to standardise Plant Health surveys across MSs, enabling meaningful comparisons of pest surveys over different time frames and geographical areas (EFSA, 2022).
9	**Scientific Network on Chemical Monitoring Data Collection (ChemMonDC)**	The ChemMonDC network's focus lies in addressing all scientific and practical aspects associated with the collection, analysis, and reporting of data relating to chemical monitoring in food and feed. The network is advocating for standardised reporting of occurrence data on chemical contaminants, residues, and regulated substances in food and feed. Moreover, it actively engages in revising data models and reporting specifications for MS and other reporting countries. The network is also instrumental in defining the most effective ways to analyse the collected data. In addition it participates in enhancing data quality for chemical substances, which is vital for intake/exposure and compliance assessments. The facilitation of the exchange of information and analytical results between reporting countries and EFSA is an essential function. Additionally, the network collaborates on activities related to data access and publication. It is acting as a national reference point for planning and organising data collections for chemical substances in food and feed. Its scope extends to reviewing EFSA outputs related to the network and sharing valuable experiences in national sampling, control programme design, laboratory methods, compliance assessment, and follow-up actions (EFSA, 2022b).
10	**Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data (ZMD)**	The ZMD network provides expert advice and support to EFSA in collaboration with the European Commission. The network's focus lies in addressing all scientific and practical aspects associated with the collection, reporting, and analysis of data related to zoonoses monitoring. This includes data concerning zoonotic agents, microbiological contaminants, and AMR in food, feed, and animals, as well as information on foodborne outbreaks. Furthermore, the network plays a crucial role in collecting data on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in bovine animals, small ruminants, cervids, and other species (EFSA, 2022a). This network has ***four subgroups*** (see below)***.***
11	**ZMD - Foodborne Outbreaks (FBO) sub-group**	The FBO sub-group was set up to support the process of harmonising data collection and reporting, with the main activities extending from 2007 (Report from the Task Force on Zoonoses Data Collection) to 2011 (Updated technical specifications for harmonised reporting of food-borne outbreaks) and then to 2014. The rules were finalised with the final publication in 2014 of the Guidance for the collection of FBO data.
12	**ZMD – TSE sub-group**	The Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies sub-group was set up to support the activities of TSE data collection. The sub-group was created in 2017, as soon as the mandate for the TSE data collection was given to EFSA (previously this activity was carried out by the Commission). Thus, since 2018 MSs are required to submit TSE surveillance data to EFSA using tools provided by EFSA.
13	**ZMD - Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) sub-group**	AMR is a high priority in the Union, as demonstrated by the implementation of the EU legislation on the harmonised monitoring of AMR in food-producing animals. As a result, the dedicated sub-group on AMR monitoring was created when the decision was taken to create sub-groups within the ZMD Network. The sub-group aims to support the setting up of the technical specifications of the harmonised monitoring of AMR and complementary baseline surveys.
14	**ZMD – WGS sub-group**	The Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) sub-group was established in 2023, following the Commission's mandate to EFSA in 2019 to develop and implement an EFSA system for the collection of WGS data, and for their analysis through the interconnection with the ECDC system. The data analysis process utilises two interoperable WGS systems operated by EFSA and ECDC. Due to this, the legal status of data analysis differs from that of data collection in other sub-groups.

15	**Scientific Network on Food Consumption Data (FCD)**	The FCD network serves as a significant forum for experts to exchange views and insights on methodologies related to the collection of food consumption and relevant data. In this capacity, the network reviews existing methods and proposes enhancements for all aspects concerning food consumption data. Moreover, it provides valuable guidance and reinforcement on reporting and data submission formats recommended by EFSA. It does so to ensure the collection of harmonised food consumption data that remains fit for purpose. Another crucial aspect of its mission involves advising on the integration and effective utilisation of food composition data in combination with dietary information to assess nutrient intake accurately. The FCD network is a key contact point, fostering coordination between EFSA and the MS in matters concerning the collection and accessibility of high-quality, current, and harmonised food consumption information (EFSA, 2021c).
16	**Scientific Network on Food Contact Material (FCM)**	The primary aim of the FCM network is to foster scientific cooperation in the realm of risk assessment activities for FCM and shared approaches among the EU MS, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, and EFSA. The FCM network serves as a crucial platform for facilitating discussions, consultations, and collaboration among relevant stakeholders. It strives to strengthen cooperation and communication among scientists engaged in risk assessment within this field. Additionally, the network plays a fundamental role in promoting the exchange of valuable information on ongoing activities and risk assessments. Moreover, it actively supports and promotes the harmonisation of risk assessment practices to ensure a unified approach. By doing so, the network aims to prevent duplication of work and, importantly, anticipates and works towards preventing potential divergences that could arise in the future (EFSA, 2022).
17	**Scientific Network for Risk Assessment of GMOs**	The GMO network plays a key role in sharing best practices and experiences in GMO/GM food and feed risk assessment expertise, thereby promoting a cohesive and informed approach across stakeholders. It also serves as a platform for discussing issues related to GMO risk assessment. This includes EFSA guidance documents, adopted opinions, and assessments of specific GMOs or GM food and feed. By engaging in such discussions, the network keeps up to date with the latest developments and challenges in GMO risk assessment. Moreover, the GMO network actively addresses emerging scientific advancements in GMO risk assessment and evaluates their implications on current risk assessment practices. This includes examining the impact of new genomic techniques in the development of GMOs. By sharing information on the development of GMOs using transgenesis and other techniques, the network enables comprehensive assessments of their potential consequences and associated risks. Data is crucial in risk assessment, and the network collaborates on addressing issues of data availability and quality required for GMO risk assessment. The network also shares information on forthcoming EFSA consultations and other scientific cooperation activities in the field of GMO risk assessment (EFSA, 2021f).
18	**Pesticide Steering Network (PSN)**	The PSN is dedicated to planning, monitoring, developing, and enhancing the risk assessment and peer review processes for pesticides. By continually refining these procedures, the PSN ensures a rigorous and robust evaluation of pesticide-related risks. Additionally, the network strives to achieve coordination and efficiency by integrating the risk assessment and Maximum Residue Level (MRL) setting processes. This integration harmonises provisions from both regulatory frameworks. Collaborative efforts are fostered through close coordination with the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA). This promotes sharing insights and it aligns different efforts in addressing pesticide-related matters. Moreover, the PSN provides advisory support on what to prioritise and it addresses the needs of risk assessors in the development and updating of risk assessment guidance documents. This advisory role aims to ensure that the guidance remains relevant, comprehensive, and responsive to emerging challenges. Furthermore, the network plays a pivotal role in facilitating cooperation and governance for the **IUCLID** database for pesticides (EFSA, 2021g), for which a dedicated ***sub-group*** has been set up: PSN IUCLID.

19	**PSN – IUCLID sub-group**	The aim of the IUCLID sub-group is to ensure the cooperation and governance for IUCLID for pesticides. IUCLID is a specific format and tool (managed by ECHA) for data preparation, electronic submission and management of pesticides dossiers, by means of the ECHA Cloud platform. Applications concerning approval and renewal of active substances (chemicals and microorganisms), basic substances and MRL applications submitted after 27 March 2021 must be submitted using the IUCLID format via the ECHA submission portal. Among the members of this sub-group are also industry representatives and representatives from ECHA. The sub-group was established in late 2021, as the dedicated forum for all practical matters related to the IUCLID tool.
20	**Scientific Network on Emerging Risks Exchange (EREN)**	The EREN network presents information on newly identified emerging issues, thus, supporting EFSA in prioritising emerging risks, and providing scientific evidence-based data. It offers recommendations for follow-up actions, collaborates with national stakeholders, and facilitates information exchange between EFSA and the MSs. The network aims to avoid the duplication of work and analyses possible emerging issues using EFSA's satellite activities. In addition, it shares experiences and provides advice on emerging risk identification methodologies at the national level (EFSA, 2021d).
21	**Scientific Network on Risk Assessment of Nanotechnologies in Food Feed (NANO)**	The NANO network serves as a facilitator for harmonising methodologies by actively sharing best practices, guidelines, and insights. By doing so, it aims to prevent potential issues that could lead to duplication of efforts or divergent opinions among EU risk assessment bodies, ensuring a unified and efficient approach. Secondly, the NANO network acts as an anchor for exchanging critical information and data between EFSA and the MSs, fostering enhanced availability and quality of data. It further promotes the sharing of valuable data collections and the surveillance of findings from national applications, which enrich the overall knowledge base. The network also serves as a platform for providing specialised expertise in specific areas, leveraging collective knowledge to tackle complex challenges. Moreover, it aims to achieve synergies in activities by identifying priorities at both national and EU levels, recognising relevant scientific developments, pinpointing priority research needs, gaps in expertise, and analytical capacity (EFSA, 2021e).
22	**Communication Expert Network (CEN)**	Risk communications are among the core mandates outlined in EFSA's founding regulations, involving close collaboration with MS to foster coherence in the risk communication process and ensure effective cooperation on public information campaigns. The CEN primarily focuses on facilitating this cooperation between EFSA and the MSs, aligning closely with the Advisory Forum (AF) to support its strategic priorities and complying with the Transparency Regulation. The network aims to seamlessly coordinate communication within the EU, to share best practices, and to share skills and knowledge across EU MS to facilitate and optimise targeted risk communication (EFSA, 2021i).

Source: Based on network ToRs and Annual Reports.

IV.2.3 Network Terms of Reference (ToR)

Each of the networks adheres to its individual ToR, which contain detailed information on the network's background, overarching and specific objectives, members involved, working methodologies, and other relevant particulars. By operating in accordance with their respective ToRs, these networks ensure a focused approach to addressing their specific scientific areas. This enables them to effectively contribute to EFSA's overall mission of safeguarding public health and maintaining food safety standards.

Nine of the current network ToRs have been established in 2021, which means they will have to be reviewed in 2024 (**Table Annex IV-3**). The ToRs of the FCM network, the ChemMonDC network and the ZMD network have been set up in 2022, which means they will have to be reviewed in 2025. The ToR of the Network on Plant Pest Surveillance have been established in January 2023 and are set to be reviewed in 2025. The AHAW network ToR have been recently reviewed in 2023, and thus the next review is set for 2026.

Table Annex IV-3: Year of establishment and foreseen next review of network ToRs

Network	Year of establishment of the ToR	Year of the foreseen next review of the ToR
PLH Network	2021	2024
PSN Network	2021	2024
Scientific Network on Plant Pest Surveillance	2023	2025
Scientific Network for Risk Assessment of GMOs	2021	2024
NANO Network	2021	2024
EREN Network	2021	2024
Scientific Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data	2022	2025
FCD Network	2021	2024
ChemMonDC Network	2022	2025
FCM Network	2022	2025
Scientific Network on BSE/TSE	2021	2024
AHAW Network	2023	2026
MRA Network	2021	2024
CEN Network	2021	2024

Source: Based on network ToRs.

IV.2.4 Network participants

The establishment and functioning of each network is based on the involvement of organisations in EU MS possessing expertise in the respective fields that have been designated by the Advisory Forum in accordance with Paragraph 1 of Article 6 of the Decision of the Management Board from 2021.

In general networks are composed of:

- members of national food safety authorities or risk assessment bodies with specific expertise regarding a networks subject
- researchers providing advice to competent authorities in the area of a network's focus

Where deemed necessary, EFSA has the authority to extend invitations to organisations with specialised expertise located outside the EU. These invitations are made on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that the participation of such organisations is appropriate or necessary to achieve the network's objectives. The invited organisations may join the network either as full participants or as observers, depending on the nature of their expertise and role within the network.

Representatives from the European Commission may participate in the activities of these network. Furthermore, representatives from other EU agencies may also take part in the work of the networks when it is deemed suitable and relevant to their respective domains.

The process of replacing network/sub-group participants and alternate participants where needed is facilitated by the respective member organisations as they are associated with each participant. Replacements are carried out in close cooperation with the EFSA unit responsible for managing the relevant network/sub-group and the corresponding Focal Point (EFSA, 2021).

The network participants, along with any alternate participants, have specific responsibilities to fulfil. They for example have to provide timely feedback on the discussions and outcomes of all network meetings and online collaborative working sessions. Furthermore, network participants are expected to actively contribute to the identification of potential future discussion topics within their network.

Every network participant must communicate their attendance or absence from any organised network meetings to both the Advisory Forum and their national Focal Point. If a network participant cannot join a meeting, they have to contact their alternate participant as well as their national Focal Point (EFSA, 2021). Thus, networks and their participants are commonly in contact with the Advisory Forum and the Focal Point Network.

IV.2.5 Network meetings

EFSA's networks should hold regular meetings, including virtual sessions, to ensure ongoing collaboration and knowledge exchange. In addition to these regular meetings, ad hoc meetings may be set up at short notice when urgent discussion topics arise.

Prior to each meeting, a draft agenda will be shared with the relevant network participants and alternate participants. The final agenda will be adopted at the beginning of each meeting.

The EFSA Secretariat is responsible for preparing draft minutes of each network meeting. These minutes are shared for comments and then agreed on during the next meeting or through a written procedure. Once approved, the minutes are to be made publicly accessible on EFSA's website (EFSA, 2021).

As shown in **Figure Annex IV-1** there were a total of 32 network and sub-group meetings in 2023, 26 in 2022 and 19 in 2021. Thus, on average, in 2023 there have been around 2.9 meetings per network. In 2022 the average number of meetings has been lower at close to 1.9, but higher than the 2021 average at 1.4 meetings per network. The networks with most meetings during these three years have been the AHAW network and its sub-groups with 13 meetings in total, as well at the PSN network with its IUCLID sub-group with a total of 13 meetings as well. This has been followed by the ZMD network with ten meetings, and the CEN and EREN with six meetings each. All active networks met in 2022 and 2023. In 2021 the FCD and FCM networks did not meet.

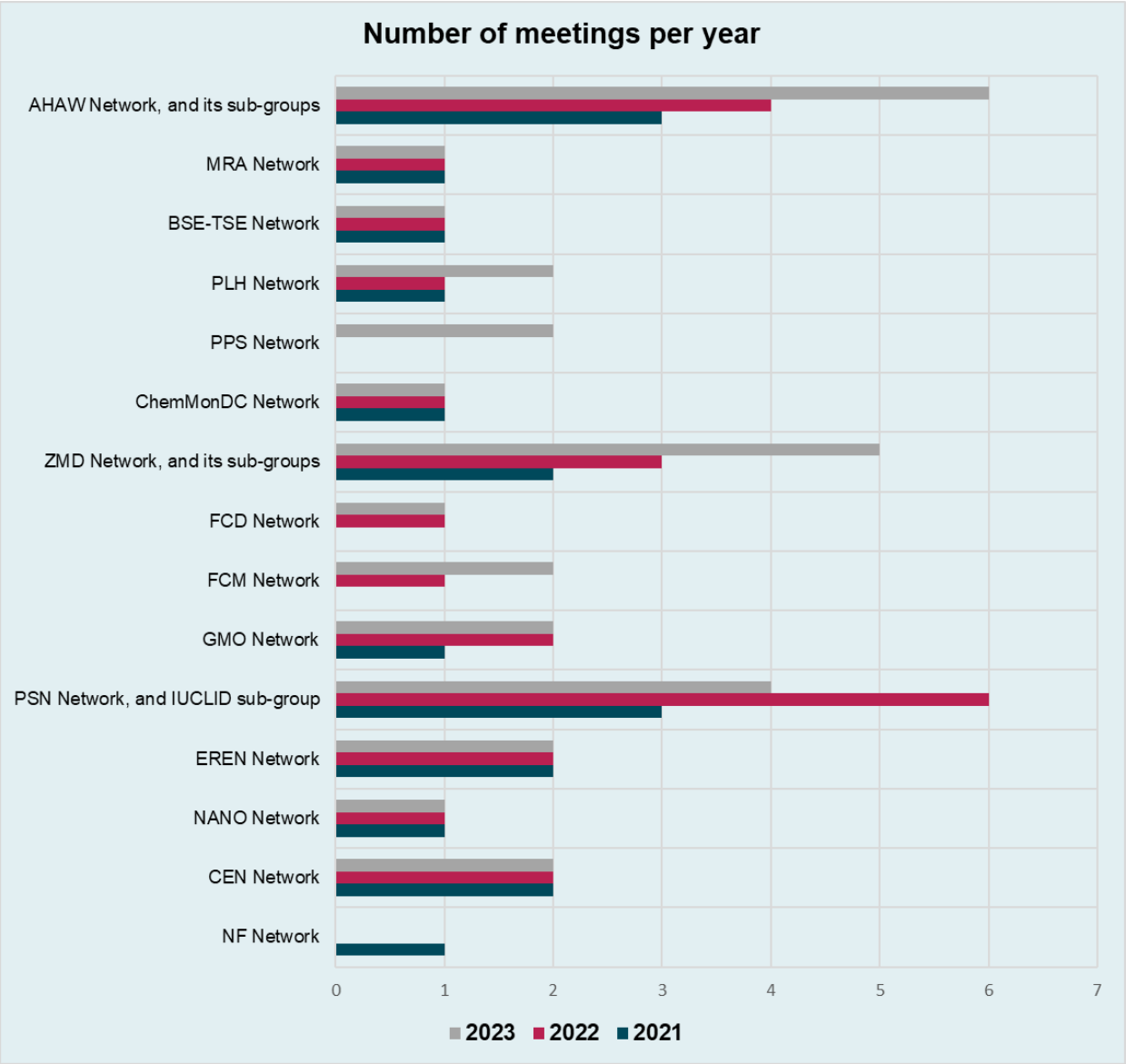


Figure Annex IV-1: Number of annual meetings of EFSA networks

Source: Based on Report of activities of EFSA Networks for the year 2022, and Report of activities of EFSA Networks for the year 2021 (recently discontinued Network on Novel Foods is included).

IV.2.6 Network funding

The budget available, as well as that actually used, for the EFSA networks/sub-groups during the 2021-23 period is presented below.

In 2023 the total budget that was made available for the EFSA networks and their sub-groups was EUR 310 660, a higher budget than in 2022 (EUR 240 750). The networks and sub-groups used around 67% (EUR 208 620) of their planned budget in 2023. All networks and sub-groups except one (AMR sub-group) remained within their set budgets. The BSE-TSE network, PSN network, FBO sub-group, and TSE sub-group did not spend any money in 2023. The draft report of activities of EFSA Networks for the year 2023 differentiated for the first time between the budgets of the networks and their sub-groups.

In 2022 the total budget that was made available for the EFSA networks was EUR 240 750, i.e. nearly three times the budget in 2021 (EUR 83 350). However, the networks only used just under 40% (EUR 97 726) of their planned budget in 2022. The CEN and the EREN

network spent more than their budget in 2022. On the other hand, the ChemMonDC network, the NANO network and the network on Novel foods did not spend any money at all, and the remaining nine networks spent less than they planned for in their budgets.

In 2021, nearly all of the planned budget was not used. Nine networks planned to spend no money and did not spend money at all in 2021. Three networks (Network on Novel Foods, PSN network, and PLH network) set a budget, but they did not use any money from it. Only the MRA network and the Network on BSE/TSE spent a very small proportion of their budget. This underspending was due to COVID-19 related restrictions, which did not allow holding in-person meetings, but only online meetings. As a result, no reimbursement costs for in person meetings were incurred (EFSA, 2021j).

Table Annex IV-4: Budget of EFSA networks/sub-groups in 2021-23 (EUR)

	2023		%	2022		%	2021		%
	Planned	Used	used	Planned	Used	used	Planned	Used	used
AHAW network	23 650 **	15 317 **	65 %	58 412	16 210	28 %	0	0	
E. Multilocularis sub-group	150	150	100 %	-	-		-	-	
One Health sub-group	13 840	8 760	63 %	-	-		-	-	
NCP sub-group	8 016	7 544	94 %	-	-		-	-	
MRA network	7 500	7 070	94 %	7 460	5 937	80 %	52 000*	900*	1.7 %
BSE-TSE network	15 000	0	0 %	19 220	9 799	51 %	52 000*	900*	1.7 %
PLH network	27 148	16 763	62 %	29 206	862	3 %	20 000	E0	0 %
PPS network	38 648	33 875	88 %	-	-		-	-	
ChemMonDC network	17 280	14 123	82 %	0	0		0	0	
ZMD Network	13 240 **	11 298 **	85 %	15 000	9 155	61 %	0	0	
FBO sub-group	0	0		-	-		-	-	
TSE sub-group	600	0	0 %	-	-		-	-	
AMR sub-group	7 990	8 756	110 %	-	-		-	-	
WGS sub-group	15 000	9 527	64 %	-	-		-	-	
FCD network	19 056	9 554	50 %	6 000	0	0 %	0	E0	
FCM network	20 000	17 760	89 %	38 000	11 079	29 %	0	0	
GMO network	10 470	8 118	78 %	15 000	0	0 %	5 000	0	
PSN network	0	0		32 452	0	0 %	1 350	0	0 %
IUCLID sub-group	7 784	2 776	36 %	-	-		-	-	
EREN network	15 510	13 538	87 %	0	11 203		0	0	
NANO network	14 778	12 397	84 %	0	0		0	0	
CEN network	35 000	11 294	32 %	20 000	33 481	167 %	0	0	
Novel Foods network**	-	-		0	0		5 000	0	0 %
TOTAL	310 660	208 620	67 %	240 750	97 726	41 %	83 350	900	1 %

* Initial and final budget covering the MRA and BSE/TSE networks
** Initial budget and used budget excludes sub-groups
*** For completeness, 2021 budget includes network on Novel Foods which was discontinued in 2023

Note: The budget breakdown per sub-group is only available for 2023.

Source: Based on the draft report of activities of EFSA networks for the year 2023 (includes new PPS network, as well as all sub-groups), report of activities of EFSA networks for the year 2022, and report of activities of EFSA networks for the year 2021.