



TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT NETWORK (CEN)

September 2023

Risk communication¹ is identified as one of the mandates in EFSA's founding regulations and includes acting in close collaboration with the Member States to promote coherence in the risk communication process as well as ensuring appropriate cooperation regarding public information campaigns². Co-operation in risk communications between EFSA and the Member States is the main focus for the Communications Expert Network (CEN), which is closely aligned with the Advisory Forum (AF) to support its strategic priorities and with the Transparency Regulation³.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the Communications Expert Network are:

- **Objective 1 – 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.
- **Tasks**
 - To work 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.
 - To establish and continuously improve mechanisms such as shared digital working spaces, shared calendars and regular teleconferences between EFSA and Member States on relevant issues to facilitate coordinated communication and coherence in information and messaging on EU food safety issues and emerging risks.
 - To explore opportunities to implement joint communication activities – including pan-European campaigns- with a focus on those issues having the greatest public health impact and of priority to EFSA and the MS.
 - To provide 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

¹ As defined in Regulation EC No 178/2002, point 13: "risk communication" means the interactive exchange of information and opinions throughout the risk analysis process as regards hazards and risks, risk-related factors and risk perceptions, among risk assessors, risk managers, consumers, feed and food businesses, the academic community and other interested parties, including the explanation of risk assessment findings and the basis of risk management decisions.

² Regulation EC No 178/2002: Article 40, points 3 and 4.

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019R1381>



Transparency Regulation and the subsequent General Plan for Risk Communication.

- **Objective 2 - Shared Best Practice**
 - To share best practices and guidelines in communications harnessing collective expertise and promoting harmonised ways of working.
- **Tasks**
 - To jointly develop and review general principles and guidelines on risk communication and crisis communication.
 - To develop guidelines and protocols on specific and discrete aspects of risk communication through ad hoc projects to address identified information needs for target audiences and stakeholder (i.e., communicating on uncertainty, risk versus hazard etc.).
- **Objective 3 - Skills and knowledge developed across Member States to facilitate and optimise Targeted Risk Communication**
 - Acquired of knowledge and shared experiences in communications and risk communications to understand better the risk perceptions of target audience;
 - Developed methods to meet their information needs through targeted communication methodologies and tools.
- **Tasks**
 - To strengthen 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., Anti-Microbial Resistance).
 - To strengthen expertise and share best practice of innovative communication practices and tools – e.g., use of social media platforms and multi-media products.

MEMBERS

The Members of the Communications Expert Network are representatives of relevant national organisations appointed for three-year terms through the EFSA Advisory Forum, in accordance with Articles 2 and 3 of the Decision of the Management Board of EFSA⁴ on the establishment and operations of networks. The network shall be composed of experts with the following profile:

- Experience in risk communication in the area of food and feed safety, in line with EFSA's mandate.
- Ability to play an active role in the Communication Unit/Department of a competent authority in a Member State.
- Be in the position to act as a communication point for relevant organisations and stakeholders within the MS, ensuring the exchange of information between these national organisations, in close collaboration with relevant national colleagues such as the EFSA Focal Points.

ACCESS TO MEETINGS

⁴ [Management Board Decision concerning the establishment and operation of European Networks of scientific organizations operating in the fields within the Authority's mission](#)



Other organisations may be invited, including those from outside the EU, with specific expertise to participate in a network meeting, where deemed appropriate or necessary. These organisations may be invited either to participate in full or as observers only.

In addition, representatives of the European Commission may participate in the work of the network. Representatives of other EU agencies may participate in the work of the network as observers as appropriate.

WORKING METHODS

The network shall meet twice per year. The working language for the network activities will be English.

In addition, the network will use other means of collaboration:

- Email exchanges for information about meetings, campaigns, activities and deliverables and sharing documents (e.g. Minutes, Terms of Reference, Flash Reports, Agendas, etc.).
- Online exchanges to share ideas, references, organisational updates and promotions.
- Teleconferences – either bilateral or multilateral for ad hoc exchanges and sharing of information regarding specific issues and 'hot topics'.
- Meetings – either bilateral or multilateral, to share experiences and expertise on areas of competence (e.g., social sciences, stakeholder engagement, organisational issues, etc.).

MS' representatives in the network shall commit to liaise as appropriate at national level before and after each network meeting in order to make sure all the necessary information is shared without prejudice to Article 10 of the Decision of the Management Board concerning the establishment and operation of European Networks of scientific organization operating in the fields within the Authority's mission.

DELIVERABLES AND OUTCOMES

- The activities of the network are defined in an Annual Workplan (prepared by EFSA). Discussions and decisions should be recorded in meeting minutes, shared with the members for feedback and published on the EFSA website.
- Risk Communications Guidelines - update the published guidelines entitled *When Food is Cooking Up a Storm Crisis Communications Best Practice Recommendations* as required.
- Risk Perception Surveys and other social science related activities– when appropriate and identified by the Network.
- Joint Communication Plans and Campaigns - when appropriate and identified by the Network.
- Contribute to initiatives and activities to inform the development of an EU Framework for Coordinated Communication.

TIMELINE

The terms of reference for the network will be due for revision in September 2026.