



# European Food Safety Authority

*Evaluation of performance 2017-2024*

Public Consultation

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## 1. Summary

Founded in 1992, the **European Public Health Association (EUPHA)** is a leading umbrella organization connecting researchers, policymakers, and public health professionals across Europe. Operating in 53 WHO European Region countries, including all 27 EU Member States, EUPHA has 87 member organizations, organizes the **European Public Health Conference** (3,000+ professionals), coordinates the **European Public Health Week**, and publishes the **European Journal of Public Health**, a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Drawing on the expertise of **EUPHA's Food and Nutrition Section**, one of its **29 dedicated thematic sections**, this document has been prepared in response to the European Commission's public consultation on the evaluation of the **European Food Safety Authority's performance from 2017 to 2024**.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) plays a crucial role in ensuring food safety across the European Union. This report evaluates EFSA's effectiveness in meeting its objectives, adherence to its core values, expertise across different areas, and overall impact. Over the years, EFSA has strengthened transparency, independence, and collaboration, reinforcing public trust in its scientific outputs.

However, challenges persist, particularly regarding **expert recruitment sustainability, resource allocation, and efficiency in peer review processes**. EFSA's expertise in risk assessment, crisis response, and regulatory support is well-regarded, although **further improvements are needed in harmonizing risk assessment methodologies and enhancing data collection**. Regulation (EU) 2019/1381 on the transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment in the food chain, commonly referred to as the **Transparency Regulation**, which entered into application in March 2021, has significantly **improved public engagement** and the openness of decision-making processes. Nonetheless, **administrative burdens remain** a concern. To sustain its effectiveness, EFSA should **strengthen expert retention strategies, refine its risk communication, and further optimize performance monitoring**. **Enhanced cooperation with EU and international bodies** will also reinforce EFSA's role as a global leader in food safety governance.

EUPHA contributed to the European Commission's stakeholder questionnaire on EFSA's performance. While the questionnaire offered a structured overview of key performance areas, such as effectiveness, values, and added value, its format relied primarily on closed-ended questions. This limited the opportunity to provide context, nuance, or strategic insight. This written contribution aims to **complement the questionnaire** by offering more detailed input and highlighting areas that may not be fully captured through quantitative scoring alone. It also reflects **EUPHA's commitment to constructive, evidence-based dialogue and the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement in shaping EFSA's future direction**.

This contribution also situates EFSA's role within the broader context of today's global challenges. As **climate change, geopolitical instability, and food system vulnerabilities rise, the link between food safety and food security has become more urgent**. **EUPHA emphasizes that public health is not only a social good but a pillar of security and democracy**. In this context, **EFSA's scientific integrity and operational strength are vital to European resilience**.

## Key recommendations

1. **Ensure long-term expert availability** by strengthening recruitment, retention, and institutional support mechanisms.
2. **Streamline internal workflows and resource allocation** to boost efficiency and responsiveness across scientific priorities.
3. **Institutionalize meaningful stakeholder engagement** beyond one-off consultations to improve policy relevance.
4. **Harmonize risk assessment methodologies** across Member States and enhance clarity of guidance to applicants.
5. **Reinforce independence and performance evaluation** through external monitoring and structural safeguards.
6. **Address peer review bottlenecks** in high-pressure areas without compromising scientific integrity.
7. **Enhance crisis preparedness** by deepening coordination with EU and national health and safety bodies.
8. **Simplify Transparency Regulation implementation** to reduce administrative burdens while preserving openness.
9. **Clarify and communicate EFSA's added value** in EU-wide resilience, cross-border protection, and policy coherence.

## 2. Effectiveness of EFSA

EFSA's core objectives include providing independent scientific advice, effective risk communication, cooperation with Member States, and identifying emerging risks. While it has strengthened transparency and stakeholder engagement, challenges remain in sustaining its expert model and balancing internal resources.

### We recommend the Commission to:

- ★ Sustain and improve expert recruitment and retention mechanisms.
- ★ Allocate resources more efficiently across scientific priorities.
- ★ Expand and institutionalize stakeholder engagement mechanisms.
- ★ Ensure flexibility in workforce deployment to meet future challenges.

## 3. Adherence to core values

EFSA's guiding values of excellence, independence, openness, accountability, and cooperation, are well-integrated but not yet fully realized. Excellence is visible in high-quality risk assessments, yet expert retention remains an issue. While transparency and accountability have improved, performance monitoring still needs refinement.

### We recommend the Commission to:

- ★ Further reinforce EFSA's independence through structural safeguards.
- ★ Develop better tools for performance evaluation and impact measurement.
- ★ Promote the Open Science transition while simplifying procedures.
- ★ Strengthen accountability by involving external public health observers.

## 4. Scientific expertise and areas of competence

EFSA shows strong competence in areas such as animal health, biological hazards, and emerging risks, but faces ongoing challenges with methodological harmonization, slow peer reviews, and unclear guidance for applicants.

### We recommend the Commission to:

- ★ Harmonize risk assessment methodologies across the EU.
- ★ Improve pre-submission advice and guidance clarity for applicants.
- ★ Strengthen crisis-response frameworks and emergency preparedness.
- ★ Enhance surveillance and data collection through digital innovation.

## 5. Risk assessments and peer review processes

EFSA's risk assessments are trusted and sound, but peer reviews—especially in high-pressure areas—can be inefficient, and monitoring systems need to be more agile and comprehensive.

### We recommend the Commission to:

- ★ Invest in improving peer review timelines without compromising quality.
- ★ Modernize surveillance systems to integrate real-time data.
- ★ Promote transparent, timely publication of scientific outcomes.

## 6. Public trust and contribution to policy

EFSA plays a key role in building public trust and supporting evidence-based decisions across nutrition, GMOs, and contaminants. Recent shocks like COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have exposed food system vulnerabilities, underscoring the need for stronger inter-agency collaboration to bolster EU crisis preparedness.

### We recommend the Commission to:

- ★ Continue investing in transparent communication channels.
- ★ Increase coordination between EFSA, ECDC, EMA, and national bodies.
- ★ Involve civil society more directly in crisis-preparedness dialogues.
- ★ Expand EFSA’s anticipatory role through stronger early warning, scenario planning, and risk scanning.

## 7. Implementation of the Transparency Regulation

The 2021 Transparency Regulation has had a major positive impact on public access and openness. It has strengthened EFSA’s independence but also introduced significant administrative burdens that risk hampering scientific productivity.

### We recommend the Commission to:

- ★ Review and streamline compliance requirements to reduce burdens.
- ★ Provide training and guidance to stakeholders affected by the changes.
- ★ Ensure that transparency does not compromise scientific timelines.

## 8. Relevance, coherence, and EU added value

EFSA's activities are largely relevant and coherent with EU policies. Its added value lies in harmonizing standards, avoiding duplication, and facilitating cross-border responses. However, stakeholder-specific communication and structured collaboration mechanisms could be improved.

**We recommend the Commission to:**

- ★ Increase EFSA's visibility and clarity in stakeholder-specific outputs.
- ★ Strengthen collaboration mechanisms with Member States and agencies.
- ★ Establish evaluation criteria for EFSA's coordination activities.
- ★ Position EFSA as a strategic actor within broader EU resilience policy.

## 9. Conclusion

EFSA stands at a turning point. In an increasingly complex world, its ability to evolve, without compromising scientific integrity, will determine its continued relevance. Beyond being a provider of food safety expertise, EFSA holds the potential to serve as a **connector**, a **catalyst**, and a **compass** in Europe's rapidly shifting landscape.

As a **connector**, EFSA bridges scientific disciplines, policy domains, national authorities, and societal actors, creating coherence in fragmented systems. It fosters collaboration across borders, sectors, and institutions, ensuring that diverse expertise contributes to a unified approach to food safety and health security.

As a **catalyst**, EFSA can actively shape the transformation of Europe's food system, not only by reacting to risks but by anticipating them, promoting innovation, and encouraging the adoption of modern risk assessment methodologies. It can drive change in how we understand and govern health risks, sustainability, and consumer protection.

As a **compass**, EFSA provides strategic orientation in uncertain times. Through its transparent, science-based advice, it helps navigate emerging threats, build public trust, and maintain societal stability. In doing so, EFSA contributes not only to protecting health but to reinforcing the democratic values that underpin the European project.

To sustain and amplify its impact, EFSA must strengthen expert engagement, streamline communication, and foster deeper collaboration across sectors and borders. It must also **embed food safety into the broader agenda of food security, climate resilience, and democratic accountability.**

EUPHA remains a committed ally in this journey. We believe that **public health is foundational to Europe's future, anchoring not only wellbeing but also trust, stability, and vision.**