

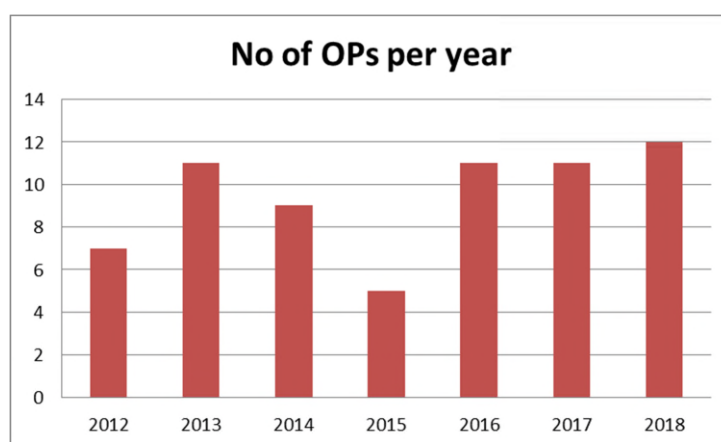
## Seven years of open panel meetings at EFSA

Openness and transparency are core values of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and are enshrined in its founding regulation. These values are critical as they provide a framework that promotes confidence in the work of EFSA among consumers and other stakeholders.

The environment in which EFSA operates has evolved over the years, with implications for the way it approaches openness and transparency. For instance, there has been a growing demand for the scientific decision-making process to be more inclusive. EFSA responded to this trend in 2012 by making a number of its scientific panel meetings open to observers as a pilot scheme. The following year it launched a 'transparency initiative', which included a commitment to continue with the open meetings.

Since 2013, several important steps have been taken to improve the transparency of EFSA's work, such as the [Discussion Group on information access and process transparency](#) (March 2013), the [EFSA stakeholders' conference "Transparency in Risk Assessment"](#) (2013), the public consultation on the discussion paper "[Transformation to an open EFSA](#)" (2014), the [technical report on the outcome of the consultation](#) published in 2015 and the [draft preliminary implementation plan](#) from the same year.

In May 2015 all efforts aimed at transforming EFSA into a more transparent and publicly engaged organisation were gathered under the umbrella of the Transparency and Engagement in Risk Assessment (TERA) project. The TERA project has since been phased out, but EFSA continues to host open plenaries – about one per scientific panel each year.



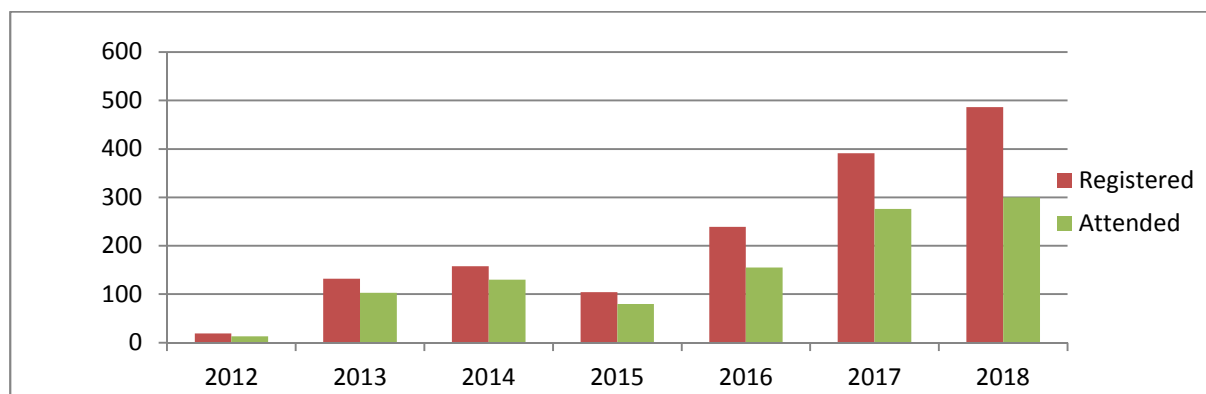
**Figure 1:** Number of open plenaries (OPs) per year

The first open plenary took place in 2012, at EFSA premises in Parma, where they continued to be held until 2014. In 2015, the open plenaries were relocated to Brussel in an effort to make them more accessible to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Although the number of both registered and attending observers increased overall in 2015, NGO representation did not rise significantly. The figures for 2016 were similar.

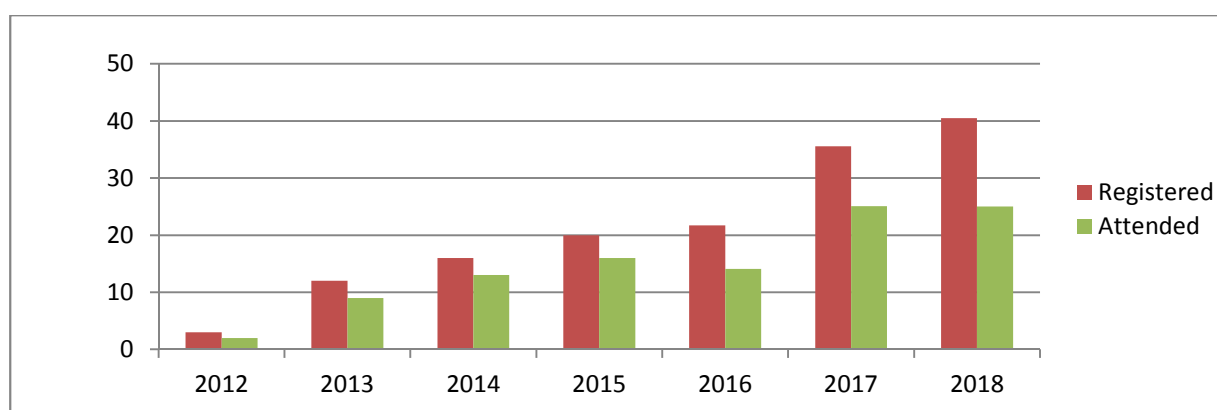
Because of the high costs and the insignificant change in observer participation, in 2017 the open plenaries were moved back to Parma. In the same year, web-streaming of open plenaries was introduced, facilitating greater participation while keeping costs down.

In 2018, a total of 300 observers attended 12 open plenaries, with 59 attending in person and 241 connected online.

EFSA has consistently gathered feedback from observers on their experience of attending open plenaries either in person or online. In most cases, the overall assessment has been either good or very good and several observers have attended more than one meeting.



**Figure 2:** Total number of observers per year



**Figure 3:** Average number of registered and attending observers per open plenary

EFSA's efforts to become a truly open and transparent organisation have been acknowledged on several occasions:

- During the workshop dedicated to transparency held in 2017, and in 2018 at the EFSA scientific conference and Stakeholder Forum, EFSA stakeholders expressed their appreciation for "EFSA's efforts and proactive approach to continuous improvement"; the ability to listen and readiness to be challenged; and "having succeeded in opening better channels for feedback".
- In DG SANTE findings published as part of the [REFIT evaluation](#), EFSA's parent DG recognises EFSA's additional steps to open its processes to its stakeholders, references some of the measures implemented through TERA, and concludes: "EFSA functions transparently and has developed important new initiatives on transparency. EFSA is globally perceived as a transparent organisation." Building on the importance of transparency for EFSA, the new legislative proposals focus on "transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment model in the food chain".
- Several EU institutions, such as the European Parliament, European Court of Auditors and Ombudsman have also recognised EFSA as a frontrunner in terms of transparency among the EU Agencies and since 2015 have granted the budget discharge specifically acknowledging

EFSA's achievements. in the most recent discharge process, MEPs welcomed EFSA's measures to increase transparency and stressed that transparency is a core element of scientific credibility.

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