EMERGING RISKS EXCHANGE NETWORK (EREN)
Minutes of the 35th meeting

9-10-11 June 2026
14:00-18:00 / 09:00-18:00 / 09:00-12:00
Minutes agreed on 3 July 2026

Location: Granada University, Spain and Web-conference

Attendees:

- Network Participants:

Country	Organisation
Austria	Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety
Belgium	Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC); University of Liege
Bulgaria	Risk Assessment Center on Food Chain
Croatia	Croatian Agency for Agriculture and Food
Cyprus	Ministry of Health - State General Laboratory
Czech Republic	Masaryk University
Denmark	DTU National Food Institute
Estonia	Estonian Veterinary and Food Laboratory
Finland	Finnish Food Authority
France	French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety, ANSES
Germany	German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety; German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment
Greece	Hellenic Food Authority
Hungary	University of Veterinary Sciences Budapest
Italy	Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale della Lombardia e dell'Emilia Romagna "Bruno Ubertini"
Latvia	Institute of Food Safety, Animal Health and Environment (BIOR)
Lithuania	State Food and Veterinary Service
Luxembourg	Luxembourg Veterinary and Food Administration
Netherlands	Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority
Norway	Norwegian Food Safety Authority
Poland	National Veterinary Research Institute - State Research Institute
Portugal	Economic and Food Safety Authority of Portugal
Romania	National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority
Slovak Republic	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic

Country	Organisation
Slovenia	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia
Spain	University of Cordoba; University of Zaragoza;
Sweden	Swedish Food Agency

- Observers:
  Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Albania); Food Standards Australia New Zealand (Australia); Canadian Food Inspection Agency (Canada); Food and Veterinary Agency (*Kosovo[1]); Institute of Public Health Montenegro (Montenegro); New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries (New Zeland); Food and Veterinary Agency (North Macedonia); Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (Serbia); AESAN (Spain); University of Granada (Spain); Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (Switzerland); Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Türkiye).

- International Organisations:
  Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- European Commission/Other EU Agencies representatives:
  DG SANTE; EEA, ECHA, SCHEER
- EFSA:
  KNOW Unit: Bernard Bottex (Chair), Milen Georgiev, Nour Elsersawy, Angelo Magiore, Raquel Garcia Mattas, Georgi Chobanov, Aikaterini Vlachou
- StaDG-ER:
  Asli Solmaz-Kalser (GHI) for point 3.2 and the entire StaDG-ER attending the joint session on 11 June

[1] *Kosovo – this designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed the participants.
Apologies were received from representatives of Malta and Ireland.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted with minor changes, including a revised order for items 5.5 and 5.6 and the postponement of two planned presentations to future meetings:

- 4.3 Info-update: Increase in EU RASFF notifications relating to tree nut imports from the USA in 2025
- 5.8 Impact of prolonged flooding (info analysis).

3. Follow up from previous meeting

3.1 Info minutes of the 34th meeting of EREN held on 28-29 October 2025.

The minutes of the 34th EREN meeting had been previously agreed by written procedure with deadlines for comments by 18 November 2025 and published on the EFSA website.

3.2 Updates in previous briefing notes

Eight briefing notes (BNs) were updated with additional evidence. Updates include information on spread and food spoilage implications of *Shewanella* spp.; the continued concerns on pufferfish exposure to tetrodotoxin; additional information incorporated on probiotics and antimicrobial resistance; recent studies on 6PPD-Q and its eventual transfer into food chain. Further insights were provided on contamination pathways of toxic alkaloids in edible flowers and on food loss and waste as a vector for AMR spread. Additional evidence highlighted dried black fungus as a significant source of bongkrekic acid production by *Burkholderia gladioli*, and new research information reinforced the role of poultry in transmitting extraintestinal pathogenic *E. coli* (ExPEC). None of the updates warranted re-analysis of the respective BNs.

3.3 Update: Potential risks of getting New Screwworm (*Cochliomyia hominivorax*) in the EU due to climatic change

The issue was presented and discussed at the 34th StaDG-ER meeting in December, where it was referred to as an emerging risk. The potential introduction of new screwworm into Europe was highlighted as an emerging risk driven by climate change, increased vector mobility and global trade, with significant implications for livestock and other warm-blooded animals. Recent outbreaks in the United States, Mexico and Central America, together with associated trade restrictions and historical occurrences outside the Americas, underlined the relevance of the issue for European surveillance and preparedness. The network noted the ongoing EFSA mandate to

assess the likelihood of introduction, potential impacts and necessary adaptations to surveillance systems. Therefore, no additional recommendations were made and the topic remains under monitoring.

4. Emerging risk signals and updates - EREN

4.1 Identification of Covert Mortality Nodavirus (CMNV) as a Zoonotic Pathogen in Human Ocular Disease

A briefing note (BN) presented new evidence on Covert Mortality Nodavirus (CMNV), originally identified as an aquaculture pathogen affecting aquatic species, and now linked to human ocular disease following reported cases in China. The discussion focused on its zoonotic potential, with uncertainties regarding transmission pathways, including handling or consumption of aquatic products, occupational exposure, and the role of seafood trade in potential introduction into European food systems. Participants noted that the novelty of the hazard, possible public health relevance, and remaining knowledge gaps warranted attention, and the network agreed to classify CMNV "as an emerging risk". Further monitoring, communication with relevant occupational health and public health bodies, and investigation of transmission routes were recommended as follow-up priorities.

4.2 Hydrocyanic acid in nuts, oil seeds and derived products

Hydrocyanic acid exposure from nuts, oilseeds and derived products BN was discussed as a potential issue identified through national risk-ranking exercises, considering occurrence data and dietary exposure. The discussion noted that increasing consumption of nuts and seeds, particularly raw or minimally processed products, may contribute to exposure. However, current evidence remains limited, especially for chronic exposure assessment, and no references were identified that indicate an increase in acute case signals reported by poison control or monitoring centres. The network concluded that "further information is needed. Future work should focus on monitoring consumption trends, refining exposure assessments with updated data, and improving data collection.

4.3 Emerging mycotoxin remediation methods

New mycotoxin remediation technologies, including plasma, nanoparticles and biological approaches, were presented as BN on potential tools to reduce mycotoxins in food and feed. The discussion noted that these methods remain largely experimental or at early development stages, with uncertainties concerning unintended effects once scaled up. The network noted that any new technology would have to be assessed for safety and therefore concluded that the topic is "not an emerging risk". Continued monitoring is recommended as the technologies evolve and further data become available.

4.4 Pro-pre-post biotics in food

The increasing use of pro-, pre-, para- and postbiotics in foods and supplements was included in BN and discussed as an emerging issue driven by innovation and the expansion of the advertised "functional food" on the market. The discussion highlighted several concerns, including discrepancies between label information and actual product content; the potential presence of microbial species carrying

transferable antimicrobial resistance genes; the use of unauthorised microbial species; and the possible exposure of vulnerable groups (e.g. risks of drug interactions), particularly as these products can be purchased without a prescription or medical consultation.

The network also noted the difficulty of classifying and regulating products that fall at the interface between food and medicinal products and are not subject to formal assessment. Considering the increasing consumer exposure, the growing complexity of products on the market, and the need for more comprehensive information on products available in the EU, the network recommended classifying this topic as "further information needed under increased concern."

As a follow-up, the network also recommended improving communication to the general public regarding the risks associated with these types of products.

4.5 StaDG-ER info update

EFSA provided an update on ongoing and upcoming activities of the Stakeholder Discussion Group on Emerging Risks (StaDG-ER), highlighting topics of potential relevance for the EREN network, including feed composition, food contact and packaging materials, microplastics, and the use of artificial intelligence in food safety. Some topics may be proposed as future BNs. The discussion underlined the importance of continued exchange between stakeholders and Member States Competent Authorities to support early identification of signals, avoid duplication, and strengthen coordinated follow-up on emerging issues. The network noted the update and supported continued information sharing on topics of common interest.

4.6 Hepatitis A potential exposure via imported berries

The BN issue concerns recurrent hepatitis A virus (HAV) contamination in berries, a high-risk food linked to outbreaks due to raw consumption and complex supply chains. HAV is transmitted via the faecal–oral route and may persist in frozen products, making berries a foodborne vehicle of concern. The discussion highlighted drivers such as high-risk imports, increasing consumption and regulatory gaps, including the absence of HAV-specific criteria and limited detection capacity. However, the network noted that HAV in berries is a well-known hazard, with some countries reporting a relatively steady level of risk associated with imported berries and no increase in hepatitis A notifications where reporting is mandatory. Existing good hygiene and agricultural practices, together with risk-based controls, remain relevant mitigation measures. Therefore, while HAV in berries remains an important food safety issue, the final consensus was to classify the topic as "not an emerging risk". Future efforts should focus on strengthening risk-based import controls, surveillance and preventive measures across the supply chain.

4.7 Clouds as a potential neglected reservoir and transport pathway for pesticides

The BN issue highlights the overlooked role of clouds in storing and transporting pesticides, with current monitoring systems failing to capture atmospheric pathways effectively. Scientifically, clouds can accumulate and redistribute pesticide residues from multiple sources through long-range transport and transformation processes, increasing uncertainty in source attribution and exposure assessment. The discussion noted key drivers such as climate change, evolving agricultural practices (e.g. use of

precipitations water for irrigation, use of drones for spraying pesticides), and limitations in existing monitoring frameworks, potentially leading to underestimated environmental and food contamination risks. In conclusion, this represents a complex emerging signal requiring further evidence, so, the network concluded the topic as "further information is needed". Future work should focus on improving atmospheric monitoring, integrating these processes into future risk assessment, and linking environmental data with the actual exposure to these pesticides via food and feed. The issue will be also followed-up with European Environment Agency (EEA).

4.8 Insects as a biological vaccine delivery vector

The use of insects, such as mosquitoes, as biological vectors for vaccine delivery to wildlife (e.g. bats) was included in BN and presented as a novel approach to support control of zoonotic diseases, including rabies. The discussion acknowledged its potential value within a One Health framework but highlighted major uncertainties related to ecological effects, biosecurity risks, possible misuse, feasibility, and the limited availability of data regarding use in real conditions. The network considered the topic a novel signal and was classified as "further information is needed", given the high uncertainty and potential biosafety implications. Continued monitoring, engagement with European Medicines Agency (EMA), environmental and biosafety authorities, and further research on feasibility and risk mitigation were recommended as future perspectives.

5. EFSA and EREN activities

5.1 Rapid risk assessment: cereulide in infant formula

EFSA presented a rapid risk assessment conducted during a crisis involving cereulide toxin contamination in infant formula, highlighting the need to address toxin-based hazards in sensitive food products. The discussion noted that the assessment was completed under urgent timelines, with limited toxicological data, methodological uncertainties, and challenges linked to extraction methods and safety factors for infants. This event highlights a broader emerging risk: toxin carry-over and enrichment during downstream processing of fermentation-derived ingredients, which may not be captured by traditional microbiological controls.

5.2 New insights on Campylobacter risks

Recent *Campylobacter* outbreaks associated with poultry, including data from Denmark and other Member States, were presented to highlight continuing challenges linked to this established foodborne hazard. The discussion noted increased severity of cases, difficulties in outbreak tracing, regulatory challenges related to process hygiene criteria, and changing exposure patterns driven by higher poultry consumption, new cooking practices, and possible environmental reservoirs. The network referred that *Campylobacter* remains a significant and evolving food safety issue requiring sustained attention. Future perspectives include strengthening the use of monitoring and surveillance data, improving communication of findings, and maintaining and enhancing coordination between public health authorities, industry and competent bodies.

5.3 Cryptosporidiosis: Literature review on foodborne outbreaks regarding suspected food vehicles and influencing factors

An update was provided on the already existing BN "foodborne cryptosporidiosis as an increasing public health concern", with challenges related to detection, surveillance and risk characterisation. The discussion highlighted limited routine monitoring, lack of validated foodborne detection methods, underreporting across countries, and the resilience of the pathogen across multiple transmission routes, including environmental pathways. The network concluded that "further information is needed under increased concern" as the current evidence remains insufficient to fully characterise the risk, and that improved surveillance is needed. Future perspectives include strengthening monitoring systems, enhancing diagnostic capacity, and integrating surveillance data to support more effective assessment and response.

5.4 SCHEER emerging risks

The SCHEER Chair of Committee presented the conceptual approach for identifying and prioritising emerging risks, highlighting topics relevant to food and environmental safety, including chemical exposure, food insecurity and environmental contaminants. The discussion emphasised the value of cross-agency collaboration and methodological alignment to improve coherence in emerging risk identification across EU scientific bodies. Participants concluded that closer cooperation between EFSA and SCHEER would support more consistent assessment and follow-up of emerging issues and early warning system signals. Continued information exchange and coordination with relevant EU scientific committees were recommended as future priorities.

5.5 HOLiFOOD and CONTEM projects

Updates were provided on EU-funded projects addressing emerging risks, including HOLiFOOD, which focuses on AI-based risk identification, and CONTEM, which examines chemical contaminants in alternative proteins. The discussion highlighted their possible contribution to early warning systems on emerging chemicals, predictive modelling, data integration and risk communication, supporting improved detection and assessment of emerging issues. The network noted that these projects strengthen methodological capacity for emerging risk identification and encouraged continued collaboration with EREN, together with dissemination of project outputs to support future risk assessment activities.

5.6 Contaminants in Entomophagy

A scoping review on chemical contaminants in edible insects was presented in the context of CONTEM project findings and related use as food and feed. The discussion noted that, although reported contaminant levels are generally low, evidence gaps remain on exposure, toxicity and insect-specifc limits. The issue therefore remains under evaluation, with future perspectives focusing on harmonised monitoring and improved data collection that may inform insect-specific limits.

5.7 Emerging risks in food supplements

The results from a multi-country tailor- made activity (TMA) on food supplements implemented under framework of EFSA Focal Point partnerships were presented, focusing on potential emerging risks linked to plant-based food supplements. The discussion highlighted several plants identified through nutrivigilance of toxicological reporting and market analysis on botanical substances of potential concern, while

noting that no full risk assessment had yet been conducted. The network concluded that the findings represent early signals requiring further investigation. Future work should focus on improved monitoring, targeted analytical studies, and expansion of nutrivigilance systems.

6. Methodolody

6.1 Methodology Resilience towards infectious diseases outbreak

A methodology for assessing the resilience of livestock systems to infectious diseases was presented, addressing the need for structured tools to support preparedness and risk management. The discussion highlighted how the approach integrates biosecurity implementation, feasibility and effectiveness into a composite index, allowing comparison across systems and identification of areas for improvement. The network noted that the methodology provides an adaptable framework for resilience assessment. Further development and application across different livestock systems were encouraged to support targeted prevention and response strategies.

7. FAO updates: food safety implications of recycled plastics and alternative food contact materials

FAO presented work on recycled plastics and alternative food contact materials, highlighting emerging concerns at the interface of sustainability and food safety. The discussion covered potential migration of chemical substances, limited data for emerging materials such as nanomaterials, and the lack of harmonised regulatory frameworks across FAO jurisdictions. The network noted that these gaps may complicate risk assessment and oversight as new materials enter the market. Further development of analytical and assessment approaches, improved data generation and international harmonisation were referred as future perspectives.

8. Newsletter and news monitoring

8.1 Newsletter updates and feedback

The newsletter update introduced a more structured emerging risks identification approach, including illustration of possible causal pathway using Directed acyclic graphs (DAGs) and other visuals to better present the links between exposures, mechanisms, and health outcomes. A dual-level reporting format was also implemented, combining concise summaries with detailed thematic topic files to improve clarity, comparability, and evidence-based prioritisation.

8.2 News monitoring

Heavy metal ingestion among consumers of protein powder supplements

Media referred to study on heavy metal subtle presence in protein powder supplements, particularly cadmium and lead. Although typical exposure remains within safety thresholds, increasing supplement use and potential cumulative exposure, especially among frequent consumers and users of plant-based powders, suggest future review of updated consumption and exposure data.

Contaminant exposure from matcha consumption

Matcha was referred as a potential issue due to its rapid market growth and consumption of the whole tea leaf in powdered form, which may increase exposure to heavy metals, pesticide residues and microbiological contamination. Although no immediate high risk was identified, increasing consumption, variable product quality and origin, and limited harmonised monitoring data support strengthened monitoring, traceability and supplier verification, as well as future review of updated consumption and exposure data.

FDA warns on toxic yellow oleander supplement

The FDA warned that several supplements marketed as tejocote root or similar botanical ingredients were found to contain yellow oleander, a highly toxic plant that can cause serious cardiovascular, neurological, and gastrointestinal effects. This highlight concerns botanical substitution/fraud, online product distribution, incomplete recalls, and the potential for acute poisoning, highlighting the need for stronger market surveillance, authentication, traceability, and rapid recall mechanisms.

Drugs of abuse in European rivers, Finnish media report

Drugs of abuse, including cocaine, tramadol and codeine, have been detected in European surface waters, reflecting consumption patterns and incomplete wastewater removal. Their possible uptake by aquatic organisms and transfer through fish and seafood raise uncertainties around chronic low-level exposure, bioaccumulation and the lack of food-specific thresholds. This signal supports stronger integration of environmental and food safety monitoring within a One Health approach.

9. Any Other business

Scientific articles were indicated in support of the discussions.

10. Closure of the meeting

The Chair thanked the presenters and participants, and the 35 EREN was adjourned.

The next 36 EREN meeting is planned in Parma at the end October. The precise dates to be communicated in the coming weeks.

Thematic Join Session (TjS): EREN – StaDG-ER

11 June 2026 – Granada University, Spain and Web-conference

TjS 1 – Introduction

The session was opened by EFSA, welcoming participants both onsite and online. The Chair outlined the objectives of the joint session, focusing on: (i) recent developments in horizon scanning (HS), and (ii) the implementation of early warning systems for emerging chemical risks.

TjS 2 – Horizon Scanning

TjS 2.1 – Reporting on EFSA HS 2026 Cycle 1

EFSA presented the results of its first 2026 horizon scanning cycle. The scope of activities has been broadened to include not only early emerging risks but also long-term signals, trends, and policy developments relevant to EFSA's remit.

Signals are identified through a combination of internal EFSA inputs, Member State networks (including EREN), EU agencies, and systematic screening of external reports and foresight outputs.

The analysis highlighted a range of signals grouped as follows:

Signals sufficiently covered (green): Topics such as circular food/feed systems, digital communication dynamics affecting trust in science, ultra-processed foods (highlighting the need for a harmonised definition and broader One Health approach), and climate change impacts were considered adequately addressed through ongoing EFSA activities.

Signals under further analysis (amber): These include AI-generated scientific information and risks of "AI-amplified trust", geopolitical dependencies in supply chains, emerging implications of quantum technologies, and the mobilisation of legacy pollutants due to climate-related events.

Signals not further considered (red): Issues related to gene-drive organisms were classified as primarily risk management, falling outside EFSA's core remit.

Participants were invited to provide feedback, share ongoing work, and indicate alternative views on prioritisation.

TjS 2.2 – National Horizon Scanning Systems

Two national approaches to horizon scanning were presented.

The Netherlands (NVWA) described a structured approach based on three complementary pillars: horizon scanning (signal detection), foresight (scenario-based analysis), and futures literacy (awareness of assumptions and biases). Activities are supported by internal networks, workshops, and emerging AI tools, with outputs feeding into a dynamic trend radar informing strategic planning. Challenges relate to embedding these approaches across a large organisation and maintaining long-term focus.

Sweden (SLV) presented a network-based model involving thematic "nodes" and a central coordination hub. Signals are analysed within nodes and consolidated into annual reports, which support operational planning and preparedness, including geopolitical aspects. The system is complemented by a national coordination mechanism for emerging chemical risks (Toxicological Council and SAMTOX).

TjS 2.3 – Discussion

The discussion highlighted common challenges and opportunities:

Current approaches within horizon scanning are mainly internal; there is a recognised need to further develop external communication strategies, including towards consumers.

Participants emphasised some methodological aspects and challenges related to managing large volumes of data and the need for clearer definitions (e.g. ultra-processed foods).

There was strong support for enhanced collaboration, exchange of signals, better interoperability between systems, and expanded networking across institutions.

TjS 3 – Early Warning and Action System for Emerging Chemicals

TjS 3.1 – EU Early Warning System (EEA)

The European Environment Agency (EEA) presented the development of the EU early warning and action system (EWAS) under the One Substance One Assessment framework.

The system aims to integrate signals from EU agencies and, on a voluntary basis, Member States, using a structured format capturing substance identity, nature of concern, and supporting evidence. Signals will be assessed based on criteria including urgency, severity, scale, and uncertainty.

An annual reporting cycle is foreseen, leading to prioritisation and potential regulatory or policy action by the European Commission and Member States. The first reporting cycle poses challenges in defining thresholds for signal inclusion and ensuring coordination across actors.

EFSA is expected to contribute as part of its usual emerging risks and horizon scanning activities, by strengthening the documentation of chemical-related emerging risks.

TjS 3.2 – Chemical Horizon Scanning (GHI)

The Global Harmonization Initiative (GHI) presented an AI-supported approach to horizon scanning based on large-scale data collection and signal processing.

Illustrative examples of emerging issues included: PFAS contamination in infant formula, cadmium exposure linked to fertilisers and novel consumption patterns, bisphenol contamination via environmental pathway.

The analysis highlighted that emerging chemical risks often arise at the intersection of evolving practices, environmental factors, and regulatory gaps.

TjS 3.3 – Discussion: Contribution of EREN and StaDG-ER

The discussion focused on how the networks can effectively contribute to EWAS. Participants emphasised the need to: progressively align terminology and criteria for

identifying emerging chemical signals; balance the level of detail required with practical workload considerations; ensure a flexible and iterative approach to signal submission.

It was agreed that EFSA will explore the development of a simplified template aligned with EWAS requirements, allowing gradual integration of additional information on chemical signals.

TjS 4 – Conclusions

The session confirmed the increasing strategic importance of horizon scanning across EFSA and Member States, with growing convergence of approaches. At the same time, further work is required to harmonise methodologies and strengthen coordination.

The development of the EU early warning system represents a significant step towards integrated identification and management of emerging chemical risks. Continued collaboration between EREN, StaDG-ER, EU agencies, and stakeholders will be essential to support its implementation.

TjS 5 - Closure of the meeting

The Chair thanked the presenters and participants, and the meeting was adjourned.