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.