

Draft Minutes

1st COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT NETWORK (CEN) Parma, Italy 1-2 March 2017

Chair: Shira Tabachnikoff

Members

Bulgaria	<i>Mariela Pchelinska</i>
Croatia	<i>Sara Mikrut</i>
Cyprus	<i>Charitini Frenaritou</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Vladimir Brychta</i>
Estonia	<i>Eva Lehtla</i>
Finland	<i>Perttu Saralampi</i>
Germany	<i>Suzan Fiack</i>
Italy	<i>Carlotta Ferroni</i>
Netherlands	<i>Annette Lijdsman</i>
Norway	<i>Ingrid Margaretha Høie</i>
Poland	<i>Katarzyna Floryanowicz</i>
Portugal	<i>Filipa De Vasconcelos Melo</i>
Romania	<i>Alina-Ioana Monea</i>
Slovak Republic	<i>Kristina Kristufkova</i>
Sweden	<i>Karin Gustafsson</i>

Observers

Bosnia and Herzegovina	<i>Dalibor Vidačak</i>
FYR of Macedonia	<i>Katerina Matikj</i>
Montenegro	<i>Andreja Boskovic</i>
Turkey	<i>Fatma Nevra Özcan</i>

Guest Speakers

<i>Benoit Vergriette</i>	<i>Catherine Clarke</i>	<i>Mirjam Jenny</i>
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EFSA Staff

Barbara Gallani

Shira Tabachnikoff

Saba Giovannacci

Christina Karkanti

James Ramsay

Rory Harrington

Francesca Avanzini

Sharon Monti

Anthony Smith

Mariya Dokova

Apologies: Austria, Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, EU-Commission.

1. Opening of the meeting

Shira Tabachnikoff, European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), welcomed all the members from the former Advisory Forum Communications Working Group (AFCWG) to the newly created Network and introduced the new members Catherine Clarke (**UK**, Food Standards Agency), Kristina Kristufkova (**Slovak Republic**, the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture) and Perttu Saralampi (**Finland**, the Finnish Food Safety Authority). A special welcome was extended to the **guest speakers**: Benoit Vergriette (Head of Risk and Society Unit, ANSES France) and Mirjam Jenny (Head Research Scientists and the Harding Centre for Risk Literacy at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Germany).

2. Welcome from EFSA's Head of Communications and External Relations

Barbara Gallani, EFSA's Head of Communications and External Relations, welcomed all to Parma and introduced the priorities of the newly formed Network: the integration of social sciences into communication strategies; the focus on exchange of practices; and the continuous feedback of Members on different communication tools.

3. [Update on financial rules](#) and DMS space

Christina Karkanti explained the main differences that the move towards a Network will bring in terms of reimbursement and allowances for the CEN Members. Saba Giovannacci introduced the new [DMS space](#) for the CEN members, including the new folder for [Communication Campaigns](#) in which Members can find and share information materials on various topics of interest to the Network. Shira Tabachnikoff encouraged Members to update the folder themselves and communicate when new material is being added in order to enable synergies within the Network.

4. [Update from the Advisory Forum](#)

Barbara Gallani reported back from the 62nd Advisory Forum (AF) meeting (held on 8-9 December) and informed Members about the upcoming 63rd Meeting to be held on 7-8 March in Malta. She noted the importance of these meetings in bringing Member States closer together and strengthening the message of a united Europe. She mentioned the International Risk Communications Liaison Group (IRCLG), a newly established network for authorities from around the globe, providing a platform for sharing experiences, tangible products and networking at the international level.

5. Presentation on the place and uses of social sciences at ANSES

Benoit Vergriette introduced the work of the multi-disciplinary team at ANSES exclusively responsible for social sciences research. He spoke about the various initiatives across the organization to integrate social sciences in risk assessment and risk communication – including seminars, conferences and meetings with natural scientists. Benoit highlighted the importance of sociological insights along “traditional” scientific knowledge in better informing decision-makers. According to him, they would allow for a communication of risks that goes beyond a simple transfer of information between risk assessment and risk management. Among the questions raised following the presentation was the application of social sciences’ insights specifically in the risk management process. It was concluded that at the point of hazard identification and exposure evaluation, implementing social insights can secure a smooth link between risk assessment and effective risk management.

6. Presentation on Consumer Insights from FSA

Catherine Clarke talked about perceptions on food poisoning. Research has shown that the issue has largely been perceived by British consumers as a low risk and related to personal habits. This in turns makes it more difficult to change behaviour and practices related to eating behaviour and routines. As a response, the FSA has adopted an educational approach focused around behavioural change nudges. She gave the example of eating rare burgers and discussed in more detail the ways in which the associated risks are determined by the context. It was concluded that effective models of risk communication reference familiar risks, are easy to understand and visualise and successfully challenge existing assumptions. In this sense, social media was identified as an effective channel to spread behavioural change messaging since it also offers the benefit of engaging audiences. Follow-up questions focused on the ways in which conflicting messages between industry and the FSA were handled.

7. Presentation on risk in consumer and health decisions

Mirjam Jenny discussed the concepts of uncertainty and how it can be wrongly perceived when measured by percentages and probabilities. It was noted that people tend to fear more ‘dread risks’ (low-probability but high-consequence events) in comparison to more relevant risks that can be continuous, like food safety risks. There were two main decision aids tools mentioned that could also be appropriate for the communications of food related hazards. The first one was a ‘fact box’ that provides a summary of the main risks, including benefits and harms. The second one was a ‘causal decision tree’ which is used when evaluating health information. The rationale behind both tools is to present findings in an accessible way, using images and visuals. Shira Tabachnikoff commented that such tools can be implemented as an effective first step for integrating social science in the group and encouraged Members to think of specific topics.

8. Workshop on Social Sciences in Risk Communications and the CEN

Barbara Gallani introduced the workshop designed to share views on the direction in which the CEN should go. Members were split in three break-out groups and each group was assigned one of the guest speakers as a facilitator. The focus of the discussion within the groups was the development of some tangible ideas on ways in which social sciences can be incorporated in the work of the CEN.

9. Conclusions and Actions from the Workshop

Feedback from the Group 1 acknowledged the need to find tools to narrow the gap between science and society. It was pointed out that social studies can be a useful tool in the analysis of target groups when designing the messaging related to food safety questions. It was also suggested that consumers in different regions could react differently to different risks. In this context the usefulness of the Eurobarometer was discussed. The importance of sharing experiences between Member States was emphasized, including the need to provide concrete case studies of where and how social insights have been applied, especially to emerging risks. To enable this best-practice exchange, it was suggested to organize regional seminars on social sciences and risk communications since similar regions are likely to face similar challenges.

Group 2 added to this input by suggesting the establishment of a platform for sharing best practices between Member States and EFSA, e.g. conferences on incorporating social sciences in the risk assessment and risk communications process. To facilitate early-on discussions on hot topics and emerging issues video or teleconferences between Members were proposed. Other proposals included: sharing contacts and creating a small database of social scientists in different countries, an expert panel advising on particular topics, and the creation of a best practice checklist.

Group 3 also focused on the need for best-practice exchanges and proposed a joint conference, trainings and meetings including presentations by social scientists. The need for sharing European success stories from Member States and about the work of the CEN and EFSA was also discussed. Controversial topics such as **emerging risks, food supplements (and the lack of nutri-vigilance), novel foods and food allergens, GMO and genome editing, sugar intake, endocrine disruptors, pesticides and pesticides residues (phenomenon of multi-residues of pesticides), BPA, and Emerging Risks** were suggested as subjects of future EU insights or Eurobarometer surveys and further research from social sciences perspective. Since national organisations might have limited time and resources to work on the development of tips for consumers and communication guidelines for these and other topics, this service could be outsourced.

During the follow-up discussion the need for more interaction between national authorities and academia was mentioned. Since issues are often country-specific, it was considered how best every country could get in contact with their social scientists. A vision of the CEN group as a bridge between social science and communications was put forward and a possible liaison with **the Paris Risk group** was considered appropriate.

Summary of proposals and activities that emerged from the workshop:

- Definition of social science in the context of the CEN activities
- A Guidance document including, checklists, tips and case studies
- Revisiting the Eurobarometer or
- Continuing with the EU insights survey on topics of growing relevance
- Organisation of focused seminars /conferences – to this end an Organising committee to be set-up. To be considered: organising such an event within the 2018 EFSA scientific conference (parallel session or similar)

- Ranking of **Top Priority topics**

- Emerging Risks
 - BPA
 - GMO
 - Pesticides
 - Novel Foods
 - Food supplements
 - Genome editing
 - Sugar intake
 - Endocrine disruptors
- Training opportunities with social scientists
- Establish a database of national social scientists that could help with the work - maybe by creating a taskforce (group of experts) that can be consulted [to start with the people who presented at the meeting]
- Joint opportunities with the Paris Risk group

10. Update on EFSA Communications activities

10.1 Anthony Smith (EFSA) provided a quick recap on the Uncertainty survey on communicating uncertainties related to scientific assessments. Results would be integrated in a separate draft guidance for which social scientist would be invited to support. The timeline of the survey and its follow-ups were presented together with tools (news, social media, etc.) that have been employed to popularize it. Members showed interest in the methodology and on receiving the final results which would be available together with a report on the project.

10.2 Sharon Monti (EFSA) and Francesca Avanzini (EFSA) presented the communications and media campaign on [Antimicrobial resistance](#) (AMR). They talked about media highlights mentioning the topic and the wide attention the campaign has received on both the national and European level. The new [data visualisation tool](#) on AMR and the slogan “reduce, replace, re-think” the use of antibiotics were discussed in more detail. The EU Insights survey on the human health impact of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in animals across the EU and the infographic on it were also presented.

10.3 James Ramsay (EFSA) presented EFSA’s stakeholder engagement approach. EFSA has attracted a relatively large number of stakeholders in the span of a few months – total of 94 – from a variety of professional fields. The concept of a “communication lab” was introduced as a platform to get input from stakeholders on the development of communication products. James also mentioned media coverage across Europe on topics that have generated high interest in EFSA’s outputs.

11. EU-Insights Risk Communications Campaigns – Evaluation and Follow-up actions

Shira Tabachnikoff presented results and background information on the EU Insights risk perception survey. EU Insights was defined as an alternative to the Eurobarometer – the idea was to decide on 1-2 topics (bi-annually) of high strategic priority – defined together with the AF. Results of the Risk Perception Survey are to be used to inform Member States’ communication strategies. The first EU Insights was finalized early 2017

and the topic was: *Perceptions on the human health impact of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and antibiotics use in animals across the EU*. It was the first survey on the contribution of animal farming to AMR.

She encouraged Members to keep her posted on media coverage on the topic and to actively share results from the EU Insights so that the added value is increased. She reminded members that an infographic summarizing results is available in [15 languages](#) and can be disseminated via social media using the hashtag *#AntimicrobialResistance* – used for all tweets on the topic of AMR. The full [report and data](#) are to be published on the EFSA Journal on 6 March while other materials (data per country, presentation slides, survey questions) available on the [DMS](#). Barbara Gallani noted that any observations of the impact the survey will help the Network develop future steps and decide how to take it further. Shira Tabachnikoff asked Member to think of particular topics of high priority for 2017-2018 across Member States. As a conclusion, the main learning points from the first EU Insights survey were: simplifying messages, aiming for more robust results and including more respondents, making it EU-wide.

12. [Discussion on CEN Work Programme 2017](#)

Shira Tabachnikoff presented a draft proposal of the CEN 2017 Workplan and introduced the main points for further discussion. During its first year, the CEN would continue with the activities already established by the AFCWG while adding on new capacities. Three main objectives for 2017 were suggested:

1. Improving coherence and preparedness
2. Sharing best practices and strengthening capacity in risk communications
3. Integrating social science in risk communication

Specific supporting activities were presented under each of these general themes. Barbara Gallani commented that the Work Programme is rather descriptive of the tools used but misses some of the specificity that might be requested by external audiences. She suggested determining particular topics to focus on and opened the floor for further discussion on identifying areas of common interest that deserve a joint effort. Among suggested topics were: nanotechnology in food (Benoit Vergriette, ANSES), following the effects of avian influenza (Slovakia), the development of common action plans at the EU level in cases of disease outbreaks (Romania and Bulgaria) and risk perceptions on food supplements (Sweden and Portugal).

Another suggestion was to share national communication plans to allow the CEN to do planning rather than reactive activities. Portugal gave the example of a national survey done to determine 10 main priorities for national researchers based on the 26 priorities on the EU Risk Assessment Agenda (EURAA). Beyond aligning with AF priorities, suggestions from Portugal and the Netherlands envisioned a feedback loop between Member States and the AF. The CEN can help inform on main priorities in each Member State hence helping to prioritize issues and raising their visibility on the supranational level. In relation to objective two, Shira Tabachnikoff informed the Members about the development of the new Risk Communication Guidelines which would have a new design including a new introduction, updates on uncertainty, social media, caffeine and acrylamide.

13. Key Country Issues

Before the presentation of the specific country issues, Shira Tabachnikoff encouraged the Members to share their work on topics that might be of interest to the Members also via e-mail or Yammer.

13.1 Sweden – Consumption of apricot kernels and linseeds

Karin Gustafsson presented the work of The Swedish National Food Agency around their advice against the consumption of linseeds and apricot kernels. From a communications standpoint, these recommendations attracted rather unexpectedly high media attention. The response strategy was to clearly communicate the reasons behind them, mainly online and via social media.

13.2 Croatia – Increased incidence of Salmonella Infantis in broiler meat

Sara Mikrut reported on the communication around a Salmonella scare possibly linked with imported eggs. The Croatian Food Agency (RASFF) also found traces of salmonella in chicken imported from Poland. The situation was challenging to handle but disadvantages were turned into advantages by ensuring: timely and open communication on risk and an approach based on transparency and compassion.

13.3 Cyprus – Tool for risk assessment and Communication activities

Charitini Frenaritou presented the work of The Cyprus State General Laboratory (CY-SGL) on assessing the exposure of the Cyprus adolescent population to toxic substances. The CY-SGL used its model for the dietary exposure assessment to chemicals, at individual level, called "ImproRisk". The model has the capacity to carry out refined dietary exposure assessment, combining different databases and datasets. Article 36 Organizations in EU MS and the Pre-accession countries are entitled to have access to the "ImproRisk" model. Communication activities included: promotion at AF/ FP meetings, conferences, joint workshops and trainings with EFSA, and through its dedicated website. Other recent communication activities regarding benefits of w3-w6 fatty acids and risk & benefits of oils & fats in our diet were communicated through publications online, on TV and via social media.

13.4 Germany – Genome editing, food supplements and International Green Week

Suzan Fiack first spoke about the emerging topic of genome editing and presented results from focus groups assessing public opinion on the topic. She then presented the International Green Week exhibition as a platform used to communicate about pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PA), acrylamide and recommendations on food supplements intake. Suzan updated the Members on the joint activities between the BfR and EFSA and on BfR's 6th Summer Academy. Finally, she presented the preliminary results of the 2016 BfR evaluation stakeholder survey and consumer monitoring.

13.5 Poland – Poisoning from eating wild mushrooms among young Polish population

Katarzyna Floryanowicz presented the topic of poisoning from the consumption of wild mushrooms. The public awareness campaign in Poland was focused mainly on young adults who are most often the victims of poisoning. A main tool was the

dissemination of a rap video on the dangers of wild mushroom picking that proved to be a success among other generations as well.

13.6 Slovakia – Botulism and Avian Influenza. Communication in the Slovak Republic

Kristina Kristufkova first presented the case of Botulism from consumption of chickpeas spread, the authorities and stakeholder involved. The issue received high media coverage in Slovakia while the authorities failed to provide a timely response. Among the main takeaway was the need to take control of the communication flow by pro-actively providing clear statements.

13.7 The Netherlands – Infographics on the main risks in slaughterhouses concerning hygiene and animal welfare

Annette Lijdsman presented an [infographics](#) developed by the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority following the introduction of new approach of intensified supervision in slaughterhouses. The communication strategy relied mainly on visuals rather than text thus taking advantage of the benefits of digital communication. Feedback has been received mainly from policy-makers and inspectors who reportedly have gained a better understanding of the different parts of the process they are responsible for.

14. Any other business

Shira Tabachnikoff closed the meeting by encouraging continuity between meetings. She urged the members to contribute to the development of key activities for the Work Programme and the suggestion of future guest speakers.

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

Reference	Who	What
Action 1	EFSA	<i>Review input from the Social Science Workshop and the Work Programme objectives and finalize the Work Programme to share with the CEN Members, AF and FP before the next CEN meeting. Main priorities are defining realistic deliverables and activities to integrate Social Science into the CEN activities while strengthening capacity building in this area. Priority activities selected from the varied proposals to be defined for 2017 with proposals for 2018 as well.</i>
Action 2	EFSA	<i>Organize a video /teleconference on emerging hot topics to develop a common strategy and look for opportunities for the early-on involvement of social sciences. Input on topics requested from CEN members.</i>
Action 3	EFSA/CEN members	<i>Update the CEN Communications Campaigns DMS folder with inputs that could be of interest to Members</i>
Action 4	CEN members	<i>Upload relevant Communications Plans and Strategies to the DMS folder</i>
Action 5	EFSA	<i>Create a WhatsApp group and the CEN Yammer group. Inform and suggest use of notifications.</i>

Document history

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