



Note to the Management Board: Towards an EU-FORA 2.0

1. Introduction

The EFSA European Food Risk Assessment (EU-FORA) Fellowship Programme has been running since 2017, with three cohorts of fellows already graduated.

An evaluation¹ of the Programme was initiated in 2020 to assess whether it is achieving the expected impact and maximising the return on investment. The evaluation also informed the development of a new, more sustainable, EU-FORA Programme based on the experience from past cycles and future strategic directions. The timing for this evaluation is not coincidental but linked to the implementation of the Transparency Regulation and the adoption of EFSA Strategy 2027.

The evaluation highlighted high fulfilment with the objectives of the Programme, as well as satisfaction of the different consulted parties. It also identified areas where improvement is recommended, in particular: (i) the outreach of the Programme; (ii) the engagement of hosting sites/supervisors beyond the Programme life cycle; (iii) the engagement of graduate fellows in EFSA-related activities beyond the Programme life cycle; (iv) the system in place for the payment of fellows; and (v) a strategy to ensure the best possible return on investment.

We hereby present a proposal driven by the needs of EFSA and MS, focused on the development of staff in MS competent organisations, with improved mechanism to ensure sustainability, as well as the return on investment, and that contributes to the implementation of the Partnerships vision.

2. Proposal of an EU-FORA 2.0

In line with EFSA's upcoming strategic objectives, the new Programme aims to further build on mutual benefits and increase EFSA and MS capacity to pool shared expertise. It will facilitate stronger fit-for-purpose partnerships and enhance the engagement of MS organisations via a strengthened involvement of hosting sites. Improved outreach will result in both a stronger food safety risk assessment community and in securing the sustainability of the programme. More concretely, EU-FORA 2.0 needs to (i) ensure a robust scheme for the payment of fellows; (ii) bring the focus closer to EFSA's partners (Article 36 organisations); and (iii) ensure a strategy with the best possible return on investment.

The proposed EU-FORA 2.0 is a 12-month 'learning by doing' fellowship, complemented with dedicated training. Its target audience are mid-career professionals from Article 36 organisations. Hosting sites and fellows are proposed to be selected via an open Call for Proposals with a minimum of two organisations applying in consortium: one acting as hosting site and the other(s) as fellow releasing organisation(s). Proposals need to be co-submitted by both parties, including already the identification of the fellow(s) to be trained and an ex-ante impact assessment on benefits to both hosting site and the organisation of origin. Through a Grant Agreement with the consortium, EFSA will be able to financially support the learning-by-doing of fellows in the work programmes selected and approved by EFSA. During the fellowship period, fellows remain as staff members of their organisation of origin. Temporary placements in hosting sites will be organised with the aim of maximising the knowledge transfer and networking.

The proposed system should overcome the difficulties arising from the current system for the payment of fellows. The co-submission of the proposals will also demonstrate the added value and impact of the proposed cooperation; promote the establishment of long-term collaboration beyond the annual cycle; and increase the involvement of supervisors and hosting sites in the short, mid and long run in between themselves and with EFSA. Furthermore, on-site training will increase the outreach by, expectedly, encouraging applications from competent authorities that until now expressed difficulties in allowing their staff members to leave for a one-year period to join the fellowship programme. The proposed EU-FORA 2.0 programme is aligned with the provisions of the Transparency Regulation and the current EFSA strategy, in particular with fostering partnerships with MS in the context of an EFSA ecosystem framework.

¹ Including outsourced review, internal consultation, and consultation with the Advisory Forum Discussion Group on Capacity Building.