

## **How stakeholder engagement facilitated the development of the open dietary exposure assessment tool 'ImproRisk'**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The State General Laboratory (SGL) carries out risk assessments on the dietary exposure of the Cypriot population to chemical substances within its participation in the Food Safety Council, under the Ministry of Health of Cyprus. Since 2014, the SGL has been developing its own risk assessment tool called 'ImproRisk', via which it can perform dietary exposure assessments. Since then, the ImproRisk tool has been upgraded to meet EFSA requirements and risk assessors' needs at national and European level. The current objective is to further upgrade ImproRisk according to EFSA FoodEx2, for more accurate exposure assessments. The anticipated impact of our project is the development of an open, harmonised and powerful dietary exposure assessment tool for chemical contaminants, which will be used by risk assessors, thus ensuring food safety and public health at European level and beyond.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Methods and tools used to engage with our audience:

- Staff from SGL and other competent food safety authorities in Cyprus: info sessions/training, exchange of emails.
- Risk assessors from food safety authorities/risk assessment institutes/universities at European level: training, oral presentations at EFSA Focal Point/network meetings and conferences, exchange of emails.
- EFSA: oral presentations at EFSA Focal Point/network meetings, joint project (grant agreement) with EFSA on the further development of the ImproRisk tool, exchange of emails.

Material actions taken:

- Allocation of sufficient SGL budget for subcontracting purposes from 2014 to date, in order to ensure that ImproRisk will reach its desired status (i.e. FoodEx2 implementation).

- Rendering ImproRisk an open access tool, to ensure that as many risk assessors as possible at EU level will make use of the tool, which is in line with EFSA principles of openness and transparency.

## RESULTS

The outcome of this engagement process was the development of an open, harmonised and accurate dietary exposure assessment tool (i.e. ImproRisk), with more than 60 registered users at EU level, who greatly contributed to ImproRisk's further development through the feedback they provided on the tool. This would not have been possible without EFSA and other stakeholders recognising that SGL is an institute with sufficient expertise in food safety and risk assessment, which builds trust and is reliable.

## DISCUSSION

### Lessons learned

#### Successes:

- Effective engagement with stakeholders, which led to:
  - Sufficient number of registered ImproRisk users and subsequent provision of feedback on its use
  - Training/workshops at EU level (e.g. TAIEX, etc.)
  - Collaboration with EFSA through a grant agreement
- Development of a harmonised and accurate dietary RA tool, through the valuable feedback of the registered ImproRisk users

#### 'Failures' and corrective actions:

- ImproRisk was initially open only to Article 36 Organisations. In 2017, it was decided that it would become an open tool, in order to attract a higher number of risk assessors to use it and, therefore, provide more feedback on its development.

One important comment was that ImproRisk should function as an online tool, which is its current status.

#### Take-away messages/ recommendations:

- Include as many relevant stakeholders as possible
- Be open and transparent
- Be reliable and trustworthy
- A 'generic' approach to developing a tool for the sake of EU citizens is positive

#### Find the right balance

- Do not be afraid of the mistakes that you will inevitably make. Just make sure that you have a 'corrective action mechanism' in place.