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Scientific Cooperation Annual Report 2014

European Food Safety Authority

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Summary

Cooperation with partners in the EU Member States and at international level has been important since EFSA was founded. The importance and relevance of such activity remains high, considering that EFSA's second key strategic objective is to build a sustainable risk assessment community with MS. This Annual Report brings together the activities undertaken in 2014 by EFSA jointly with the Focal Point network to implement Scientific Cooperation. It also highlights how EFSA supports the European Commission in its enlargement programmes and contributes to the harmonisation of risk assessment practices with EU institutions and agencies, as well with international partners.

EFSA's Advisory Forum continued its activities centred on the development of an EU Risk Assessment Agenda, on data collection and access, on strengthening scientific cooperation and on reviewing the operation of the Advisory Forum. During 2014, Focal Points continued to act as an interface between EFSA and national authorities, research institutes, consumers and other stakeholders, supporting AF members in the implementation of activities related to networking and scientific cooperation. A review of the Focal Point network was concluded in 2014 with the approval of new Focal Point Agreements as of 2015, with an increase of the EFSA's financial support granted to Focal Points to approximately 1 million euros.

With regards to information exchange, a total of 109 requests for input were sent by email within the Focal Point network in 2014, while 213 documents were shared by via the EFSA's Information Exchange Platform, their vast majority (70%) concerning risk assessment outputs. Moreover, 18 Focal Points also shared information on relevant planned activities, in particular annual and strategic work plans, as well as planned risk assessment activities.

By end of 2014, EFSA's Article 36 List contained 330 entries from 30 different countries (EU Member States, Iceland and Norway). Almost all Focal Points (26 out of 30) reported to have taken actions to promote (and support the review) of the List, having organised a total of 60 meetings. Overall, 58 new organisations were included on the List, 185 updates of organisation profiles were endorsed and 101 entries were removed from the List.

In 2014, EFSA conducted an external evaluation to assess the impact of its science grant and procurement projects. The external evaluation showed that these projects have a strong networking and cooperation benefit, facilitating collaboration between MS organisations and forging new, lasting relationships, particularly for Article 36 organisations. The evaluation also brought up the added value of larger and longer term grant-funded projects. Based on the evaluation, thematic grants and framework partnership agreements were launched as new tools under the grant schemes.

By end of 2014, a total of 4,528 applications were submitted to EFSA's Experts Database, representing 225 new applications submitted during the year, bringing the total number of included experts up to 3,813. Attracting scientific experts to collaborate with EFSA on an ad-hoc basis remains an important support activity carried out by Focal Points. In 2014, almost all Focal Points (29 out of 30) reported to have promoted the submission of new applications to the database, while 19 reported to have promoted the database as a source of expertise for national use.

Training in risk assessment is an increasingly growing activity that promotes the harmonisation of risk assessment practices across the EU and contributes to capacity building. During 2014, EFSA supported the implementation of the 2nd edition of the Better Training for Safer Food risk assessment training courses. A total of 32 courses will be run during the period 2014-2018, delivering training in eight different risk assessment areas to 800 national experts from Member State public organisations. Overall, 20 Focal Points reported in 2014 to have provided support to the implementation of these training opportunities.

During 2014, EFSA further implemented recommendations arising from the self-review of EFSA's Scientific Networks. An important recommendation concerns the role that Focal Points play in facilitating the exchange of information between network members and Advisory Forum members at national level. Fifteen Focal Points reported to have held at least one meeting with national network representatives; 9 reported to have held bilateral meetings with their Advisory Forum members; and 6 reported to have supported the updating of the list of network representatives.

In 2014, EFSA concluded the implementation of its Pre-Accession Programme 2011-2014 set up under the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. Activities carried during the year included the organisation of induction trainings on GMO and pest risk assessment, and a seminar on risk communication, all addressed to Pre-Accession countries. In addition, representatives from Pre-Accession countries participated in 11 EFSA meetings, including Advisory Forum and Focal Point meetings.

In February 2014, EFSA started its European Neighbourhood Programme for 2014-2016. The overall objective of the programme is to promote the understanding of EFSA's work, share expertise and create information exchange mechanisms. Two country visits as well as a three-day food safety conference - with 55 participants from the ENP countries and speakers from the European Commission, international organisations, Member States, Pre-Accession countries and EFSA - were organised.

EFSA worked closely with a range of international partners. In particular, scientific and technical support was provided to the European Commission in Codex Alimentarius related activities. EFSA also started activities to strengthen scientific cooperation with the Joint Expert Committees of World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization; and took over the scientific secretariat together with the European Commission of the International Food Chemical Safety Liaison Group.

EFSA collaborated closely with EU sister agencies (ECHA, EMA, ECDC and EEA), for example through regular bilateral videoconferences with the European Chemicals Agency, a trilateral meeting with this Agency and the Joint Research Centre's Institute for Health and Consumer Protection, and a visit to the European Environment Agency. In 2014, EFSA took over the chairing of the meetings of the European Agencies' Network on Scientific Advice.

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1. Introduction

Cooperation with partners in MS and internationally has been important since EFSA was founded, and EFSA's second key strategic objective is to build a sustainable risk assessment community with MS. Over the years, several tools, activities and networks have been established to structure networking and cooperation.

This Annual Report brings together the activities undertaken over 2014 by EFSA and the FP network to operate scientific cooperation. In addition, it highlights how EFSA supports the EC in its enlargement programmes and contributes to harmonisation with international partners, EU institutions and agencies.

Scientific cooperation has been discussed in-depth with a number of partners and gained a multi-annual perspective this year, as laid down in the Scientific Cooperation Roadmap 2014–2016¹ and the EFSA's Multi-annual Programme on International Scientific Cooperation 2014–2016².

2. Scientific Cooperation Activities in 2014

2.1. Advisory Forum

The EFSA Advisory Forum was established in 2002 under Regulation (EC) No. 178/2002 (EFSA's Founding Regulation), setting out the principles of the General Food Law and the establishment of EFSA, and has a main role in providing strategic advice to the Executive Director on EFSA's work.

The AF members represent each national body responsible for risk assessment in the EU, Iceland and Norway, with observers from Switzerland and the EC. The AF is chaired by EFSA's Executive Director and is at the heart of EFSA's collaborative approach to working with MS. Through it, EFSA and MS join forces in addressing European risk assessment and risk communication issues. Members use the AF to advise EFSA on scientific matters, its work programmes and priorities, and to address emerging risk issues as early as possible. The AF members have committed to: exchange scientific data, coordinate risk communication activities and messages, address contentious issues and diverging opinions, set up working groups to focus collectively on specific issues, coordinate work and avoid duplication – all of these in order to meet the obligations imposed on them by EFSA's Founding Regulation.

2.1.1. Activities of the Advisory Forum

There are four meetings of the AF per year, as stipulated in EFSA's Founding Regulation. In addition to the general exchange of information and coordination of activities, for each meeting there is a strategic focus to the discussions. In 2014 these centred on the development of an EU Risk Assessment Agenda, on data collection and access, on strengthening scientific cooperation and on reviewing the operation of the AF. The AF members were also kept well informed of the activities of EFSA's Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and Units through regular attendance of their representatives.

2.1.2. EU Risk Assessment Agenda

One of the key activities set out in the Scientific Cooperation Roadmap 2014–2016 is to develop an EU Risk Assessment Agenda to address common long term needs and actions in support of risk assessment in the EU. While MS have their own work plans and priorities, the aim of the EU Risk Assessment Agenda is to agree an additional joint programme of prioritised risk assessment support activities.

In order to identify specific activities and joint projects to be prioritised, programmed and resourced in the coming years, an AF Discussion Group was convened in 2014 to commence the task of defining common priorities and clarifying who is involved in what activities. After several meetings of the Discussion Group, the process of identifying topics to be included in the EU Risk Assessment Agenda has been established by setting a range of criteria to be considered in the prioritisation. The work on producing an agreed list of priorities will continue in 2015.

¹ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/corporate/pub/scientificcooperationroadmap1416.htm>

² <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/corporate/pub/iscmap1416.htm>

2.1.3. Review of the Operation of the Advisory Forum

In 2012, EFSA's external review identified that "the use of AF's advice and assistance can be improved to be more efficient" and recommended further strengthening cooperation with MS, in particular stimulating exchanges and the participation of each MS at AF meetings.

As a specific review of the activities and functioning of the AF had not previously been carried out, a review of the operations of the Forum was initiated in order to ensure it continued to meet the requirements of the Founding Regulation as well as the needs of EFSA and MS. The first stage of the review was a member survey conducted in October 2014. The survey led to important conclusions, namely: the most important objective of the AF, as ranked by respondents, is to ensure close cooperation between national competent bodies; most respondents reported that it is extremely important to share information on new and on-going risk assessment activities; respondents also reported to want more interaction with EFSA's Scientific Networks and the Scientific Committee.

The start of a second phase of looking at aligning the tasks of the AF (as set out in EFSA's Founding Regulation) and the roles that the AF members play in achieving the tasks commenced in the AF meeting of December 2014. An external facilitator engaged the members in discussion groups to identify ways in which the AF met its stated objectives and how these could be improved. The full review will be completed during 2015 and presented to the AF members at their meeting in December 2015.

2.1.4. Guest Scientist and Staff Exchange

In 2014, a first pilot of EFSA's Guest Scientist and Staff Exchange scheme was launched in cooperation with the AF. The aim of this scheme is to strengthen and enhance the scientific cooperation between EFSA and its partners. During the first year, EFSA received 11 scientists for an average of 2 weeks. Positive feedback was provided from both EFSA and the guest scientists' side to the AF, who agreed to continue and possibly expand the scheme. In addition, 4 EFSA staff members were hosted by MS institutions for an average of 5 days.

2.2. Focal Point Network

Focal Points act as an interface between EFSA and the national food safety authorities, research institutes, consumers and other stakeholders. The FP network is made up of members from all 28 EU MS, Iceland and Norway, as well as observers from Switzerland and EU candidate countries.

FPs support their AF members in the practical implementation of activities related to networking and scientific cooperation, namely to: ensure the exchange of scientific information between national authorities and EFSA; support competent organisations under Article 36 of EFSA's Founding Regulation; promote at national level the setting up of networks of organisations and scientific experts for supporting EFSA's activities; and raise EFSA's scientific visibility and outreach in MS.

The foundation of the FP network was laid down with the signature of the Declarations of Intent³ by the AF and the adoption of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking⁴ by EFSA's Management Board. The expansion of the role of FPs is further envisaged in EFSA's Scientific Cooperation Roadmap 2014-2016. EFSA and FPs meet on a regular basis, and meetings are chaired by EFSA. FPs report annually to EFSA on their activities summarised in annual activity reports⁵.

2.2.1. Focal Point Agreements

FP Agreements were signed between EFSA and MS for the first time in 2008. All MS, as well as Norway and Iceland, renewed their FP Agreements in 2014. Switzerland, as well as Candidate Countries - The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey - have all actively participated in the activities and meetings of the FP network during 2014.

In January 2013, an EFSA FP Task Force was set up to review the work of the network after a period of five years of operation (2008–2012). The analysis made was presented to the AF members in

³ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/af/afdeclaration.htm>

⁴ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/aboutefsa/keydocs.htm>

⁵ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/fp.htm>

September 2013, who concluded that the FP network is a strong and operational network, meeting the overall objective to strengthen scientific cooperation and networking between EFSA and MS. During 2014, the Task Force continued its work, which included consultations with the EC on the legal and financial framework of the activities of the network. In September 2014, EFSA endorsed the implementation of new FP Agreements along with an increase of the financial support to be granted to FPs, from almost 800 thousand euros up to above 1 million euros (see Figure 5). The new FP Agreements have the form of multi-annual grant agreements and will be implemented as of 2015.

2.2.2. Focal Point activities

Three FP meetings were organised in 2014. These aimed to support FPs in their tasks by providing background information, guidance, training and a platform for networking. Priorities continued to be the exchange of views and experiences in the practical implementation of FP tasks, as well as the exchange of information on FP activities.

During 2014, FPs continued to implement their tasks as laid down on the respective FP Agreements. These included the exchange of scientific information, the provision of support to Article 36 organisations, the promotion of networks of scientific experts (including the EDB), the consolidation and expansion of national networks, and raising the scientific visibility of EFSA and MS activities. Preliminary work undertaken by FPs in preparation of their new tasks also kicked off in 2014, namely the coordination of the activities of EFSA's Scientific Networks at national level and the dissemination of information (and provision of support) regarding risk assessment training opportunities.

2.3. Information Exchange

EFSA exchanges information in a collaborative way with MS through different mechanisms and FPs playing an important role in this activity. In 2014, FPs continued to collect and share information amongst themselves and with EFSA on several areas of risk assessment and data collection. A total of 109 requests for assistance and input were sent by email to FPs, either from EFSA or from other FPs.

The Information Exchange Platform is a tool that facilitates the information exchange regarding risk assessment activities, storing mandates or requests to conduct a risk assessment, outputs of a risk assessment, work plans of national food authorities and country specific information such as country profiles. By end of 2014, the IEP contained a total of 1,700 documents, remaining an important tool for sharing relevant scientific risk assessment information. The vast majority of documents stored in the IEP are risk assessment outputs (80.7%), while the remaining are work plans (7.5%), risk assessment mandates (6.6%) and country specific information (5.2%).

In 2014, 24 FPs uploaded a total of 213 documents onto the IEP (see Figure 1). These were 142 risk assessment outputs, 27 risk assessment mandates, 23 country profiles and 21 work plans. Overall, 18 different FPs reported to have shared at least one type of planned activity with EFSA and other FPs. In this context, 11 FPs reported to have shared annual work programmes and 12 to have shared strategic (or equivalent) work plans via the IEP. Moreover, 11 FPs reported to have shared information on planned risk assessments, as well as on planned research and data collection activities, via a dedicated reporting table created to this purpose.

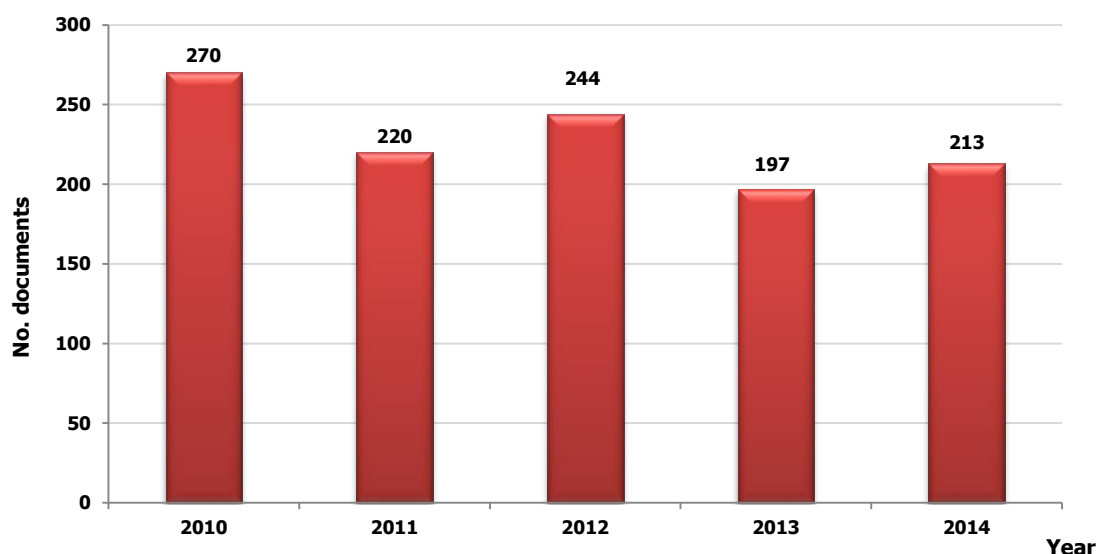


Figure 1: Number of documents uploaded on EFSA's Information Exchange Platform/year

The 142 risk assessment outputs uploaded during 2014 were distributed into 13 main categories (i.e. scientific areas, see Figure 2). Most of the documents uploaded were classified as scientific opinions (116). The remaining ones were technical reports (14), statements (10), and guidance documents (2). The two scientific areas where more uploads were made were "Genetically Modified Organisms" and "Dietetic products nutrition and allergies (NDA)".

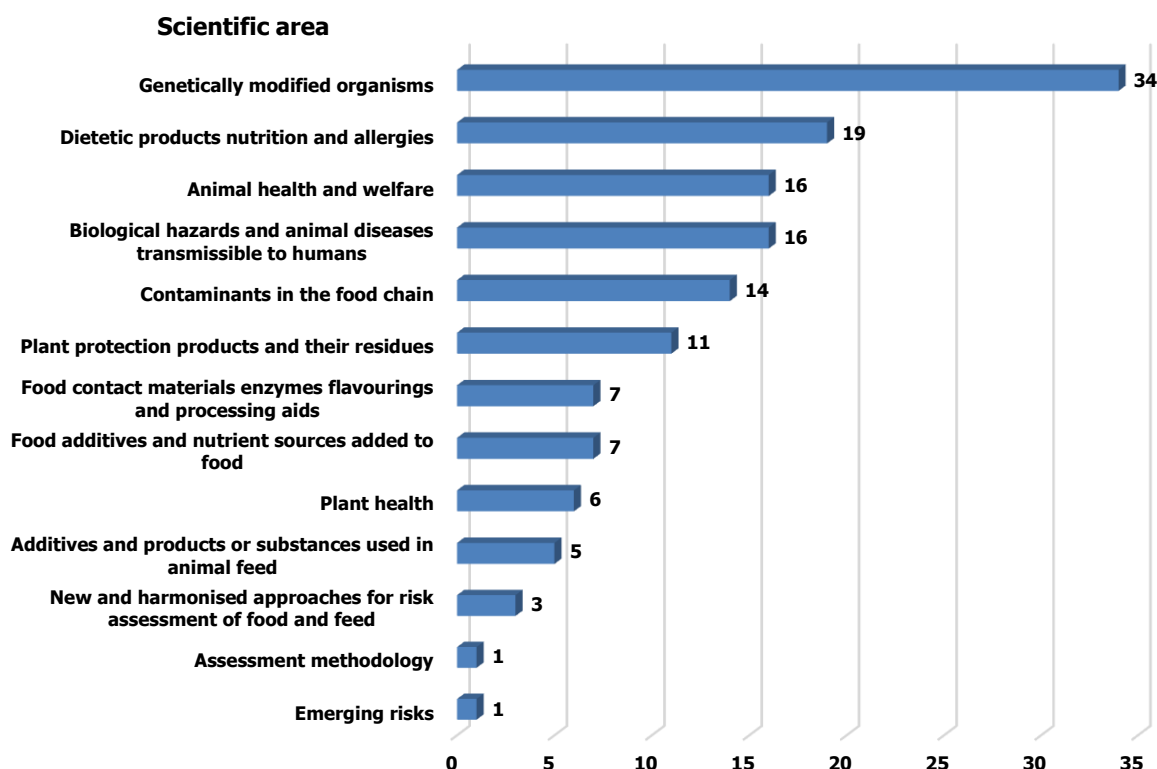


Figure 2: Number of documents uploaded on EFSA's IEP in 2014 / scientific area

As part of a new wider IT framework review in EFSA, it is planned to replace the IEP by a new and more dynamic tool for information exchange in the near future. With regards to the current repository of information available in the IEP, it will continue to be available in this tool. The current mid-term

plans are to migrate such information into the grey literature repository to be set up under EFSA's Virtual Library project.

2.4. Article 36 network

The Article 36 List⁶ (or network of organisations) originates in Article 36 of EFSA's Founding Regulation, which provides the legal basis for cooperation between EFSA and designated MS competent organisations. Being the keystone for fostering networking and promoting scientific cooperation in the fields within EFSA's mission, it is fundamental to keep the List up-to-date and ensure that it fully covers EFSA's remit.

During 2014, EFSA assisted organisations and MS in reviewing the Article 36 List, e.g. through giving training and information sessions to FPs and organisations in MS; providing FPs with overviews of the status of organisations on the Article 36 List; and providing country profiles to AF members and FPs with information on Article 36 organisations' involvement in EFSA's grant and procurement projects.

During 2010-2011, the number of entries on the Article 36 List increased, continuing the growth observed in previous years, which reflected the need to ensure that the most relevant organisations were part of the List (see Figure 3). During the last quarter of 2012 a review of the Article 36 List was launched and subsequently new organisations were included on the List (58 in 2014). Amongst other changes, the review process led to the replacement of predecessors or parts of organisations included on the List and consequently to their deletion (101 in 2014). By end of 2014, the Article 36 List contained 330 entries originating from 30 different countries (MS, Iceland and Norway).

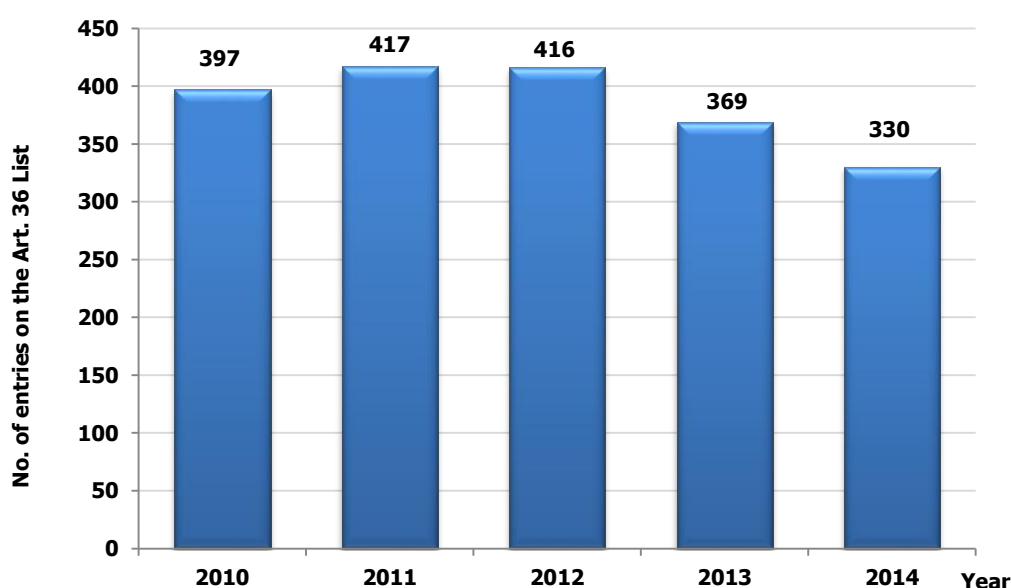


Figure 3: Number of entries on the Article 36 List / year

In 2014, almost all FPs (28 out of 30) reported to have taken actions to further develop the network of Article 36 organisations. A total of 26 FPs reported to have organised 60 meetings in their countries concerning specifically the Article 36 List (see Figure 4). Most FPs (24 out of 30) also provided support to Article 36 organisations in encouraging and assisting them to submit proposals for EFSA grants. Finally, 27 FPs reported to have promoted EFSA's calls for proposals (grants) and calls for tenders (procurement) through the relevant national networks once published on EFSA's website.

⁶ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/art36/art36list.htm>

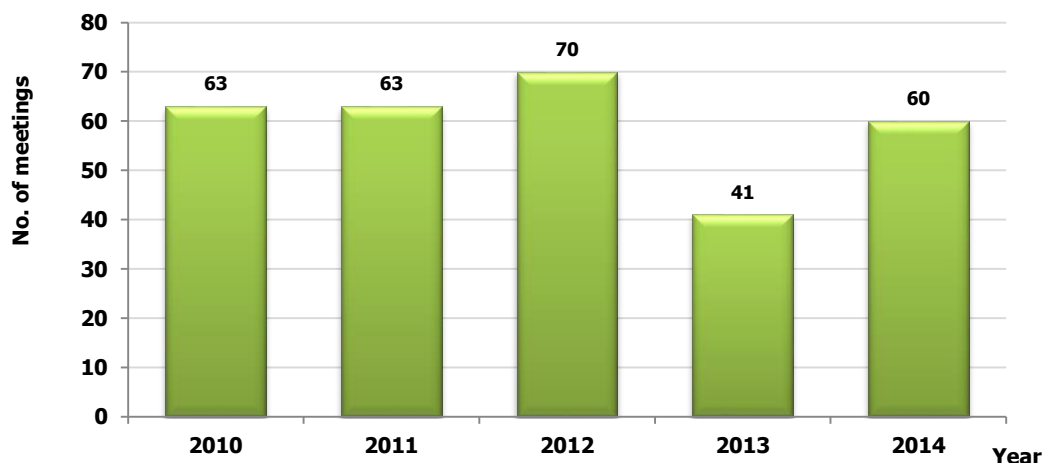


Figure 4: Number of meetings with (potential) Article 36 organisations / year

In the last five years, EFSA has allocated an increasingly higher budget to support grant and procurement projects (see Figure 5). During the period 2010-2014, 61 grant agreements (amounting to €9,542,183), 30 FP Agreements with all MS, Norway and Iceland (amounting to €3,797,500) and over 700 procurement contracts (amounting up to €33,570,016) were successfully awarded.

In 2014, EFSA conducted an external evaluation⁷ to determine the impact of its science grant and procurement projects on the delivery of its tasks. Results have shown that these projects had a strong networking and cooperation benefit, facilitating collaboration between MS organisations and forging new, lasting relationships, particularly for Article 36 organisations. The evaluation also indicated that the impact of EFSA's science spending could be further increased by greater use of longer term, larger research (grant-funded) projects. As a result, since 2014 EFSA has broadened the tools under its grant schemes in order to include thematic grants and framework partnership agreements⁸.

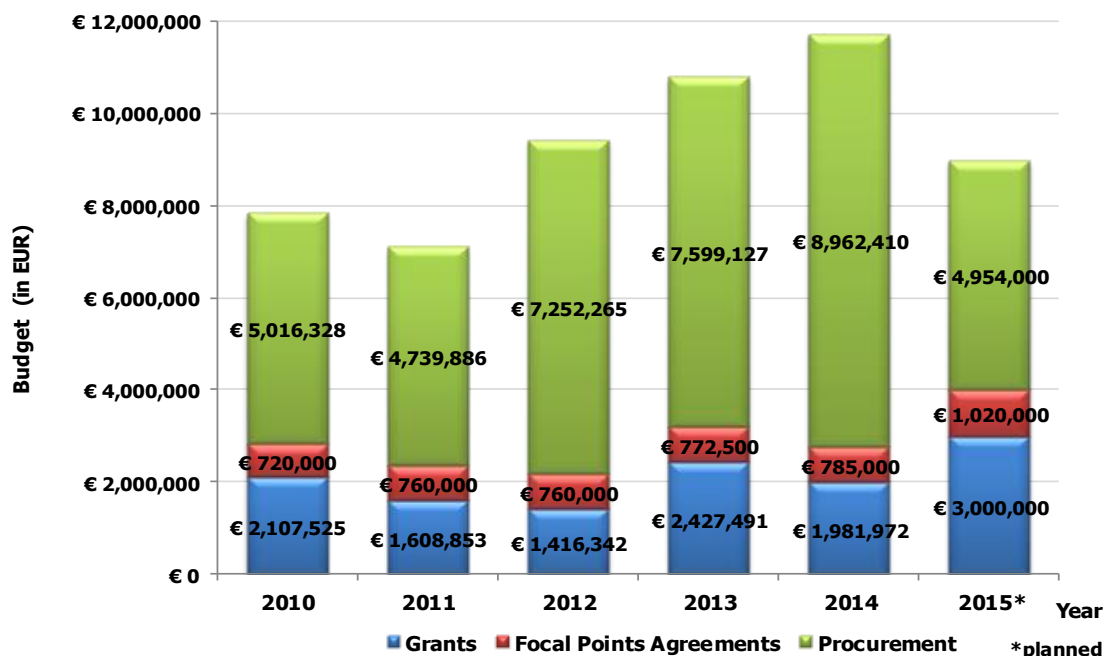


Figure 5: Evolution of EFSA budget under EFSA's grant and procurement schemes / year

⁷ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/supporting/pub/695e.htm>

⁸ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/search/doc/amp1517.pdf>

2.5. Expert Database

During 2014, EFSA's EDB continued to grow. By end of 2014, a total of 4,528 applications were submitted to the EDB (since 2008), including 225 new applications submitted in 2014. From all submitted applications in 2014, 206 experts were included in EDB, bringing the total number of included experts up to 3,813. The majority of experts included on the EDB (95.4%) gave consent for the sharing of their profiles with MS, EEA/EFTA countries and EC via their AF and FP representatives.

Figure 6 shows the geographical distribution of experts included in the EDB per country of origin. The figure illustrates that some MS and EEA/EFTA countries continue to have a relatively low representation on the EDB. Also experts from candidate countries and other third countries have expressed interest in collaborating with EFSA.

FPs promoted the submission of applications to EFSA's EDB in 2014 through a variety of activities, namely by: advertising the database through national (or dedicated FP) websites (18 FPs); presenting the database at national events or meetings (17 FPs); sending e-mail messages to networks of experts (10 FPs); and using promotion material such as leaflets, banners and articles in newsletters and scientific journals (4 FPs).

The EDB was promoted by 19 countries as a source of expertise for national use. In addition to the EDB, most FPs maintain national databases of experts or national networks of experts from where they draw expertise for their own national projects/activities. Information on EFSA's expertise needs is also sent to FPs and cascaded down to such networks on a need basis.

Other activities carried out in 2014 to promote the EDB included, for example, the setting up of an information stand on the occasion of the EUROSCIENCE Open Forum (ESOF2014) that took place in Copenhagen in June 2014. As a result of this promotion, there was an observed increase of the number of applications submitted to the EDB in the following months after the event.

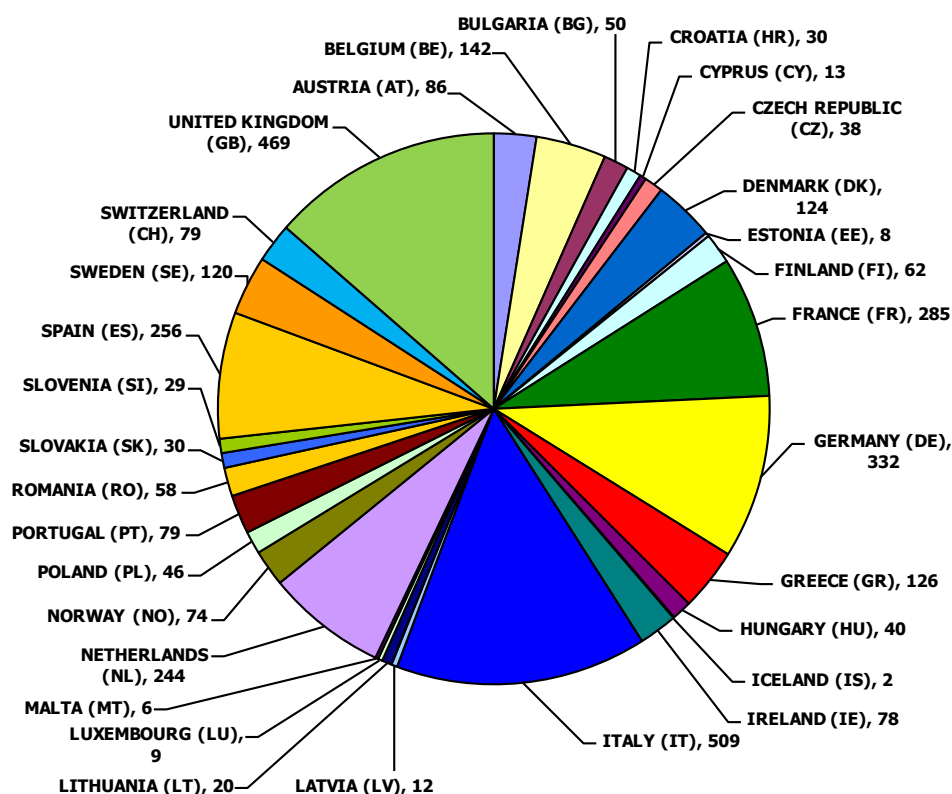


Figure 6: Number of EU and EEA/EFTA experts included in EFSA's Expert Database by end of 2014

2.6. Training Activities

The second cycle of risk assessment training courses addressed to MS and Candidate Countries started during 2014. These courses are set under the EC BTSF framework and implemented by a selected contractor. EFSA supports these courses by: providing the content for the technical specifications of the call for tender; commenting the draft programmes proposed by the contractor for the different risk assessment training courses; participating as observer in the courses (e.g. answering questions, providing clarifications arising during discussions in support of tutors, delivering one (or more) presentation(s) during the courses); and contributing to evaluate the courses in order to assess where improvements can be made.

The main goal of these courses is to train experts from national public institutions and with a scientific background and interest in food and feed safety in order to expand their theoretical knowledge and practical skills on principles and methods of risk assessment. In this way, EFSA contributes to the harmonisation of risk assessment practices across the EU as well as to capacity building.

A total of 16 courses will be run during 2014-2016 (2 courses for each of the 8 different scientific areas), followed by an interim evaluation, and then again repeated in 2017-2018. Over this period, the courses will allow the training of a total of 800 national experts. More information on the training courses is available on the BTSF website⁹.

The dissemination of information and provision of support regarding risk assessment training initiatives is a key activity where FPs became active during 2014. In total, 20 FPs reported the following activities: 10 countries disseminated general information on the BTSF courses; 12 countries disseminated BTSF training material; 13 countries liaised, at national level, with the BTSF National Contact Point for provision of support on the implementation of the courses; and 4 countries have used BTSF material for implementing risk assessment courses at national level.

2.7. Scientific Networks

EFSA's Scientific Networks have been established to facilitate the development of a scientific cooperation framework between EFSA and MS through the coordination of activities, the exchange of information, the development and implementation of joint projects and the exchange of expertise and best practices in the fields within the Authority's mission. EFSA has currently 14 Scientific Networks, chaired by EFSA and supported by the relevant EFSA units. A graphical depiction of the relation between organisations represented in EFSA's Scientific Networks and in the Article 36 List is presented in Annex A.

Following the self-review of EFSA's Scientific Networks undertaken in 2012, several recommendations were made in order to improve and optimise their work. These included requesting FPs to facilitate the exchange of information between network members and AF members at national level; and request MS representatives in each network to liaise as appropriate at national level before and after each network meeting. In this context, during 2014 FPs started preparing the implementation of this activity, namely by: holding (at least one) meeting(s) with national network representatives (15 FPs); holding bilateral meetings with their AF members (9 FPs); and supporting their AF member in updating the list of network representatives (6 FPs).

2.8. Pre-Accession Programme

Council Regulation establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) was adopted on 17 July 2006, replacing previous pre-accession financial instruments. The IPA currently covers five countries with Candidate status (Albania, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Turkey and Serbia) and two countries with Potential Candidate status (Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo¹⁰) – see Figure 7.

Under the IPA, EFSA is implementing the action entitled "Preparatory Measures for the Participation of the Candidate and the Potential Candidate Countries in EFSA"¹¹, financed by the EC. The objectives of

⁹ <http://www.trainsaferfood.eu/trainings/riskassessment.aspx>

¹⁰ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

¹¹ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/euenlargement.htm>

this programme are to: prepare the competent bodies in beneficiary countries active in the fields relevant to the work of EFSA, the EC and MS for their future participation in EFSA networks; help create communication and information exchange systems that will enable future participation of the beneficiary countries in EFSA networks; transfer knowledge on methodologies used in the fields within the remit of EFSA, in particular on risk assessment and data collection; support the beneficiary countries in their communication activities linked to risk assessment.

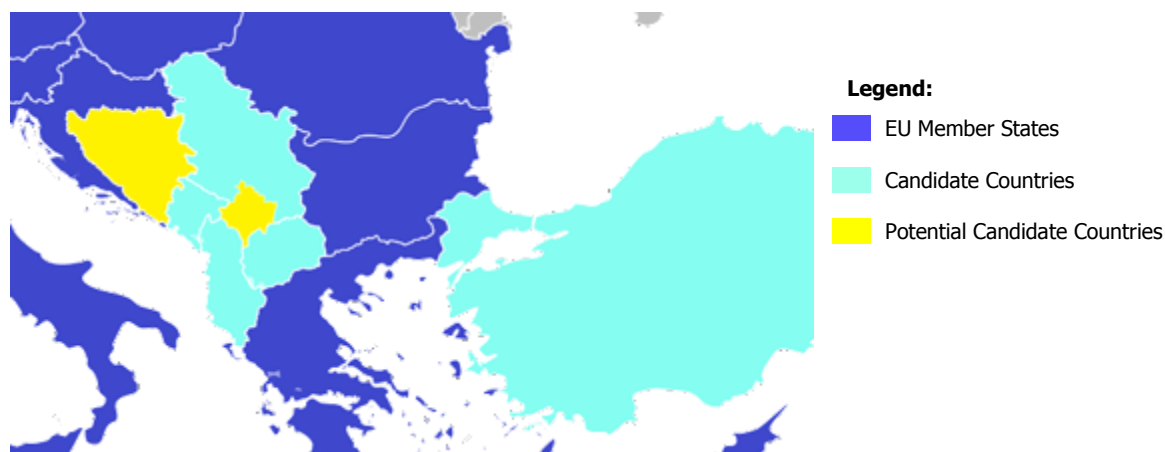


Figure 7: Countries under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance by end of 2014

In the context of this programme, EFSA organised in 2014 three events for the 7 Pre-Accession countries, namely induction training on pest risk assessment in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina; induction training on risk assessment of GMOs in Antalya, Turkey; and a seminar on risk communication in Belgrade, Serbia. In addition, experts from Pre-Accession countries participated in 11 EFSA meetings, including AF and FP meetings.

In September 2014 the work on the 2011-2014 Pre-Accession Programme concluded with a meeting in EFSA with all national coordinators and assistant coordinators of the 7 countries. At this meeting the outcome of the 2011-2014 Programme was discussed and suggestions for the next programme were made. The new draft Pre-Accession Programme for 2015-2017 is foreseen to be signed in 2015 and to last for 27 months, with a budget of €600,000. The new programme foresees several activities, including induction trainings for all IPA countries, TAIEX funded workshops, a study tour in Lithuania, participation of IPA countries in EFSA crises exercises, as well as in AF, FP and AFCWG meetings (the latter only for Candidate Countries) and in other EFSA events and meetings.

2.9. European Neighbourhood Programme

In 2014, EFSA launched its ENP for 2014-2016¹². The overall objective of the Programme is to promote the understanding of EFSA's work in the ENP countries, share expertise and create information exchange mechanisms.

EFSA's ENP programme includes countries that have indicated a particular interest in collaborating with EFSA (ENP Lead Countries - Algeria, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Israel, Moldova, Morocco and Palestine) and other EU-neighbour countries (Armenia, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia and Ukraine) – see Figure 8. During 2014, EFSA established a network of national coordinators with the ENP Lead Countries and as well contact persons in the remaining countries via the respective EU Delegations.

The overall project organisation was set up to involve not only staff from the national authorities for food and feed safety (coordinating institution), but also to reach the scientific community and wider public in the beneficiaries countries. Communication and information exchange systems were set up between EFSA and the ENP countries. The network of national coordinators/contact persons facilitates the implementation of the programme activities and the day-to-day cooperation.

¹² <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/euneighbourhood.htm>

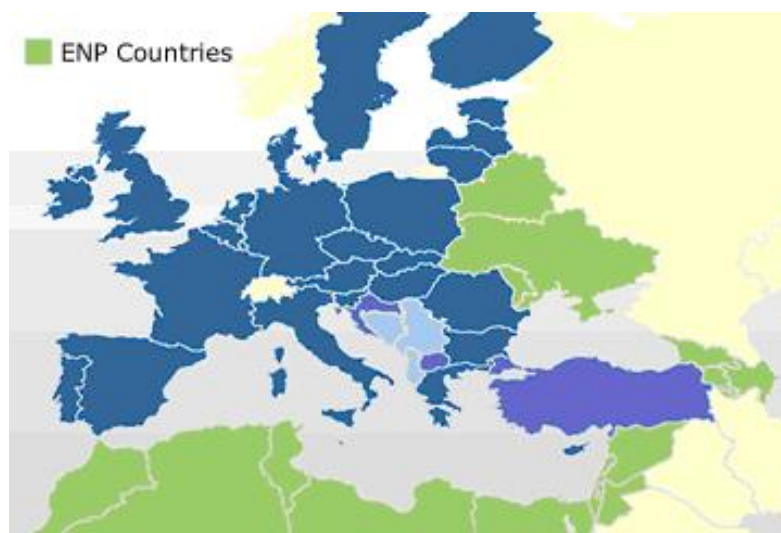


Figure 8: Countries under the EU European Neighbourhood Policy by end of 2014

In July 2014, two country visits were organised to Morocco and Moldova. During each visit two EFSA representatives held discussions with the national coordinators and relevant staff on general information about EFSA, organisation of national food safety systems and future activities of the programme. A European Neighbourhood Food Safety Conference was organised in November 2014. During three days, 46 speakers from the EC, international organisations, MS, ENP countries and experts from EFSA presented the work, methodologies and practices of their institutions in the respective food safety area. Fifty five experts from 14 ENP countries attended the conference, including the officially appointed national coordinators and contact points. EFSA also started bilateral discussions with Algeria, Azerbaijan, Israel and Jordan on specific risk assessment issues that will be followed up during the planned visits to these countries. In order to reach a wider audience, ENP national coordinators have been asked to ensure a high number of participants during such visits.

2.10. International and Inter-Agency Cooperation

International Cooperation

EFSA maintains close working contacts with a range of international partners active in its remit. A more detailed description of EFSA's international activities is provided in the Multi-Annual Programme on International Scientific Cooperation 2014-2016².

During 2014, EFSA continued to collaborate closely with international partners (e.g. WHO, FAO, FSCJ, US-FDA). In particular, EFSA continued to provide scientific and technical support to the EC in Codex Alimentarius related activities (e.g. during the 46th Session of the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues in China and the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses). Furthermore, EFSA started activities to strengthen scientific cooperation with the Joint Expert Committees of WHO and FAO in the area of developing internationally harmonised methodologies and approaches for risk assessment, data collection and risk communication (e.g. the Joint EFSA/WHO stakeholder meeting on Threshold of Toxicological Concern (TTC) approach and the joint EFSA/WHO expert workshop on TTC; and the preparatory meeting with FAO to identify existing and future areas for cooperation in the area of risk assessment, risk monitoring, risk communication and nutrition). EFSA also participated in teleconferences of the IFCSLG and has taken over the scientific secretariat of this international platform together with the EC.

EFSA contributed to various capacity building activities in risk assessment and risk communication. On this matter, during 2014 EFSA met with delegations of the FSCJ, participated on FSCJ events on BPA and risk communication, and visited US agencies (i.e. US FDA, US-EPA and USDA). Meetings were also held with CFSA, FSANZ, NZEPA and NZMPI on specific thematic areas. EFSA further shared its experience with 15 delegations from Asian, African and South American countries.

Inter-Agency Cooperation

EFSA works together with EU institutions (such as the EC Scientific Committees and the EC JRC) and EU agencies with a risk assessment mandate, such as ECDC, ECHA, EEA and EMA (i.e. sister agencies) on areas with an international outreach. Memorandums of Understanding signed with EU agencies and institutions provide a framework for these scientific cooperation activities.

In 2014, EFSA continued to collaborate closely with its sister agencies to ensure a consistent approach to risk assessment at EU level. In particular, EFSA had regular bilateral videoconferences with ECHA to exchange information and expertise in areas of common interest; and a delegation of ECHA's senior management visited EFSA to discuss ongoing scientific cooperation activities. As a follow up of the latter, EFSA participated in a trilateral meeting with ECHA and JRCs' IHCP. In the last quarter of 2014, EFSA visited the EEA, in Copenhagen, to share information on the agencies' structures, organisation, priorities and work programmes; to exchange views on areas of common interest and to explore options for deeper cooperation. In this context, the ECDC Memorandum of Understanding was renewed. EFSA continues to participate at the EU-ANSA and, during 2014, the chairing of this network has formally passed from ECDC to EFSA.

3. Outlook

EFSA, jointly with Member States, has carried out several scientific cooperation initiatives over 2014, building on solid working relations established during previous years. An overview of the different mechanisms and cooperation tools currently available is provided in Annex B in the form of a Scientific Cooperation Toolbox.

This year Scientific Cooperation gained additional dimensions through discussions with Member States to agree on common objectives for the coming years, as laid down in the Scientific Cooperation Roadmap. Another important gain has been a better integration of EFSA's cooperation activities in- and outside of the European Union, with the establishment of a multi-annual programme on international cooperation, putting scientific cooperation on a wider, more global perspective.

The Scientific Cooperation Roadmap provides for ways and specific actions to address the recommendations of the Management Board and EFSA's strategic objectives, with the vision to move beyond the operation of specific cooperation tools towards building a common Risk Assessment Agenda, where priorities are defined and on which Member States and EFSA can partner.

Sharing of workload and outsourcing will be key activities supported by additional financial instruments. This relates to the external review of EFSA's grant and procurement schemes, which highlighted grant agreements as being particularly suited for cooperation and networking activities, and suggested making more use of grant-funded projects. Much operational work has been done in the past by Focal Points and Article 36 organisations to update the network contacts, which should pave the way to more grant opportunities for these organisations. The newly established grant schemes, such as the thematic grants and the framework partnership agreements, aim to stimulate innovative proposals by Member State organisations and long-lasting partnerships. Cooperation and mentoring directly among Member State organisations could further be supported by EFSA through twinning projects allowing the exchange of knowledge and expertise and strengthening Europe's capacity in food safety risk assessment.

The risk assessment courses under the Commission's Better Training for Safer Food programme and the Guest Scientist and Staff Exchange schemes have shown to be very successful cooperation tools. Additional activities, such as summer courses, regional training opportunities and development of basic risk assessment training opportunities/material targeted to non-scientists and relevant stakeholders will be explored. Another novel means to stimulate new opportunities for building and sharing expertise would be through increasing staff mobility for example through the exchange of PhD students and fellowships.

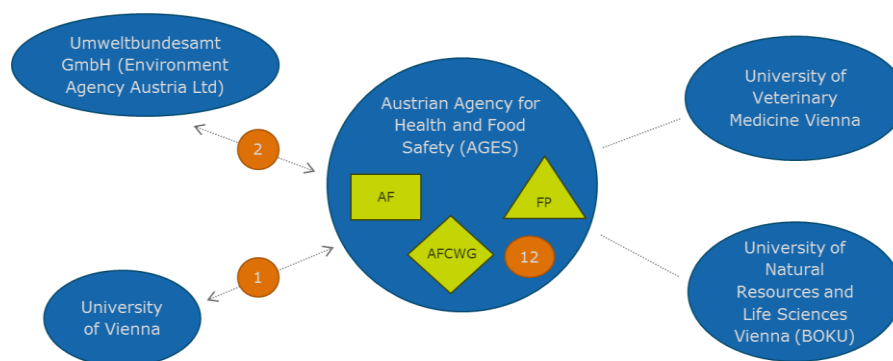
Finally, the establishment of an EU Risk Assessment Agenda with common priorities on which to cooperate will give a further significant boost to partnership among EFSA and Member States.

Abbreviations

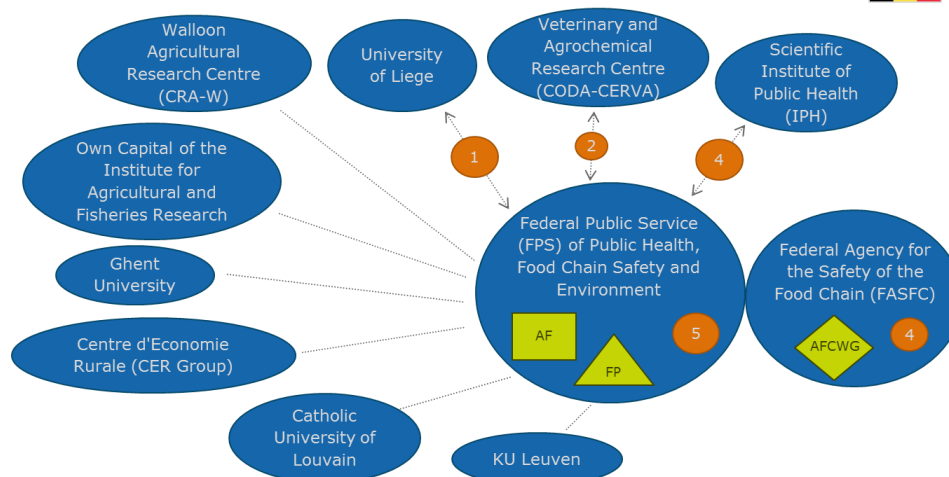
AF	Advisory Forum
AFCWG	Advisory Forum Communications Working Group
BTSF	Better Training for Safer Food
CFSA	China Centre for Food Safety Risk Assessment
EC	European Commission
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
ECHA	European Chemicals Agency
EDB	Expert Database
EEA	European Environment Agency
EEA/EFTA	European Economic Area/European Free Trade Association
EMA	European Medicines Agency
ENP	European Neighbourhood Programme
ESOF2014	EUROSCIENCE Open Forum
EU	European Union
EU-ANSA	European Agencies Network on Scientific Advice
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FP	Focal Point
FSANZ	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
FSCJ	Food Safety Commission of Japan
GMO	Genetically Modified Organisms
IEP	Information Exchange Platform
IFCSLG	International Food Chemical Safety Liaison Group
IHCP	Institute for Health and Consumer Protection
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JRC	Joint Research Centre
MS	Member States
NDA	Dietetic Products Nutrition and Allergies
NZEPA	New Zealand Environmental Protection Authority
NZMPI	New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
TTC	Threshold of Toxicological Concern
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
US-EPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
US-FDA	United States Food and Drug Administration
WHO	World Health Organization

Annex A – Relation between organisations on Article 36 List and in EFSA Scientific Networks¹³

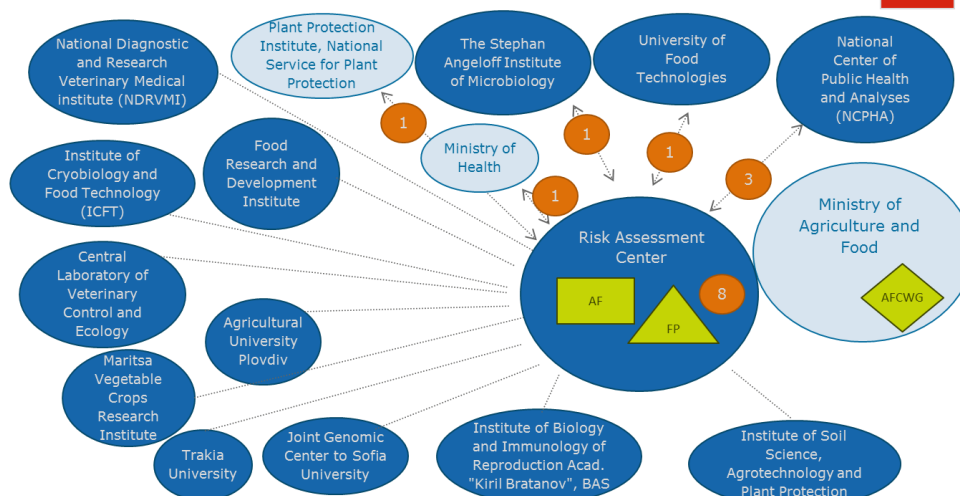
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BELGIUM

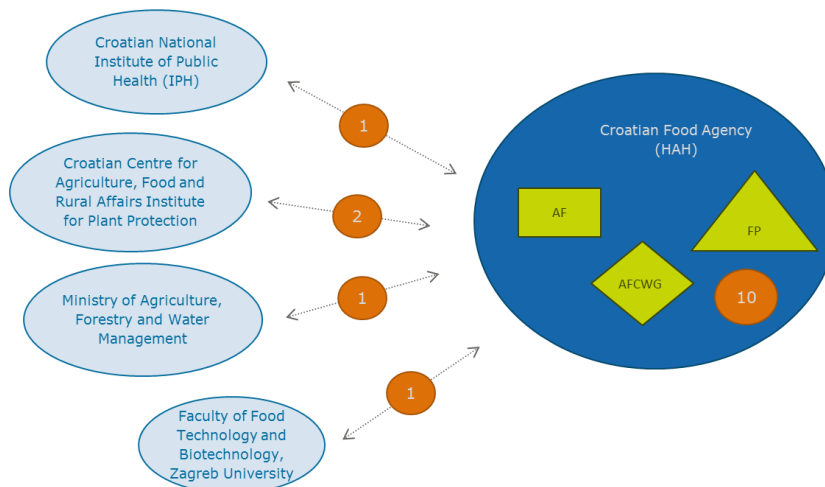


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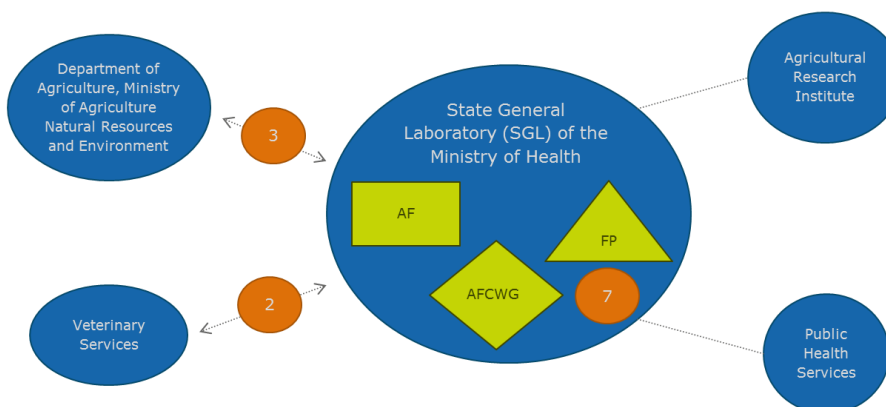


¹³ Status 31/12/2014

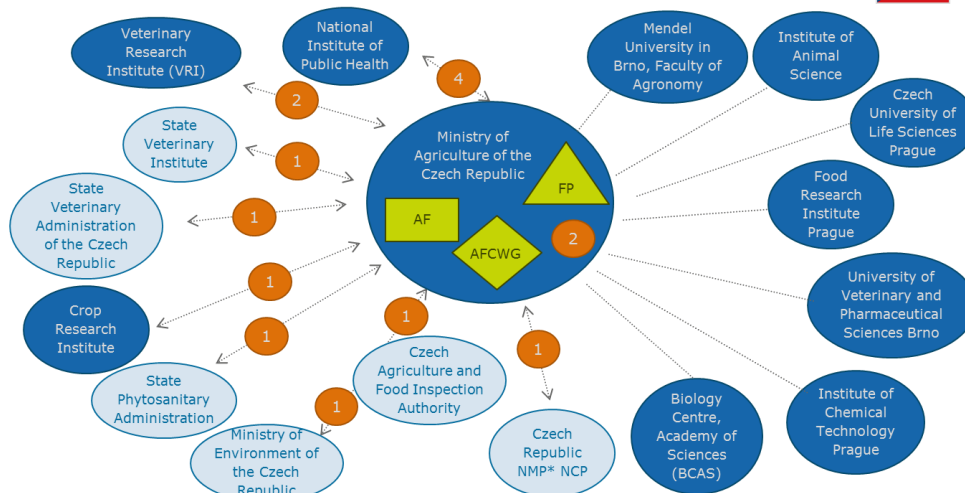
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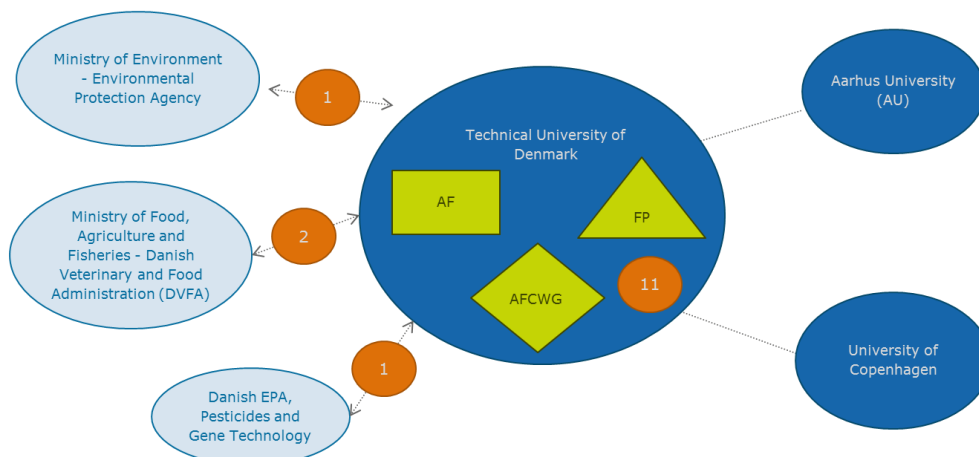
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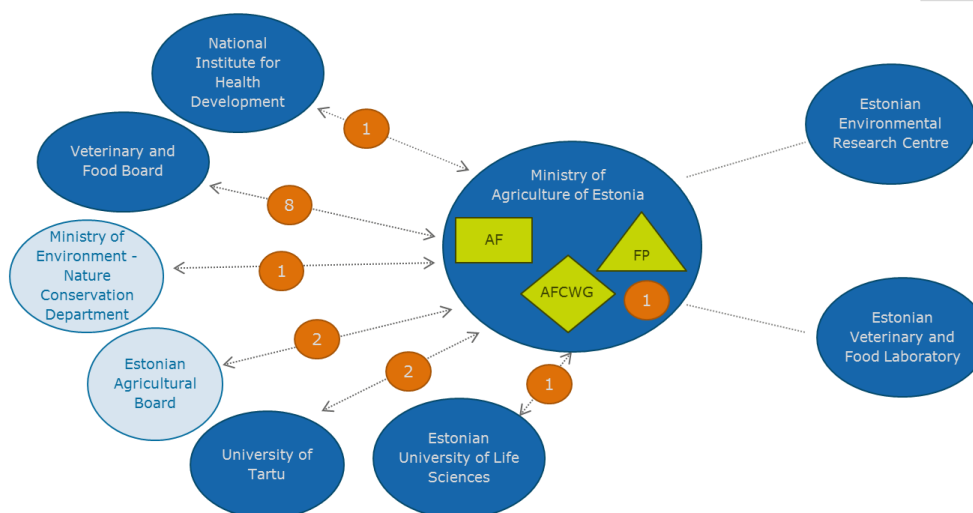
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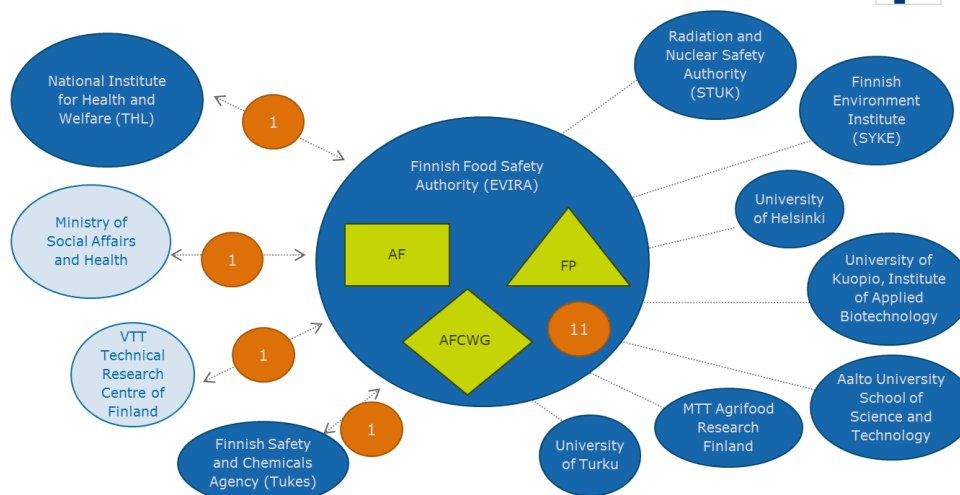
DENMARK



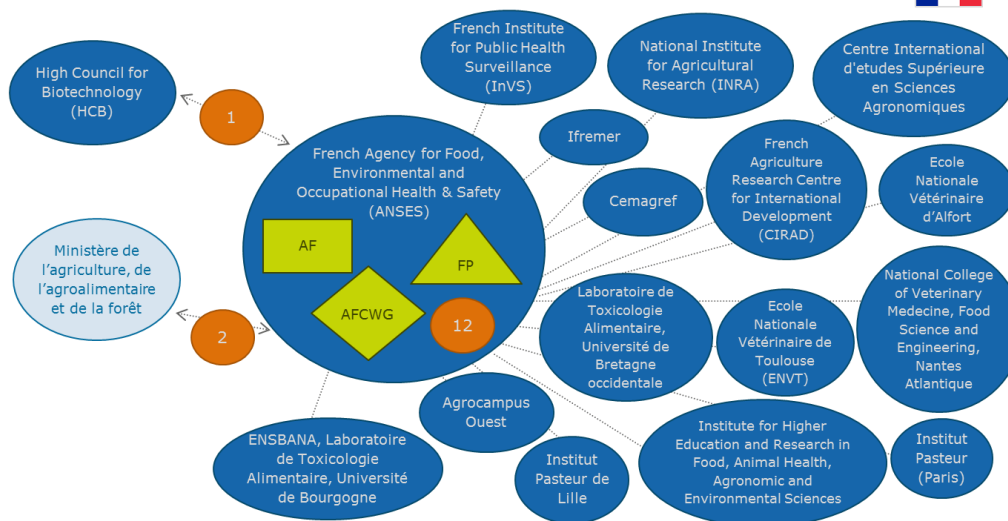
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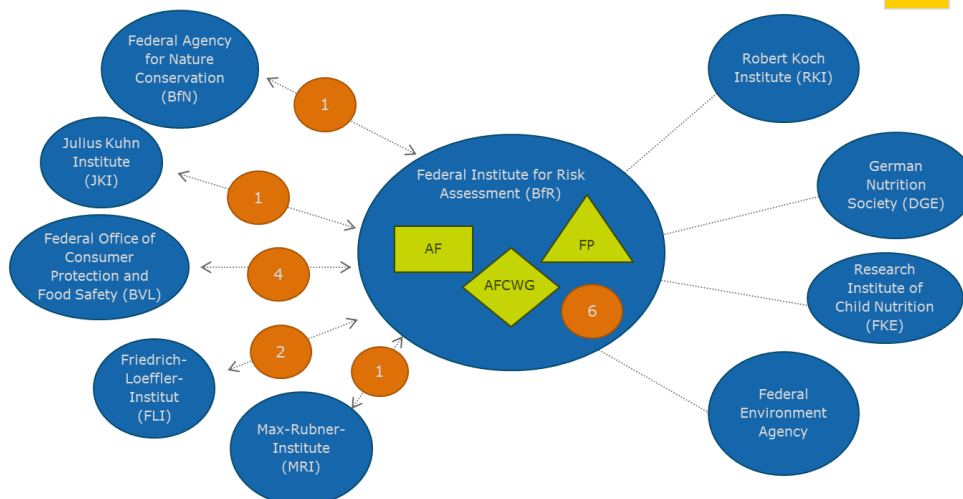
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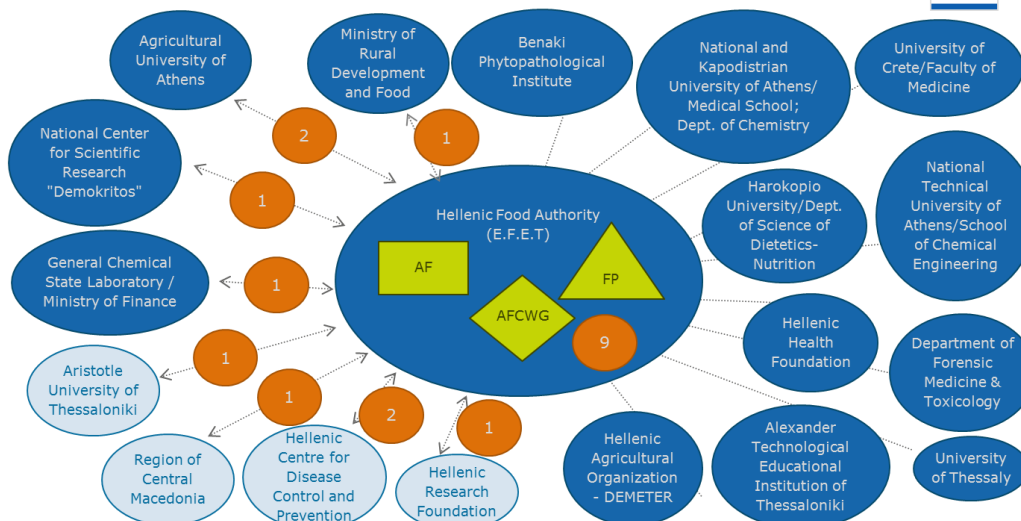
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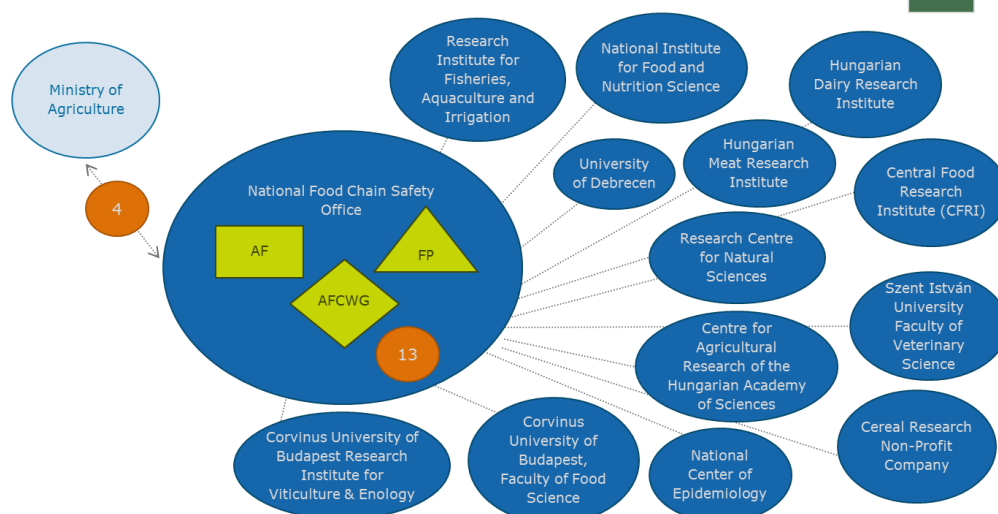
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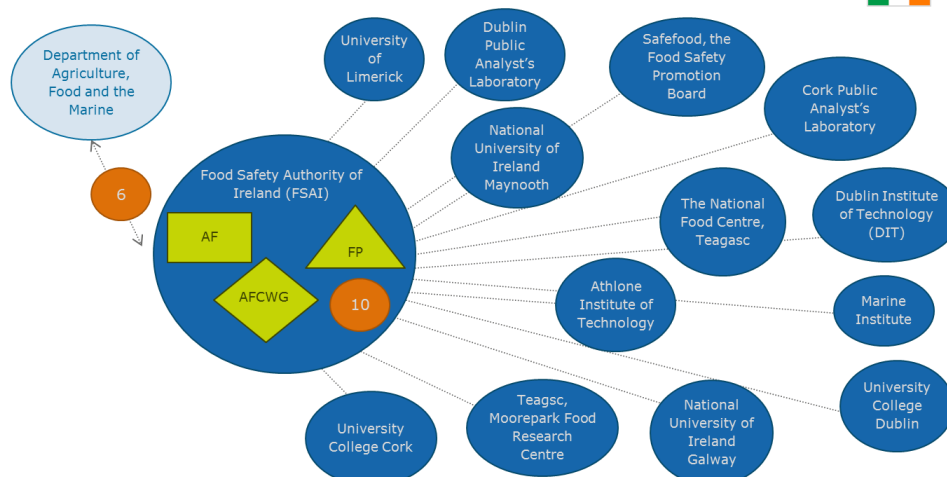
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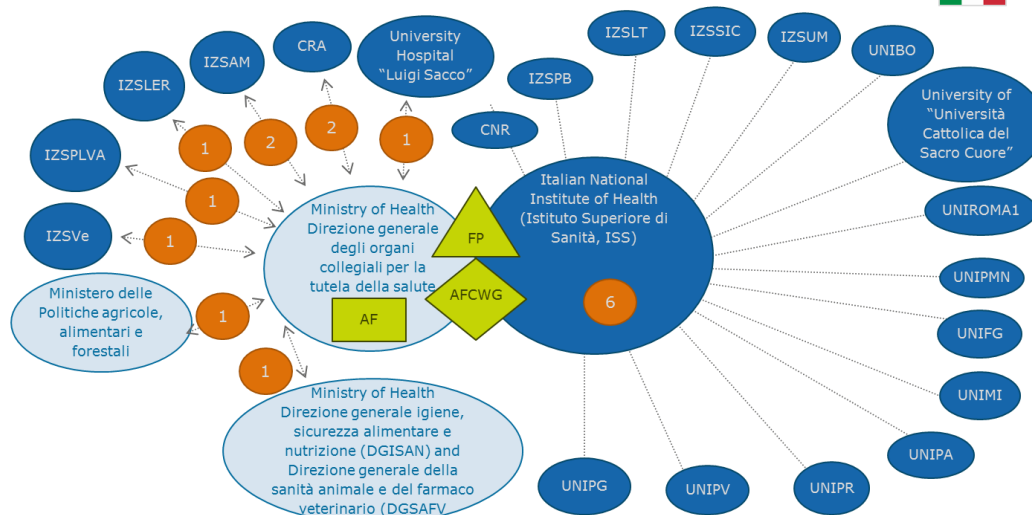
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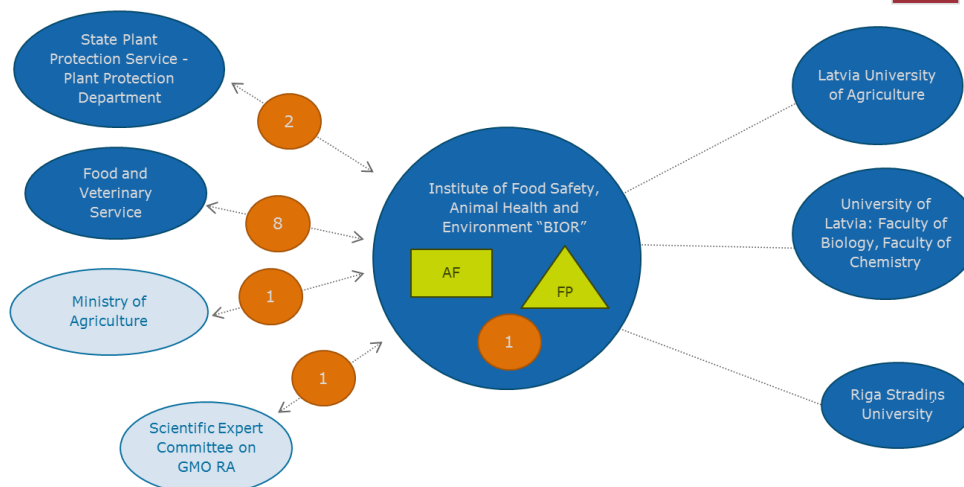
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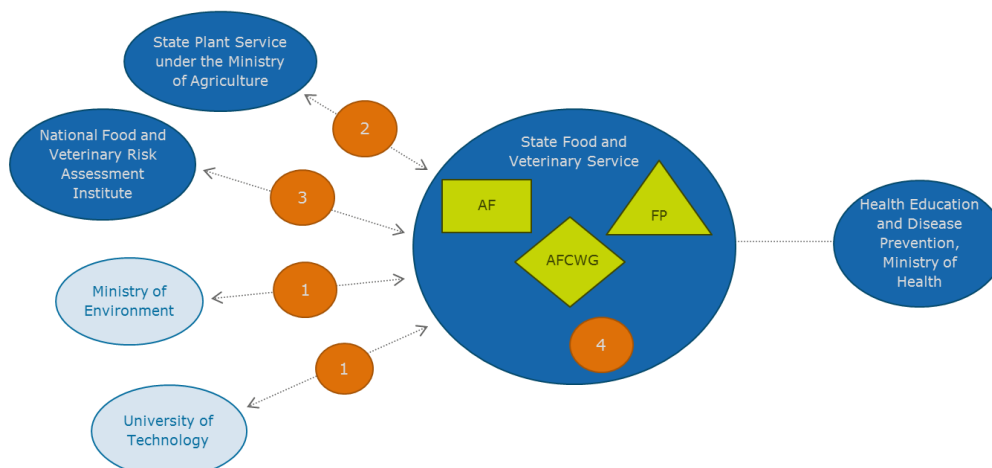
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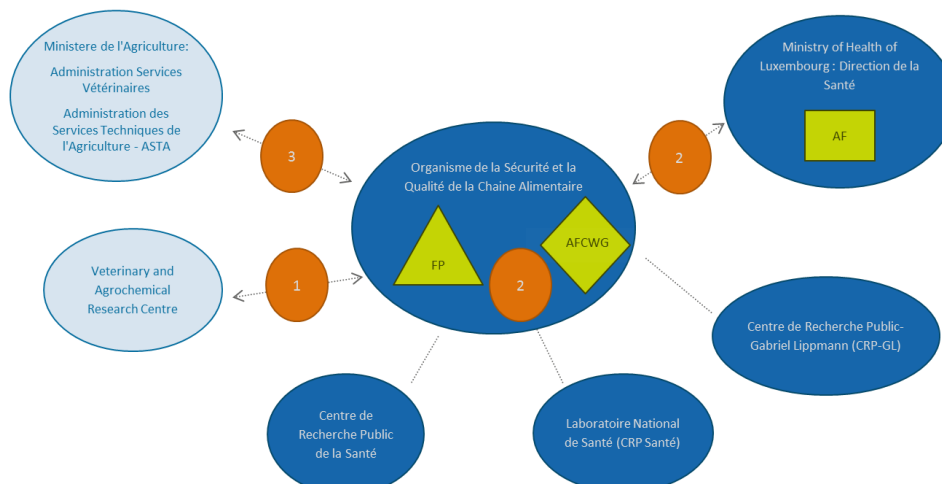
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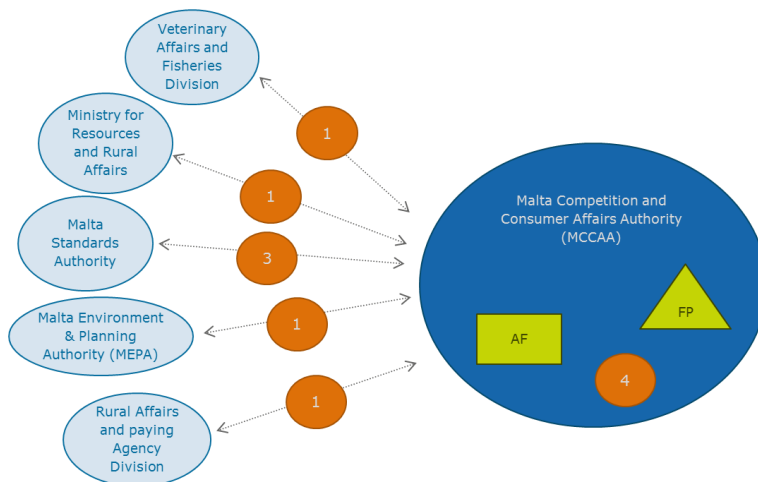
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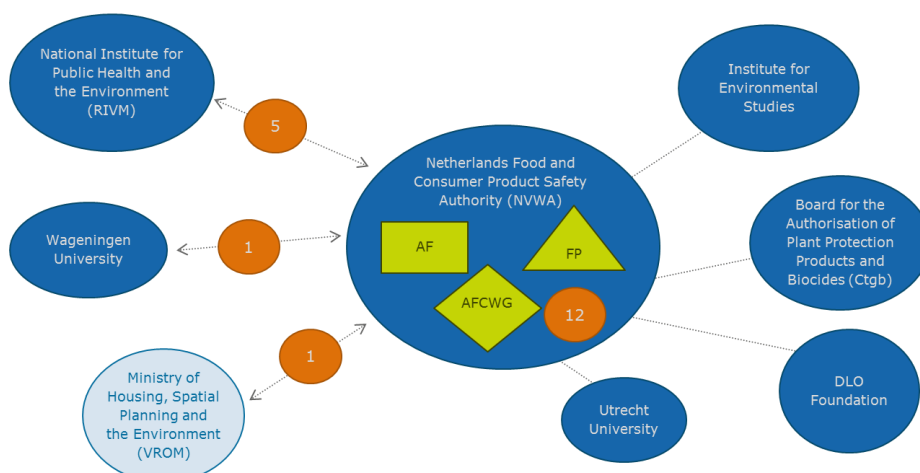
LUXEMBOURG



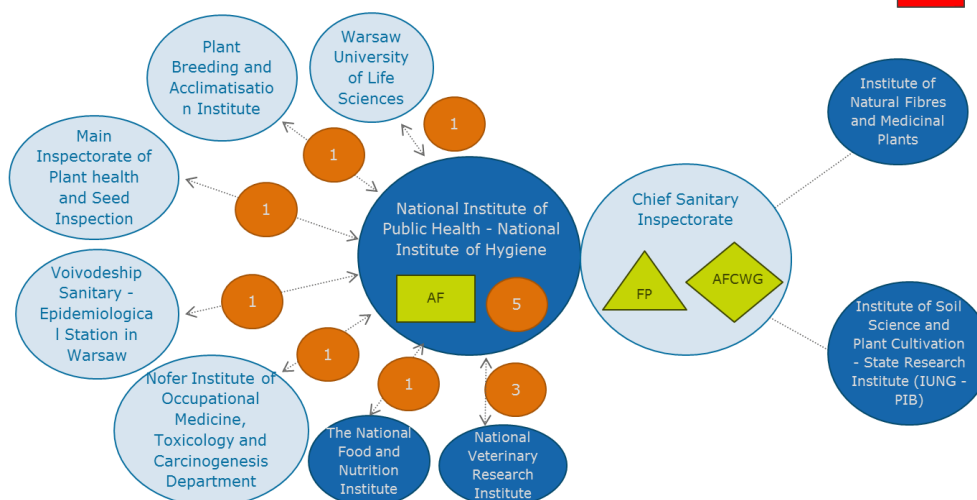
MALTA



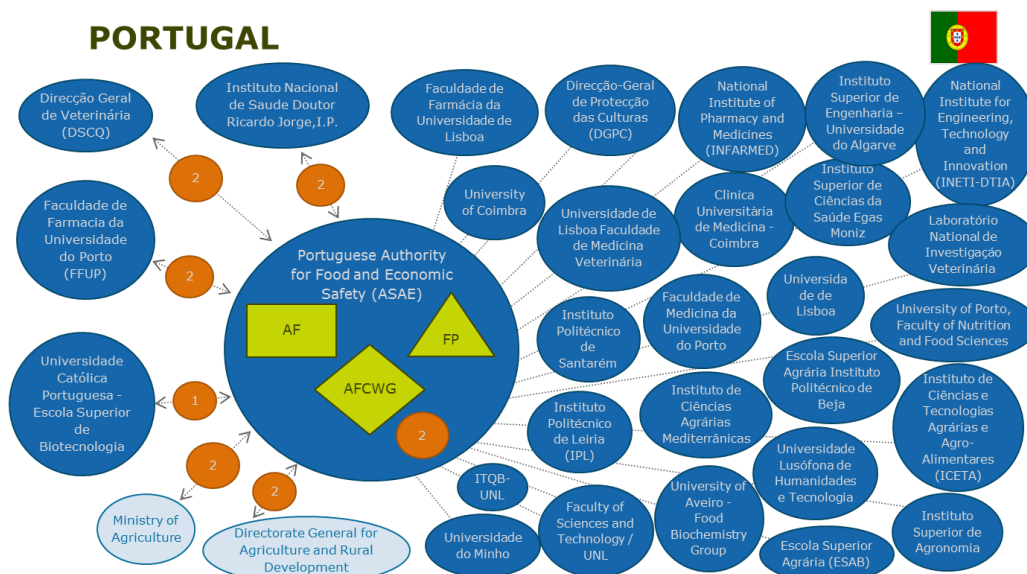
NETHERLANDS



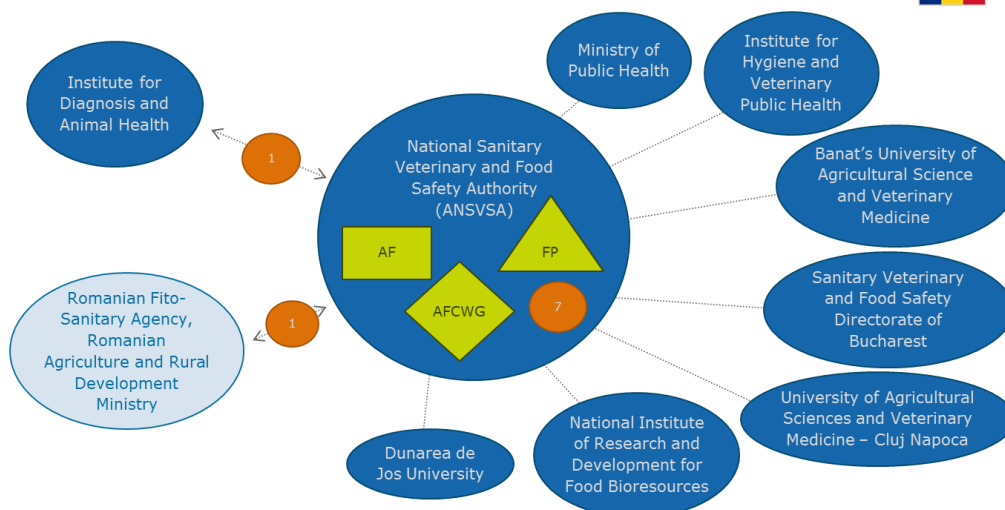
POLAND



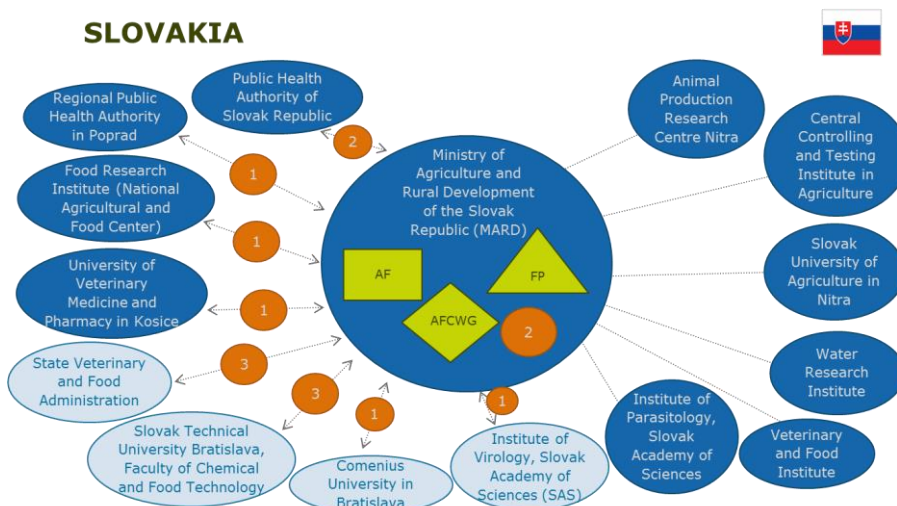
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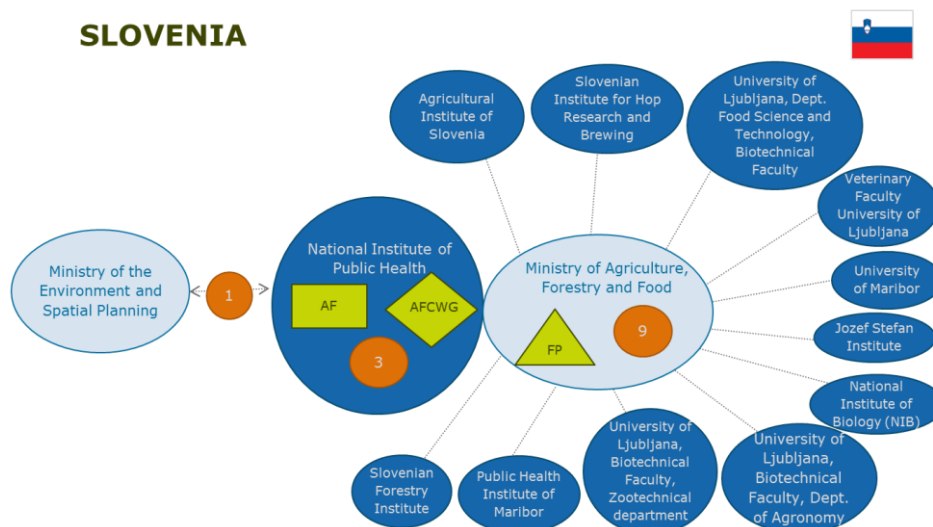
ROMANIA



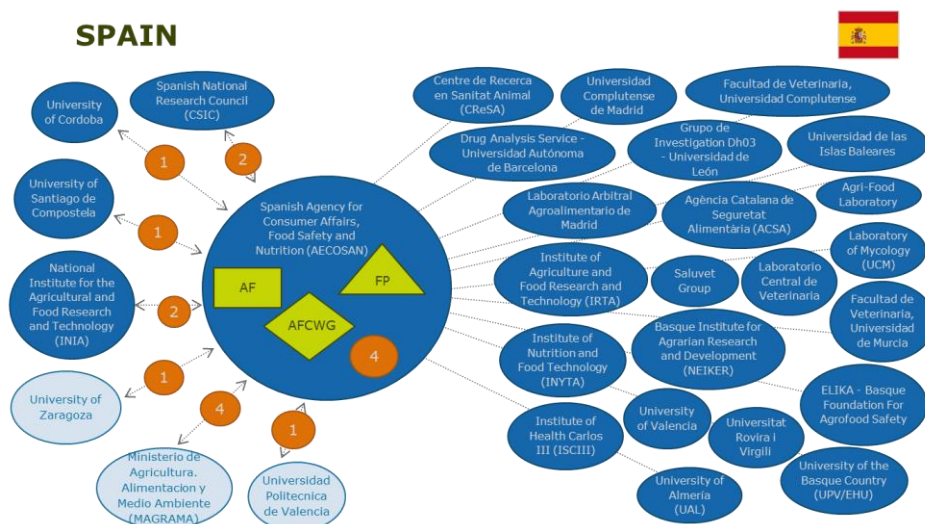
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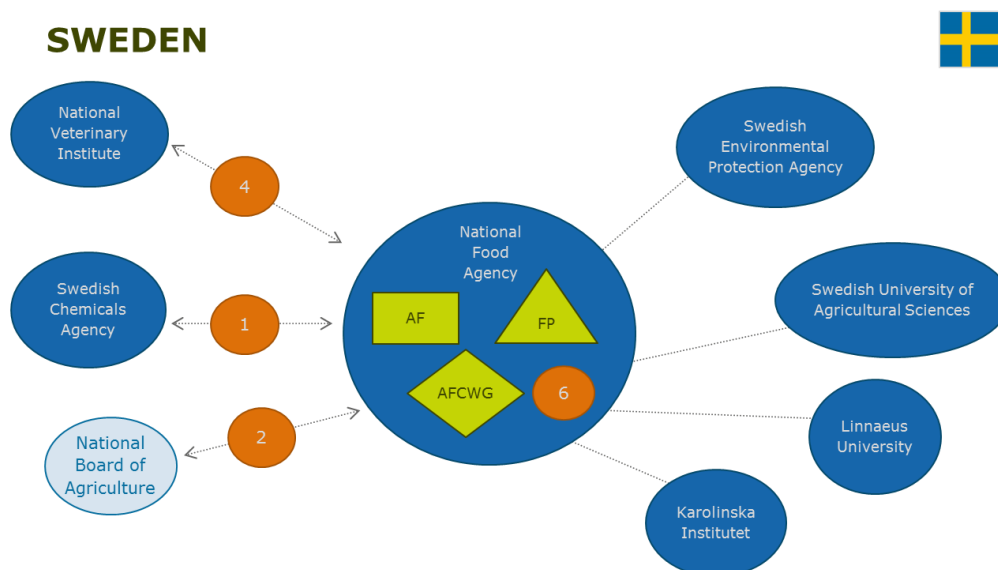
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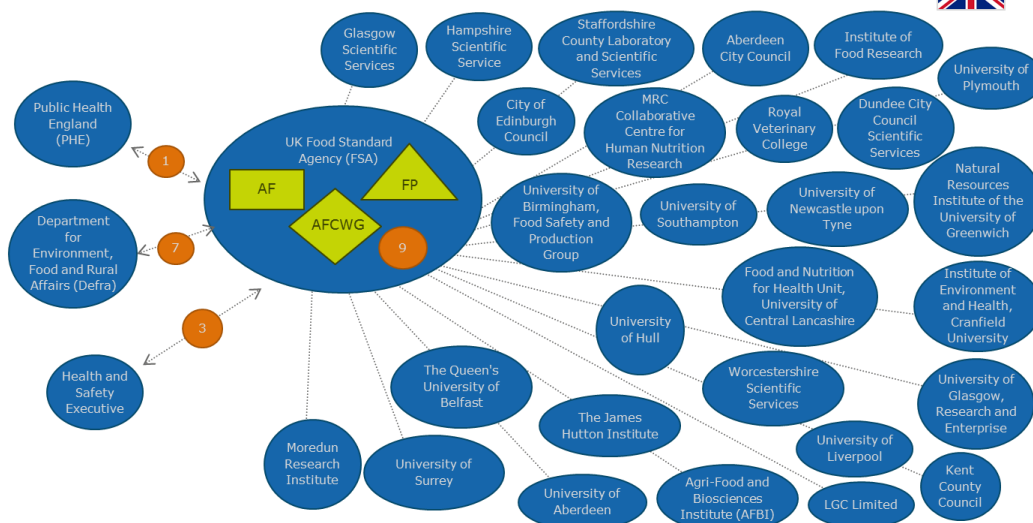
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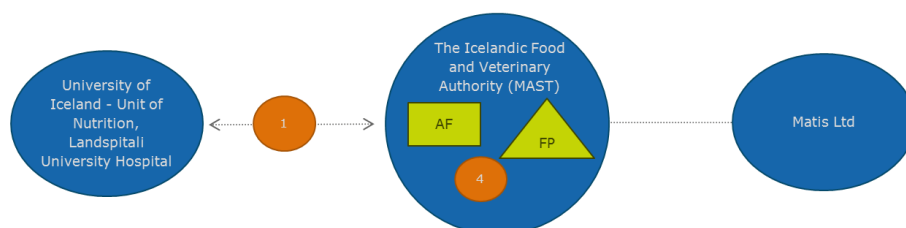
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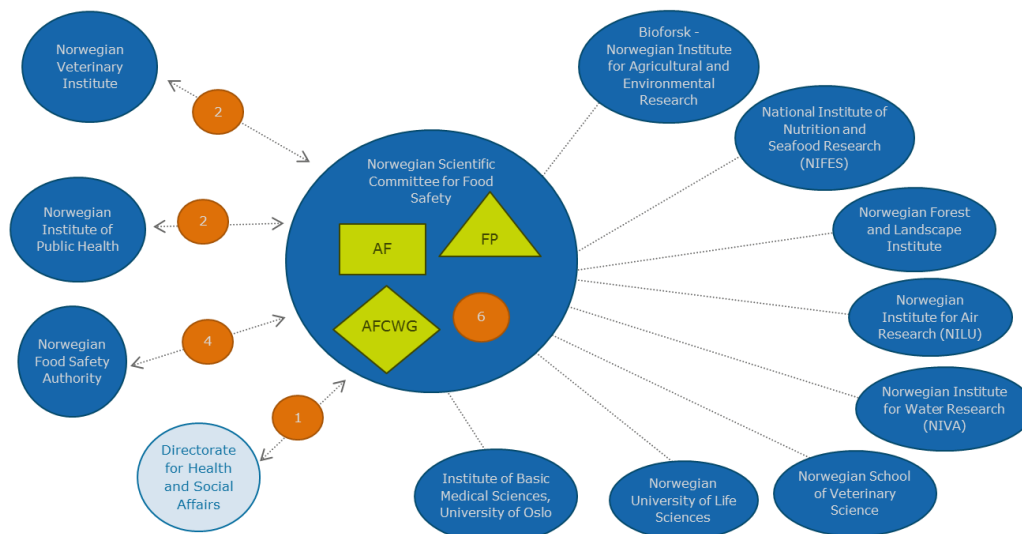
UNITED KINGDOM



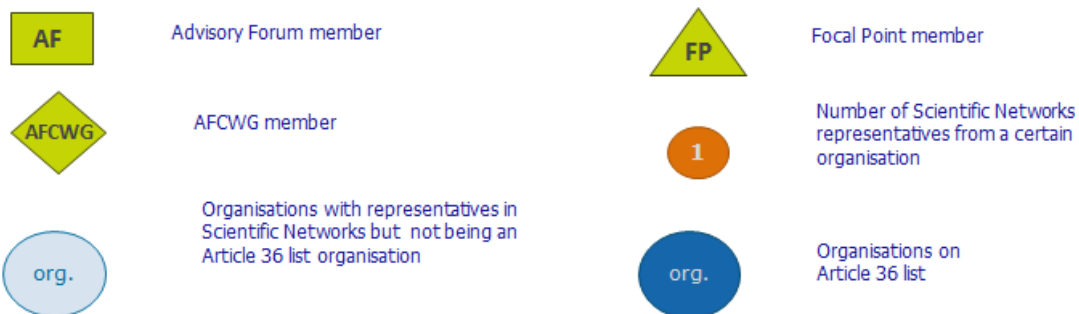
ICELAND



NORWAY



Legend



Note: This document represents a simplified graphical overview of Advisory Forum (AF), Focal Point (FP), AF Communication Working Group (AFCWG), Article 36 organisations and organisations with representatives in EFSA's Scientific Networks per country (Member States, Iceland and Norway), as on 31.12.2014.
 For most up-to-date information, please refer to EFSA's website: Article 36 List (<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/art36.htm>), and details of AF, FP, AFCWG and Network organisations' representatives (<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks.htm>).

Annex B – EFSA Scientific Cooperation Toolbox

OBJECTIVES OF SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION ROADMAP

SCIENTIFIC CAPACITY BUILDING AND INTELLIGENT USE OF RESOURCES

- Building risk assessment community
- Data collection and sharing
- Strengthen (inter-)national networking
- Share workload among partners
- Efficient use of expertise in MS
- Avoid duplication of work and divergent views
- Establish EU risk assessment agenda on shared priorities

COHERENT INTERNATIONAL VOICE

- Joint work programmes with international partners
- Support EU in international commitments
- Harmonize risk assessment approaches
- Coherence in risk communication

LIST OF MECHANISMS (NETWORKS AND PROGRAMMES)

- Focal Point Network
- Advisory Forum
- Advisory Forum Communications Working Group
- Article 36 Network
- Scientific Networks
- Scientific Panels and Working Groups
- Pre-accession Programme
- European Neighborhood Programme
- International Cooperation
- Inter-Agency cooperation

LIST OF TOOLS

- Information exchange, document sharing
- Public consultations and pre-notifications
- Workshops on new guidance
- Events, seminars, study tours, conferences
- Expert Database – Talent Management
- Scientific Data Warehouse (S-DWH)
- Staff Exchange (Guest Scientists, Fellowship, National Experts in Professional Training, Seconded National Experts, PhD exchange)
- Training (advanced RA courses, BTSF)
- Procurement (direct calls, framework contracts)
- Grants (Specific Grants, Thematic Grants, Framework Partnership agreements, Twinning Projects, Focal Point Agreements)
- Early identification of emerging risks
- Joint projects