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## Editorial: The European Food Risk Assessment Fellowship Programme (EU-FORA)

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### Introduction

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has recently released the details of its inaugural fellowship programme, the European Food Risk Assessment Fellowship Programme (EU-FORA) which will begin in 2017. In essence, EU-FORA is a practical ('training by doing') programme that aims to increase the expertise and capacity available to risk assessment bodies at both the European and national levels.

One of the pillars of EFSA's Founding Regulation<sup>1</sup> is the coordination and development of risk assessment capacity and the harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies in the fields within its mission. This is reflected in EFSA's Strategy 2020 which lists as one of its five key objectives: *Build the EU's scientific assessment capacity and knowledge community* (EFSA, 2013).

To perform and develop these activities, both EFSA and the EU Member States need to engage with a substantial number of experts and scientific organisations. It is obvious that the capacity, experience and expertise to undertake scientific assessments related to food safety vary widely across the Member States depending on the origins, structure and history of their national authorities. Moreover, approaches and methodologies on how certain types of risk assessments should be best performed can vary across organisations also.

During EFSA's Second Scientific Conference held in Milan in November 2015, one of the main conclusions of the session on Expertise for the Future was that *EFSA and other organisations responsible for conducting food safety risk assessment, are encouraged to invest in capacity building and methodology development and harmonisation activities, and to maintain excellence in performing risk assessment activities. International organisations like EFSA should play their role in identifying and determining expertise and competencies needed from professionals, predicting also the future needs and participate in the setup of the curriculum and the organisation of relevant training programs of various levels and forms* (Bosman et al., 2016).

<sup>1</sup> EFSA Founding Regulation: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2002:031:0001:0024:en:PDF>

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## Programme outline

In order to facilitate these needs, EFSA has designed and is currently developing the EU-FORA programme which is scheduled to commence in September 2017. It is inspired by similar programmes which have been successfully coordinated and conducted for many years by the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC), the European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training (EPIET) and the European Programme for Public Health Microbiology Training (EUPHEM).<sup>2</sup>

The entire EU-FORA programme has been developed and supervised by a Fellowship Programme Committee where, in addition to EFSA staff members, a number of representatives from the Member State authorities are contributing.

EU-FORA is aimed specifically at early- to mid-career scientists working in food safety organisations across Europe. These scientists (fellows), currently working in their national competent authorities, will have the opportunity to complete a placement for 1 year in the competent authority of another country where they will be fully integrated into the work of the hosting site. This will help to develop their knowledge and experience in food risk assessment and contribute to the harmonisation of methodologies, in a practical, 'learning by doing' environment. The programme also includes 3 weeks of induction training in chemical and microbiological risk assessment and three 1-week modules focusing on different aspects of risk assessment and risk communications.

The costs for the participation of fellows in the induction training and training modules will be fully covered by the EU-FORA programme and, during the placement, fellows will receive a monthly subsistence allowance. On completion of the programme, it is expected that the fellows will transfer new knowledge and competences to their parent organisation, thereby increasing its capacity to perform risk assessment-related activities. Together, the fellows and their supervisors at the hosting sites will form a network which will support capacity building during and after completion of the programme. In addition, it is expected that further networking and bilateral cooperation will develop between the originating organisations and the hosting sites.

## Selection process

The selection and placement process for fellows and hosting sites is scheduled to be completed by the end of March 2017 and the first cycle of the programme is expected to start with induction training in the following September. The first cycle will involve the participation of 15 fellows and a further 15 participants will be identified from the Member States and EFSA specifically for the induction training.

The calls for expression of interest for selecting the fellows and fellow hosting sites are published in the links below:

Call for hosting site: <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/fellowship/apply-as-hosting-site>

Call for fellows: <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/fellowship/call-for-expression-of-interest>

## Follow-up

At the end of the programme, the fellows will be requested to publish an account of their scientific work in a special issue of EFSA Journal; they will be awarded a Certificate of Participation by EFSA and will be included in the Fellowship alumni network that will be closely linked to EFSA activities.

It is anticipated that the fellows will form an additional pool of experts for food safety risk assessment activities at both the national and EU levels. They will increase the capacity of the Member State organisations to perform such activities and they will support EFSA either as experts or by providing data and scientific information needed for EFSA's tasks.

## References

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<sup>2</sup> <http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/aboutus/jobs/Pages/fellowships.aspx>