

**CCEURO\_QUESTIONNAIRE ON CRITICAL AND EMERGING ISSUES IN FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY**  
**ITALY**

CRITICAL AND EMERGING ISSUES IN FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY

**CRITICAL ISSUES**

Counterfeiting of pharmaceutical and phytosanitary products and frauds involving active substances in general

*Rationale*

Counterfeiting of pharmaceutical and phytosanitary products offers wide margins of profit to illegal organizations, often international. Profitability of illegal behaviour is a major driver of food safety risk.

Considering the common international nature of illegal business, worldwide standardization of testing, monitoring and risk assessment approaches would be beneficial to food safety.

The issue is global and has trade and public health implications.

Risk posed by botanicals

*Rationale*

The consumption of botanicals/herbs has become progressively more popular in European countries over the past years. Very often they are included in complex mixtures and marketed as food supplements. Botanicals contain active substances which are sometimes only partly identified and toxicologically characterized. This makes botanicals potentially harmful in particular considering the "mixture effect" deriving from their inclusion in complex formulations (e.g. supplements). Other concerns originate from the potential contamination of the species intentionally consumed with toxic species that accidentally occur during harvesting or processing (e.g. seeds) of botanicals. Contaminations by mycotoxins is another concern.

Monitoring of consumption habits, assessment of biological activities of active components (including mixtures), setting of sanitary and quality standards as well as characterization of contamination would be beneficial.

The issue is global and has trade and public health implications.

Food safety hazards from street food

*Rationale*

A significant proportion of food is consumed by urban populations as street food in developing countries, being a cheap and fast eating option particularly in a time of economic crisis. Consumption is also significant in industrialized countries, often in connection with street markets and fairs, and leisure activities in general. At present, data on food safety hazards of street food mostly refer to developing countries worldwide.

Considering the diversity of situations in CCEURO Member Countries, the assessment and guidance for management of these hazards in the European region seem appropriate.

The issue is global and has public health implications.

**EMERGING ISSUES**

Geographic distribution of biotoxins

*Rationale*

Possibly in connection with climate change, the geographic distribution of biotoxins that contaminate food (fishery products) is changing and expected to undergo further modification in the future. An example is the recent report of ciguatera from local fish in Canary Islands.

Better knowledge of the epidemiology of these intoxications and contamination data from fishery products outside endemic areas could be useful to perform specific risk assessments. Harmonization of data collection, standardization and monitoring activities are deemed necessary at European region level.

The issue is global and has trade and public health implications.

Un-notified replacement of food ingredients

*Rationale*

Following market globalization and unfair business of some operators, ingredient replacement has emerged as a significant topic. While this conduct does not constitute a safety issue by itself, it opens the door to undefined and/or unregulated ingredients being introduced into the food chain. This issue falls primarily into the fraud domain but monitoring of the ingredients being most often used as replacers and associated hazards would assist and inform proper risk assessment.

The issue is global and related to trade, and might have public health implications.

Mycotoxins (mixtures, masking)

*Rationale*

Possibly in connection with climate change, temperate regions like Europe are experiencing recurrent crises of mycotoxin contamination of commodities, mostly cereals, including maize with aflatoxin and DON, wheat and barley with DON. Mycotoxin contamination is an old and reasonably defined food safety problem but some issues appear to be still open, i.e. the toxicity of mixtures of toxins, the residue levels varying between countries, the lack of level for some toxins. Lastly, recent studies showed the occurrence of modified chemical forms of mycotoxins as the result of metabolic transformations operated by contaminated plants. These forms, called masked mycotoxins, can lead to underestimation of the mycotoxin content of commodities due to analytical overlooking of the modified molecules. On the other hand, little is known about the toxicity of the modified mycotoxins.

A risk assessment in the European region would be useful.

The issue has trade and public health implications.

Dietary emulsifiers

*Rationale*

Large amounts of these chemicals are being used by the food industry worldwide. High proportions of food items commonly consumed contain emulsifiers with the result that the population exposed and the level of exposure are high, especially in industrialized countries where the consumption of industrially manufactured foods is predominant. Little is known on long-term effects in humans especially with regard to intestinal barrier integrity and consequent possible modulation of mucosal response and food allergy among the possible outcomes.

A risk assessment in the European region would be useful.

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The issue is global and has trade and public health implications.

Arsenic in seafood

Seafood can contain several times the amount of arsenic (As) than other foods and is considered an important source of dietary intake in humans, beside plants such as cereals (in particular rice) and root vegetables.

A risk assessment in the European region would be useful.

The issue is global and has trade and public health implications.