TECHNICAL REPORT

Expert Database 2011 Annual Report of Activities[1]

European Food Safety Authority[2]

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), Parma, Italy

SUMMARY

EFSA's expert database (EDB) was launched on the 5th of June 2008 with the main objective to establish a database of external scientific experts that can be queried in order to support the activities carried out by the Scientific Committee, the Scientific Panels and working groups.

During 2011, the database continued to grow, having received an average of approximately 45 applications per month, and a total of 540 applications. The EDB held information on 3 002 experts by the end of 2011. The information on 94 % of them is shared with external users of the database, namely with the members of the Advisory Forum and of the Focal Point Network and the European Commission.

During the course of 2011, the EDB continued to be promoted with the support of Focal Points (at national level) and by EFSA. All EU Member States (MS) and EEA/EFTA countries, with the exception of Liechtenstein, as well as 34 other countries, are represented in the EDB. Analysis of data from the EDB revealed that some MS and EEA/EFTA countries continue to have a relatively lower representation, considering the country population. Consequently, these countries in particular would benefit from future promotion activities of the EDB.

All main areas of expertise that fall within EFSA's remit are present on the EDB. "New technologies" and "Plant health" continued to be the areas of expertise apparently less well represented in the EDB. However, "Plant health", as well as "Toxicology" and "Exposure assessment" were the areas of expertise with higher growth rates. "Toxicology" and "Exposure assessment" were the scientific areas most frequently sought in the EDB, as revealed by a user survey. An increase of the number of available experts in these areas may be achieved by fostering targeted EDB promotion activities.

During 2011 the EDB SC also updated the Policy for Data Renewal of EFSA's Expert Database (EDB) and the necessary IT-changes have been made to the tool to manage submission and eventual deletions of expired profiles. This updated policy aims to strengthen measures to preserve the accuracy and quality of the data stored in the EDB, and further address recommendations made by the European Data Protection Supervisor.

A high number of Member States and EEA/EFTA countries (24 out of 30) participated in an EDB survey conducted in November 2011. More than half of the responding countries have queried the EDB in search for expertise, the majority on a quarterly basis or around twice a year. The user survey also revealed that the EDB has improved its capacity to deliver expertise, given the decrease in the number of respondents indicating a fair frequency of detection of expertise (from 42 % in 2009 to 17 % in 2011), and the increase on the number of respondents indicating a good/very good frequency of detection of expertise (from 25 % in 2009 to 42 % in 2011).

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General promotion activities aimed at increasing the total number of experts included in the EDB, as well as targeted promotion activities in certain countries and scientific areas, continue to be the priority activities foreseen for 2012 on the EDB. Further cooperation activities with Focal Points are crucial to achieve the abovementioned proposed objectives.

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KEYWORDS

expert database, application, validation, eligibility, promotion

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MANDATE

The Advisory Forum & Scientific Cooperation Unit is tasked to prepare annual reports of activities on the EDB. Such technical reports shall provide a comprehensive description of yearly activities, as well as an analysis of data held in the EDB, in particular regarding its growth; expertise available per country and per area of expertise; and data validity. The yearly reports may also focus on a particular aspect of the EDB, to be decided on a case by case basis by the EDB Supervisory Committee (EDB SC).

The daily management of the EDB is coordinated by the EDB Administrator (a designated staff member of the Advisory Forum & Scientific Cooperation Unit). The EDB Administrator is supported by the EDB SC. This Committee is composed by the EDB Administrator and by designated senior staff members of EFSA's scientific Directorates. The Committee meets on a quarterly basis to assess the validity and eligibility of applications submitted to the EDB. The Advisory Forum & Scientific Cooperation Unit provides the secretariat for EDB SC meetings.

OBJECTIVES

This annual report summarises the activities carried out during the course of 2011 to implement EFSA's EDB project and assesses data available in the EDB, as compared to data available in previous years. The report mainly concerns the period from January until December 2011, i.e. a period of 12 months (referred to in this report as "reporting period").

EVALUATION

1. Introduction

The recommendation for EFSA to set up an expert database was made in the report of the *ad-hoc* Advisory Forum Working Group on the Input of National Authorities into the work of EFSA's Scientific Committee, Panels and other expert groups (INA-AFWG), presented to the Advisory Forum[3] at its meeting on May 2006. This recommendation was later endorsed by the Advisory Forum Steering Group on Cooperation on March 2007. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the expert database project were endorsed by the Advisory Forum on April 2007.

An EFSA Scientific Cooperation Working Group (ESCO WG) was set up in November 2007. Following its first meeting in December 2007, an EDB project plan was discussed and endorsed by the Advisory Forum and the Scientific Committee on April 2008. The EDB was officially launched on the 5th of June 2008, along with the publication of the *Decision of the Executive Director concerning the selection of members of the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and external experts*[4] (referred to in this report as "Decision on the Selection of Experts").

The main objective of EFSA's expert database is to establish a database of external scientific experts that can be queried in order to support the activities carried out by the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels, EFSA's networks, and respective working groups. By creating such a database, EFSA achieves the following goals: (1) enhances the transparency of the process through which experts are invited to participate in EFSA's scientific activities; (2) enhances EFSA's capacity to conduct risk assessments and other scientific activities falling within its remit; and (3) responds more effectively and flexibly to growing workload, particularly in cases where very specialised, unexpected or urgent work is required.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Applications submitted to the EDB

EFSA's homepage displays a banner dedicated to the EDB, which redirects to EFSA's EDB webpage[5] containing general information on the database. The online procedure to submit an application to the EDB starts on this webpage and consists on three steps: i) registration in the database; ii) filling an electronic application, available at the EDB login page; and iii) submission of the completed application. Applicant experts shall indicate whether they wish to share their profiles just with EFSA, or also with MS, EEA/EFTA countries and the European Commission.

During 2011, activities aiming to promote the EDB and thus to increase the amount of applications submitted were carried out. These included the pre-filling of applications on behalf of experts that provided their curricular information to EFSA in the context of past calls for expression of interest, followed by their invitation to join the EDB. Other promotion activities concerned the sending out of email messages about EFSA's expert database to experts participating in EFSA's activities (e.g. to participants of scientific colloquia and the EFSA expert survey) and the use of social media. Cooperation with Focal Points (FP) for the identification of expert databases or networks of scientists falling within EFSA's remit was continued. During 2011, the EDB was also used to promote EFSA's calls to (1) renew the Scientific Committee and eight of its scientific Panels for the three-year period from mid-2012 to mid-2015, and (2) pre-select experts for two of its scientific Panels for the three-year period from mid-2014 to mid-2017.

[3] http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/af.htm
[4] http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/aboutefsa/keydocs.htm
[5] http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/expertdb.htm

2.2. Validity and eligibility check of submitted applications

The process for inclusion of experts into the database is based on the assessment of a set of mandatory information provided with the online application. This task is carried out by the Administrator of the EDB (a representative from the Advisory Forum & Scientific Cooperation Unit), supported by a senior representative from EFSA's Risk Assessment & Scientific Assistance Directorate and a senior representative from the Scientific Evaluation of Regulated Products Directorate, making up the Expert Database Supervisory Committee (EDB SC). This Committee meets on a quarterly basis. The Advisory Forum & Scientific Cooperation Unit provides the secretariat for the EDB SC meetings.

The EDB SC guides the Administrator of the EDB on the decision process for inclusion or exclusion of experts into/from the EDB, and on other matters related with the management of the EDB. Full details on the adopted assessment procedures are formally laid out in the EDB SC Procedures.

2.3. Overall assessment of data available in the database

2.3.1. Expert distribution per country of origin

Applications submitted to the EDB come from applicants of EU MS and beyond. As one of the factors to be taken into consideration by EFSA staff when carrying out the selection of experts that contribute to EFSA's scientific activities is MS representativeness (as foreseen in the Decision on the Selection of Experts *"... Specifically, for otherwise equal candidates, priority shall be given to underrepresented Member States. Experts from non-EU countries may be considered in case appropriate candidates from Member States cannot be identified;..."*.) an evenly MS distribution of expertise in the EDB (i.e. according to population size) is recommended.

2.3.2. Expert distribution per area of expertise

The EDB application form allows experts to choose from 12 main areas of expertise, subdivided into a total of 125 subfields of competence. Applicant experts are required to identify at least one subfield of competence in order to be able to submit their applications.

2.4. Collection of user feedback

During the period between 24 October 2011 and 18 November 2011, an EDB user-survey was carried out: one questionnaire targeted EFSA users and a second questionnaire was sent to external users of the EDB. The main objectives of the survey were to: (1) collect feedback from users on how often the search tool is being used; (2) how often sought expertise is found; (3) which fields of expertise were more sought in the EDB; (4) the user-friendliness of the tool; and (5) any recommended improvements on the IT interface of the EDB, in particular on available features.

3. Results

3.1. Applications submitted to the EDB

During 2011, a total of 540 applications were submitted to the EDB, corresponding to an average of 45 submitted applications per month. An overview in time (from June 2008 to December 2011) of submitted applications is shown in Figure 1. A decrease on the overall monthly average since the launch of the EDB, from 101 applications (observed by end of 2010) to 83 applications (observed by end of 2011) was noted. Figure 1 illustrates that during 2011 the number of submitted applications was relatively stable, with a peak of above 90 submitted applications in June 2011.

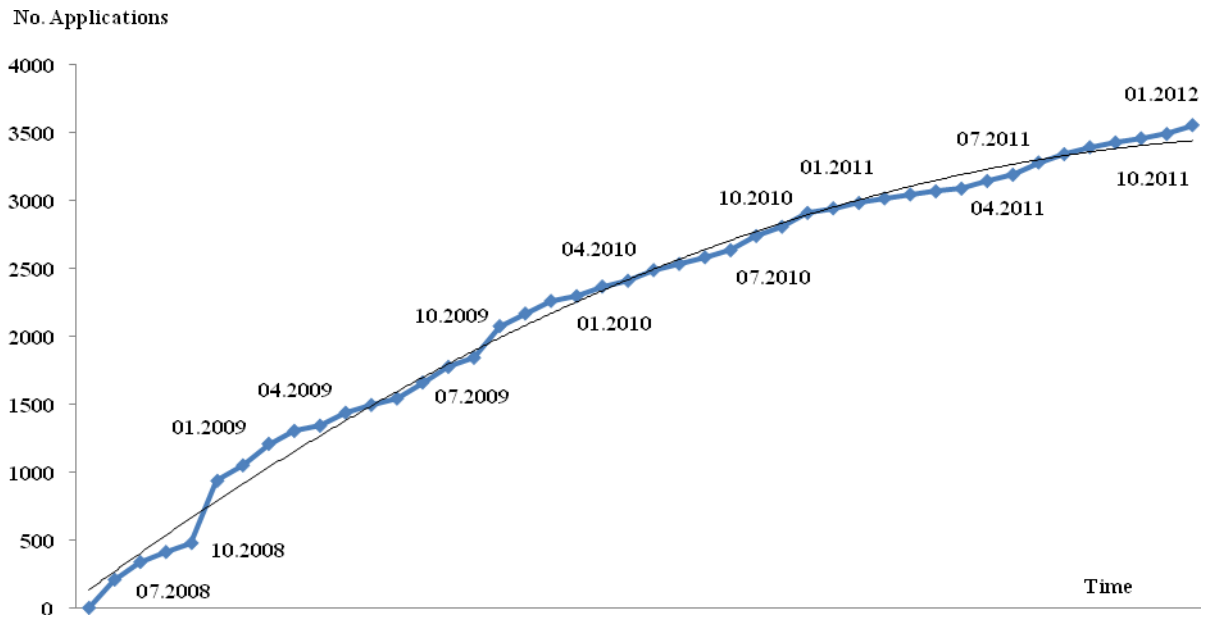


Figure 1: Submitted applications from June 2008 until end of 2011

During 2011, EFSA continued to actively promote the EDB. A total of 104 information emails was sent out to attendees of EFSA's scientific colloquia (on emerging risks and on plant health) and to 140 participants of other scientific activities co-organised or having EFSA's participation (e.g. joint conference co-organised by EFSA in Sarajevo; participants of a *Listeria monocytogenes* conference in the US). In addition, an invitation email was sent to 96 prefilled reserve list candidates of the calls for (1) the ANS and CEF Panels and (2) expanding the reserve list of the remaining EFSA Panels); and as well to 322 participants of the last EFSA expert survey.

FP have also played an important role in promoting the EDB. During 2011, they provided for over 40 presentations referring specifically to the EDB, at national scientific events, in more than 18 countries; they published information about the EDB on 19 national FP web pages; they disseminated promotion material (leaflets, postcards and banners, as well as articles in newsletters, newspapers or national scientific journals) on the EDB to members of the national FP networks in more than 11 countries; and they sent out e-mail messages and established personal contact with applicant experts, so to give information on the EDB, in more than 11 countries. FP have assisted experts in filling in the online application form in eight countries and promoted the use of the EDB search tool amongst their national networks of experts and organisations in 22 countries.

During the second semester of 2011, social media were also used as a vehicle for promoting the EDB. LinkedIn[6], a social networking website launched in May 2003 and mainly used for professional networking, was the selected tool. A total of 51 user-groups were identified to operate within EFSA's

[6] http://www.linkedin.com

remit. Short posts containing a brief description of EFSA's EDB and the relevant links to EFSA's website were disseminated, addressing an overall estimate of more than 85 000 subscribers.

3.2. Validity and eligibility check of submitted applications

During the course of 2011, the EDB SC met three times to discuss in detail the results of the validity and eligibility checks of applications made by the EDB Administrator. The final outcome of the validity and eligibility checks of applications submitted to the EDB during the reporting period and overtime, since its launch, is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Assessment of submitted applications during the reporting period (2011) and in total

Outcome of validity/eligibility checks		No. of applications in 2011	Total No. of applications
Included		**542 (77.2 %)**	**3 002 (85.2 %)**
Not included	Update requested	71 (10.1 %)	315 (8.9 %)
	Excluded	68 (9.7 %)	140 (4 %)
	Not valid	7 (1 %)	28 (0.8 %)
	Drop Out	14 (2 %)	39 (1.1 %)
	Subtotal	**160 (22.8 %)**	**522 (14.8 %)**
Total		**702 (100 %)**	**3 524 (100 %)**

During the reporting period, a total of 542 experts were included in the EDB, corresponding to 77.2 % of all submitted applications, i.e. slightly below the overall proportion of included experts (85.2 %) since the day of launch of the EDB.

In 2011, a total of 160 applications (22.8 %) were not included in the EDB: 71 experts were requested an update before any decision could be made on their inclusion; 68 were excluded from the EDB by decision of the EDB SC; 7 applications were considered not valid; and 14 experts requested to be removed from the database. At year end, solely three applications were pending assessment by the EDB SC.

During 2011 the EDB SC also updated the Policy for Data Renewal of EFSA's Expert Database (EDB) and the necessary IT-changes have been made to the tool to manage submission and eventual deletions of expired profiles. This updated policy aims to strengthen measures to preserve the accuracy and quality of the data stored in the EDB, and further address recommendations made by the European Data Protection Supervisor. Profiles of experts dated over 11 months since the date of last (re)submission are sent an automated reminder, requesting experts to update and resubmit their profiles or to confirm that their profiles remain up-to-date. If not complying within set intervals, experts are sent an automated reminder, re-asking experts to update and resubmit their profiles or to confirm that their profiles remain up-to-date. This reminder will contain an explicit warning that failure in the updating and/or resubmission of profiles within 6 months will lead to exclusion from the EDB. Finally, profiles of experts close to expiry are notified for deletion to the EDB Administrator through the EDB corporate mailbox.

By the end of 2011, 93.7 % of all included experts (i.e. 2 812 experts) had indicated their willingness to share their profiles with MS and EEA/EFTA countries, thus being visible to external users of the EDB. This proportion represents an increase of 1.2 % when compared to the situation by the end of 2010, and is a good indicator of the openness and willingness towards cooperation with other national food safety agencies expressed by experts joining the EDB.

3.3. Overall assessment of data available in the database

3.3.1. Expert distribution per country of origin

By the end of 2011, experts from 64 different countries were included in the EDB. Experts from all MS and EEA/EFTA countries are represented in the EDB, with the single exception of Liechtenstein, along with 34 third-countries. Experts from these third-countries amount to 8.3 % of all included experts.

The number of experts from the EU and EEA/EFTA included in the EDB per country of origin is presented in **Figure 2**. Italy, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Netherlands and Spain are the countries presenting the highest number of experts, corresponding to 55.8 % of all included experts.

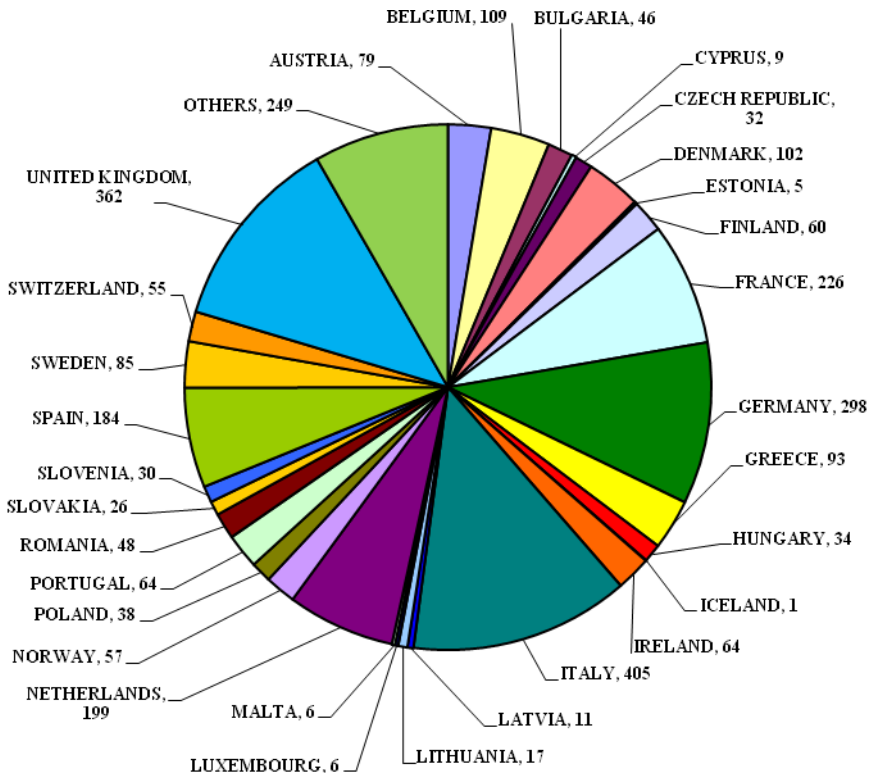


Figure 2: Number of EU and EEA/EFTA experts included in the EDB per country of origin

With regards to non-EU and non-EEA/EFTA countries, United States, Canada and Turkey are the best represented in the EDB, amounting for 57 % (i.e. 31.7 %, 12.9 % and 12.4 % respectively) of all third-country experts (see Figure 3). It should be noted that the acceding country Croatia and the candidate countries Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey are relatively well represented as third-countries, amounting to 25.7 % of all third-country experts.

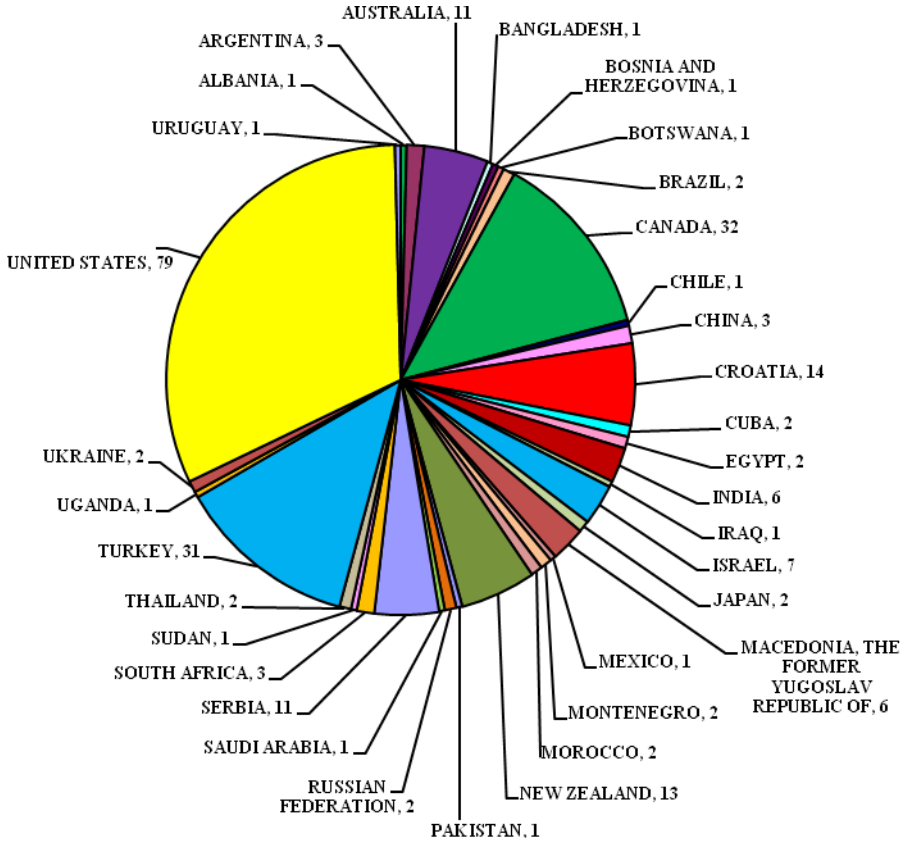
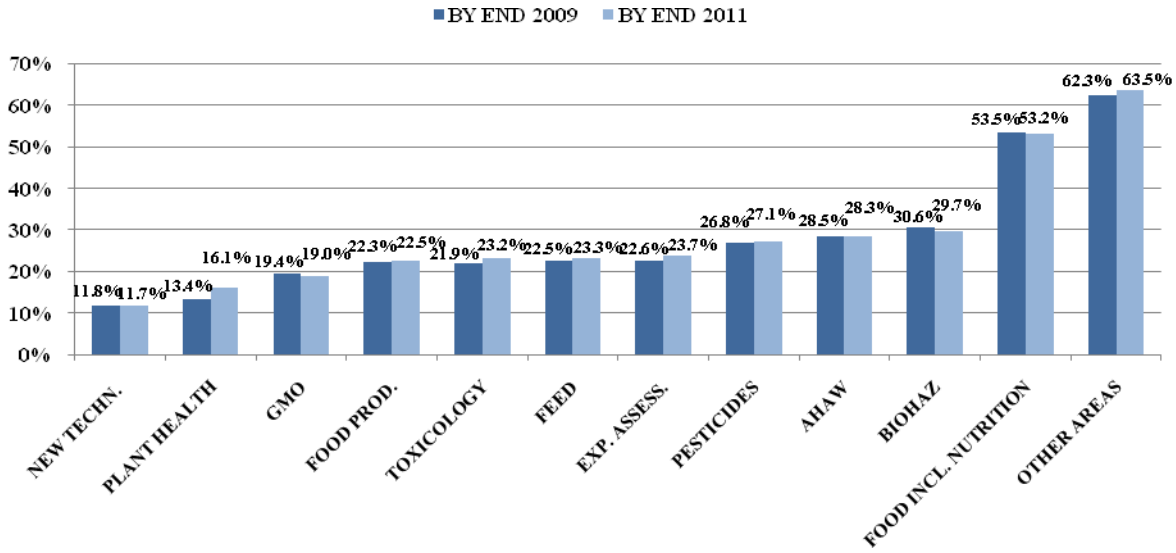


Figure 3: Number of non-EU and non-EEA/EFTA experts included in the EDB per country of origin

3.3.2. Expert distribution per area of expertise

The proportion of experts included in the EDB per main area of expertise at the end of 2011, as compared to end of 2009 is shown in Figure 4.

The distribution of experts amongst the different areas of expertise available in the EDB has remained similar between the end of 2009 and the end of 2011. Despite their overall increase in terms of number of experts, the areas of expertise presenting a lower number of experts remain “New technologies”, “Plant health” and “Genetically modified organisms”, whereas those with the highest number of experts remain the so called “Other areas” and “Food including nutrition”. The main areas of expertise observing higher growth rates during 2011 (i.e. a higher increase on the proportion of experts selecting such expertise, as compared to their proportion by end of 2009) were “Plant Health” (2.7 % increase), “Toxicology” (1.3 % increase) and “Exposure Assessment” (1.1 % increase).



Legend:
NEW TECHN. - new technologies, such as nanotechnology and cloning
GMO - genetically modified organisms
FOOD PROD. - food production and food supply
EXP. ASSESS. - exposure assessment
AHAW - animal production, health and welfare
BIOHAZ - biological hazards
OTHER AREAS - general areas e.g. food safety, statistics and modelling, agronomy, etc.

Figure 4: Proportion of experts in the EDB per main area of expertise by the end of 2011 as compared to end of 2009

3.4. Collection of user feedback

3.4.1. Feedback from EFSA staff

A total of 41 replies from 14 EFSA Scientific Units were received on the EDB survey addressed to EFSA staff (Appendix A). Two Units did not reply to the survey.

Use made of the EDB

In 78.1 % of consultations made, the EDB was used with the purpose of finding experts in specific fields of competence which were needed for an EFSA scientific activity, while in 53.6 % the purpose was to find specific experts already known to have the appropriate expertise for a specific scientific activity. The EDB was also used by EFSA staff to verify if experts indicated by a MS or by an EFSA network for an EFSA scientific activity were included in the EDB in 29.3 % of consultations made. Other reported uses of the EDB were:

- to assess in detail the curricular information of included experts;
- to assess how many experts from a designated country are included in the EDB.

Frequency of identification of sought expertise in the EDB

On the question concerning the frequency of identification of sought expertise by making use of the EDB (i.e. excluding experts originally found outside the EDB and then invited to join the EDB), 42.9 % of respondents selected the frequency rate “0-20 %”, as opposed to 56.5 % in 2009 (see Figure 5). The increase observed on the frequency rates “41-60 %” and “61-80 %”, from 4.3 % in 2009 to 17.1 % and 14.3 %, respectively, in 2011, should also be noted.

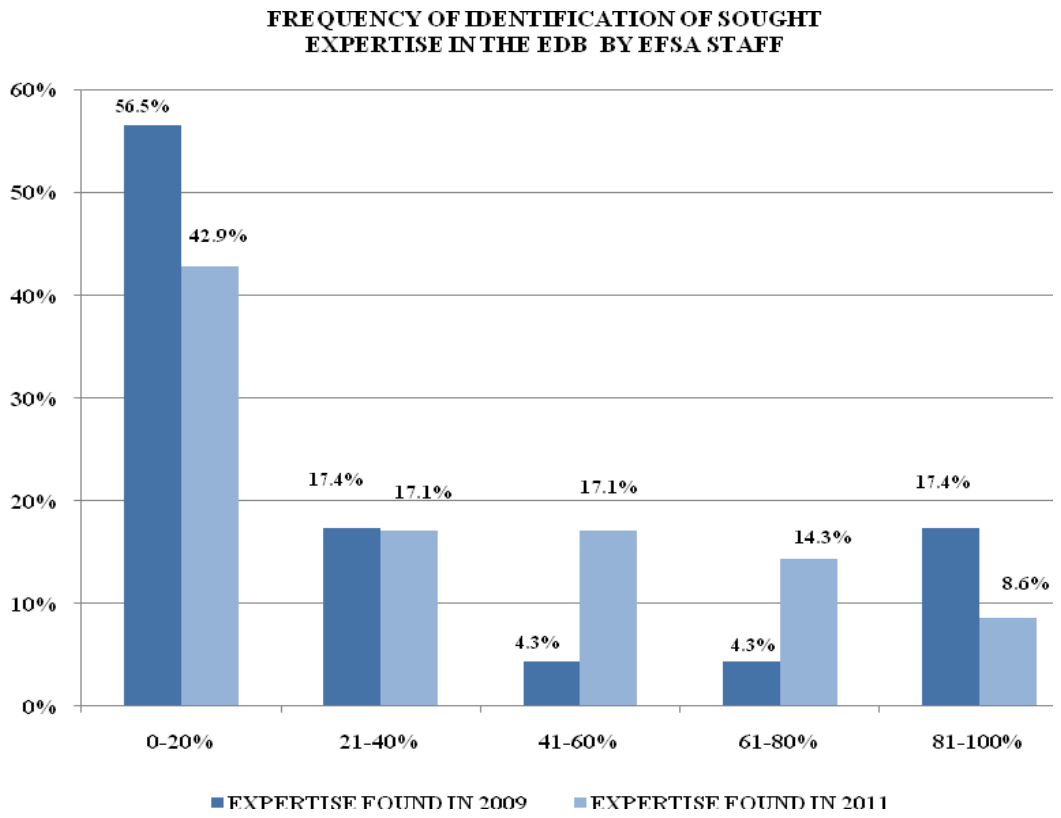


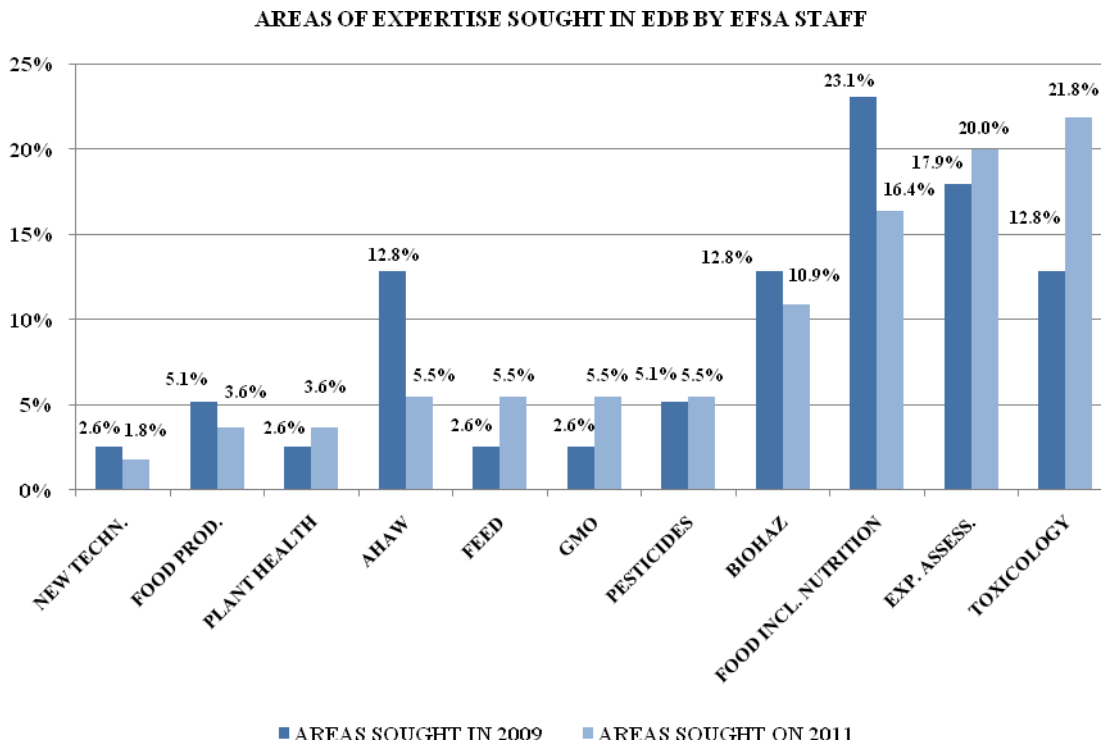
Figure 5: Frequency of identification of sought expertise in the EDB by EFSA staff, broken down per frequency categories (e.g. in 2011, expertise was found in the EDB with a frequency between 0-20 % by 42.9 % of respondents)

Reasons for not using potential experts identified during EDB queries

On the question concerning reasons that have led to the non-use of potential experts identified during EDB queries, 61.5 % of respondents replied that better expertise could be found outside the EDB; 46.1 % indicated that experts were not available; and 23.1 % mentioned that experts had no interest to carry out the task at hand.

Areas of expertise queried on the EDB

The whole range of areas of expertise covered by EFSA's remit was queried on the EDB during the course of 2011. "Toxicology", "Exposure Assessment" and "Food including nutrition" (as indicated by 21.8 %, 20 % and 16.4 % of respondents, respectively) were the fields most frequently queried, following a similar trend in 2009 (see Figure 6).



Legend:
NEW TECHN. - new technologies, such as nanotechnology and cloning
FOOD PROD. - food production and food supply
AHAW - animal production, health and welfare
GMO - genetically modified organisms
BIOHAZ - biological hazards
EXP. ASSESS. - exposure assessment

Figure 6: Areas of expertise sought in the EDB by EFSA staff, at end of 2011, compared to end of 2009

User-friendliness of the EDB search tool

On the question "*Do you consider the EDB search tool to be user friendly?*" 63.4 % of respondents replied "Yes", while 36.6 % replied that improvements are still necessary. Comments for future enhancements of the EDB were reported, in particular (1) improving the keyword search feature located under the refine search tab of the search tool; (2) increasing the overall speed of the search tool; (3) limiting the number of competences experts are able to detain; (4) improving the user-friendliness of saving, printing and exporting results of queries; and (5) allowing the use of the logical condition "OR" amongst the search parameters used in queries.

Promotion of the EDB

When questioned about ideas to promote the EDB, EFSA staff suggested (1) advertising the EDB in scientific journals, including the EFSA Journal; (2) use of social networks; (3) propose registration in the EDB to those subscribing to EFSA news; and (4) use of networks of organisations operating within EFSA's remit to reach out to communities of scientific experts (e.g. Article 36 list).

3.4.2. Feedback from external users

A total of 30 replies were received from 24 MS and EEA/EFTA countries on the questionnaire addressed to external users of the EDB (Appendix B). Six countries did not reply to the survey, while other six provided more than one reply.

Use made of the EDB

On the question "*Have you used the EDB to identify expertise for scientific activities?*" 16 out of 24 reporting Member States (58.3 %) have replied "YES". Two Member States replied "NO" to this question, although answers received to other questions suggest the use of the EDB for other purposes. The main reason indicated by the remaining countries for not having used the EDB were the lack of need for it, given the existence of national scientific advisory bodies and/or expert databases.

Half of the countries that have used the EDB did so on a quarterly basis, while 43.8 % around twice a year. The frequency of use of the EDB by MS and EEA/EFTA countries, as compared to EFSA staff, is presented in Figure 7.

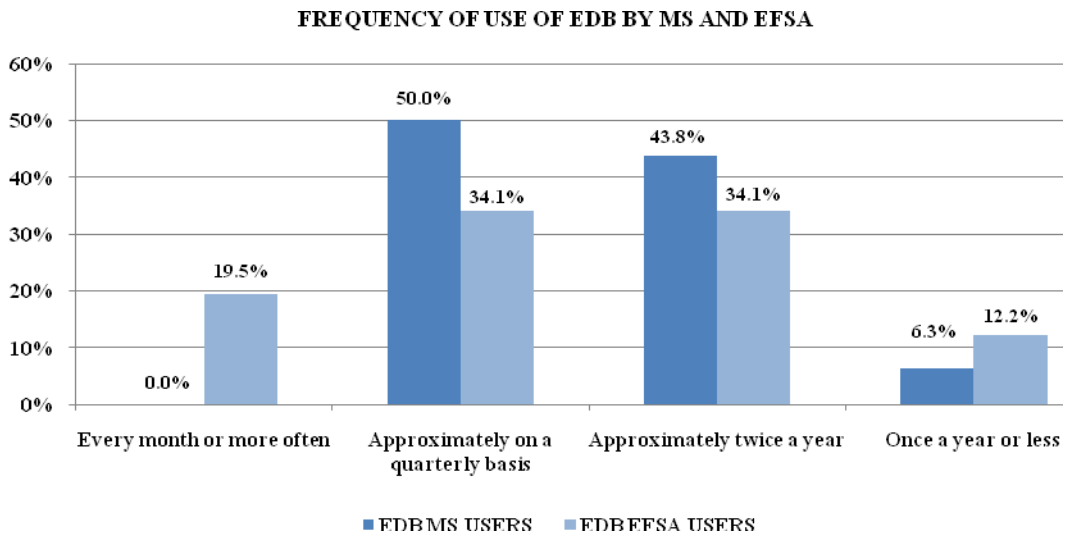


Figure 7: Frequency of use of EDB by MS, including EEA/EFTA countries, as compared to EFSA staff

Identification of expertise following consultation of the EDB

On the question concerning the frequency of identification of sought expertise by use of the EDB, 33.3 % of respondents selected the frequency rate "21-40 %", as opposed to 25 % in 2009 (see Figure 8). Also the increase observed on the frequency rates "61-80 %" and "81-100 %" from 8.3 % and 16.7 % in 2009, as compared to 16.7 % and 25 %, respectively, in 2011 should be noted.

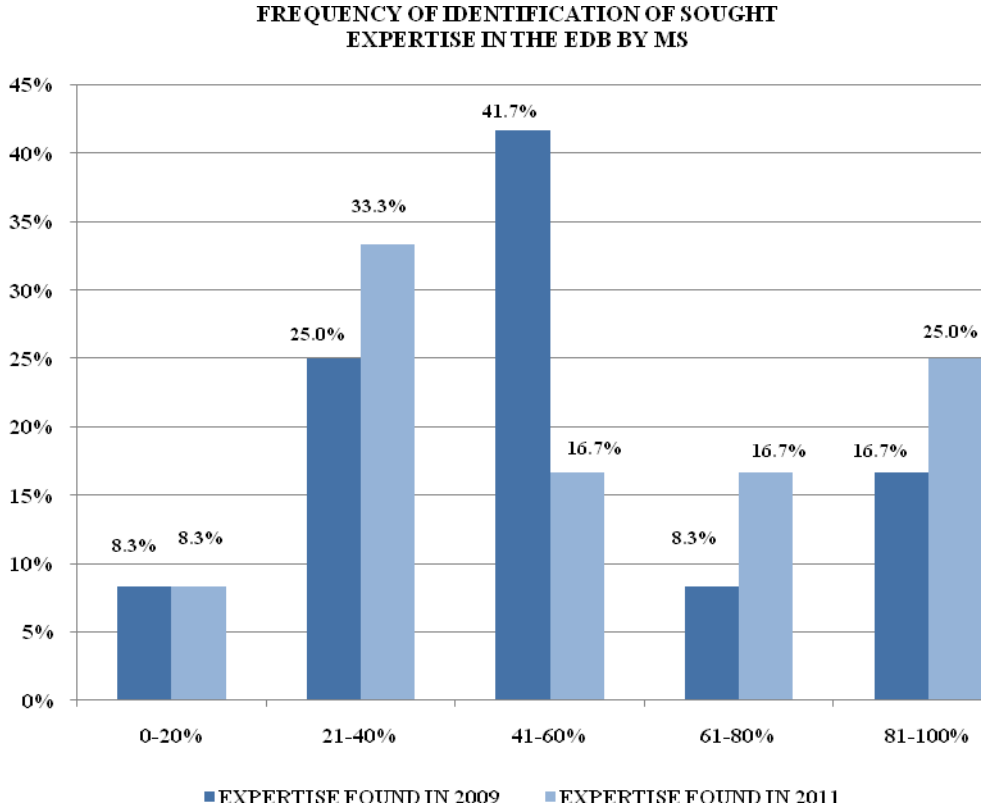
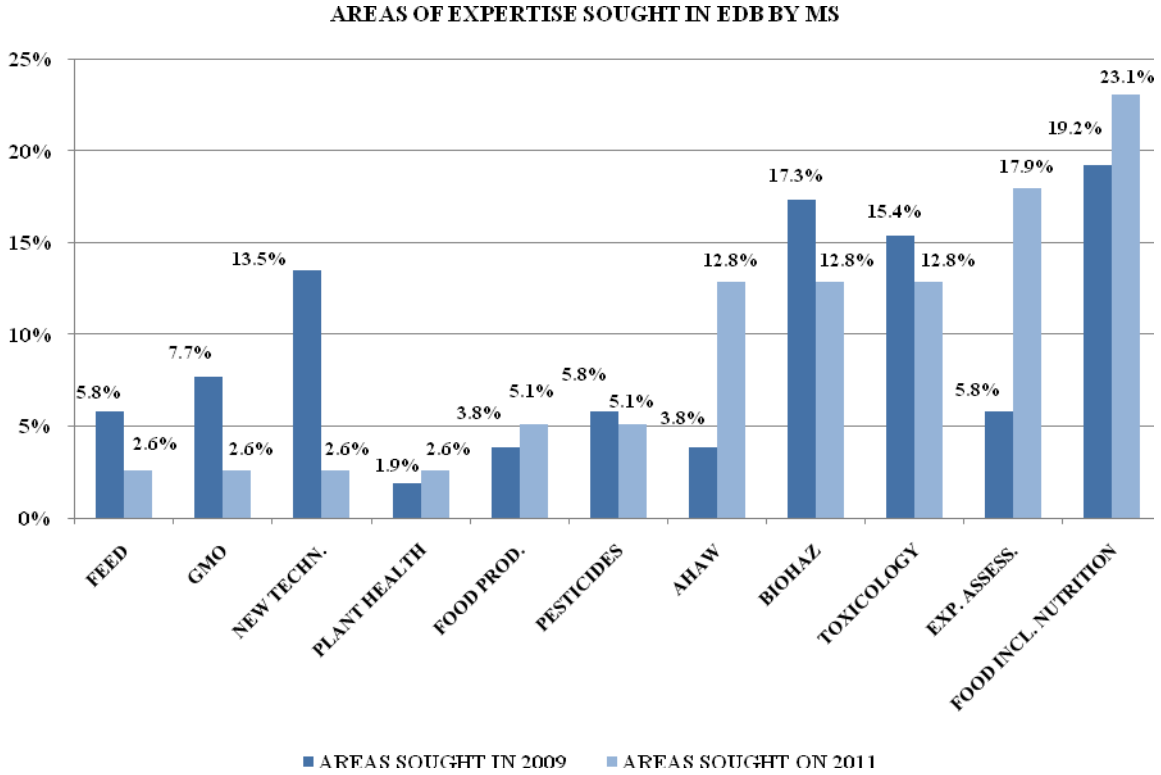


Figure 8: Frequency of identification of sought expertise in the EDB by MS and EEA/EFTA countries, broken down per frequency categories (e.g. in 2011, expertise was found in the EDB with a frequency between 81-100 % by 25 % of respondents)

Areas of expertise queried in the EDB

The whole range of areas of expertise covered by EFSA's remit was queried on the EDB during the course of 2011. "Food including nutrition" and "Exposure Assessment" (as indicated by 23.1 % and 17.9 % of respondents, respectively) were the fields most frequently queried (see Figure 9).



Legend:
GMO - genetically modified organisms
NEW TECHN. - new technologies, such as nanotechnology and cloning
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EXP. ASSESS. - exposure assessment

Figure 9: Areas of expertise sought in the EDB by MS and EEA/EFTA countries by end of 2011, as compared to end of 2009

User-friendliness of the EDB search tool

On the question "*Do you consider the search tool to be user friendly?*" all respondents using the EDB (16) replied "YES".

Promotion of the EDB

When questioned about ideas to promote the EDB, respondents suggested that additional promotion could be carried out via the Focal Point Network, in particular (1) a direct link/banner to EFSA's webpage concerning the EDB placed on Focal Point websites; (2) short promotional articles included in national newsletters or cascaded down via email to national networks of experts/organisations; and (3) use of dedicated outreach flyers/promotion material on the EDB, at national scientific events.

4. Discussion

4.1. Applications submitted to the EDB

The average number of submitted applications per month during 2011 (45) was lower than the average in 2010 (70), nevertheless steady over the year. The higher growth rate observed during the month of June of 2011 (above 90 submitted applications) was the result of a specific EDB promotion activity, namely the prefilling and subsequent invitation of 96 experts included in the reserve lists of the calls for the ANS and CEF Panels and for expanding the reserve lists of the remaining EFSA Panels. As compared to other promotion activities, the analysis of the response rate of prefilled experts clearly indicates that this type of promotion activity is a highly effective one and should be further continued.

In addition to spontaneous applications, the continued steady growth rates observed during 2011 resulted from other EDB promotion activities. FP played a crucial role in promoting the EDB via the use of presentations or other outreach material in national scientific events; via their website; or by direct contacts made with potential experts. At EFSA level, promotion activities included the sending out of information emails about the EDB to over 500 identified potential experts. The use of social media, in particular of LinkedIn was also explored. Despite the high number of potential addressees of posts sent throughout user-groups of interest (to over 85 000 subscribers, split amongst 51 user-groups), the number of submitted applications remained just above the monthly average for the year during the course of this activity.

4.2. Validity and eligibility check of submitted applications

The proportion of experts requested an update on their profiles before any decision on their inclusion in the EDB could be made was 10.1 % during the reporting period, similar to the overall values by end of 2011 (8.9 %) and by the end of 2010 (9 %). The application fields most frequently requested an update ("Education", "Professional experience", "Specific curricular information" and "Listing of publications") contain the critical scientific information to assess the suitability of an expert to cooperate with EFSA.

The overall proportion of applicants excluded from the EDB since its launch has slightly increased from 3 % by end of 2010 to 4 % by end of 2011. This was due to a relatively high proportion of applicants excluded from the EDB during the reporting period (9.7 % in 2011). The main reasons that led to the exclusion of the majority of these experts were the lack of professional experience (being it no professional experience at all or professional experience not falling within EFSA's remit) and the lack of evidence of publications or reports relevant to EFSA's remit. The overall number of applicants excluded from the EDB is considered to be kept at a low level, in line with the flexible eligibility criteria in use for deciding upon the inclusion of experts into the EDB.

The proportion of applications considered "Not valid" during the reporting period (only 2011) was 1 %, a value that is equivalent to that observed by end of 2010 and 2011 (0.8 %). The low proportion of non-valid applications continues to reflect a good understanding of the required information to be filled in the application forms.

During 2011, a total of 14 experts previously included in the EDB (2 %) requested to have their profiles deleted from the EDB. On the vast majority of these cases, the reasons presented for dropping out from the EDB were either the retirement of the experts or the lack of time available to engage in cooperation activities with EFSA. The overall proportion of experts that have so far dropped out from the EDB since its launch (1.1 %) is considered to be low.

The low proportion of applications pending assessment at the end of 2011 (three applications) is an indicator that the validity and eligibility checks of applications have been kept up-to-date.

4.3. Overall assessment of data available in the database

4.3.1. Expert distribution per country of origin

Representation of MS and EEA/EFTA countries in the EDB, in terms of number of experts, by end of 2011, varied between 13.5 % for Italy (as opposed to 13.3 % by end of 2010) and 0.03 % for Iceland (as opposed to 0.04 % by end of 2010). The distribution of experts per country of origin continues to follow an apparent positive correlation with the size of the country population. However, similarly to the situation by the end of 2010, in five well populated MS the proportion of experts in the EDB is lower than one would expect from the relative size of the country population at EU level (with over 20 million inhabitants each).

To ensure a good overall EU geographical balance of available expertise in the EDB, it is recommended to continue to strengthen EDB promotion activities on the abovementioned five well populated MS, as well as on four identified new MS. Similarly, it is also recommended that targeted promotion activities shall continue to be carried out in the accession country Croatia and in the candidate countries Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

4.3.2. Expert distribution per area of expertise

In general, the proportion of experts selecting the main areas of expertise represented in the EDB has kept stable overtime (see Figure 4). The main reason explaining a high number of experts in "Other areas" is clearly the general nature of the underlying subfields of competence available to be chosen, e.g. food safety, bacteriology, parasitology, epidemiology, etc. As to the main category "Food including nutrition", the high number of experts observed continues to be a consequence of the nature of the activity, a core area within EFSA's remit, covering the scope of three EFSA scientific Panels (Dietetic products, nutrition and allergies - NDA; Food additives and nutrient sources added to food - ANS; and Food contact materials, enzymes, flavourings and processing aids - CEF).

"Plant Health" was the area of expertise observing the highest increase by end of 2011 (2.7 % increase). Such increase is most welcome, given that this area continues to be, along with "New technologies", one of the areas less well represented in the EDB (see Figure 4). The apparent underrepresentation for these two areas of expertise continues to be justified by the low number of underlying subfields of competence for the area of "New technologies" (just two subfields, nanotechnology and cloning), and by the more recent history of "Plant Health" as an EFSA Panel.

4.4. Collection of user feedback

4.4.1. Feedback from EFSA staff

The main reason reported by EFSA staff for using the EDB (as indicated by 78.1 % of respondents) was to find available experts for EFSA's scientific activities. Comparison of survey data from EFSA staff in 2011 and 2009 seems to indicate that the EDB has improved its capacity to deliver scientific expertise, given the decrease in the number of respondents indicating a low frequency of detection of expertise (from 56.5 % in 2009 to 42.9 % in 2011), and the increase on the number of respondents indicating a good frequency of detection of expertise (from 4.3 % in 2009 to 14.3 % in 2011). However, a significant amount of respondents (53.6 %) indicated to have also used the EDB to find experts known to detain the appropriate expertise for a specific EFSA scientific activity. The latter, combined with a relatively low number of respondents (8.6 %) observing a high frequency of detection of expertise in the EDB, is a clear sign that, in general, more expertise is required in the database.

"Toxicology" was reported to be the area of expertise more sought in the EDB by end of 2011 (as indicated by 21.8 % of respondents), while in 2009 it ranked third highest (as reported by 12.8 % of respondents) - see Figure 6. "Exposure assessment" and its underlying horizontal subfields (e.g. probabilistic methods, trend studies, statistical evaluation, mathematical modelling) ranked the second highest area of expertise sought in the EDB in 2011 (as indicated by 20 % of respondents), a pattern

similar to that observed in 2009 (as reported by 17.9 % of respondents). "Food including nutrition" ranks the third highest area of expertise sought in the EDB by end of 2011 (as reported by 16.4 % of respondents), while in 2009 it ranked first (as mentioned then by 23.1 % of respondents). The high number of queries made for expertise in this area is a consequence of the nature of the activity, a core area within EFSA's remit, covering the scope of three EFSA Panels (Dietetic products, nutrition and allergies - NDA; Food additives and nutrient sources added to food - ANS; and Food contact materials, enzymes, flavourings and processing aids - CEF).

Although 63.4 % of respondents referred to the EDB search tool as user-friendly, some improvements were recommended, particularly on the speed of the tool, on the usability of some refine search parameters (e.g. the keyword search feature) and on the quality of the information available in the database. In addition, participants suggested the use of new channels for the promotion of the EDB (as opposed to the "classical" ones), such as the use of social media (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter) and of networks of organisations meanwhile consolidated (e.g. the Article 36 list of organisations).

4.4.2. Feedback from external users

A high number of countries (24 out of 30) participated in the EDB survey. More than half of the responding countries (58.3 %) have queried the EDB in search for expertise, the majority on a quarterly basis or around twice a year – see Figure 7. Of those countries that replied not to have used the EDB, the main reason seems to be associated with the lack of need due to existing national scientific advisory bodies and/or expert databases delivering the needed expertise.

Comparison of survey data reported by MS in 2011 and 2009 seems again to indicate that the EDB has improved its capacity to deliver scientific expertise, given the decrease in the number of respondents indicating a fair frequency of detection of expertise (from 41.7 % in 2009 to 16.7 % in 2011), and the increase on the number of respondents indicating a good/very good frequency of detection of expertise (from 8.3 % / 16.7 % in 2009 to 16.7 % / 25 % in 2011 – see Figure 8).

The results on areas of expertise more frequently sought in the EDB during 2011 showed that "Food including nutrition", "Exposure assessment" and "Toxicology" ranked highest, overlapping with the results obtained on the survey addressed to EFSA staff in 2011.

All responding countries considered the EDB to be user-friendly. MS also recommended the further use of the Focal Point Network to continue promoting the EDB. The main channels suggested to be used for such promotion were national websites, national newsletters, emails sent through national networks of experts and organisations, and national scientific events.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the course of 2011, EFSA's expert database continued to receive a constant number of applications, with an average of 45 applications per month and a total of 540 submitted applications. Activities that have mainly contributed to such growth were (1) direct invitations sent by EFSA to identified experts, as a follow up of their pre-filling into the database; and (2) information email messages sent by EFSA and Focal Points to identified networks of organisations and experts. Given the decrease on the overall monthly average, from 101 applications (observed by end of 2010) to 83 applications (observed by end of 2011), processes aimed at further populating the database should continue to be carried out. Such promotion activities shall include the pre-filling and/or invitation of experts known to EFSA from other activities (e.g. EFSA calls for expression of interest, scientific colloquia), and as well continued cooperation with Focal Points. To be able to carry out the necessary promotion activities additional human resource is needed.

The EDB holds information on 3 002 experts, 93.7 % of which is available to external users of the EDB (EU Member States, EEA/EFTA countries and the European Commission, via Advisory Forum and Focal Point representatives).

The proportion of experts represented in the EDB per MS varied between 13.5 % for Italy and 0.03 % for Iceland. The distribution of experts per country of origin continues to follow an apparent positive correlation with the country population. However, similarly to the situation observed by end of 2010, in five well populated MS the proportion of experts in the EDB is lower than one would expect from the relative size of the country population. To ensure a good overall geographical balance of available expertise at EU level in the database, it is recommended to continue strengthening promotion activities in the abovementioned MS. Similarly, it is also recommended to continue targeting EDB promotion activities to the accession country Croatia and to the candidate countries Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

The main areas of expertise observing higher growth rates in the EDB by end of 2011 were "Plant health" (2.7 % increase), "Toxicology" (1.3 % increase) and "Exposure assessment" (1.1 % increase). The observed growth on the number of experts indicating to detain expertise on "Plant Health" is most welcome, given that this area of expertise continues to be one of the scientific areas apparently less well represented in the EDB, along with the "New Technologies" (nanotechnology and cloning). A user-survey also revealed "Toxicology" and "Exposure assessment" as the scientific areas more frequently sought in the EDB, thus meriting further promotion. An increase on the number of available experts in the EDB on the abovementioned areas may be achieved by fostering targeted promotion activities. To this purpose, support from Focal Points should be considered so to best aim the relevant professional groups.

During 2011 the EDB SC also updated the Policy for Data Renewal of EFSA's Expert Database (EDB) and the necessary IT-changes have been made to the tool to manage submission and eventual deletions of expired profiles. This updated policy aims to strengthen measures to preserve the accuracy and quality of the data stored in the EDB, and further address recommendations made by the European Data Protection Supervisor.

A user survey showed that 58.3 % of MS and EEA/EFTA countries have used the EDB during 2011. The main reason indicated by external users for not having used the EDB was a lack of need for it, given the existence of national scientific advisory bodies and/or expert databases delivering the expertise required. The survey also revealed that the EDB has improved its capacity to deliver sought expertise, given the increase on the number of respondents indicating a good/very good frequency of detection of expertise. Although the EDB was generally considered user friendly, recommendations were made for future improvements, namely regarding the speed of the search tool and the functionality of the keyword search feature.

In summary, if given the needed human resource, the main priority activities for 2012 regarding the EDB will be:

- To continue actively promoting the EDB via ongoing EFSA activities (e.g. calls for expression of interest, and scientific colloquia);

- To foster further cooperation with Focal Points, namely by use of EDB outreach material (leaflets, postcards and banners) at national scientific events, via the use national Focal Point web pages, and by disseminating information on the EDB throughout national networks of organisations/experts;

- Target EDB promotion activities to MS with a relatively low number of experts in the EDB, with the support of Focal Points;

- Further explore the use of other routes to promote the EDB, such as the use of social media, the EFSA Journal, and promotion activities targeted to certain professional groups.

APPENDICES

A. EXPERT DATABASE USER SURVEY FOR EFSA STAFF

1. Please indicate the EFSA Unit to which you belong.*

SELECT

2. Please indicate the reasons why you have used the Expert Database (EDB) (more then one choice is possible).*

- ☐ To find available experts in certain fields of competence when setting up or renewing a Working Group
- ☐ To find specific experts you already knew had the appropriate expertise for a Working Group
- ☐ To find experts that were nominated by a MS or EFSA dedicated network for a specific Working Group
- ☐ OTHER

3. If you have chosen OTHER in the previous question, please specify in the text box below.

4. How often (%) were you able to identify potential experts that matched a sought profile following a first consultation of the EDB (i.e. exclude those cases when you had to search for experts outside the EDB)?*

- ○ 0-20%
- ○ 21-40%
- ○ 41-60%
- ○ 61-80%
- ○ 81-100%
- ○ Not applicable

5. Whenever you consulted the EDB and found a list of potential experts possessing the required expertise, which were the main reasons that led to exclusion (more then one choice is possible)?*

- ☐ Experts had a conflict of interest
- ☐ Choice of experts led to a geographical misbalance in the Working Group
- ☐ Experts had no interest to carry out the task at hand or were not available
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ Not applicable

6. From all experts finally selected to cooperate with EFSA, how many of them (%) were originally identified on the EDB (i.e. exclude those experts you had to invite to join the EDB in order to select them)?*

- ○ 0-20%
- ○ 21-40%
- ○ 41-60%
- ○ 61-80%
- ○ 81-100%
- ○ Not applicable

7. If you have chosen OTHER in the previous question, please specify in the text box below.

8. In case you could not find the required experts following a first consultation of the EDB, how did you manage to identify them (more then one choice is possible)?*

- ☐ Literature or web search
- ☐ Request to the Advisory Forum, Focal Points or any other EFSA dedicated network
- ☐ In consultation with Members of Scientific Panels or Scientific Committee

- [ ] OTHER
- [ ] Not applicable

9. If you have chosen OTHER in the previous question, please specify in the text box below.

10. Which were the main fields of competence you have used to search for expertise during the past year (more then one choice is possible)?*

- [ ] Food including nutrition
- [ ] Feed
- [ ] Animal production and health
- [ ] Plant health
- [ ] Plant protection products
- [ ] Biological hazards
- [ ] Food production and food supply
- [ ] Genetically modified organisms
- [ ] Toxicology
- [ ] Exposure assessment
- [ ] New technologies (e.g. nanotechnology, cloning)
- [ ] OTHER
- [ ] Not applicable

11. If you have chosen OTHER in the previous question, please specify in the text box below.

12. Which areas of expertise do you consider need further strengthening in the EDB over the coming year (please specify using keywords)?

13. Do you consider the search tool to be user friendly?*

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

14. Please feel free to make any comments or sugestions on the search tool, including on the use of the refine search tab, in the text box below.

15. Please feel free to make any other comments or suggestions to help us improve the EDB, in the text box below.

Submit Survey

B. EXPERT DATABASE USER SURVEY FOR EXTERNAL USERS

1. Have you used the Expert Database (EDB) to identify expertise for your national scientific activities?*

- Yes
- No (please choose "Not applicable" to questions 3-8 and answer only questions 2 and 9-11)

2. In case you have chosen "No" on the previous question, please indicate the main reasons in the text box bellow.

3. How often have you used the EDB?*

- Every month or more often
- Approximately on a quarterly basis
- Approximately twice a year
- Once a year or less
- Not applicable

4. Which were the main fields of competence you have used to search for expertise during the past year (more then one choice is possible)?*

- Food including nutrition
- Feed
- Animal production and health
- Plant health
- Plant protection products
- Biological hazards
- Food production and food supply
- Genetically modified organisms
- Toxicology
- Exposure assessment
- New technologies (e.g. nanotechnology, cloning)
- OTHER
- Not applicable

5. If you have chosen OTHER in the previous question, please specify in the text box below.

6. How often (%) were you able to identify the expertise you were looking for?*

- 0-20%
- 21-40%
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- 81-100%
- Not applicable

7. Do you consider the search tool to be user friendly?*

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

8. Please feel free to make any comments or sugestions on the search tool, including on the use of the refine search tab, in the text box below.

9. In order to help us target the EDB promotion activities, please indicate which fields of competence do you foresee to be of high interest over the next year (more then one choice is possible).*

- ☐ Food including nutrition
- ☐ Feed
- ☐ Animal production and health
- ☐ Plant health
- ☐ Plant protection products
- ☐ Biological hazards
- ☐ Food production and food supply
- ☐ Genetically modified organisms
- ☐ Toxicology
- ☐ Exposure assessment
- ☐ New technologies, e.g. nanotechnology, cloning
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ Not applicable

10. If you have chosen OTHER in the previous question, please specify in the text box below.

11. Please feel free to make any other comments or suggestions to help us improve the EDB, in the text box below.

Submit Survey