European Commission

CASP 2019

Coordinated Activities on the Safety of Products

Knowledge sharing

Final Report



PROTECTING
European consumers together

Justice and Consumers

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List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
CASP	Coordinated Activities on the Safety of Products
CHAFEA	Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency
DG JUST	Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers of the European Commission
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Economic Area
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EU	European Union
EUIPO	European Union Intellectual Property Office
GPSD	General Product Safety Directive
HA	Horizontal activity
ICT	Information and communications technology
KoM	Kick-off meeting
KS	Knowledge sharing
MS	Member State(s)
MSA	Market surveillance authority
Safety Gate/ RAPEX	Rapid Alert System for Dangerous Non-Food Products



1. Knowledge sharing activity overview

1.1 Main objectives

The purpose of the horizontal activity (HA) on knowledge sharing (KS) was to identify best practices developed by participating market surveillance authorities (MSAs), and to share their valuable experience about these important topics among all the participants to provide a relevant learning experience and an opportunity for dialogue and joint collaboration.

Cooperation between MSAs is of strategic importance as it represents one of the most efficient ways to prevent unsafe products from posing consumer safety risks on the European Single Market. In particular, it provides synergies and benefits for the MSAs, and it supports the effective enforcement of the General Product Safety Directive (GPSD) and other harmonisation legislation dealing with product safety.

Cooperation takes place in different forms, such as:

- Exchanging information and data;
- Reinforcing measures to identify dangerous products;
- Facilitating the sampling of suspicious products for verification and compliance/safety testing purposes;
- Jointly identifying and applying best practices.

At the EU level, MSAs have established different modalities of cooperation aligned with the legal and organisational set-up at national levels and the application of the corresponding EU legislation. Moreover, Member States (MS) have developed tools to improve or systematise cooperation at a national level. These tools were developed on their own initiative, and based on activities and material developed by the European Commission (EC), after exchanges of practices between MS or at regional fora.

This HA took the form of study visits focused on topics of common interest: an MSA that had gained valuable experience hosted a meeting and shared their best practices and any lessons they had learned. Two study visits were organised during CASP 2019; they addressed the matters of cooperation with customs authorities and the use of emerging technologies and ICT capabilities for market surveillance.

The main objectives of the HA on KS were to:

- Provide MSAs with the opportunity to improve their knowledge on technical and organisational topics, best practices and new market trends;
- Raise awareness on different ways to solve common issues;
- Facilitate discussions and KS among MSAs;
- Collect recurring challenges common to many MSAs that require common approaches to address them;
- Identify remarkable initiatives that can be replicated by more countries, acknowledge the efforts invested and learn from their successes;
- Identify topics or activities that could be developed at an EU level in a coordinated way.

Figure 1 - Context, Objectives, Process and Outcomes of the activity

Context

All MSAs across the EU (and EEA/EFTA countries) are confronted with similar dangers and challenges. It makes, therefore, perfect sense for the MSAs to champion the initiatives and projects that have demonstrated superior added-value and efficiency.

Objectives

The specific objective of the HA on knowledge sharing was to showcase two initiatives to all participating MSAs. It aimed at providing an opportunity to discuss and analyse the practical benefits of these initiatives.

Process

The HA put two initiatives in the spotlight:

- In Warsaw (Poland), an initiative on the cooperation between MSAs and customs authorities;
- In Helsinki (Finland) the participating MSAs had the ability to learn from a successful communication campaign 'At your own risk' and a number of case studies on the use of data mining and other digital techniques to support their work.

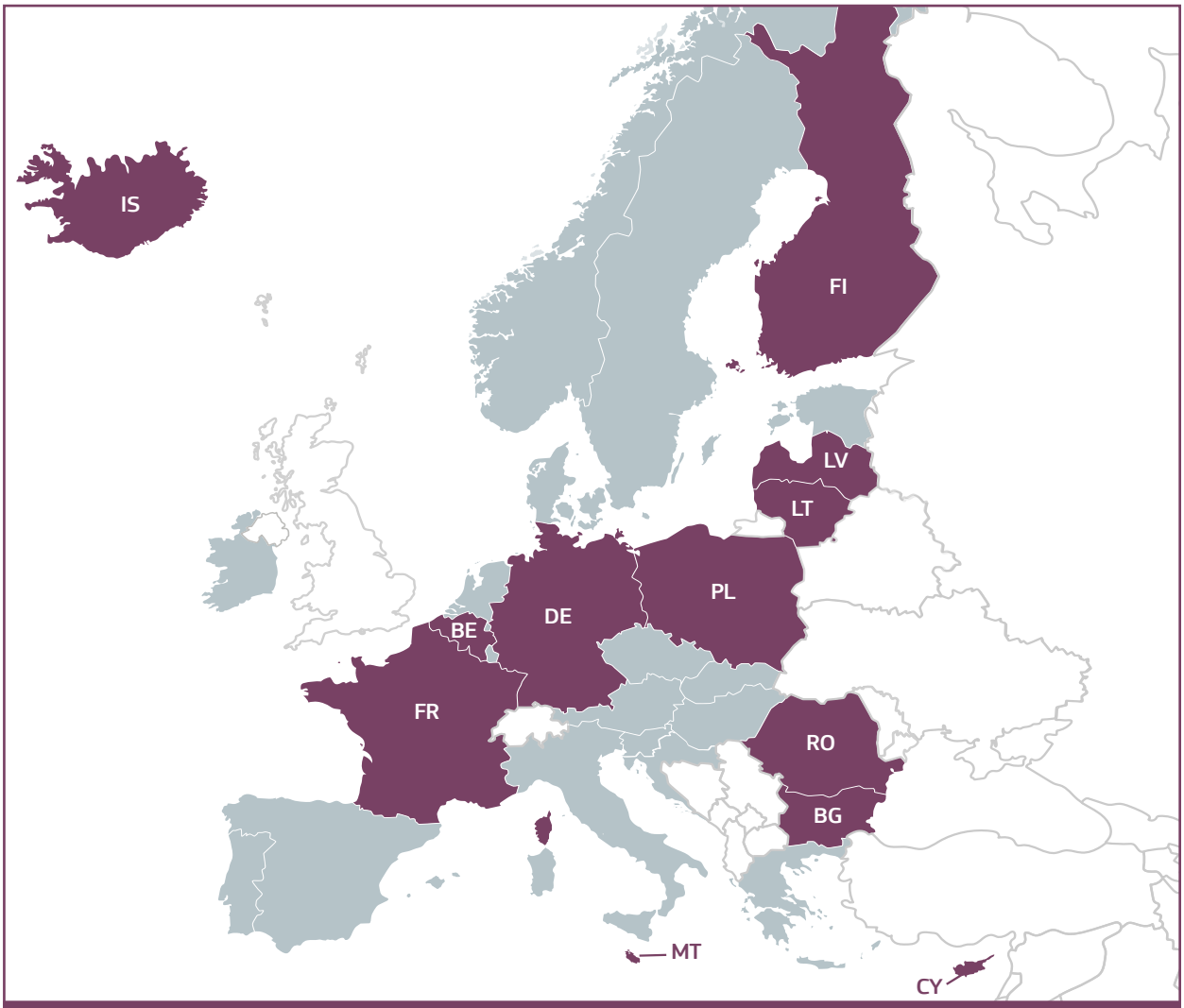
Outcomes

- Lively Q&A sessions with initiative owners
- Discussions on challenges and success factors
- Overview of digitalisation initiatives in the area of market surveillance
- Debriefs on national practices

1.2 Overview of participating MSAs

As part of CASP 2019, 12 MSAs from 11 EU MS and 1 European Free Trade Association (EFTA) MS joined forces to conduct a HA on KS. The participants are listed below.

Figure 2 - Map of participating MSAs



PARTICIPATING Market Surveillance Authorities	
Belgium	FPS Economy, Directorate General Energy
Bulgaria	State Agency for Metrological and Technical Surveillance
Cyprus	Department of Labour Inspection, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance
Germany	District Government Düsseldorf
Finland	Finnish Safety and Chemicals Agency (Tukes)
France	Directorate General for Competition, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Prevention (DGCCRF)
Iceland	The Consumer Agency (Neytendastofa)
Lithuania	The State Consumer Rights Protection Authority of the Republic of Lithuania
Latvia	Consumer Rights Protection Centre of Latvia
Malta	Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority
Poland	Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK)
Romania	National Authority for Consumer Protection

1.3 Roles and responsibilities

Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency (CHAFEA)
For the implementation of all coordinated actions falling under the CASP 2019 project, including the monitoring and approval of all contractual deliverables, CHAFEA acts as the Contracting Authority and manages the administrative relationship with the Contractor on behalf of the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers of the European Commission (DG JUST).

DG JUST
The EC, through DG JUST, oversees the planning and execution of the CASP initiatives, ensuring both the operational leadership and management of the CASP projects and their successful implementation. DG JUST supports the participating MSAs through coordinated actions, providing guidance and enabling and catalysing the interactions between MSAs to facilitate decisions, joint actions and knowledge exchange.

Contractor
Regarding the KS activity, the Contractor was responsible for:

- The overall coordination and logistical organisation of the KS activities, including all necessary meetings throughout the project;
- Providing technical expertise and advice on KS to support the work of the national MSAs;
- Reporting on, communicating and disseminating the outcomes of the activities to all CASP 2019 participants and other relevant stakeholders.

Technical expert
In order to provide the necessary level of technical expertise and knowledge needed to properly respond to the project's requirements, the Contractor was supported by a dedicated technical expert with previous experience and knowledge of product safety, consumer safety and standardisation.

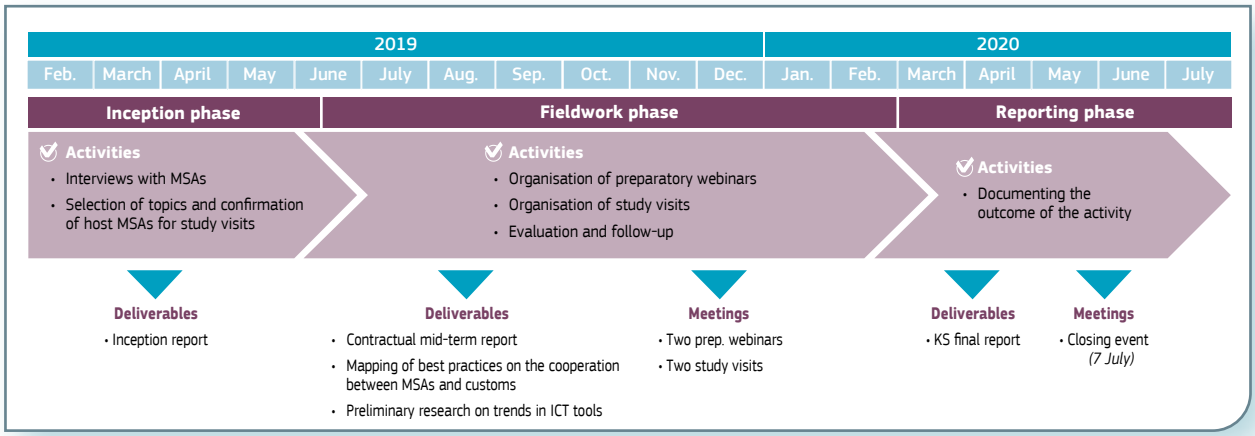
The main tasks of the KS expert consisted of:

- Providing technical inputs throughout the project and offering guidance to the MSAs and the Contractor in order to make optimum decisions in terms of activity scoping and methodological approach;
- Supporting the project team with the identification of best practices and relevant case studies, any relevant documentation, and key stakeholders to be approached;
- Engaging the project participants to identify useful knowledge, and following up on the use of best practices;
- Supporting the host MSAs in the planning and organisation of the study visits, liaising with content contributors to prepare the materials shared as part of the knowledge exchange sessions;
- Moderating and facilitating the knowledge exchange sessions;
- Actively contributing to the writing of project reports, as well as reviewing material.

1.4 Timeline of the activity

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020, and the subsequent lockdown of European countries throughout the final months of the CASP 2019 project, determined a four-month extension of the project timeline to allow for the finalisation of all contractual activities. The immediate impact on CASP 2019 due to the travel restrictions imposed in March 2020 in Europe was the cancellation of the CASP 2019 Closing Event, which was scheduled to be held in Brussels on 12–13 March 2020. The event was subsequently organised for July 2020 as a series of virtual video-conferences.

Figure 3 - Roadmap of the activity



1.4.1 Phases of the activity

The activity was divided into three operational phases: inception, fieldwork and reporting.

1.4.1.1 Inception phase

During the inception phase, the scope of the HA was further defined. Based on the initial interviews held with MSAs, a number of interesting topics were identified. To make sure all MSAs willing to host an event and present a case were alerted, an open request was launched on the online project platform (Wiki Confluence). Out of the MSAs that highlighted potential topics they could showcase, Finland and Poland were identified as the most interesting options for hosting mutual KS visits (based on the relevance and widespread usefulness of the topics).

1.4.1.2 Fieldwork phase

During the fieldwork phase, before each KS visit, a preparatory (Skype) webinar was organised with project participants to introduce the topics and the agenda of the upcoming study trip. This offered the participants the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback on the proposed agenda. Two study visits were organised, each with a specific focus: 'Cooperation with customs authorities' (Warsaw) and 'The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in market surveillance' (Helsinki). At the end of each study visit, the participant MSAs were requested to fill in an evaluation form. Detailed minutes were provided, to allow both participant and non-participant MSAs to benefit from the discussions and the outcomes of the study visits.

1.4.1.3 Reporting phase

During the reporting phase, the outcomes, final conclusions and recommendations for this activity were documented in this final report.

1.4.2 Communication activities

1.4.2.1 Internal communication

Coordination and communication with the MSAs was at the core of the CASP 2019 project. These exchanges of view gave direction to the project and the majority of decisions were made in agreement with the MSAs. Coordinating with 12 MSAs from 12 countries required the use of various communication channels.

Phone interviews

First contact telephone interviews with the MSAs were organised at the beginning of the project. The objective of the interviews was to get a full understanding of the expectations of each of the national representatives, to gather information on the national market situation and to collect experiences from previous national or joint actions.

Meetings

Within the KS activity, the following face-to-face and virtual meetings (attended by the participating MSAs, the KS expert, the EC representatives and the Contractor) took place:

- Two virtual meetings/webinars to introduce the agenda and topics of the study visits;
- Two KS study visits to —
  - Present best practices and to showcase particular capabilities developed locally that could be replicated by other MSAs in their activities,
  - Facilitate exchange of expertise among participating countries.



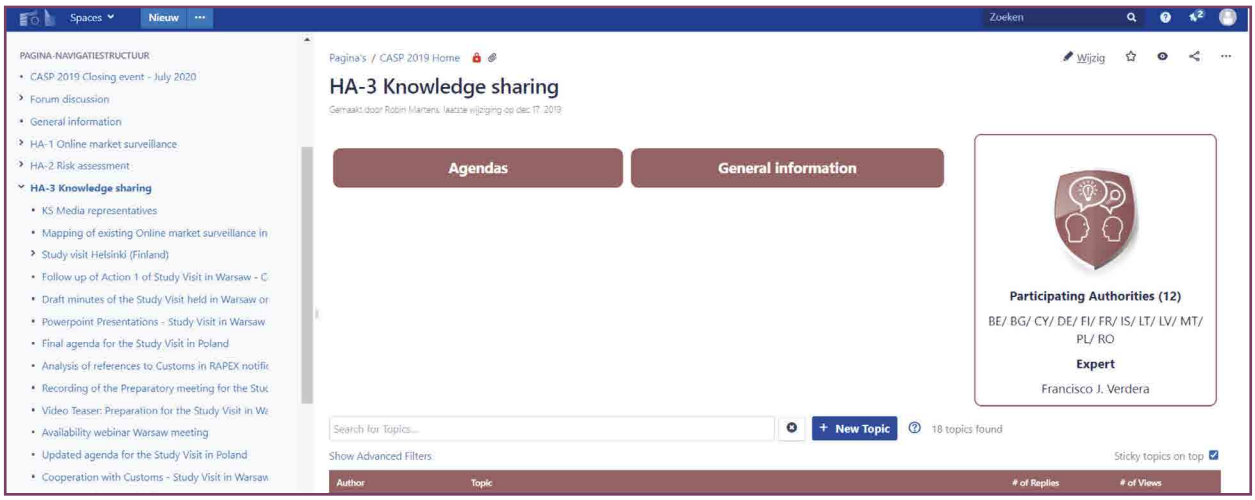
Wiki communications and consultations

To complement the meetings, **Wiki Confluence** was used as the main channel to ensure continuous communication with the participating MSAs, the expert and the EC representatives, to provide updates and to support collaborative decision making. The Wiki space reflected the visual identity developed for the project and for the specific KS activity.

Figure 4 - KS activity landing page (Wiki Confluence)

Wiki Confluence was used to:

- **Share information** on the activity (participating MSAs, scope, objectives, expert, etc.);
- **Share documents** (e.g. minutes of the study visits, presentations from contributors) as well as updates on the organisation of webinars;
- **Consult the MSAs** on their availability to attend meetings and the proposed agendas;
- **Exchange views** on best practices.



1.4.2.2 External communication

A dedicated visual identity was created for the CASP 2019 project, as well as for each individual horizontal or product specific activity. No specific communication messages were developed for the KS HA, as its value resides primarily in the internal facilitation of the dialogue and knowledge exchange among the participants.

The outcomes of the CASP2019 project and all its activities, including KS, are communicated externally via a dedicated website hosted by the EC. The CASP website[1] was developed as the main point of reference for external stakeholders regarding the CASP initiatives of public interest.

The CASP 2019 Closing Event offers the opportunity to communicate the project's results externally. Initially planned to take place in Brussels in March 2020, the CASP 2019 Closing Event has been transformed into a series of virtual video-conferences organised for July 2020.

The objectives of the Closing Event are to:

- Formally wrap-up individual project activities, offering participants the opportunity to reflect on their experience and lessons learned, as well as review the actions taken and those planned for the future;
- Introduce all project participants to all the specific activities conducted and their outcomes, beyond the immediate activities in which they were directly involved;
- Showcase the non-compliant products that were identified during CASP 2019 and the hazards that were avoided by MSA measures;
- Communicate to the general public and to other stakeholders the results and conclusions of the CASP 2019 activities, and launch the communication materials developed.

In addition, the CASP 2019 Closing Event, organised in conjunction with the Annual Media Event concerning the rapid alert system, offers a platform to communicate the results of the system and the annual report (including the dangerous products that were identified, notified and withdrawn from the market due to safety concerns, across all MS and product categories) to media representatives.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/consumers/consumers_safety/safety_products/rapex/alerts/?event=casp:home&lng=en

2. Summary of main activities and outcomes

2.1 Scoping of the activity

Based on desk research and interviews with different national authorities showing interest in this activity, a number of interesting topics were identified. To make sure all the MSAs willing to host an event and present a case were identified, the Contractor launched an open request on the online Wiki project platform. In this request, a detailed explanation of the role of a host MSA was included, together with the estimated workload involved in hosting a KS study visit.

Out of the MSAs that highlighted potential topics they could showcase, **Finland and Poland** were identified as the most suitable two candidates for hosting mutual KS visits.

This was based on three criteria.

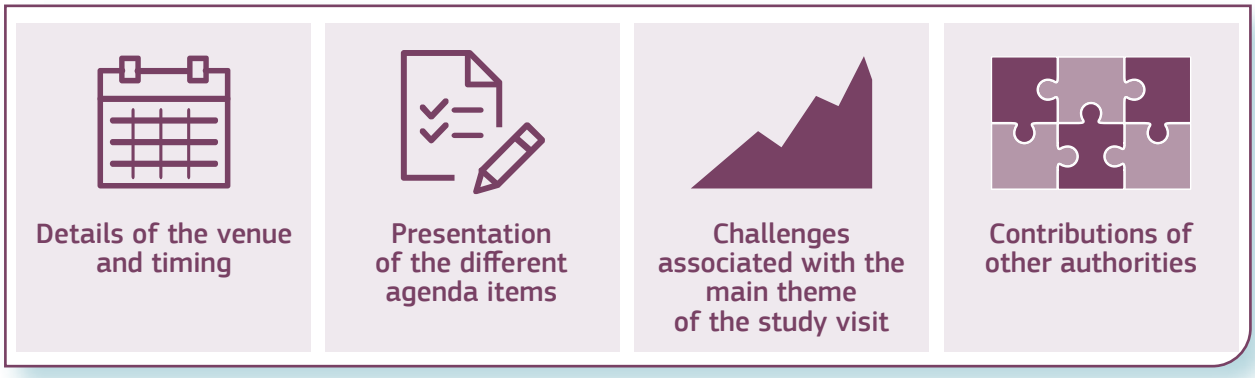
- The proposed topics: **'Cooperation between MSAs and customs'** (both Poland and Finland), an **'At your own risk' consumer awareness campaign** (Finland) and **'Nettidogi — Text mining tool'** (Finland) were selected as being the most interesting topics for MSAs to explore, as they have a large potential for replicability in other countries.
- During the interviews, the two MSAs clearly expressed their interest in hosting an event and being a front-runner in their topic within the EU.
- During the interviews, different MSAs referred to Poland and Finland as having valuable best practices to present and acknowledged their expertise on these topics.

Other interesting potential topics for KS (e.g. product labels and trademarks) were suggested during the interviews.

2.2 Organisation of preparatory webinars

For each KS visit, a preparatory (Skype) webinar was planned. During this virtual meeting, the expert introduced the case study/topic to the participants. The participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback during the webinar, which guided the expert and host MSA towards the concrete preparation of the visit.

Preparatory meetings helped to set the scene for the study visits, and advanced the main topics for discussion:



2.2.1 Warsaw study visit

A first webinar on 'Cooperation with customs' took place on Thursday, 5 September 2019.

The following documents were shared via the project space to prepare for the study visit:

- A short video covering the analysis of the Rapid Alert System for Dangerous Non-Food Products (RAPEX)[2] notifications containing measures performed by customs;
- A short video covering the recent Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 and introducing the topic of the study visit (cooperation with customs).

The preliminary questions addressed to the participating MSAs before the study visit are listed below. The purpose of these questions was to prepare the MSAs for the visit by elaborating on the main theme, which could foster discussions during the visit.

- How is the cooperation between MSAs and customs authorities established in your country?
  - On a case by case basis?
  - Through coordinated campaigns regarding a specific category of products?
  - The result of a systematic approach?
- Is the cooperation triggered by the MSA, by customs or by both?
- Is the cooperation systematically registered with RAPEX?
- What are the particular difficulties authorities face when —
  - Deciding on controls on high volume imports of fast moving goods?
  - Applying controls on small parcels?
- What can we learn from this experience?
- What more could be done at European level to ensure a harmonised approach?
- How is information exchanged?Do you grant access for customs to the IT platforms and databases linked with market surveillance notifications?
- Can you provide best practices applied in your country?

2.2.2 Helsinki study visit

The second webinar, on 'The use of ICT techniques in market surveillance' was held on Thursday, 5 December 2019.

The following documents were shared via the project space to prepare for the study visit:

- A worksheet containing preparatory questions on the use of ICT techniques in market surveillance;
- Some information on the ICT techniques covered by the study visit (selected by the technical expert).

The preliminary questions addressed to the participating MSAs before the study visit are listed below.

- What are your expectations regarding the use of ICT techniques?
- Identify similar experiences in your country (market surveillance, customs, other sectors).
- Are you aware of similar experiences in other MS?
- For which of the ICT topics would you be interested to initiate activities at a European level with your fellow MSA colleagues?
- What are the challenges in your daily work (please identify at least five)?
- Brainstorm with your colleagues at a national level on how technology could help you to better face these challenges.
- What are your expectations regarding the discussions on artificial intelligence (AI) for the study visit in Helsinki?

The role of these preliminary questions was to set the scene for the discussions to be held during the study visit, to assess the level of familiarity and involvement of each participating MSA with the study visit topics, and to align expectations regarding the content to be covered by the speakers for the different sessions.

[2] Products placed on the market are subject to general safety requirements. The EU has introduced a rapid alert system (RAPEX) for products that pose a serious risk to consumers. Data on measures taken to prevent or restrict the marketing or use of non-food, non-pharmaceutical or non-medical products or devices that pose a serious risk to different public interests is rapidly exchanged and published.

2.3 Organisation of study visits

The two study visits were organised in very close collaboration with the host MSAs (and subject to approval from the EC).

2.3.1 Study visit to Warsaw

The Office of Competition and Consumer Protection of Poland (UOKiK), together with the Customs Service (Ministry of Finance of Poland), organised and hosted a two-day study visit in cooperation with the project team and the experts. It took place on 10–11 September 2019. MSAs from nine MS (Austria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Latvia, Poland and Romania), together with the EC and a representative from the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) participated in the meeting.

2.3.1.1 Visit to LS Airport Services handling agent and customs premises

The KS meeting in Warsaw started with a visit to the cargo area of LS Airport Services in the Warsaw airport. Participants were provided with insights into the handling of goods and customs' declarations, the process of selection regarding the examination of goods, and the cooperation between customs and several MSAs in Poland.

Additionally, a presentation was provided by representatives of DHL Express Poland about the overall parcel delivery processes run by the company and how potentially non-compliant products were detected. The presentation included an in-depth analysis of the exchange of data and documentation with customs.

Polish customs are responsible for detecting and combating crimes and offences related to the violation of provisions regarding goods (that are subject to prohibitions or restrictions under Polish law, EU law or international agreements), the prevention of such crimes and offences, and the prosecution of their perpetrators if they were discovered by the Customs Service.

The customs premises at the airport practically cover the entire courier industry for Poland (including DHL Express, UPS Polska, RGW or TNT) and they are one of the first entry points for goods coming into the EU. The number of customs controls in the field of product safety and compliance in Warsaw involved nearly 1.9 million customs declarations in 2018.

2.3.1.2 Visit to the UOKiK headquarters

The second day of the visit took place at the UOKiK headquarters. UOKiK is the monitoring authority for market surveillance in Poland, manages market surveillance campaigns and performs consumer-safety-related testing activities. Both MSAs and customs authorities in Poland are aware that ensuring compliance and product safety contributes to fair commercial practices in Poland. It was estimated that 25% of production costs are associated with compliance, and if this aspect is not controlled compliant and safe products are at a clear disadvantage.

Representatives of the Polish MSA presented the market surveillance system in Poland and the organisation of UOKiK. The established level of cooperation between the Polish MSA and customs was shared as a best practice and discussed with the participants. This cooperation was identified as one of the most efficient ways to prevent dangerous products from reaching the Polish market and provides mutual synergies and benefits for both authorities.

The Polish customs authorities presented the role of customs in supporting product safety in Poland, shared how information and guidance is exchanged between them and the MSA, and demonstrated how they circulate notifications among other customs authorities in the EU. The participants discussed the usefulness of providing guidance and training to customs authorities and how to effectively photograph sampled products at the border to facilitate the identification and analysis of non-compliant products.

Some of the best practices used by customs and/or UOKiK to reinforce the collaboration between customs authorities and MSAs:

- Establishing a network of MSA contact points who exchange opinions or can be consulted by customs officers;
- Developing or adapting existing checklists for the detection of unsafe products;
- Ensuring a mutual exchange of data on certain importers or suspicious product groups (if needed);
- Conducting joint projects — planned at an international (such as participation in customs cooperation linked with the Visegrád Group or the Baltic Sea Countries Group) or central level (timing, scope, subject, risks);
- Organising joint training courses/workshops at a regional or central level (at least once a year — e.g. how to recognise dangerous products);
- Granting customs authorities access to the RAPEX system (review);
- Inviting customs authorities to participate in the Market Surveillance Steering Committee meetings (coordination at central level).

2.3.2 Study visit to Helsinki

The Finnish MSA (Tukes) volunteered to host a study visit related to the 'The use of ICT techniques in market surveillance', and it was organised for 8–9 January 2020.

A preliminary research of trends in different information and communication tools and technologies that support market surveillance was performed by the KS expert and the project team, including the level of adoption of specific ICTs by MSAs. The research consisted of desk research on available reports, websites and presentations covering the use of ICT for market surveillance or other activities related to product safety. Based on the initial research, a list of promising ICT techniques was further investigated. These technologies were analysed in terms of their potential to support market surveillance activities.

Tukes, other MSA representatives, the EC and the Contractor provided several examples of innovative applications of ICT techniques and tools, including:



A Finnish **communication campaign** 'At your own risk' focused on making citizens aware of the consequences of buying a product from online stores outside the EU.

Several best practices presented by MSAs show how **data mining** can support product safety in a market surveillance context: use of data mining for the identification of new or trendy products offered online (Nettidogi project), non-compliant energy labelling of electronic products sold online (NordCrawl2 project); detection of certain products linked with occupational health and safety based on customer reviews available on online platforms.

A **web crawler** project owned by the EC aimed at detecting products that have been included on the RAPEX database for safety reasons but are still offered on online webstores.

The use of **blockchain** as a distributed ledger technology, ensuring traceability along a supply chain and facilitating information exchange and data collection/sharing in a cost effective way among many supply chain participants with various existing IT systems.

A brainstorming session on **AI** and other ICT techniques that offer practical and novel solutions to authorities´ recurrent challenges, enabling the effective and efficient screening of a large volume of product safety data.

A brief description of the main best practices shared for each session is summarised in the following sections.

2.3.2.1 'At your own risk' campaign — Finland

The objective of this campaign was to make consumers aware of the **consequences of ordering and using a product from online stores outside the EU**[3].

The campaign was a success, not only in terms of the results, but also because it enabled effective cooperation among different authorities in Finland. Social media was used (such as a Facebook group of consumers — with more than 100000 members) to ask consumers to propose the products the testing campaign should look at and also to raise awareness in general.

Tukes managed to have the campaign broadcast on Finnish public television without any media investment, achieving significant media exposure and raising public awareness.

The campaign was supported by hard facts, obtained through the testing of products such as toys, cosmetics and childcare articles. The results were astonishing, only 1 out of 32 tested products was found to be safe.

[3] Information and videos on the 'At your own risk' campaign can be found in English on the Tukes website (https://tukes.fi/en/at-your-own-risk).

2.3.2.2 Examples of data mining in market surveillance — Finland

Tukes presented a software platform that was set up to **recognise new products that are in high demand, those registering high sales over a short period of time** ('trendy products'), which should be further investigated regarding their safety and compliance. Recognising these trendy products gives more time to authorities to find out if the products pose safety hazards and to inform consumers about any novel and dangerous products promptly.

The Nettidogi project used data mining and the identification of specific words for products sold online, comparing the amount of available products (within certain product categories of interest) at different moments in time, and using this evolution as an indicator for flagging new trends. When new products are sold online, the amount of words associated with these new products starts to grow, highlighting potential new consumer trends at the moment that they emerge.

2.3.2.3 Examples of data mining in market surveillance — Germany

The German MSA, in collaboration with a specialised contractor, designed a software tool (work in progress) for the analysis of certain products linked to occupational health and safety (in particular PPE) based on *customer reviews on online platforms.*

The analysis of reviews posted on online retail sites provided valuable information for market surveillance, particularly the low ratings provided by users that highlighted potentially hazardous products.

After pre-processing, automatic acquisition and the categorisation of some of the information, which had to be reviewed and validated manually, the system correctly assigned 655 out of 720 products that had been manually identified as dangerous.

Key lessons learned

- AI can reliably detect unsafe products, under the close supervision of a human operator, in order to process large amounts of data.
- To comply with data protection legislation, no data can be collected from closed internet forums with a small number of members, and customer reviews need to be anonymised before being analysed.
- No automated decision making should take place without human processing and verification.

2.3.2.4 Nordic project for market surveillance in the fields of eco-design and energy labelling (NordCrawl2 project)

Using web scraping techniques, machine learning and **image recognition to review the energy labelling of products offered online**, the project compared collected data with a database of products. This enabled the project to answer several questions regarding the electrical products investigated:

- Is there an energy efficiency label displayed?
- Is the energy efficiency label correct?
- Is this category of energy efficiency allowed for this product category (as a result of the combination of eco-design and energy efficiency labelling legislation)?

The same technology and approach could be applied to the analysis of product safety information, for instance for capturing and analysing images related to product warnings and user age limits (in the case of toys in particular).

2.3.2.5 Development of a web crawler for market surveillance

This project aims at developing a proof of concept for detecting products that have already been notified through Safety Gate (and should therefore no longer be available to consumers for safety reasons) but are still offered on certain online retail sites.

The tool uses keywords derived from the Safety Gate weekly reports and notifications to distinguish whether references to a product point to a product that is still available online or to one that has been effectively recalled. By using a public search engine, the tool (which can be managed by the user via an interactive dashboard) generates a list of websites where recalled products are still available for purchase.

The proof of concept has met the expectations of the EC, and there are plans to make it available to all MSAs through Safety Gate.

2.3.2.6 Presentation on potential applications of blockchain technology to market surveillance challenges

A presentation was given by the Contractor on the use of blockchain technology to support market surveillance. Blockchain can be considered as a potential solution if the following five conditions are met:

- Are there multiple parties conducting transactions across different systems?
- Is there a trust issue among the parties?
- Are tamper-proof records of transactions between the parties important?
- Is there something valuable being exchanged?
- Would the parties benefit from increased transparency?

Blockchain can be useful when large amounts of decentralised information/transactions are being exchanged between different organisations with diverse IT systems. The technology enables the traceability of the transactions, which can no longer be changed.

2.3.2.7 Brainstorm session on the use of ICT techniques to support market surveillance

The study visit ended with a brainstorming session on the use of AI and other ICT techniques to solve daily and recurrent challenges in market surveillance activities. An expert on AI provided an introductory presentation.

The activity expert facilitated a brainstorming session with the MSAs, asking participants to reflect, and share their thoughts on two key questions.

1. What are the challenges in your daily work (specifically, those that could be solved by the techniques discussed during the study visit)?
2. What practical/tangible applications could be developed at European level (to face those challenges)?

As a result of the brainstorming, some additional ICT applications were suggested.

- Combining different sources of data used in market surveillance by using blockchain technology; blockchain could link and automate information that is available in different systems and run by different authorities and stakeholders.
- Use data mining and AI to focus on the media and news to identify accidents, injuries and safety issues connected to certain products.
- Use blockchain and AI/machine learning to increase the traceability of certain products and their components.
- Use data mining and AI/machine learning to collect and interpret safety related information linked to novel products that are trending online, as soon as new product trends are identified.
- Use AI/machine learning to recognise products that are similar/identical to those that have been reported in alert databases (e.g. Safety Gate) but are being sold by different manufacturers under different brand names.



2.4 Evaluation and follow-up

2.4.1 Evaluation of the study visits

Both study visits received excellent feedback from participants who appreciated both the practical nature of the topics and the novel approaches, supported by evidence from pilot projects. The lessons that were shared encouraged MSAs to try to replicate such practices in their own countries and whetted their appetite for future international projects where they could to apply the newly acquired ideas at a larger scale. The support and facilitation provided by the Contractor, the activity expert and other guest speakers were highly rated by participants.

Given the nature of the KS activity (which, apart from their participation in the study visits, required few actions from the MSAs throughout the project), the usefulness of the Wiki communication space was reduced in this case. For similar activities in the future, an increased level of interactivity and experience sharing could also be facilitated virtually using the Wiki Confluence space dedicated to the activity.

2.4.2 Follow-up actions

2.4.2.1 Warsaw study visit

A mapping of best practices on the cooperation between MSAs and customs authorities was developed (see the Annex) based on the input received during the discussions and additional input from several MSAs after the study visit. This list could be used as input for future coordinated activities such as the CASP 2020 HA 'Cooperation with customs'.

Among other queries, participants were asked to indicate if the following best practices were applied in their organisation and, if not, if they would be interested in developing them:

- Joint MSA–customs campaigns;
- Network of MSA contact points/experts for consultation and advice;
- Sharing of test results (from domestic or international laboratories) between MSAs and customs;
- Mutual exchange of data on importers or suspicious products;
- Joint training courses/workshops.

Although it's commonly agreed that good cooperation between MSAs and customs promotes market surveillance, only a very limited number of MSAs confirmed that they are actively applying the best practices identified in other countries, which shows that there is great potential for further improving MSA performance through the dissemination and implementation of best practices across MS.

2.4.2.2 Helsinki study visit

Preliminary research on trends in ICT tools that support market surveillance was undertaken to identify topics of interest before the Helsinki study visit. The results of the preliminary research were summarised and can be used for future coordinated activities. As only a selection of the analysed techniques were presented and discussed further during the visit, the insights gathered in this research can be used for follow-up actions.

Specifically, the following ICT techniques were identified as having great potential for market surveillance application:

- Data analytics
- Blockchain
- Internet of things (IoT)
- AI and machine learning
- Automated image recognition
- Image data mining
- Text data mining

Taking into account the current level of development and maturity, and considering the availability of potential experts to provide their experience during the study visit, only the following topics were considered for the Helsinki visit:

- Web crawling and data mining techniques — legal issues related to copyright and data protection should be discussed further during future coordinated activities;
- AI and machine learning techniques — additional applications, that have not yet been investigated, include a potential rapid monitoring system (through image processing) for products entering the Single Market through custom controls;
- Blockchain distributed ledger technology.

The results of these sessions were communicated in the previous section.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 General conclusions

Given that CASP 2019 was the first project developed under a new contractual framework for the organisation of coordinated activities, the Contractor collected a series of lessons learned that future CASP activities could leverage. All project meetings with the MSAs were thoroughly documented (with a particular focus on feedback received from the participants regarding their experience during the activities). Certain findings are specific to each activity, while others are relevant to all the HAs developed during the project.

HAs are significantly different from the product specific activities and therefore require a dedicated approach, one aimed at maximising learning and experience sharing among participants, facilitating open discussions and harmonising market surveillance practices.

The KS HA provided an additional platform and opportunity for focused interactions among MSAs, enabled them to showcase and discuss their top initiatives and lessons learned, and reaffirmed their interest in collaborating and learning about novel techniques and practices. The topics selected for the study visits were current and relevant to the daily challenges of the MSAs. The host MSAs dedicated significant efforts towards ensuring high quality content and interactions, and were fully supported by the activity expert.

A number of organisations were involved in shaping this HA (among others: MSAs, customs authorities, DHL Express Poland and the EC). Based on the participants' assessment of the study visits, this activity format was considered to have made a positive contribution to improving the MSAs' modus operandi by providing valuable learning opportunities.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The main topic of the Helsinki study visit 'The use of ICT techniques in market surveillance' included a large array of ideas, techniques and initiatives. The topic was very popular with the participants. However, due to the number of agenda points and the limited time available, the initiatives and ideas were only explored on a general level. Given the immense interest, the commonality of the challenges, the increasing number of national initiatives and the wide range of possible technical applications, **further follow-up and knowledge exchange on related topics would be beneficial — and could be envisaged for future coordinated activities.** This would enable a deep-dive into specific applications and also facilitate international cooperation, bringing pilot applications to large-scale deployment.

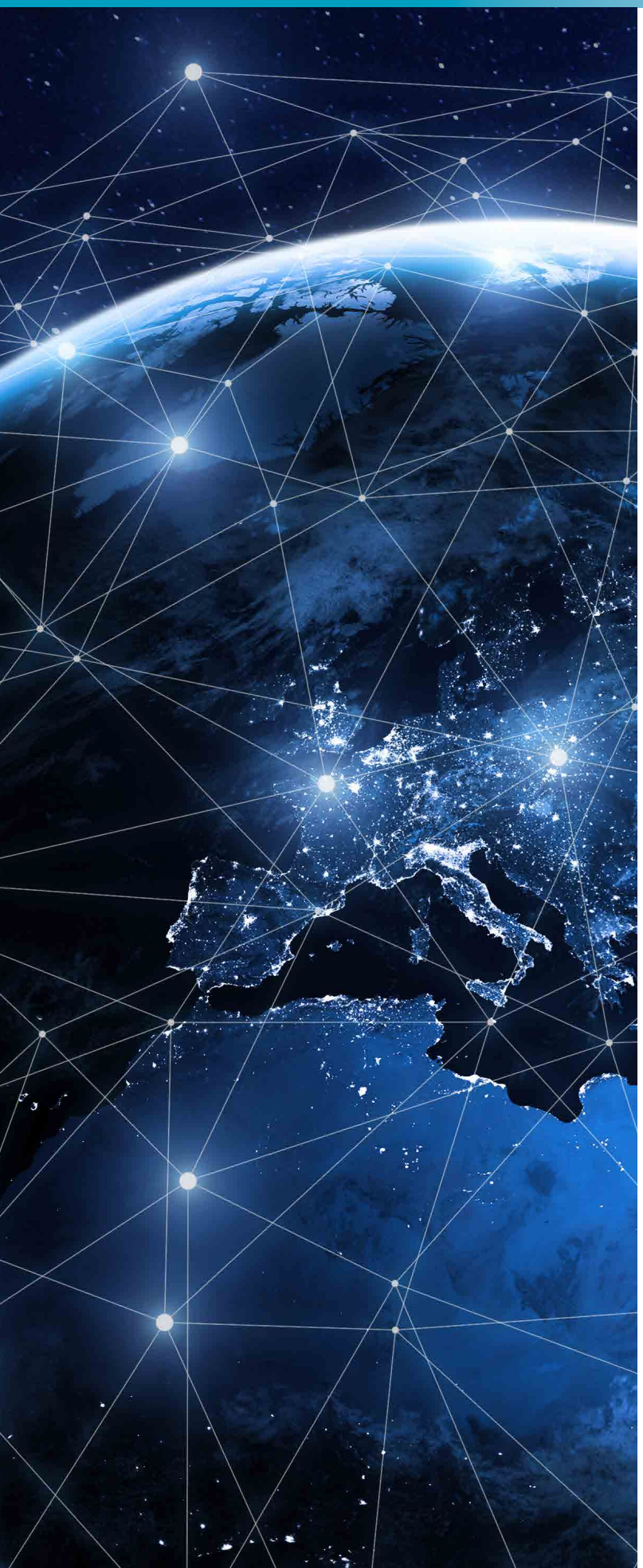
Recommendation 2

Specific potential applications of **ICT technologies** discussed during the study visit in Helsinki could be further explored in future coordinated activities and developed at European level

- Identification of accidents, injuries and safety issues related to products, through the analysis of media and news.
- Increased traceability of products and components.
- Capturing, consolidating and sharing data on accidents that are related to product safety.
- Selecting products for potential testing campaigns based on consumer comments on social media.
- Use of data mining and AI/machine learning for collecting and interpreting safety related information linked to novel products that are trending online, as soon as new product trends are identified.
- Use of AI/machine learning to recognise products that are similar/identical to those that have been reported in alert databases (e.g. Safety Gate) but are being sold by different manufacturers under different brand names.

Recommendation 3

KS was identified as a recurring need among MSAs — it should be considered as a **recurrent HA in future coordinated activities.**



3.3 Lessons learnt

3.3.1 Produce short videos to communicate with MSAs on Wiki

It was observed that short videos are an effective method of communicating specific topics through the project Wiki platform, as they ensure the exchange of information between the participants after the study visits in a user friendly way.

3.3.2 Increase participant engagement throughout the project

Besides the study visits, participants were not actively involved during activity, unless they were involved in hosting and organising a study visit. Therefore the community page on the project platform (Wiki Confluence) should aim at engaging with the MSAs and encourage KS.

3.3.3 Preparation of study visits

To ensure the deep commitment and engagement of all contributors to the KS sessions, significant preparatory effort is needed from the Contractor and host MSAs prior to the study visit. Having a dedicated person within the host organisation who is well positioned to make decisions and allocate resources would advance the project more efficiently.

3.3.4 Identification of host MSAs

Although the key discussion topics were selected quite quickly after the first rounds of interview with the participants (held to identify best practices), confirming the MSAs' availability to host a study visit proved to be more difficult. This might well be an issue in future coordinated activities.

3.3.5 Increase focus of study visits

During the study visits, additional time is needed to allow more opportunities to share best practices and to hold a Q&A after each session. This would encourage the engagement and involvement of the participating MSAs. The content of each session could be focused more narrowly, allowing a deeper dive into specific details.

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Publications Office of the European Union

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020
PDF ISBN 978-92-76-20285-1 doi:10.2838/415762 DS-01-20-413-EN-N

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