

## **The Role of Stakeholders in the European Union's Food Safety Risk Assessment**

In the realm of the EU food safety policy, policymakers base their decision-making on the scientific risk assessment opinion of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). EFSA assesses only if biological or chemical risks or contaminations pose a risk to human and animal health and well-being based on internationally recognised standards. EFSA's scientific research and risk assessment by definition and its statute should be objective and independent. Due to call for increased openness, transparency and legitimacy, EFSA as well as other EU and Member States institutions are involving stakeholders in their processes and decision-making. As the topic of safe food concerns all, as this is the basis for our daily living but as well an enormous market and revenues, many highly diverse interests are entangled. This raises the question of how the EU institutions such as EFSA take into account and balance the interests of different parties, including if they are opposite in the case of NGOs and industry in the case of pesticides.

Yet so far, in the sphere of public policy studies the research on the notion of stakeholders is missing. Based on case study research in pesticide risk assessment, this study addresses this gap. Combining theoretical arguments of new institutionalism, punctuation equilibrium and theory of access from the governance, organisational and public policy studies literature, this framework establishes a framework to analyse and clarify the role of stakeholders in EFSA's risk assessment of EU food safety policy, including type of interests, strategies of influence, effects of influence, misbalance of representation and if general principles of involving external actors are adequate in food safety policy. This construction tends to cluster around aspects of provision of expert knowledge, lobbying, deliberation, inclusion, open science, legitimacy and evidence-based policymaking.

A set of different qualitative research methods stemming from social science is employed, including literature review, documentary analysis, case study research and 16 structured in-depths expert interviews. By concretizing this framework in the context of the studied case, it is shown how stakeholder engagement is highly complex but needed for policies to be publicly accepted and risk associated with food safety adequately and targeted communicated.

Public institutions must manage the difficult tasks of independently and scientifically assess risks in food with limited resources meanwhile engaging with conflicting but legitimate stakeholders who possess interests to exert influence as well as deal with scientific uncertainty and value-laden scientists. The main finding is that each stakeholder group has a *raison d'être* and serves others goals such as output or input legitimacy factors, which is of reciprocal benefit. Moreover, resource-poor stakeholders such as NGOs can be highly influential and successful in campaigning as analysed in the case study of glyphosate. NGOs used the policy window in 2015 to reframe the policy image and via attention-grabbing, agenda-setting and venue-shopping to a policy change in 2019 with immense legislative changes for more transparency as well as triggering institutional and political changes.

While the focus of this study is the role of stakeholders within the EU policy of food safety, further research could especially expand on the notion of power and the possibility to be applied in other EU sectoral policies.