

## **The EURRECA Network, paving the way to align micronutrient recommendations in Europe**

The EURRECA (EUROpean micronutrient RECommendations Aligned) Network of Excellence, funded largely by the European Commission (EC), has been established to work towards a framework of advice on micronutrients to better inform policy-makers as they formulate national recommendations. The aim is to produce Europe-wide scientific consensus on the evidence on which micronutrient recommendations can be used, enabling such evidence to be converted rapidly, conveniently and appropriately into recommendations published in national policy documents.

The Collaborative Network is originally made up of 34 partners based in 17 countries, with a large involvement from academia, food industry, consumer groups, national nutrition societies and the health professions. The Networks aims to be sustainable beyond its EC funding period.

### ***The need to align recommendations***

Individual countries in Europe review their national guidance on recommendations for micronutrients at different times, which means they are not always working with the same or the most recent scientific information. Countries use different methods and different groups of experts to determine their national requirements, and different concepts to express these recommendations. For example, some nations group all adults together and provide one recommendation for all; others provide separate recommendations for men and women. Age groupings for babies and children also vary. The result is differing national recommendations and confusion for policy-makers, health professionals and consumers. Besides, the rather small physiological differences between people across Europe do not justify the currently considerable differences in nutrient recommendations across Europe. There is a need to increase transparency and a need for a common framework with agreed language and terminology to develop recommendations and keep them up-to-date.

### ***Priorities and populations***

Initial work has identified the priority micronutrients, among which are folic acid, Vitamin D and iron. EURRECA's focus will be on the most vulnerable groups of the European population such as the older generation, pregnant and lactating women, children, those on low incomes and migrant populations.

EURRECA will not only consider nutrition science advice but also policy implications that take into account national, social, cultural and ethical differences.

### ***'Best practice' tool kit***

The EURRECA Network has started by establishing the *status quo* for devising micronutrient recommendations in Europe, taking into account recent initiatives from countries outside Europe, as well as recommendations made by International organisations. The Network will identify previous barriers and explore "evidence-based" solutions.

As EURRECA's work progresses, a comprehensive 'tool kit' will be produced of 'best practice' guidance that will help address and, in some cases, overcome these barriers. Such a tool kit will help overcome fragmentation and provide a framework and process through which practical advice can be updated quickly and effectively as new scientific information becomes available. Components of the tool-kit are likely to include:

- Guiding principles on best methods to provide practically usable evidence for deriving nutrient requirements and recommendations
- Consensus on indicators of micronutrient status and best methods for their measurement;

- Best practice guidelines for the involvement of consumers and other stakeholders to help scientists express and explain nutrient recommendations in a consumer friendly format.

The tools EURRECA develops, should help the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as well as organisations charged with developing and revising nutrient recommendations.

### ***Collaboration with consumers in mind***

Consumers across Europe have a right of access to the best nutritional information available so that they can make informed choices about what they eat, wherever they live, at whatever stage of life and their own personal circumstances. EURRECA's task is to help establish a process that will enable European and national policy-makers and health professionals to react to emerging scientific evidence and get the best nutrition advice to consumers as quickly as they can. Through its wide collaboration with European and national nutrition societies, research and academic institutions, professional organisations, the food industry with particular focus on SMEs and consumer groups, EURRECA will make a real difference to policy makers and consumers.

### ***An example of activity – Towards understanding current micronutrient recommendations in Europe***

One of the research activities within EURRECA (Research Activity on Current Recommendations for population groups) aims to collate, compare and critically evaluate existing micronutrient recommendations for all population groups set by European countries/organisations. The aim is to give an overview of the available micronutrient recommendations in Europe, and to provide information on their origin, concepts and definitions. The Network has focussed initially on the diversity in European recommendations on vitamin A and vitamin D, with the idea to explore differences and commonalities in approaches (i.e. differences in endpoints, type of evidence used to set recommendations, expert's opinions and assumptions) that could possibly explain the variations observed. So far, background information was not sufficient transparent to disentangle the relative contribution of these different aspects. This strengthens the need for guidance on setting evidence based, up-to-date European recommendations.

EURRECA has an excellent opportunity to develop tools to improve transparency on the approaches used in setting micronutrients recommendations, including the selection of criteria for adequacy, weighing of evidence, and interpretation of data.

### **References:**

1. L. Pijls, M. Ashwell and J. Lambert. EURRECA - A Network of Excellence to align European Micronutrient Recommendations. *Food Chemistry* 2009;113:745-753. (Available at <http://europe.ilsis.org/NR/ronlyres/E464FB1A-F84D-4CF6-AB19-6655C1918DC4/0/EURRECAPijls2008.pdf>)
2. J. Hautvast, Guest Editor. EURRECA: EUROpean micronutrients RECommendations Aligned - Preparing the Way. *European Journal of Nutrition* 2008; 47(Suppl.1):1-40 (Available at: <http://europe.ilsis.org/NR/ronlyres/EF031622-B246-4F83-BFA3-DE4DF699708E/0/Fulldocument.pdf>)

### **For more information:**

<http://www.eurreca.org/>

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