

Introduction - Understanding international provision of allergen information

RSM UK Consulting LLP (RSM), working in partnership with University College Cork Consulting and Allergy UK, were commissioned (6 December 2022) by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to carry out a rapid evidence assessment to develop an understanding of the international provision of allergen information in the non-prepacked sector.

Food hypersensitivities (FHS) have a severe and enduring psycho-social impact on people with the condition (Begen, et al., 2016). Previous research has found that households with FHS bear a greater economic and financial burden, spending up to 17% more on weekly food purchases as well as losing a week off work (paid and unpaid) due to their condition (RSM, 2022). As such, it is crucial that consumers with FHS are provided with, or can access, consistent and accurate information about food allergens contained within products they purchase and consume.

- In December 2014, the Food Information for Consumers (FIC) Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011, extended the existing requirement to declare 14 mandated allergens on prepacked food to include non-prepacked/loose food (e.g. food sold loose, food packed on premises at the request of the consumer, meals served in a restaurant).

Study aims

This study aimed to:

- determine the legislated approaches for the provision of food allergen information in the non-prepacked sector across 18 countries
- understand trends in allergy-related deaths and incidents data across these countries
- gather information on the enforcement process and capabilities in each country
- review the consequences for non-compliance, monetary or otherwise, applicable in each country and their effectiveness
- understand 'what works' from four categories of stakeholders, including consumers, researchers, policymakers/ enforcement authorities, and food businesses.

These aims provided the high-level themes that were used to guide the evidence collection, analysis and reporting.

A note on recommendations from the research: The overall objective of this rapid evidence assessment was to develop recommendations for the FSA to inform future policy and regulation decisions based on evidence of 'what works'. However, the literature reviewed, provided limited evidence on the effectiveness of policies, i.e. evidence which evaluated the approaches relating to measures such as improved safety, compliance, unintended consequences or feasibility. As such, we were unable to provide evidence-based recommendations from the literature reviewed. We have instead gathered information on the ideas or potential solutions suggested in the research. However, we would caution the reader about implementing these without a systematic review and evaluation of the effectiveness, feasibility and disbenefits associated with these and other potential solutions.