



# Impact evaluation of the Euphresco network

## Executive summary

*26 January 2021*

The study is carried out by:

Daniel Traon (project manager)

Dr. Francesco Montanari

Laurence Amat

Ines Ferreira

Contact: [daniel.traon@arcadia-international.net](mailto:daniel.traon@arcadia-international.net)

Euphresco is a network of phytosanitary research programme owners, programme managers, national plant protection organisations, and research institutes whose activities support and enhance the coordination of phytosanitary research and the collaboration of statutory plant health (quarantine and emerging pests) research stakeholders.

Research coordination and collaboration ensure that optimal use of the limited resources available in plant health is made, avoid duplication of work, and increase opportunities for synergies.

While, during its first stages of life, Euphresco relied on two cycles of EU financing – i.e. Euphresco I (2006-2010) and Euphresco II (2011-2014) – to promote transnational European cooperation in the plant health area, Euphresco has since developed into a self-sustaining network with an international outreach.

The network has grown significantly over time. The initial ERA-NET project consortium was composed of 24 member organisations (17 countries) in 2006 and 35 member organisations (23 countries) in 2011. The self-sustainable network started in 2014 with 29 member organisations (22 countries). Currently, Euphresco's membership encompasses 68 member organisations that are located in more than 50 countries worldwide.

The Euphresco governance has considered it essential to evaluate how the self-sustaining network has addressed its strategic objectives and to review the impact it has had in plant health research, to build on past successes and to identify opportunities for improvement, to reflect on the overall objectives and future priorities of the network. The evaluation focusses on the 2014-2020 period and covers Euphresco's functioning and the impacts of its activities.

### **Approach**

The methodology used for this impact evaluation consists of desk research, an online survey, interviews conducted by the experts with Euphresco's members and other relevant external stakeholders (e.g., policymakers, research bodies, industry representatives), in addition to a focus group to discuss the findings of the survey.

The online survey was widely distributed to all the members of the network, the research entities participating in Euphresco's projects, and to other relevant stakeholders (e.g., initiatives working on plant health/agriculture/forestry research, national and regional research funders, policymakers). Overall, the participation in the survey was very good as a total of 83 respondents completed the online survey questionnaire.

Following the presentation of the findings of the survey in an interim report, an online focus group took place between the evaluators and the Euphresco Network Management Group members. The focus group has been a unique opportunity to discuss the findings of the survey and to reflect on the organisation of the analytical phase of the evaluation.

During the analysis phase and before drafting the evaluation report, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted based on a semi-structured questionnaire to discuss the findings and the main issues identified during the survey.

### **Findings and conclusions**

**The evaluation suggests that Euphresco has, by and large, fulfilled its objectives of establishing a sustainable network of plant health research users** (funders, policymakers, scientists) for coordination and collaboration in transnational projects while plant health activities, including research, are low at regulatory and political levels.

**All in all, Euphresco provides good value for money.** The evaluation revealed that the relevance and the quality of the scientific research coordinated via the network are perceived as high in the opinion of both members and non-members. In the last six years, Euphresco has

launched a large number of research projects (approximately 80). Members and other stakeholders are largely satisfied, especially as far as the functioning of the Euphresco Network Office is concerned.

**Euphresco has established a *Modus Operandi* and a Strategic Research Agenda that are largely fulfilling the needs of its members.** Their usefulness is largely recognised and the process to improve these two key documents is perceived as efficient by Euphresco's members. The number of members and non-members participating in projects continues to increase demonstrating the uniqueness of Euphresco, i.e. providing a platform for networking between plant health research stakeholders.

**The governance of the network through the Governing Board and the Network Management Group has been assessed positively by Euphresco's members.** This setup, inherited from the ERA-NET phase of the network, has proven effective and was consolidated over time, including during the recent expansion of the network, and, therefore, does not require any major rethinking or review at this stage.

**The suitability of Euphresco's tools and procedures to support transnational research projects and the overall level of visibility** that the network has ensured for plant health research activities **are assessed as good to very good by the members of the networks and the non-members** that have been/are participating in Euphresco funded projects. Other stakeholders (e.g., industry) are less positive on these two points and consider that Euphresco should be more proactive in disseminating project results to them.

**A good level of trust has been established with national plant protection organisations that have become members of Euphresco. The network has been building its reputation amongst the Regional Plant Protection Organizations and the secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention.** Building a similar relationship with the European Commission will strengthen the network influence and will open to more opportunities for collaboration.

**The degree of applicability (use and re-use) of the outcomes of the projects and initiatives promoted by Euphresco across different geographical areas seems high** as more and more participants from new geographic areas are either participating in Euphresco funded projects or becoming members of the network.

**All in all, as a result of Euphresco's activities, research capacity has been strengthened and the quality of scientific input improved in the field of plant health.**

Notwithstanding these achievements, the present evaluation identified the following challenges and areas for improvement.

**The evaluation has highlighted the need for Euphresco to collectively reflect on its medium and long-term future.** This reflection process should aim at clarifying the role that Euphresco should assume in the future as, based on the evaluation findings, its members are divided into two possible scenarios: whether the network should continue to provide the same service or whether it should enhance some current activities and start new ones, also through its expansion at the global level. In both cases, Euphresco could become a model for international organizations interested in plant health research such as the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention, the Regional Plant Protection Organizations, the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority, the Plant Health Quadrilaterals Group.

Despite the above, **the Governing Board, in particular, would benefit from some improvements.** This includes the need to promote more active participation by a greater number of member organisations than it is currently the case and to focus more on science and research than administrative issues. As far as the Network Management Group is concerned, owing to the key strategic and steering role that most members attribute to that body, it is

necessary to ensure that a sufficient number of its members have long-standing involvement and/or in-depth knowledge of Euphresco. The evaluation also points out to few weaknesses and risks which are linked to the total dependence of the Euphresco Network Office on one single person. This situation calls, in the first place, to the need to design and implement appropriate solutions ensuring business continuity and, in the second place, consider on the appropriateness of the current staffing of the secretariat to carry out its activities, balancing between research knowledge and management skills.

**There is a clear need for the network to design a more structured and ambitious external communication policy to raise awareness about Euphresco's activities**, in general, and disseminate more effectively project results to non-scientists, including policymakers and professionals, in particular. Other stakeholders (e.g., industry) consider that the overall level of visibility that the network has ensured for plant health research activities is rather low and call for a more proactive role in disseminating project results to them.

### **Approaches to overcome the main issues**

*Issue No 1: Visibility and external communication.* A clarification is needed on the exact role of Euphresco's members and the Euphresco Network Office vis à vis of the network activities. The Euphresco Network Office should promote Euphresco at institutional levels (national, regional, and international) and Euphresco's members should improve the visibility of Euphresco's activities within their countries.

*Issue No 2: Sustainability of the network.* Coordination of the network would benefit from the strengthening of activities such as external communication and network positioning to reach not only scientists but also practitioners, policymakers, industry, and other stakeholders. Such an approach would allow a further professionalisation of the Euphresco Network Office.

The current review of the Network Office resources by the Network Management Group and the Governing Board should deliver guarantees to secure long-term funding of the network. The question of whether or not Euphresco should open to other organisations in the EPPO region and abroad needs to be further discussed.

All Euphresco's members should be encouraged to be involved in the network activities, to secure a high level of representation at the governance level and large participation in the transnational research activities. This solution would allow new perspectives and ideas to be integrated into the network while consolidating it through a larger base of concerned members. In doing so, efforts would not ultimately always be on the same small group of members.

*Issue No 3: Lack of consensus on how Euphresco should develop.* The evaluation has not allowed identifying how Euphresco should develop in the medium term. This situation poses a threat to the mid-term sustainability of the network and further discussions shall be promoted within the network, under the leadership of the Network Management Group, clearly explaining why such lack of 'vision' is detrimental to the network.

*Issue No 4: Positioning of Euphresco.* The evaluation of Euphresco highlights that the external communication of the network vis-à-vis policymakers and other stakeholders e.g. industry is not optimal, leading to issues as regards the exact positioning of the network in the plant health arena. When efforts of the coordination to engage with external bodies and stakeholders are recognised, these are not sufficient and not regular enough.