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Answer given by Ms Kyriakides
on behalf of the European Commission
(21.9.2020)

The research published by the Catania Department of Hygiene[1] confirms the findings of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)[2], that humans are exposed to micro- and nano-plastics through their diet. The authors acknowledge the importance of additional toxicological and epidemiological studies. Following the recommendations by the Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors[3] that research is needed to fill knowledge gaps in this area, a call for research proposals on "Micro- and nano-plastics in our environment: Understanding exposures and impacts on human health" was launched in July 2019[4] under the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. Also other research topics[5] contribute to this priority.

EFSA will organise in May 2021 a Scientific Colloquium[6], where one of the main topics for discussion will be the identification of the data gaps, which need filling in the context of risk assessment for health.

The European Strategy on Plastics[7] proposes several measures to tackle microplastics pollution. The European Chemical Agency proposed a restriction on microplastics intentionally added in products under the REACH Regulation[8].

In addition, two studies are being launched on unintentional releases of microplastics such as from textiles, tyre abrasion and pellets in view of possible measures by the Commission. Once sufficient scientific information is available, EFSA will be requested to perform a risk assessment on possible health effects related to presence of micro- and nano- plastics in feed and food. Taking into account the outcome of this risk assessment, appropriate regulatory measures under Regulation (EEC) 315/1993[9] will be considered to ensure a high level of public health protection.

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[1] Publication of the research performed by the Catania Department of Hygiene: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935120305703?via%3Dihub

[2] EFSA CONTAM Panel (EFSA Panel on Contaminants in the Food Chain), 2016. Statement on the presence of microplastics and nanoplastics in food, with particular focus on seafood. EFSA Journal 2016;14(6):4501, 30 pp. doi:10.2903/j.efsa.2016.4501

[3] Environmental and Health Risks of Microplastic Pollution, Group of Chief Scientific Advisors Scientific Opinion 6/2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/groups/sam/ec_rtd_sam-mnp-opinion_042019.pdf

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/sc1-bhc-36-2020. The submission deadline for research proposals closed on 4 June 2020.

[5] For example the topic: Emerging challenges for soil management: use of plastic in agriculture https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018-2020/main/h2020-wp1820-food_en.pdf

[6] Scientific Colloquium: "A coordinated approach to assess the human health risks of micro- and nanoplastics in food" http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/event/new-dates-may-2021-efsa-scientific-colloquium-25-coordinated-approach

[7] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy COM(2018) 28 final.

[8] https://echa.europa.eu/it/registry-of-restriction-intentions/-/dislist/details/0b0236e18244cd73

[9] Council Regulation (EEC) No 315/93 of 8 February 1993 laying down Community procedures for contaminants in food (OJ L 037, 13.2.1993, p. 1)