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RESEARCH TENDER CALL



TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Project Reference No.: 04-2025

Project Title: Food Safety Behaviours and Information Influences Among Vulnerable Consumers on the island of Ireland


1. Objective/Knowledge Gap:

- Identify the types of food safety information that vulnerable consumers (YOPI¹) actively seek and currently rely on.
- Examine where these consumers access food safety information, how they apply it, and the factors that influence their adherence to food safety advice. This includes evaluating the impact of potentially unreliable sources, such as social media, on their perceptions and behaviours.
- Explore the challenges that may prevent YOPI consumers from seeking, receiving, or implementing food safety guidance.
- Investigate strategies to enhance engagement, reduce barriers, and improve food safety communication tailored to different YOPI groups.

2. Background

Consumers in the YOPI group—young children, older adults, pregnant women, and immunocompromised individuals—are particularly vulnerable to foodborne illnesses caused by pathogens such as *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Escherichia coli* spp., *Salmonella* spp. and *Campylobacter* spp. This increased susceptibility is often due to immune suppression, either from

¹ YOPI (Young, Older adults, Pregnant, Immunocompromised) refers to groups at higher risk of foodborne infections due to weaker immune defences. This includes children under five, adults over 65, pregnant individuals, and those with compromised immunity.

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underlying health conditions or medications, as well as the physiological changes associated with age and pregnancy. As a result, fewer pathogenic organisms are required to cause illness, and infections tend to be more severe (Lund and O'Brien, 2011).

Studies indicate that consumers rely on various sources for food safety advice, including traditional media, healthcare professionals, and online platforms. Trust in these sources plays a key role, with television being particularly influential for older generations, while younger consumers often turn to social media and blogs. Preferences also vary by country and age group, shaping how food safety information is received (Banati et al., 2024). However, the increasing use of social media as an information channel raises concerns about misinformation and the credibility of sources (Vraga & Bode, 2020).

Credibility of sources is particularly important for vulnerable consumers, such as young children, older adults, pregnant women, or individuals with compromised immune systems (YOPI), as they may depend on advice from external sources, such as healthcare providers or media, to make decisions regarding their health. Ensuring access to accurate, reliable, and well-sourced food safety information is crucial for these groups to make informed choices and protect their well-being.

This project addresses a critical public health need by examining how vulnerable consumers on the island of Ireland navigate the increasingly complex information environment surrounding food safety. By identifying current information-seeking behaviours, sources, barriers, and potential engagement strategies, this research will inform more effective public health interventions tailored to the specific needs of YOPI groups.


3. Approach

This study will employ a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative and quantitative research to gain a comprehensive understanding of YOPI consumers' food safety behaviours.

4. Technical Specification

(a) Scope of research

- Examining YOPI consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours concerning food safety information.
- Identifying barriers and challenges to obtaining and using reliable food safety information.

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- Evaluating the role of social media in influencing food safety practices.
- Developing recommendations for improving food safety communication targeted at YOPI consumers.

(b) Literature review

The contractor must conduct a comprehensive literature review on consumer food safety behaviours, focusing on information-seeking habits, communication effectiveness, and the impact of social media, particularly among YOPIs. The review should identify key sources of food safety information, factors influencing their credibility, and common barriers to adopting food safety recommendations. Additionally, it must examine the spread of misinformation, the credibility of food safety advice across different platforms, and the role of digital engagement in shaping consumer behaviour.


The review must include peer-reviewed studies and a thorough search of grey literature, including government and organisational reports from international centres of excellence. A clear, systematic approach to identifying, selecting, and analysing relevant studies must be outlined

(c) Qualitative and quantitative work

The contractor will select appropriate methodologies to achieve the objectives of the project. A full justification and rationale for the proposed methodology and analytical approach will be required. It will be necessary to indicate for all aspects of the project how the proposed data will be collected, analysed, and reported. The research should be mixed in nature.

The contractor must consider all possibilities and influencing factors with regards to this project, including:

- Appropriate geographical spread and representation across urban and rural locations.
- A fifty-fifty split between Ireland and NI.
- Inclusion of all YOPI groups, ensuring representation of individuals who are immunocompromised, pregnant, older adults, and infants/young children.
- Consideration of gender, socioeconomic status, educational background, and cultural influences.

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The research will involve a combination of:

- Focus Groups: Conduct focus groups with YOPI individuals.
- Interviews: Conduct interviews with healthcare providers to understand their perspectives on YOPI consumers' food safety behaviours.
- Surveys: Implement a survey across the island of Ireland to assess YOPI food safety knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

(d) Analysis

The contractor will employ rigorous methods for both quantitative and qualitative analysis to ensure comprehensive examination and interpretation of the data collected in the research project. The contractor will provide explicit details of the methods for quantitative and qualitative analysis.

(e) Data handling and Reporting


After each six-month period, the contractor will submit to SafeFood an interim report detailing progress for each deliverable of the project. The contractor is responsible for collating all outcomes and a project final project report will be submitted to SafeFood on completion of the study. All forms, documentation and electronic files must be retained by the contractor until further notice from SafeFood in case of issues arising after the completion of the research.

(f) Quality assurance

The contractor will use validated methods for quantitative work where applicable and provide explicit details of the qualitative analytical methods.

5. Proposed Activities/Deliverables

- Literature review
- Research methodology and data collection plan
- Survey instruments and focus group/interview guides
- Data analysis and interim reports
- Final project report with key findings and recommendations

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6. Evaluation of Tenders

Quality of the proposal:

- ✓ Anticipated deliverables;
- ✓ Research method and facilities;
- ✓ Value for money;
- ✓ Potential for application;
- ✓ Work plan, including the overall timeframe.

Quality of Applicants:

- ✓ Experience in subject area;
- ✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

Please note that the successful applicant must sign a data processing agreement that will govern the processing of personal data as part of this project.


7. Duration of Project

It is anticipated that the duration of the project will be 12 months. A detailed timescale of research should be submitted by each applicant.

8. Tender Application Forms and Guidelines

The Tender Application Form and associated Guidelines can be downloaded from <https://www.safefood.net/research>. They can also be obtained by emailing research@safefood.net, quoting the project reference number **04-2025**. Alternatively, please contact SafeFood as per the details below.

Ms. Gillian Fox
Research Coordinator
SafeFood
7 Eastgate Avenue
Little Island
Cork
T45 RXO1

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Tel: + 3532304100

The closing date for receipt of applications by SafeFood is no later than **4pm Friday 20th June 2025.**

9. References

Banati, D., Jevšnik, M., Nyambayo, I., Bogueva, D. and Stanley, N.L., 2024. Consumer perception of food safety in Europe. In: *Consumer Perceptions and Food*, pp. 415-455. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-7870-6_21.

Lund, B.M. and O'Brien, S.J., 2011. The occurrence and prevention of foodborne disease in vulnerable people. *Foodborne Pathogens and Disease*, 8(9). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1089/fpd.2011.0860>.

Vraga, E.K. and Bode, L., 2020. Defining misinformation and understanding its impact: A review of literature. *Journal of Communication*, 70(1), pp. 109-129. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1716500>.