

# Better labelling is necessary to empower people with food allergy in Europe

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## Abstract

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) is a non-profit network of allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patients organisations, representing 35 national associations in 22 European countries and over 400,000 patients. EFA is dedicated to making Europe a place where people with allergies, asthma and COPD have the right to best quality of care and safe environment, live uncompromised lives and are actively involved in all decisions influencing their health.

The adoption of Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the provision of food information to consumers in October 2011 was welcomed by EFA as a positive step to enhance the protection of the health of people with food allergy. According to the European Academy for Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI), the leading professional organisation and the primary source of expertise in the field of allergy in Europe, the impact of food allergy on the life of the around 17 million affected patients in Europe is often underestimated and it is dramatically increasing for children. Over the past ten years, the number of allergic children younger than 5 years has redoubled and the emergency room visits for anaphylactic reactions have increased seven-fold.

Clear and more understandable food information, as intended by the new regulation, help consumers make better-informed choices and safer use of food, which is crucial for people with food allergy, intolerance or special dietary requirements. For patients that risk severe anaphylactic reactions from food, even the simplest actions in daily life, such as eating at a restaurant or purchasing non-prepacked food, can also be life-threatening. The burden this situation creates for people with allergy requires specific policy actions and their implementation in practice so that these people can easily and in a reliable way identify and avoid potential risks in their diet.

EFA's efforts are focused on ensuring adequate, patient-centred implementation of the main new provisions within the regulation, which require mandatory information on allergen in non-pre-packed foods, and on giving input and key policy recommendations to the Commission that has the powers of deciding on the voluntary measures adopted in relation to so-called "precautionary labelling." The patients' perspective on this crucial issue as well as examples of best practices collected by several EFA members should be effectively taken into consideration by policy-makers when implementing the new regulation.

**Keywords:** Food allergy, people with food allergy, EU regulation, food labelling, allergen, policy.