



Administrative Decision – ECDC/AD/2024/16

Administrative Decision on the Establishment and Functioning of EU Health Task Force

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Related documents

List of relevant standards, legislation and documents	<p>Regulation (EU) 2022/2370 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 amending Regulation (EC) No 851/2004 establishing a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control</p> <p>Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 on serious cross-border threats to health (SCBTH)</p>
List of relevant ECDC documents	<p>Rules for reimbursement of expenses that have been incurred by invitees who were invited by ECDC</p> <p>ECDC travel insurance</p>

Abbreviations and definitions

AAR	After-Action Review
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG HERA	Directorate-General for Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority
DG RTD	Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
DG SANTE	Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
EC	European Commission
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
EMA	European Medicines Agency
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
EPIET	European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training
EPRS	Emergency Preparedness and Response Support
EUHTF	EU Health Task Force
EUPHEM	European Public Health Microbiology Training Programme
EWRS	Early Warning and Response System
GOARN	Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network
HoU	Head of Unit
HoS	Head of Section
IAR	In-Action Review
NFP	National Focal Point
PHF	Public Health Function
SIMEX	Simulation Exercises
WHO	World Health Organization

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed shortcomings in the European Union (EU) mechanisms for managing public health threats, including a lack of readily available resources for timely deployment to emergency settings. Following the initial lessons learned from COVID-19, the reinforced role for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) according to its amended mandate, includes the establishment of an EU Health Task Force (EUHTF) to provide operational outbreak response and crisis preparedness support to EU/EEA countries as well as supporting wider global health security. The ECDC is establishing and coordinating the EUHTF, with the support and collaboration of the European Commission (EC), EU/EEA countries and EU partners. This Administrative Decision governs the establishment and functioning of the EU Health Task Force and lays down the procedure to enrol internal and external public health experts in the EUHTF Expert Pools.

The legal basis of this Administrative Decision lies in Article 11a of Regulation (EU) 2022/2370 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 amending Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 establishing a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control:

(1) The Centre shall establish an EU Health Task Force and ensure that there is a permanent capacity and an enhanced emergency capacity to mobilise and use it. The EU Health Task Force shall provide assistance with regard to requests for prevention, preparedness and response planning, local responses to outbreaks of communicable diseases and after-action reviews in Member States and in third countries, in cooperation with the WHO. The EU Health Task Force shall include the Centre's staff and experts from Member States, fellowship programmes and international and non-profit organisations.

(2) The Centre, in cooperation with the Commission, shall develop a framework to define the organisational structure and the use of the permanent capacity of the EU Health Task Force. At the joint request of the Commission and Member States, the enhanced emergency capacity of the EU Health Task Force shall be mobilised. The Commission shall, by means of implementing acts, adopt the procedures concerning the mobilisation of the enhanced emergency capacity of the EU Health Task Force. Those implementing acts shall be adopted in accordance with the examination procedure referred to in Article 30a(2).

(3) The Centre shall ensure that the EU Health Task Force is coordinated with, complementary to and integrates the capacities of the European Medical Corps, other relevant capacities under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and mechanisms of international organisations.

(4) Through the EU Health Task Force, the Centre shall provide Union field response experts in international response teams mobilised by the WHO Health Emergencies Programme mechanism and the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), in accordance with appropriate working arrangements established with the Commission.

(5) The Centre shall facilitate the development of field response capabilities and crisis management expertise among the Centre's staff and experts from Member States and EEA countries, from candidate countries and potential candidates, as well as from European Neighbourhood Policy countries and partner countries, at the request of the Commission and in collaboration with the Member States.

(6) By establishing a mechanism for mobilising and using the EU Health Task Force, the Centre shall maintain the permanent capacity of the EU Health Task Force and enhance the country-specific knowledge necessary to carry out missions to Member States, at the joint request of the Commission and Member States concerned, to provide science-based recommendations on preparedness for and response to threats to health and to carry out after-action reviews, within its mandate.

2. Scope and applicability

Upon request, the EUHTF will support EU/EEA countries, EU accession countries, potential candidate countries, European Neighbourhood Policy countries, partner countries, other third countries and international organisations for:

- **Timely emergency response during outbreaks and crises** related to communicable diseases or diseases of unknown origin including remote support and rapid in-country field deployment, support for outbreak investigations and response, identification of preparedness gaps, provision of science-based recommendations, support for operational and outbreak-related research and provision of guidance, protocols, resources, and tools.
- **Strengthening countries emergency preparedness** including the development, testing, and updating of preparedness protocols and plans, assessment of preparedness gaps through self-assessments and external evaluation of country preparedness and response planning, simulation exercises (SIMEX), in-and-after action reviews (IAR/AAR), tailored capacity building activities and trainings.

The EUHTF will work in coordination with the EC (e.g. DG SANTE, ECHO, HERA, RTD), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), as well as other international organisations.

3. EUHTF composition, coordination and functioning

The EUHTF comprises a Permanent Capacity (= the ECDC Coordination Team), EUHTF Expert Pools and an Enhanced Emergency Capacity.

3.1. EUHTF Permanent Capacity

The EUHTF Permanent Capacity (= the ECDC Coordination Team) coordinates the EUHTF activities and manages the EUHTF procedures, working modalities, objectives, tasks, and annual work planning. It supports the EUHTF routine operations and is involved in the technical work of the EUHTF. It handles requests for EUHTF support, coordinates deployments, conducts readiness and preparedness work, manages communications and coordination with partners.

The National Focal Points (NFPs) for Preparedness and Response serve as ECDC Coordination Team counterparts in the EU/EEA countries to exchange information and offer support as needed in strengthening emergency preparedness and response.

3.2. EUHTF Expert Pools

The Permanent Capacity will rely on pools of internal and external experts contributing on a voluntary basis to implement the EUHTF assignments. The EUHTF Expert Pools are composed of three different pools of experts:

- Public health experts employed at ECDC (ECDC Expert Pool).
- Fellows during their 2-year placement in the ECDC Fellowship Programme (EPIET, EUPHEM both the European and the MS track) and EPIET-associated programmes (ECDC Fellowship Pool).
- Public health experts from the EU/EEA countries and international and non-profit organisations (External Expert Pool).

Upon receipt of a request for EUHTF support, the ECDC Coordination Team defines the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the assignment in collaboration with the requesting authority, channels the request through the EUHTF Expert Pools, selects the experts and assembles a Response Team to fulfil such a request. The Response Team may include ECDC experts, external experts and/or ECDC fellows, who are selected based on their skills, experience related to the criteria described in the ToR and their availability after expressing interest for the specific EUHTF assignment.

Furthermore, members of EUHTF Expert Pools will be part of a community of knowledge and practice and will be invited to participate in EUHTF training sessions and simulation exercises.

3.3. Mobilisation of the EUHTF Enhanced Emergency Capacity

In the event of the recognition of a public health emergency at Union level, the European Commission and the Member States can request ECDC to mobilise the Enhanced Emergency Capacity leveraging to the maximum extent the resources available within the EUHTF to facilitate the response. Following receipt of Member States' requests for assistance from the Enhanced Emergency Capacity of the EUHTF, the ECDC Coordination Team shall coordinate the EUHTF support.

4. Procedure for registration of experts in the EUHTF Expert Pools and their enrolment in EUHTF assignments

Core expert profiles to be registered in the EUHTF Expert Pools:

- Public health epidemiologist
- Public health microbiologist
- Public health preparedness and response expert
- Emergency operations centre (EOC) expert
- Infection prevention and control (IPC) expert
- Points of entry/Border health expert
- Risk communicator
- Biostatistician

Additional profiles of interest for the EUHTF Expert Pools:

- Biosecurity and biothreats expert

- Data manager
- Entomologist
- Geographic information systems (GIS) expert / Geographer
- One Health expert
- Social scientist
- Water and sanitation (WASH) experts / Water system expert

4.1. ECDC Expert Pool

Following regular requests for interest, ECDC technical/scientific staff are proposed to register in the ECDC Expert Pool. Registration includes completing a profile, following a standard template, by providing areas of expertise, language skills and previous experiences.

Upon receipt of a request for EUHTF support, the ECDC Coordination Team liaises with those registered experts fulfilling the required characteristics or launches targeted internal calls to join the EUHTF Response Team responding to a specific assignment. Prior internal line manager approval is necessary to participate to an EUHTF assignment. Heads of Units (HoU), Heads of Sections (HoS), line managers from the respective Units and the human resources section will be informed of the experts taking part to the EUHTF Response Team.

4.2. ECDC Fellowship Pool

Fellows in the ECDC Fellowship Programme (EPIET, EUPHEM both the European and the MS track) and EPIET-associated programmes are registered in the EUHTF Expert Pool from completion of the introductory fellowship training course until the end of their fellowship. ECDC Fellowship alumni and EAN members do not directly participate to the EUHTF Expert Pools, unless they are already included in the ECDC Expert or External Expert Pools.

Upon receipt of a request for EUHTF support, the ECDC Coordination Team liaises with the ECDC Fellowship Office to assess whether the assignment fits the learning objectives of a fellow and whether their participation to the response team is feasible. If deemed so, the ECDC Coordination Team, through a standard form shared via the ECDC Fellowship Office, launches a call to join the EUHTF Response Team responding to a specific assignment. Appropriate support and supervision of the fellow for the duration of the assignment will be provided and will be outlined in the form. Fellows (EPIET, EUPHEM and EPIET-associated programmes both in the European and in the MS track) who have completed the introductory fellowship training course may respond to the call by confirming their interest, with a curriculum vitae and a brief motivation letter. Prior supervisor's and coordinator's approval is necessary for fellows to apply. Based on the expression of interest received and following a selection process, the ECDC Coordination Team in liaison with the ECDC Fellowship Office, selects one or more fellows to join the team responding to the specific assignment. The ECDC Fellowship Office informs the fellow, the fellow's supervisor, and coordinator about the fellow's participation in the EUHTF response team.

4.3. External Expert Pool

Following regular calls for interest, to register as external experts, applicants are required to complete a profile following a standard form, using the ECDC's Stakeholder Relationship Management (SRM) platform. Experts will be asked to provide their contact details, areas of expertise, language skills and their curriculum vitae.

Upon receipt of a request for EUHTF support, the ECDC Coordination Team shares the request for support and terms of reference with the experts in the pool that fulfil the expert profile and have the expertise needed for the specific assignment. Thereby, experts are invited to send an expression of interest to the ECDC Coordination Team. The ECDC Coordination Team reviews the applications of the interested experts and selects the most suitable experts for the assignment.

4.4. Additional mechanism to identify experts

If no profile is identified from any of the pools of experts, or if the ECDC Coordination Team receives no expression of interest in response to a specific request, the ECDC Coordination Team circulates the request to the National Focal Points (NFPs) and the National Coordinators (NCs), relying on them to cascade requests for support to their own Member States (MS) expert network(s). In addition, when urgent support is needed (outbreak investigation / emergency response), the request is simultaneously circulated to the NFPs and the EUHTF Expert Pools, to save time in the identification of experts for the Response Team. The experts reached through the NFPs would then submit their expression of interest and curriculum vitae to the ECDC Coordination Team. The ECDC Coordination Team reviews the applications and selects the most suitable experts for the assignment.

4.5. Conditions of deployment and remote work

Deployment-related expenses are covered by the ECDC annual budget or by the organisation coordinating the deployment in case this is not ECDC (e.g., DG ECHO and GOARN). These expenses include travel, accommodation, visa costs, mandatory vaccinations, insurance and per diem. Such expenses are not covered in relation to EUHTF activities performed remotely. Deployed experts are required to have primary medical insurance to cover for non-emergency medical issues. ECDC provides complimentary insurance covering emergency medical expenses as well as costs of repatriation in case of personal accident and/or serious illness, theft, riots, etc. Insurance coverage may be extended should the ECDC Coordination Team determine that there is a need to do so.

5. Governance and EUHTF Advisory Group

As per the ECDC regular governance mechanism, the ECDC Coordination Team reports to ECDC internal governance bodies as required. Furthermore, annually, the ECDC Coordination Team reports to the ECDC Advisory Forum about the scientific quality of its work and to the ECDC Management Board to seek approval for the EUHTF workplan and budget.

The EUHTF Advisory Group established in 2024, advises the ECDC Coordination Team on operational, administrative, and technical decisions, including setting annual work plan priorities, and assisting in identifying opportunities for international collaboration.

The EUHTF Advisory Group includes ECDC staff as internal members (Chair: HoU Public Health Functions, Deputy-Chair: HoS Emergency Preparedness and Response Support, and the ECDC Coordination Team). In addition, external members include six selected EU/EEA country representatives (rotating every two years), four EC representatives from DG SANTE, DG ECHO, DG HERA and DG RTD, one representative from the European Medicines Agency (EMA), one representative from GOARN, one representative from WHO-EURO, one representative from the European Public Health Association (EUPHA) and one representative from an international non-profit organisation.

The EUHTF Advisory Group is convened for the first time in January 2024 and meets twice per year. Ad hoc consultations are also expected. In addition, the ECDC Coordination Team will remain in close contact with the EUHTF Advisory Group and the EUHTF Expert Pools on the activities of the EUHTF via regular teleconferences and through EUHTF information bulletins.

6. Final provisions

These rules will enter into force on the day following their signature.

Implementation of these rules may be defined in standard forms and work instructions.