

Thirty-fourth Meeting

Stockholm, 16-17 June 2015

ECDC Public Health Training Strategy

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Summary:	<p>The Public Health Training Strategy proposes three strategic objectives in the context of ECDC's corporate mission and the legal context within which the Centre works. The objectives address workforce strengthening, maintaining a network of training partnerships and further developing a virtual training centre function, in order to support and assist Member States and the Commission to have sufficient numbers of trained specialists for key functions in disease prevention and control.</p> <p>The strategy outlines the target audience for training activities and introduces a needs based approach, following recommendations from the Internal Audit Service. In addition, the strategy proposes how ECDC training efforts could be complemented by Member States' efforts in training public health professionals.</p> <p>The MB is asked to endorse the new training strategy, and task ECDC to closely work with the Advisory Forum (AF) and the National Focal Points (NFPs) for training on the technical and operational implementation of the strategy.</p>
Action:	For endorsement.
Background:	<p>The Second Extraordinary MB meeting (20 January 2015) requested ECDC to propose a new Public Health Training Strategy by June 2015.</p> <p>ECDC continued an iterative consultation process, following up on the discussion paper on Public Health Training Strategy as presented in 2014. The draft training strategy here presented is based on guiding principles most recently discussed with the AF working Group in AF 41 (February 2015), the meeting with the NFPs for Training (April 2015), and the AF in plenary (May 2015). The proposed strategy was unanimously supported by the May AF. Some minor updates have been made to reflect input given, and remaining issues relate to details on the technical and operational implementation.</p>

Contents

Legal Basis	1
Vision	1
Strategic objectives to arrive at the vision	1
Specific Role of ECDC in the European training landscape.....	1
Target workforce	2
Competency-based training	2
A needs-based approach	2
ECDC Training Efforts (Strategic Objective 1).....	2
ECDC Fellowship Programme.....	2
ECDC Continuous Professional Development Programme.....	3
Member State training efforts	3
Networking (Strategic Objective 2).....	4
Virtual Training Centre (strategic objective 3)	4
Implementation	5

Legal Basis

Article 9.6 of the ECDC founding Regulation (851/2004) states that "*The Centre shall, as appropriate, support and coordinate training programmes in order to assist Member States and the Commission to have sufficient numbers of trained specialists, in particular in epidemiological surveillance and field investigations, and to have a capability to define health measures to control disease outbreaks.*"

Article 4 of the Decision 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border threats to health calls for consultations aimed at "*supporting the implementation of core capacity requirements for surveillance and response as referred to in Articles 5 and 13 of the IHR.*"

Vision

Based on the ECDC's **Mission** to strengthen Europe's defence against infectious diseases, ECDC has the following **vision** on public health training:

A competent workforce across Europe effectively collaborating and coordinating between local, subnational, national and Community levels to prevent, detect, assess and control diseases that could threaten the health of the European population.

Strategic objectives to arrive at the vision

1. To strengthen and maintain the workforce in the Member States and at the Community level through relevant training of key national experts, in order to ensure adequate performance of functions for communicable disease preparedness, prevention, detection, assessment and control nationally and cross-border.
2. To strengthen and maintain a network of European and global training partners, supporting capacities to provide training to the workforce in the EU at local, subnational, national and Community levels.
3. To support the cascading of training within the Member States by providing a common virtual training infrastructure with access to training material, e-learning and platforms for communities of practice.

Specific Role of ECDC in the European training landscape

For Europe to be able to defend itself against communicable diseases, a trained and competent workforce is needed at all levels from local to Community, with efficient and effective communication, coordination and collaboration between the levels.

Under the subsidiarity principle in the EU legislation, the Member States have responsibility for public health, including ensuring having sufficient numbers of trained experts for public health functions within the country. ECDC may assist and support the countries, especially to have a sufficient number of trained experts that have knowledge and experience to efficiently respond to communicable disease threats with an international, or potentially international, dimension and to interact and collaborate with experts from other countries.

ECDC neither has the mandate nor the capacity to take over the Member States responsibility to train staff for sub-national and local needs without a cross-border dimension. However, the Centre should play an important role in supporting the countries to strengthen their own national training capacities, through support to the build-up of national field epidemiology training programmes (FETPs), continuous professional development and training-of-trainers programmes, providing e-learning and other training resources that could be utilised by the national training partners or directly by a broader audience. ECDC should further support the national efforts to cascade training in the countries.

The ECDC training efforts will thus be complementary to and supportive of the training activities of other national actors, including institutes of public health, universities and schools of public health.

Where such national training activities exist, ECDC will seek partnerships in order to support the training efforts.

Target workforce

ECDC aims to coordinate training programs aimed at the primary target audience of experts at the Member States and the Community levels, who are designated to contribute to dealing with cross border health threats due to communicable diseases. Effectively, this target audience will be approximated by the sum of all professionals who are formal members of ECDC related networks.

ECDC aims to support training programs and assist member states to train the secondary target audience that comprises all other professionals at local, sub national and national levels that contribute to communicable disease preparedness, prevention, detection, assessment and control.

Main focus of the direct training efforts should be on fellowships for young and mid-career professionals and on enhancing hands-on competencies of key mid-career and senior public health staff at national level as part of life-long learning, and in support of cascading of training within the country.

Competency-based training

The ECDC training activities will be based on agreed and well-defined lists of core competencies needed for effective preparedness, prevention, detection, assessment and control of communicable disease threats with cross-border dimensions.

ECDC will work with the Member States and other training partners to facilitate the incorporation of the defined EU core competencies into the formal training activities at country level (e.g. by Schools of Public Health and Universities).

A needs-based approach

Adhering to audit recommendations from 2014 to address the training gaps across Europe based on needs assessments, ECDC will continuously work with the National Focal Points for Training and the Advisory Forum to identify and refine robust and agreed methodologies to assess medium- and long-term national and Community level training needs, taking into account the demographic profile of the existing national workforces.

To this purpose, it would be helpful if each Member State has an explicit workforce strategic planning, in order to safeguard business continuity of essential public health operations under Decision 1082/2013 and IHR 2005. ECDC could assist the countries by providing tools for such planning.

Different needs in different countries and regions within the EU, thus identified will be taken into account in the allocation of the ECDC training resources. Support to meet specific national/regional training needs could be done through organisation of regional courses open for some countries only, prioritised participation in the ECDC run training courses or other initiatives, such as twinning and staff exchange.

ECDC Training Efforts (Strategic Objective 1)

ECDC Fellowship Programme

The back-bone of the ECDC training efforts is the fellowship programme, with two paths (EPIET for epidemiology and EUPHEM for public health microbiology), and for each path one EU-track and one Member State track (MS-track). The main objective of the fellowship programme remains to build an EU-wide network, between all the Member States, of highly trained experts sharing the same competencies and "speaking the same language", enhancing the overall EU and national capacities to address national and cross-border outbreaks of communicable diseases.

The EU-track fellowships aim to strengthen a mid-career EU-wide workforce mobility, while the MS-track fellowships aim to ensure these competencies in the national workforce also in countries otherwise at risk of “brain drain”. The fellows under training, regardless of being EU-track or MS-track, have proven to be an important part of the combined European resources for addressing emerging cross-border health threats and adding European value, and fellow assignments should have a larger EU relevance.

International experience and exposure for the fellows is essential, and opportunities to partake in ‘assignments abroad’ in Europe or elsewhere should be encouraged. This is especially important for MS-track fellows that by the nature of their contract are less exposed to working abroad.

Training of trainers will remain an important element of the fellowships, enabling fellows to cascade training to early- and mid-career professionals for essential public health operations during their fellowship and after graduation.

With the overall European approach to the fellowship programme and the need to involve all Member States in the programme, ECDC will continue to apply mechanisms that ensure equitable opportunities for each Member State to host fellows, and maintain an appropriate balance between the EU-track and the MS-track as advised by the Advisory Forum and National Focal Points for Training.

The balance between the number of EPIET and EUPHEM fellows should be needs based according to principles agreed with the National Focal Points for Training and the Advisory Forum.

ECDC Continuous Professional Development Programme

Building on the mid-career competencies for intervention epidemiology and public health microbiology of the fellowship programmes, ECDC aims to additionally offer a programme for continuous professional development targeting the senior levels of the workforce. Senior level competencies in field epidemiology, public health microbiology, preparedness and adult learning, including didactics and instructional design should be the basis for such a curriculum. In addition, the programme will cover the specific competencies required for the ECDC Disease Specific and Public Health networks.

The goal of a new Continuous Professional Development Programme is to support professional development through continuous education (life-long-learning) in a blended format, for European public health professionals working in preparedness, prevention, detection, assessment and control of communicable diseases, available and willing to cascade training in their context to the regional and local levels.

Inspired by current activities (e.g. Summer School, short courses, senior exchange programme), the Continuous Professional Development Programme is envisioned as a consolidation of those, with a flexible format, where participants nominated by the National Focal Points for Training may sign up for individual courses or for the entire programme.

The basis for such curriculum is competencies in field epidemiology, public health microbiology and adult learning, including didactics and instructional design, and including courses in a blended format (online modules, face-to-face workshops, communities of practice).

Member State training efforts

To ensure full synergy, the Member States should commit to undertake efforts of cascading the training provided by ECDC to relevant groups at local, subnational and national levels. To provide the context for such cascading, Member States would need to define a strategy to approach workforce training needs, based on the requirements to perform essential public health operations such as defined in IHR2005 and Decision 1082/2013, in order to have sufficient training capacity for public health professionals (at least for threat detection, assessment and management).

Member States are encouraged to request ECDC support to set up a national field epidemiology training programme (FETP) or to incorporate EU ‘core competencies framework’ in national schools of public health or university curricula.

Networking (Strategic Objective 2)

ECDC is committed to continue to strengthen its training networks in order to find synergies between the various training providers in the field across Europe, and to facilitate the broad incorporation of the defined EU core competencies for disease prevention and control into the formal activities of training partners across Europe, including schools of public health and universities.

The coordination of activities with the Member States will be done through regular meetings with the National Focal Points for Training and its Network Coordination Committee, providing the views of the countries to the ECDC. The network of National Focal Points will be instrumental to target cascading of ECDC training efforts to the relevant levels within the Member States.

Regular consultations with the Advisory Forum will ensure an additional EU perspective on the activities. ECDC promotes sharing of good practice by gathering experts from all Member States to teach, supervise and facilitate in all of the ECDC training activities.

Strengthening and maintaining partnership with the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER), organising more than 100 academic institutions throughout Europe, will both aim to co-develop core competencies and facilitate cascading of training to local, sub-national and national professionals in the Member States.

Partnership with the World Health Organisation (WHO) will enable ECDC to align training efforts with WHO, as well as sharing results of training needs assessments performed among EU Member States, especially in supporting the full implementation of the IHR Core Capacity 7 on human resources.

ECDC provides scientific leadership to the 'Mediterranean Programme on Intervention Epidemiology Training' (MediPIET). Beyond the specific MediPIET objectives, ECDC will foster a close network collaboration between its fellowship programmes and MediPIET, through exchange of trainers, sharing of course material, joint training activities and joint international assignments.

Through partnership with the global 'Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network' (TEPHINET) in general and bilateral FETP-relations specifically, ECDC will ensure alignment and further development of FETP-like curricula, as well as creating global partnerships for international crisis response.

Partnerships for development of E-learning and sharing resources will include all partnership models mentioned above, plus specific groups specialising in E-learning.

Virtual Training Centre (strategic objective 3)

A common virtual training infrastructure will allow partners' access to training material, e-learning courses and provide platforms for communities of practice. The new ECDC technical e-learning platform is built on open standards allowing for sharing of e-courses and facilitators within the training networks and translation of courses to other languages by the training partners.

The virtual training infrastructure will include a new 'ECDC Virtual Academy', which is accessible only via subscription and targets the larger workforce for disease threat prevention, detection, assessment and control within the European Union.

In addition, the virtual training infrastructure will include an open community platform, aimed to share the knowledge elements that are part of ECDC supported curricula. The platform will provide articles to share methods, principles and concepts, to which the entire global community can contribute and comment. The platform will allow linking the articles to core competencies and the curricula of the ECDC Virtual Academy. Finally, the platform will allow Communities of Practice to collaborate online.

The virtual training centre's resources will furthermore contribute to training needs assessment on request of Member States or the Commission and it will facilitate the development and maintenance of core competencies that are relevant for performing tasks described in IHR2005 and 1082.

Implementation

After endorsement by the Management Board of this training strategy, ECDC will work closely with the Advisory Forum and the Coordinating Competent Bodies in the technical and operational implementation of the strategy, including fine-tuning the methodologies for training needs assessments, further integration of the EPIET and EUPHEM paths of the fellowship programme (including revisions of objectives), further linkage of EUPHEM to other EU-funded public health microbiology investments (such as MediLabSecure, EU mobile labs, EuSCAPE), competency development, finding synergies between the fellowship programme and MediPIET, etc.

ECDC will annually report on the progress to the Management Board within the framework of the Director's Annual Activity Report.