



EUPHEM

International Assignments
Standard Operating Procedures

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EPIET/EPIET-associated-programmes (EAP) & EUPHEM

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Glossary of terms

ToRs	Terms of Reference
MOH	Ministry of Health
PH	Public Health
EPIET	European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training
EUPHEM	European Programme for Public Health Microbiology
EAP	EPIET-Associated Programmes
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
FETP	Field Epidemiology Training Program
WHO	World Health Organization
GOARN	Global Outbreak and Alert Response Network
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontière
POF	Project Opportunity Form
PHT	Public Health Training Section
LoM	Letter of Motivation

1. Background

The European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (ECDC) hosts the ECDC Fellowship, a two-year competency-based Training Programme with two paths, intervention epidemiology (EPIET) and public health microbiology (EUPHEM). EPIET works in close collaboration with EPIET-associated programmes (EAPs), which are Field Epidemiology Training Programmes (FETPs) run by the Member State.

During the two-year fellowship, possibilities for international assignment might appear and fellows are given the opportunity to extend their experience in an international context.

An **international assignment** is a short-term deployment of a fellow for field work outside the country of the training site.

2. Purpose of this document

This document describes the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for international assignments of EPIET/EUPHEM/EAP fellows for the shared use of:

- Public health institutes/agencies¹ interested in offering opportunities for international assignments to fellows
- Current fellows
- ECDC fellowship programme Training Site Forum
- Training Site supervisors
- EPIET/EUPHEM/EAP scientific coordinators
- ECDC
- European Commission

It applies to international assignments based on requests handled by the ECDC Fellowship Programme; when requests are handled directly by EAPs for their fellows, the EAPs follow their own procedures.

3. Introduction

Occasionally, ECDC, international organizations (WHO, MSF, UNCHR, etc.), Ministries of Health (MOH, or their national institutes), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and private agencies request the support of fellows by sending out a request for assistance or a Project Opportunity Form (POFs)² to the ECDC fellowship programme.

EPIET/EUPHEM/EAP encourages fellows to apply for these international assignments, provided the assignment allows acquisition of programme-relevant competencies.

¹ These include, but are not limited to, international organizations and their branches: ECDC, WHO/GOARN, MSF/Epicentre

² The POF can be found in Appendix 1

4. Duration of the assignment

Assignments (deployments) usually last 4-6 weeks, but may extend up to 8 weeks, depending on the nature of the assignment and the request. In the request, the duration of the assignment should take into account not only the duration of the deployment but also the time needed to finalise formal reports.

5. Initial request

Agencies/institutes requesting support from one or more fellows will send their request to the ECDC fellowship. Depending on the requesting institute/agency, the type of request may differ. These are the main categories:

1. "ECDC assignments" refer to projects organized and offered by ECDC, e.g. by a specific Disease Programme;
2. Requests addressed directly to ECDC, e.g. WHO, ECHO, MoHs, NGOs, etc.; and
3. Requests addressed directly to the Fellowship Programme e.g. from NGOs, MoHs, EAN, and private agencies/institutes.

All requests will need approval from the relevant Head Scientific Coordinator previous to circulation of the request among fellows. The technical coordination of the assignments may be delegated to another fellowship scientific coordinator after approval by the relevant Head Scientific Coordinator(s). The Head Scientific Coordinator, or the scientific coordinator to whom the coordination of the international assignment has been delegated, is then the **responsible coordinator/s**.

The steps described below are applicable to all types of assignments.

Procedure

- a. The requesting agency/institute prepares and sends the Terms of Reference (TORs) for the assignment to the **Head Scientific Coordinator/s** and the responsible coordinator (in case of delegation). The requesting agency/institute may use the project opportunity form (POF) (Appendix 1) to frame the type of assistance required. A Security Assessment Report may also be requested in case of potential security issues in the place of deployment. A checklist for requesting agencies/institutes is provided in Appendix 2.
- b. The **Head Scientific Coordinator/s**, together with the responsible coordinator, review the TORs and decide whether the proposed assignment is appropriate for fellows. For this review and decision, they may consult with the other scientific coordinators in the team.
Depending on the risk level of the assignment, the **Head Scientific Coordinator/s** may also seek additional clearance from ECDC International Relations and/or Legal Services prior to clearing the assignment for fellows.
- c. Criteria to decide to offer opportunities to fellows include:
 - i) Public health importance and scientific interest
 - ii) Training opportunities provided by the assignment
 - iii) Political and security issues

- iv) Availability of financial support
- d. Assignments funded by the private sector must comply with the 'ECDC Independence Policy' to avoid not only conflict of interest issues but also the possibility of "double funding (see section 13)".
- e. The **responsible coordinator/s** circulates the finalised TORs and/or POF, with a clearly indicated deadline by which to apply, to:
 - i) all the EPIET/EAP/EUPHEM fellows to offer them the opportunity to apply for the assignment or simply inform them,
 - ii) all respective Training Site supervisors to inform them of the request,
 - iii) all EPIET/EAP/EUPHEM scientific coordinators, and
 - iv) the Fellowship Faculty Bureau (FFB).

The request is circulated and fellows' applications are received via ECDC's e-learning platform EVA.

6. Administrative arrangements

The requesting institute/agency arranges and covers the following expenses for the fellow:

- Briefing and debriefing opportunity at the requesting agency (if needed)
- Daily allowance (per diem)
- Travel and accommodation during the assignment (deployment)
- Personal and equipment insurance during travel and assignment (including medical assistance and repatriation)
- Visa or other travel documents, including necessary medical check-ups, vaccination and chemoprophylaxis when appropriate
- Financial support for future scientific communication / conference, if applicable

Requesting agencies may offer a contract for the duration of the deployment, formalizing the responsibilities of the different partners, including issues related to TORs, insurance packages, accommodation and per diems. Other requesting agencies may use different mechanisms to define their relation with the fellow. Occasionally, especially for missions that may expose fellows to specific risks, ECDC may request a contract that legally binds the requesting agency and the agreed offer of services to the fellow being deployed.

The Training Site supervisor must check that the administrative arrangements for/and the deployment of the fellow are in agreement with local employment laws and the fellows' employment contract.

In most cases, during the assignment, the fellows' salary will continue to be covered by ECDC, EAP or the Member State. **EU-track** fellows whose salaries are funded by ECDC are not allowed to receive any additional financial compensation (salary/consultancy fee) while receiving a salary from their host Training Site.

7. Application process for fellows

Interested fellows who want to apply for an international assignment will:

- 1) Obtain approval from their primary Training Site supervisor, who will take into account the fellow's workload and progress toward completion of the fellowship objectives, commitments at the Training Site, and administrative issues (compatibility of the deployment with employment contract) (see section 8 for criteria).
- 2) Inform their EPIET/EUPHEM frontline coordinator. The frontline coordinator will check if the applying fellow fulfils the requirements for the assignment and if s/he is on track with the training objectives. EAP fellows may also require approval by the programme directors (see section 8 for criteria).
- 3) By the stated deadline:
 - a) submit an updated CV and the LoM;
 - b) send in evidence of approval by the training site supervisor.

Fellows cannot apply directly to the requesting agency, unless otherwise agreed.

Also fellows who are specifically and individually invited to an international assignment, due to their expertise or former involvement with a requesting agency, will have to seek approval from their Training Site supervisor and frontline coordinator, and inform the Head Scientific Coordinator/s.

A checklist for fellows is provided in Appendix 3.

8. Approval criteria

Some general criteria that supervisors and coordinators take into account to approve the fellow's deployment are the following:

- Progress of the fellow towards achieving the training objectives and how the specific assignment may help him/her meet those
- Technical skills and competencies, either present or not yet acquired
- Technical skills and specific background/expertise required for the assignment
- Previous international assignments
- Ability to adapt to the specific environment
- Languages spoken
- Availability for the entire expected duration of the assignment

In addition, criteria may vary according to the assignment and they are normally specified in the POFs/TORs.

9. Selection procedure

1. The **responsible coordinator/s** collect/s all the above-mentioned documents (CVs and LoMs) from the applicants and sends them to the requesting agency.
2. The requesting institute/agency makes the final decision on the selection of the candidates. In few occasions, the responsible coordinator may influence the selection to prioritize a fellow with less project opportunities in a Training site and to ensure equal opportunities to all fellows.
3. The **responsible coordinator/s** informs about the final decision :
 - a. all fellows

- b. all coordinators
 - c. the FPO
 - d. the Head of Public Health Training Section at ECDC
 - e. Relevant supervisor/s
4. The Head of Public Health Training Section at ECDC informs the European Commission, of fellows on mission outside of the EU. This task may be delegated if necessary.
 5. Successful candidates go through the checklist for fellows before, during and after the assignment (Appendix 3).
 6. All requests are logged and ECDC keeps a record of all assignments.

10. Supervision in the field

Fellows are considered full-fledged professionals in training. The requesting institute/agency will assign a field supervisor who is responsible for the fellow during the assignment and provides on site or “remote” supervision [1]. The **frontline coordinator** or another **assigned coordinator** will also supervise fellows during the whole period of the assignment. The frontline or assigned coordinator will be in contact with the fellow at least once a week during the deployment via e-mail or telephone and will organise a debriefing upon the fellow’s return. Assignments that may expose the fellows to specific risks (e.g. complex emergencies) may require daily contact with the fellow. These contacts are logged in an international assignments database at the PHT section, ECDC. Fellows are informed of this requirement prior to deployment.

11. Fellows’ outputs and feedback from coordinators

In addition to the specific requirements for each assignment, the fellows are expected to provide the following outputs:

- A **preliminary report**, that is prepared before leaving the field. The fellow sends this report to the supervisor in the field (requesting agency), the **frontline or assigned coordinator**, the **responsible coordinator**, and the Head Scientific Coordinator. The frontline or assigned coordinator will provide feedback within 48 hours.
- A **final mission report**, which the fellow sends to the requesting agency for comments before finalising, and forwards to the frontline/assigned, the **responsible coordinator**, and the Head Scientific Coordinator when finalised.

All products/deliverables of the assignments are subject to the rules on contributions, authorship, clearance and acknowledgements specified in TORs of the requesting agency and the technical reference documents of the fellowship. The requesting agency also has to clear any “Postcards from the field” or similar testimonials, before they are published on the ECDC website. A data use agreement may be signed between the requesting institute/agency (or the Training Site during the assignment) and EPIET/EUPHEM/EAP, when appropriate.

12. International assignments directly organized by the training sites

Occasionally, Training Sites directly organise international assignments for fellows.

Procedure to follow is:

- The training site supervisor and the front-line coordinator (for EPIET/EUPHEM) check whether the proposed assignment is appropriate for the fellow using the same criteria as above, considering the suitability and usefulness of the project for the fellow, security issues, and compatibility with ECDC rules, e.g. regarding conflict of interest, double funding, or other.
- The training site covers all the costs of the international assignment including travel and accommodation, daily allowance, travel documents and insurance for the fellow.
- The training site supervisor and the front-line coordinator (for EPIET/EUPHEM) agree in advance on supervision of the fellow during the deployment and on site.
- EAP-organized international assignments will be in accordance with local procedures.
- EAPs and EPIET/EUPHEM training sites inform the Fellowship Programme about directly organized international assignments in order for ECDC to keep a record of all requests for assistance (international assignments) directed toward fellows.

13. Transparency and conflicts of interests

The organization of international assignments needs to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest. Therefore:

- Third parties providing opportunities should disclose the sources of funding that will be used to support the deployment of the fellow(s);
- Opportunities for international assignments, in particular when funded by the private sector, should be assessed by ECDC for potential conflict of interest, double funding and any issues linked to transparency. According to ECDC Independence Policy, ECDC staff cannot receive any payment from the pharmaceutical industry (including expenses for travel and accommodation); this applies as well to EU-track and MS-Track fellows;
- Assignments should also comply with the internal and national rules of the training site where the fellow is employed;
- Publications and reports that follow international assignments should disclose the source of funding that was used to support the fellows.

Appendix 1 - Project opportunity Form

European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training	
Project opportunity form	
Title of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a short title for the project
Name, email and affiliation of contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify who is requesting the project
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify where the fellow would have to work
Project rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Justify the project in one line or two
Project objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify what the project should achieve
Methods to use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the general types of methods that should be used for the project (e.g., analytical epidemiological study, modelling, surveillance data analysis)
Data / information provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline the kind of data / information (e.g., database) you could provide for the project
Pre-requisite / background needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify what skills would be needed for the project (In addition to a mainstream EPIET background)
Timeline from start to finish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimate the number of weeks that may be needed from the beginning to the end of the project. Specify dates if applicable.
Proportion of time to be assigned to the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimate the proportion of time that should be assigned to the project during the duration of the project
Description of the output / product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe what the report should consist in (Body of the product + annexes if applicable) Mention if this project could lead to an opportunity to publish
Technical supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mention who would be available to provide technical guidance, how much supervision would be available and what areas could be covered
Insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify how the fellow will be covered in terms of insurance while on assignment
Funding available for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel Accommodation and per diem Personal and equipment insurance during travel and assignment (including medical assistance and repatriation)
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the sources of funding that will be used to support the deployment of the fellow(s)? Does EU or ECDC provide any of this funding? (If YES, please specify)
Conflict of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please disclose any potential conflicts of interest (see section 13 of the SOP for International assignments)

Appendix 2 – Checklist for agencies/institutes requesting assistance

Request for assistance

1. Send the Terms of Reference (TORs) or POF to the Head and responsible coordinator
2. Agree with the responsible coordinator on the final Terms of Reference (TORs)
3. Arrange and cover the following expenses for the fellow:
 - a. Briefing (including security and health issues) and debriefing opportunity
 - b. Daily allowance (per diem)
 - c. Travel and accommodation during the assignment (deployment)
 - d. Personal and equipment insurance during travel and assignment (including assistance and repatriation)
 - e. Visa or other travel documents, including necessary medical check-ups, vaccination and chemoprophylaxis when appropriate

Before sending the fellow to the field

4. Select the most appropriate candidate; discuss your decision with the responsible coordinator
5. Assign a supervisor for the fellow (on site or "remote")
6. Arrange travel, accommodation and insurance of the fellow during the deployment
7. Arrange a briefing (including security issues)
8. Provide the fellow with the terms and conditions of the insurance coverage

While the fellow is in the field

- 9. Provide communication means in the field including access to e-mails and mobile telephones
- 10. Establish security standard operating procedures (if applicable)
- 11. Arrange medical care for the fellow (if needed)
- 12. Supervise the project and monitor the work plan so that the field assignment can be completed as planned
- 13. Continuously provide feedback to scientific outputs/products delivered by the fellow

Upon return

- 14. Arrange a debriefing
- 15. Provide feedback to the final mission report and any other scientific outputs/products delivered by the fellow
- 16. Follow up on the psychological/mental health of fellow for possible PST

Appendix 3 – Checklist for the fellows

Application

To do before applying:

1. Obtain approval from training site supervisor
2. Inform frontline EPIET/EUPHEM coordinator (if you are an EPIET fellow).
Obtain approval from the EAP director (if EAP fellow).

To do when applying:

3. Send to the **responsible coordinator** (cc supervisor and frontline coordinator), by the stated deadline:
 - a. Updated CV
 - b. A Letter of Motivation (LoM) (preferably in the language requested for the assignment)
 - c. The approval from the training site supervisor

In the field

To do before departure:

1. Verify validity of the passport (some countries request validity for at least six months from the start of the travel)
2. Contact the requesting agency/institute for all travel arrangements
3. Provide the responsible and frontline coordinator with the exact dates of your travel, your contact details (e-mail, telephone) during the deployment and details of a contact person (family)
4. Verify validity of immunization, start malaria prophylaxis (if needed) and check with requesting agency that immunization, malaria prophylaxis and emergency medical kits are available
5. Sign the appropriate insurance documents
6. Ask the requesting agency for a security briefing

To do while in the field:

- 7. Inform the responsible and frontline coordinator and the training supervisor about safe arrival in the country of the assignment. Share in-country phone number.
- 8. Contact regularly the frontline coordinator (by e-mail or telephone, as frequently as agreed)
- 9. Strictly comply to health and security rules
- 10. Prepare a **preliminary report** before leaving the field. Send it to the requesting agency supervisor and the frontline coordinator for comments.

To do upon return:

- 11. Produce all requested deliverables in time, according to terms of reference
- 12. Debrief the requesting agency
- 13. Debrief the frontline coordinator
- 14. Fill in all necessary justifications for reimbursement of expenses
- 15. Consult at an early stage relevant health specialists (if needed)
- 16. Prepare a **final mission report**. Send it to the requesting agency supervisor and the frontline coordinator for comments.

Appendix 4 – Checklist for scientific coordination team

Request for assistance

1. Decide if the mission is appropriate for EPIET/EUPHEM fellows
2. Circulate the project opportunity to the fellows and supervisors
3. Refer suitable candidates to the requesting agency/institute
4. Approve final Terms of Reference (ToRs) with requesting agency/institute before departure of the fellow

Before the fellow leaves to the field

5. Ensure that the fellow meets the requirements and is ready for departure (e.g., insurance coverage, vaccination. See point 3 - requesting agency/institute)
6. Agree who will provide distant supervision (frontline/assigned coordinator)
7. Agree on frequency and method of contact while the fellow is in the field

While the fellow is in the field

8. Keep in touch with the fellow while in the field for:
 - Technical supervision
 - Security and welfare supervision *

Upon return

9. Debrief the fellows as to share technical and managerial lessons
10. Provide comments and input on the mission report

At all times

11. Maintain an updated log on the status of all international missions

*The regularity and methods for contact will depend on the context and will be agreed before fellow's departure. In case of serious circumstances, the scientific coordination team may require daily contacts with the fellow.