



MEETING REPORT

ECDC public health training: Aligning training strategies between Member States and the EU level, 2014–2020

Stockholm, 23–24 October 2013

Executive summary

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) held its fifth consultation on EU-level training strategies with Member State representatives in Stockholm on 23–24 October. This meeting marked the first one which also included the recently nominated national focal points for public health training under ECDC's coordinating competent body structure.

The main goal of this consultation was to review the implementation of the ECDC public health training strategy in the European Union and update it in accordance with plans and expectations at Member State level as well as reinforcing collaboration with international counterparts.

The programme included a consultation on 'Experiences from the first two EPIET Member State Track cohorts and how will they shape the future'. The meeting began with a presentation on ECDC's Strategic Multiannual Programme 2014–2020 on public health training. Representatives from the European Commission and the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization introduced the 'European action plan for strengthening public health services and capacities' as a key pillar of the European Policy Framework Health 2020.

Six countries presented their national strategies for public health training: Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal. Slovenia shared its experience with the EPIET Member State Track. This was followed by working group discussions on:

- lessons learnt from the implementation of the EPIET and EUPHEM Member States Track and areas for quality improvement;
- the priorities for 2014–2015 at Member States and EU level regarding courses of the training programme for professional development in applied epidemiology;
- acknowledgment/accreditation with ECTS for training activities performed in the training programmes and e-learning courses (relations with the public health schools/academia); and
- e-learning priorities, partnerships and communities of practice.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

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As in previous consultations, there was broad support for short courses for continuous professional education and exchange of experiences. Some topics could be covered by stand-alone e-learning modules, but in general participants prefer blended format and a network approach. Senior level competencies in specific topics should also be addressed. The dialogue between partners in governance structures needs to be strengthened, including Advisory Forum and other national focal points, for example surveillance focal points. Regarding accreditation, efforts should be aligned with those of the European public health workforce and the ECTS system, thus strengthening collaboration between ECDC and ASPHER.

1 Background

Europe's defence against infectious diseases depends on a continuously available competent workforce capacity at all levels. This requires high-quality graduate and post-graduate training within the national universities and schools of public health, complemented with life-long professional development activities such as courses, conferences, peer review processes and on-the-job training.

Following the founding regulation which establishes ECDC and its mandate to strengthen the capacity of the EU for the prevention and control of infectious diseases [1], the Public Health Training Section has periodically consulted the Member States to review the strategy and listen to their expectations. Following their advice, ECDC has developed training activities for senior and mid-career public health professionals through short courses that are now consolidated in a 'training programme for professional development' in applied epidemiology [2], and the ECDC summer school. The European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology (EPIET) was integrated in ECDC in 2007, and the European Programme in Public Health Microbiology (EUPHEM) was created in 2008.

The core competencies for public health epidemiologists working in the area of communicable disease surveillance and response in the European Union [3] were presented at the second Member State consultation and at the Advisory Forum meeting in September 2007 and published in January 2008. They serve as a reference to guide curricula and support some countries in public health capacity development. ECDC has also developed a set of core competencies for the EUPHEM programme [4] and for infection control and hospital hygiene professionals [5] in Europe.

Based on the results of an external evaluation of EPIET in 2010, the members of the ECDC Advisory Forum recommended that the EPIET programme should be reorganised and expanded to better respond to the needs of the Member States. Thus, the EPIET training was organised in two complementary pathways, in intervention epidemiology (EPIET) and public health microbiology (EUPHEM). Both EPIET and EUPHEM are now composed of two tracks, the EU and the Member States track. The EPIET Member States track aims at building capacity in Member States who have so far not directly benefitted from the EPIET programme in terms of returning EPIET fellows or having established EPIET training sites within their country. Information about the Member States track is available at the ECDC website.

In 2013, the ECDC Public Health Training Section developed an e-learning strategy to make training accessible for a larger audience and cater to different learning styles. For most public health professionals having access to blended training (e-learning and face to face) will make a more efficient use of their time.

This was the fifth ECDC consultation on public health training strategies for the EU. Previous ECDC consultations on training Strategies with the Member States were held in 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2009. One meeting was organised with EU enlargement countries in 2011. Annex 1 includes links to the previous reports.

2 Scope and purpose

The main goal of this consultation was to review the implementation of the ECDC public health training strategy in the EU and update it in accordance with plans and expectations at the Member State level as well as reinforcing collaboration with international counterparts. Specific objectives included:

- Present and clarify ECDC's Strategic Multiannual Programme 2014–2020 on public health training and discuss the implementation with the Member States
- Present the current status of the EPIET and EUPHEM Member States track, discussing lessons learnt from its implementation and areas for quality improvement
- Introduce the e-learning strategy of the ECDC training centre
- Discuss acknowledgment with ECTS for training activities performed in the training programmes and e-learning courses.

3 Methodology

The consultation included a face-to-face meeting that consisted of presentations by Member States, ECDC, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Commission on approaches currently implemented as well as working group sessions on each of the specific objectives. The meeting was complemented by online surveys that were administered to the national focal points for public health training for its preparation, evaluation and follow up.

The agenda of the consultation, list of participants and papers for the working groups can be found in the Annex.

4 Participants

The consultation targeted the Member State national focal points for public health training, field epidemiology training programmes (FETPs) in EU Member States (Spain, EPIET-associated programmes), EPIET Member State-track training site representatives and EUPHEM training forum chair, representatives from the WHO, the European Commission, the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER), MediPIET, staff from the ECDC Public Health Training Section and ECDC Disease Programmes. See Annex 3 for a list of participants.

5 Introduction and ECDC public health training plans 2014–2015

In 2007–2013, over 1200 participants from EU Member States trained in ECDC-coordinated short courses, with a trend of decreasing numbers in the recent years, due to competing priorities within the budgets. This phenomenon is important from the perspective of national focal points for public health training, since the results of a survey on this topic (see next chapter) suggest that Member States consider short courses offered by ECDC as highly relevant.

ECDC presented an overview of planned topics for training activities for the ECDC work plan 2014–2015:

- Implemented fellowship training curricula: The new structure of EU and Member States tracks in combination with national associated training programmes will be consolidated, aiming to reduce capacity gaps between Member States.
- E-learning: Guided by the approved strategy, the e-learning strategy will be implemented, aiming to reach a much larger audience.
- Competence profiles for disease-specific networks and core functions: Existing sets of core competencies will be supplemented with specific competence profiles for vaccine-preventable disease experts, tuberculosis experts and core functions such as preparedness.
- Short courses from the catalogue and senior exchange programme: In addition to the provision of specific short training courses, ECDC will pilot-test short exchange programmes where senior experts can spend up to two weeks abroad for study visits to public health organisations.
- MediPIET: In 2014, ECDC will finalise the development of curriculum and coordination processes for a regional field epidemiology training programme in the Mediterranean. In 2015, ECDC plans to contribute scientific and methodological experience in fellowship programme management to a consortium of providers that will implement the Mediterranean Training Programme.
- Good practice workshops: ECDC will evaluate the added value of 'sharing good practice workshops' to continuing professional development for public health professionals.

The European Commission announced the availability of a free survey tool. See: <http://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/>

6 ECDC online survey

The 28 participants of ECDC’s online survey expressed a low interest for meetings, videoconferences and surveys; instead, they said they would prefer to communicate with ECDC’s PHT Section by e-mail, newsletters, and phone calls.

Regarding the 2014–2015 work plan, the results are presented in Figures 1a and 1b.

Figure 1a. Work-plan topics and participants’ ratings

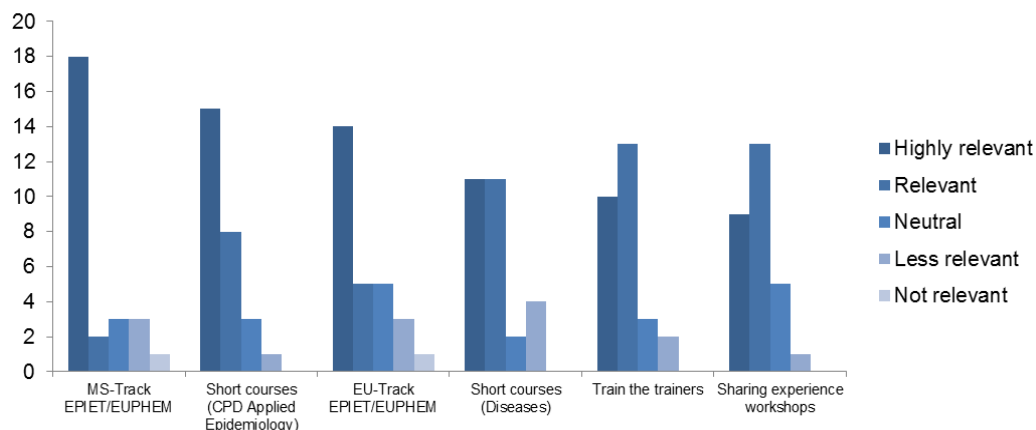


Figure 1b. Work-plan topics and participants’ ratings

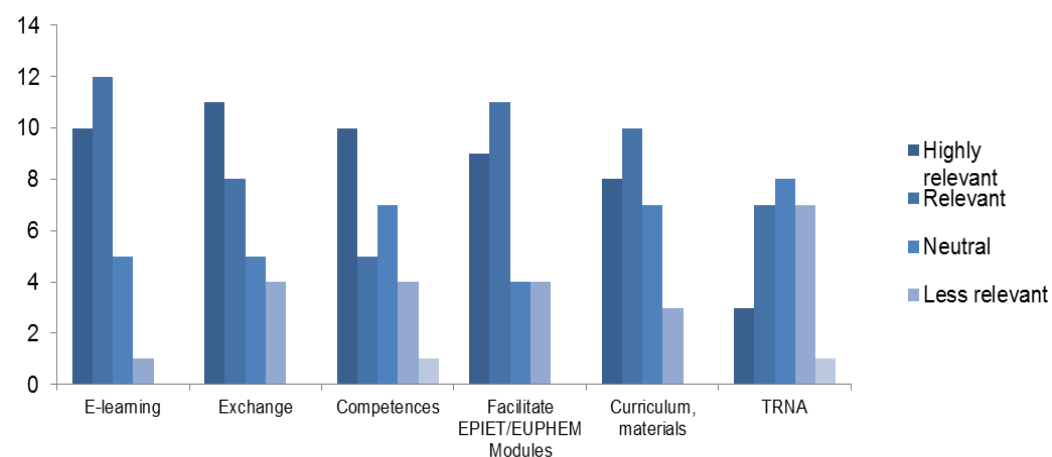
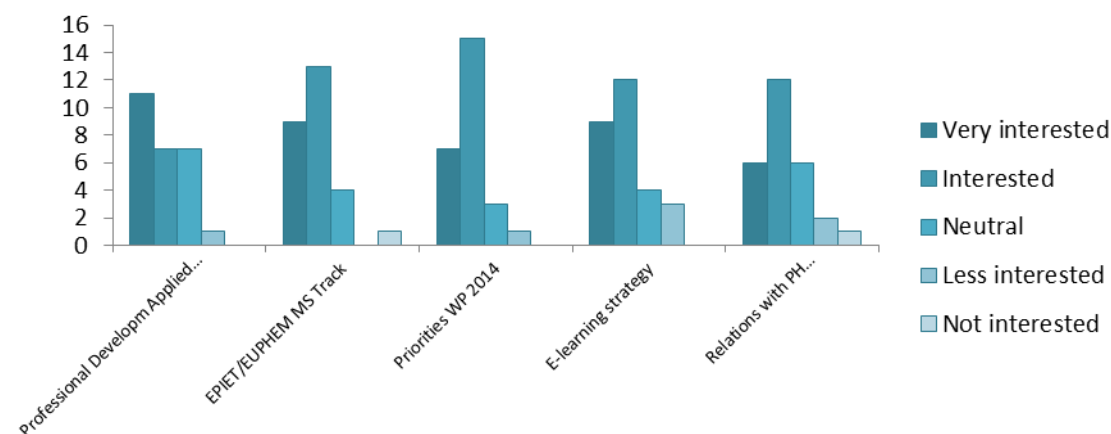


Figure 2. Survey results on five training-related topics



7 Presentations

A detailed summary of the presentations listed below can be found in a report sent earlier this year to the national focal points for public health training and all participants in the consultation.

European Commission

Frank van Loock, Health Threats Unit, Directorate-General Health and Consumers, European Commission, lectured on 'Epidemiology training and support to health workforce'.

In the context of the European Commission support to capacity building, four areas were highlighted: training exchange through the Erasmus programme; the action plan for the EU health workforce; the health components of the European Structural and Investment Funds; and epidemiology training.

WHO Regional Office for Europe

'The European action plan: public health workforce development' was presented by Casimiro Dias, Technical Officer, Division of Health Systems and Public Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe.

The 'European action plan for strengthening public health services and capacities' (EAP) is a key pillar for implementation of the European Policy Framework Health 2020. Adopted by the Regional Committee for Europe in Malta, September 2012, the EAP aims to support the Member States in improving health, tackling inequalities and securing the delivery of the ten Essential Public Health Operations and the core set of accessible, high-quality, efficient and effective individual, community and population-based public health services.

Experiences from Member States

Six countries presented their national strategies for public health training: Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Slovenia presented their experience with the EPIET Member States track.

Robert Muchl presented the public health structures of Austria (federal state level, local health boards and local authorities) and their differences in responsibilities and training needs.

Branko Kolarić reported on training strategies in the field of communicable disease control in Croatia.

Brigitte Helynck lectured on training strategies for capacity building in the prevention and control of communicable diseases in France.

Katharina Alpers informed the meeting participants about postgraduate training activities in applied epidemiology (Master of Science in applied epidemiology) in Germany.

Jeannette de Boer phrased the topic of her talk as a question: 'What workforce we need for communicable disease prevention and control in the Netherlands?'

Paula Vasconcelos talked about the organisation of public health training in Portugal.

Irena Klavs summarised Slovenia's experiences with the EPIET Member States Track.

ECDC Disease Programmes

Ida Czumbel gave a presentation on competencies in the prevention and control of vaccine-preventable diseases and immunisation.

She proposed a set of core competencies and told the participants that ECDC had planned to establish a multidisciplinary expert panel to discuss the suggested competencies. A first meeting with the expert panel was planned for 12 July 2014.

8 Summaries from Working Groups

Working Group A: Member States track, EPIET and EUPHEM

ECDC initiated the Member States track of EPIET in 2011 to address brain drain issues affecting some of the EU Member States. Since 2013, there has also been a EUPHEM Member States track.

The working group discussed the challenges of supervising a former colleague who for a period of two years becomes an EPIET/EUPHEM fellow. It also allowed for discussion of ECDC's priority criteria for Member States track seat allocation and invited suggestions on ECDC primarily supports the Member States that are most in need of public health capacity building activities.

Working Groups B and C: Priorities for 2014 and training programme for professional development (short courses)

This working group discussion covered:

- Priorities for the 2014–2015 work plan at the EU and Member State level in the context of the ECDC Multiannual Strategic Plan (SMAP) 2014–2020
- Career professional development (CPD) in applied epidemiology

Working Group D: Governance in public health training at the European Union level

Objectives of this working group included:

- Review of the proposed governance structure for public health training
- Review of the terms of reference for the training of national focal points

Working Group E: Relations with public health schools/academia (European Credit Transfer System accreditation)

Topics discussed in this working group included:

- Why do we need accreditation?
- EPIET/EUPHEM. Module could be accredited separately or as a whole; Master's programme in applied epidemiology or PHM, and not in PH; avoid jeopardising the field work
- Short courses? ASPHER has started the process, collaboration between ECDC and ASPHER is needed.

Working Group F: E-learning strategy

Based on the Strategic Multiannual Plan 2008–2013, ECDC developed and approved a first e-learning strategy document. A Learning Management System is being procured to support the management of courses. This will be linked with the hosting, support and delivery of e-learning modules, blended learning, and face-to-face courses. ECDC's national focal points for training, WHO, the European Commission, EPIET-associated programmes, FETPs and TEPHINET will all be involved. FEM Wiki¹ will be supporting the communities of practice.

¹ <https://wiki.ecdc.europa.eu/>

9 Member States consultation: follow-up

After the consultation, a follow up questionnaire was made available. A total of 17 responses were received. A majority of respondents was in favour of e-learning products delivered by ECDC and provided input on priorities for courses in the continuous professional development programme and governance. The respondents endorsed the relevance of the following topics: management and logistics of outbreak investigation, rapid assessment in complex emergencies; introduction to intervention epidemiology; principles and computer tools for outbreak investigation; microbiological and epidemiological aspects of outbreak investigation; control of multidrug-resistant microorganisms in healthcare settings, principles of public health surveillance and time series analysis, epidemiological methods applied to vaccine-preventable diseases, scientific writing and train-the-trainers ECDC summer school. Respondents approved every single topic proposed in the follow-up questionnaire by a wide margin of votes.

Conclusions

This was the first meeting of the national focal points for public health training nominated in accordance with the new structures for ECDC's coordinating competent bodies.

The meeting made clear that the planning of training activities needs to be clarified and aligned in many areas. In addition, questions remained on achieving a consensus on work plan priorities and having access to knowledge about available resources.

Meeting participants agreed that a further review of the experiences from the first cohorts of the Member States track would be helpful, as would be an induction process. In general, timelines need to be clearer and more interaction between the training sites and the national focal points for public health training would be beneficial.

Developing the senior competency level could be useful; there would be advantages in introducing new courses.

Accreditation. Efforts should be aligned with the European public health workforce. Joining the ECTS credits system would require more collaboration between ECDC and ASPHER.

Governance. The dialogue between partners needs to be strengthened and links to other national focal points should be improved. There were questions about national focal points and interaction with the Advisory Forum. Terms of reference and the governance process should be reviewed to clarify the role of the national focal points.

ESCAIDE. The annual conference is seen as an opportunity for continuous professional development in the area of disease prevention and control and the national focal points considered this a relevant argument to continue a regular rotation of the conference venue among EU Member States.

Annex 1. References

- [1] European Union (2004). Regulation (EC) no 851/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 establishing a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Official Journal of the European Union: L 142/141 - 142/111. Available from: http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/aboutus/key%20documents/0404_kd_regulation_establishing_ecdc.pdf
- [2] Catalogue of ECDC training courses for Public Health professionals in EU/EEA and enlargement countries (2014–2015). Available from: http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/activities/training_activities/Documents/2014-2015-ECDC-Training-Catalogue.pdf
- [3] Core competencies for public health epidemiologists working in the area of communicable disease surveillance and response, in the European Union Stockholm, January 2008. Available from: <http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/training-core-competencies-EU-public-health-epidemiologists.pdf>
- [4] European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. European public health training programme. Stockholm: ECDC; 2013. Available from: <http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/microbiology-public-health-training-programme.pdf>
- [5] European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Core competencies for infection control and hospital hygiene professionals in the European Union. Stockholm: ECDC; 2013. <http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/infection-control-core-competencies.pdf>

Links

- Meeting report: training strategy for intervention epidemiology in Europe, Stockholm, 30 Nov – 2 Dec 2005. Available from: http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/0512_MER_Training_Strategy_for_Intervention_Epidemiology.pdf
- Meeting report: training strategy for intervention epidemiology in Europe, Stockholm, 11–12 September 2007. Available from: http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/0709_MER_Training_Strategy_for_Intervention_Epidemiology.pdf
- Meeting report: training strategy for intervention epidemiology in the European Union, Stockholm, 27 October 2008. Available from: http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/0810_MER_Training_Strategy_for_Intervention_Epidemiology.pdf
- Meeting report training strategy for intervention epidemiology in the European Union, Stockholm, 12–14 October 2009. Available from: http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/1003_MER_CB%20training_final.pdf
- Meeting report: workshop on training capacity, resources and needs assessment for the EU candidate countries and potential candidates, Stockholm, 5–6 September 2011. Available from: <http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/ECDC-Meeting-training-needs-assessment.pdf>

Annex 2. Agenda

Wednesday, 23 October 2013

- 09:00–09:30** Welcome
Karl Ekdahl, Head of Public Health Capacity and Communication
Presentation of the meeting, introduction of participants
- 09:30–10:00** Presentation of the online survey results and the draft of ECDC's strategic multiannual programme on public health training and priorities.
Arnold Bosman
- 10:00–10:30** Presentation by Frank van Loock (European Commission)
- 10:30–10:45** Coffee break
- 10:45–11:15** Presentation by Casimiro Dias (WHO Europe), introduced by Carmen Varela Santos
- 11:15–12:30** Presentation of experiences: Member States and ECDC Disease Programmes, introduced by Sybille Rehmert
- 12:30–13:30** Lunch
- 13:30–15:00** Working group A: Member States Track
Working groups B and C: Priorities for 2014–2015 at EU and Member State level/training programme
professional development in applied epidemiology
Coffee break
- 15:30–16:30** Plenary feedback, moderated by Alena Petrakova

Thursday, 24 October 2013

- 09:00–09:30** Governance framework on ECDC training activities
Arnold Bosman
- 09:30–10:00** Training programme for professional development in applied epidemiology, relations with public health schools/academia (ECTS accreditation) and e-learning
Chaired by Carmen Varela Santos
- 10:00–11:15** Working Group D: Governance in public health training
Working group E: Relations with public health schools/academia (ECTS accreditation)
Working group F: E- learning
- 11:15–11:30** Coffee break
- 11:30–12:30** Feedback from working groups
Chaired by Liliya Todorova Janssens
- 12:30–13:00** Conclusions of the meeting
Arnold Bosman

Annex 3. List of participants

Country	Name	Role
Austria	Robert Muchl	Nominated to attend by national coordinator
Belgium	Javiera Rebolledo Gonzalez	Nominated to attend by national coordinator
Bulgaria	Galina Asseva	National focal point for public health training, alternate
Czech Republic	Pavla Krizova	National focal point for public health training
Estonia	Natalia Kerbo	National focal point for public health training
Finland	Outi Lytikäinen	National focal point for public health training EPIET Member States track representative
France	Brigitte Helynck	National focal point for public health training
Germany	Katharina Alpers	National focal point for public health training Coordinator for German PAE
Greece	Nikoletta Mavroei	National focal point for public health training
Hungary	Marta Melles	National focal point for public health training
Latvia	Dzintars Mozgjs	National focal point for public health training
Lithuania	Nerija Kupreviciene	National focal point for public health training
Netherlands	Jeanette De Boer	National focal point for public health training
Portugal	Paula Vasconcelos	National focal point for public health training, alternate
Romania	Florin Popovici	National focal point for public health training EPIET Member States track representative
Slovak Republic	Zuzana Kristufkova	National focal point for public health training
Slovenia	Irena Klavs	National focal point for public health training EPIET Member States track representative
Spain	Maria Victoria Martinez De Aragon	National focal point for public health training Director FETP
Sweden	Anders Wallensten	National focal point for public health training
United Kingdom	Samantha Bracebridge	National focal point for public health training FETP Coordinator
Croatia	Branko Kolaric	Nominated to attend by national coordinator
Czech Republic	Petr Pazdiora	EPIET Member States track representative
Italy	Paolo D'Ancona	EPIET Member States track representative
Finland	Jaana Vuopio	EUPHEM training forum chair, national focal point for public health training, alternate
Italy	Loredana Ingrosso	EUPHEM supervisor, nominated by national coordinator
Norway	Ulf Dahle	EUPHEM supervisor, nominated by national focal point for public health training
Belgium	Robert Otok	ASPHER director
Serbia	Vesna Bjegovic-Mikanovic	ASPHER designated president 2014–2015
Denmark	Casimiro Jose Canha Cavaco Dias	WHO Europe
WHO	Pierre Nabeth	WHO Lyon
EU	Frank Van Loock	European Commission, DG SANCO
EU	Arnold Bosman	ECDC, Public Health Training Section
EU	Carmen Varela Santos	ECDC, Public Health Training Section
EU	Sonsoles Guerra	ECDC, Public Health Training Section
EU	Liliya Todorova-Janssens	ECDC, Public Health Training Section
EU	Vladimir Prikazsky	ECDC, Public Health Training Section
EU	Victoria Markevich	ECDC, Public Health Training Section
EU	Aftab Jasir	ECDC, Public Health Training Section
EU	Yvan Hutin	ECDC, Public Health Training Section
EU	Alena Petrakova	ECDC, senior advisor
EU	Sybille Rehmert	ECDC, Country Preparedness Support
EU	Ida Czumbel	ECDC, Scientific Assessment Section
EU	Marion Muehlen	ECDC, Public Health Training Section