

EU Health Task Force

Summary concept note

Background

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 learnt from COVID-19 and previous events, the reinforced role for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), according to its new mandate¹ 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 EU/EEA countries, the European Commission (EC) and EU partners.

Scope and applicability

The EUHTF will support EU/EEA countries, EU accession countries, potential candidate countries, and European Neighbourhood Policy countries, 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), WHO, and the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), as well as other international organisations on ad hoc basis.

EUHTF Coordination Team, Expert Pools and Enhanced Emergency Capacity

The EUHTF is composed of a permanent EUHTF ECDC Coordination Team, three EUHTF Expert Pools and an EUHTF Enhanced Emergency Capacity.

The **ECDC Coordination Team** coordinates all 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, coordinates deployments including receiving requests for

¹ (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.

support and taking decisions on accepting requests, conducts readiness and preparedness work, manages communications and coordination with partners.

The **EUHTF Expert Pools** are composed of three different pools of experts:

- ECDC Expert Pool: Public health experts in ECDC, who volunteer as member of a pool following an open call.
- ECDC Fellowship Pool: Fellows during their 2-year placement in the ECDC Fellowship Programme (EPIET, EUPHEM and EPIET-associated programmes).
- External Expert Pool: Public health experts in EU/EEA countries, contributing on a voluntary basis (including alumni of the ECDC Fellowship Programme).

The experts of the EUHTF Expert Pools support assignments of the EUHTF. When the EUHTF receives a request for support, the ECDC Coordination Team assembles a Response Team to fulfil such a request. The Response Team may include experts from ECDC, external experts, or ECDC Fellows, who are selected on the basis of their skills, experience and availability after expressing interest towards the specific EUHTF assignment. Furthermore, experts will engage in a community of knowledge and practice by participating in training sessions and simulation exercises offered by the ECDC Coordination Team.

In the event of a declaration of a public health emergency, the EUHTF receives a request by either the EC or the EU/EEA countries to activate the **EUHTF Enhanced Emergency Capacity** leveraging to the maximum extent all the resources available within to the EUHTF to facilitate response. The EUHTF Enhanced Emergency Capacity is coordinated by the EC and ECDC.

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

Governance

As per ECDC regular governance mechanisms, and on behalf of the EUHTF, the ECDC Coordination Team will report annually to the ECDC Advisory Board about the scientific quality of its work, and to the ECDC Management Board to seek approval for the EUHTF workplan and budget. In both bodies, both EU/EEA countries and the EC are represented.

Advisory body - the EUHTF Advisory Group

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

It is formed by the ECDC Coordination Team, **six selected EU/EEA country experts** (rotating every three years), four EC representatives (from DG SANTE, DG ECHO, DG HERA, and DG RTD) one representative from the European Medicine 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 NGO.

The EUHTF Advisory Group was convened for the first time in January 2024, taking over from the Ad Hoc EUHTF Working Group, which operated in 2023 to support the ECDC Coordination Team during the first year of the EUHTF. The EUHTF Advisory Group meets twice per year. Ad hoc consultations are also expected. In addition, the ECDC Coordination Team remains in close contact with the EUHTF Advisory Group and the EUHTF Expert Pools via regular teleconferences and through additional EUHTF communication channels, to provide updates on ongoing deployments, outbreaks, and to inform about any newly developed protocols, resources or tools.