



SUMMARY

For the first time ESCAIDE was held as a hybrid event, bringing people back together in-person, but continuing to provide online access. Here, we talk you through the sessions and discussions across the three days of ESCAIDE 2022, which happened from 23 to 25 November in Stockholm and online.

ESCAIDE 2022 Highlights Report

A look back on the conference

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ESCAIDE at a glance

The European Scientific Conference on Applied Infectious Disease Epidemiology (ESCAIDE) is an annual event organised by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), a public health agency of the European Union (EU), headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. ECDC's ambition is to protect the over 500 million people in Europe from infectious diseases.

ECDC organises ESCAIDE every year to be a platform for...

- **sharing** of scientific **knowledge and experience** in all areas applied to infectious disease prevention and control
- discussing and debating **scientific advances** and **current public health challenges**
- **strengthening and expanding** the **human network** of all involved in this field in Europe and globally
- providing opportunities for further **professional development** for fellows and students in this field.

...to strengthen the prevention and control of infectious diseases in the EU/EEA and globally.

ESCAIDE is a conference for the entire community of scientists and professionals dedicated to infectious disease prevention and control, in the EU/EEA and globally, including epidemiologists, microbiologists, clinicians, public health professionals, communication specialists, modelers, statisticians, social scientists and policy makers.

It has been held since 2007 as an in-person conference, with rotational hosting between Stockholm and another city in an EU/EEA Member State. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAIDE 2020 and 2021 were held entirely online, live-streamed on an interactive online platform.

For the first time this year, ESCAIDE was held as a hybrid event, bringing people back together again in-person, but continuing to provide online access.



[Visit the ESCAIDE website](#)



ESICAIDE 2022 hybrid 23-25 November, in Stockholm and online

ESICAIDE 2022 had over 600 participants gathering in-person across the three days, for the first time in three years, at Münchenbryggeriet in Stockholm, and over 2400 people joining online. ESICAIDE has grown hugely in recent years, with the increased prominence of the field during the COVID-19 pandemic, and accessibility of online events. We were pleased to see that the interest in attending ESICAIDE this year remained high, and that conducting the conference in hybrid allowed the larger audience that the conference captured during the online editions to still participate. Continuing to offer online participation means that the conference was still accessible to the audience, presenters and speakers who could not travel to Stockholm due to cost, distance, and other commitments, or be accommodated in the capacity of the venue.

ESICAIDE 2022 registered participants indicated they were from 29 countries inside EU/EEA (2042) and from 94 countries outside EU/EEA (989).

The programme was packed and included 5 plenaries, 9 Fireside sessions, 13 Poster tours, side events, info stands and many other activities. Many saw the conference as a time to reflect on the huge workload, outputs, and advances of the field in the past few years. A key message was the need to not only discuss the lessons we have learned, but ensure they are implemented to improve public health responses in the future.

Here, we talk you through the events and discussions across the three days of ESICAIDE 2022.



[Consult the ESICAIDE 2022 Programme](#)

Wednesday 23 November Day 1

The first day was opened with the ESCAIDE 2022 keynote session, where ECDC Director Andrea Ammon introduced keynote speaker Alena Buyx, president of the German Ethics Council, to reflect on the ethical considerations of public health measures, and how ethicists and public health professionals can collaborate to create public health measures that balance competing moral goods. Alena emphasised that public health experts need to be aware of the risks that certain public health measures pose to a person's overall health, not just their physical one.

To reach decisions on the implementation of public health measures, it is vital for politicians and policymakers to include input from public health experts, ethicists and the public, for measures to be effective, proportional and supported. To improve the inclusion of ethical perspectives, Alena put forward an innovative idea of creating a digital platform with ethical considerations and recommendations that politicians across the world can consult when deciding on the appropriate public health measures. Better structures are needed to improve public engagement and involvement. In the future we will experience many more public health emergencies, especially due to climate change, which can only be managed by working together through informed debate.

“Restricting freedom is an exception. We must accept that sometimes there were situations where freedoms were restricted too much or for too long” – Alena Buyx, President of the German Ethics Council, speaking in Plenary A on ethical boundaries to control a pandemic



After the first plenary, Andrea Ammon kicked off the conference with a welcome message to participants.

During lunch, a mindfulness session gave in-person participants an opportunity to relax, and Career Compass hosted six public health professionals who shared insights on their own career paths.

A lunchtime seminar highlighted how mathematical modelling can provide insights into longer-term trajectories of the epidemiology of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases like influenza, and the longer-term health-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the COVID-19 pandemic fades from public attention, the session highlighted that the level of COVID-19 that we 'accept' to live with is higher than was hoped for 12-24 months ago, as the rates of infection and death in Europe continue to be the highest in comparison to all other infectious diseases.

Participants presented a wide array of studies in the first day's abstract sessions (firesides/orals and poster tours), showcasing research on various disease groups, epidemiology, and public health policy and practice. One takeaway from the session 'Sexually and community-acquired infections, including HIV' was the importance of the quality of the tools to gather data to inform interventions according to stakeholders and population. A session on public health impacts, focusing mostly on the COVID-19 pandemic, addressed how the impact can be delayed (for example because of decreases in coverage of HPV vaccination), making the final impact difficult to assess.



[Consult the ESCAIDE 2022 Abstract Book](#)

The second plenary covered refugee health, with a panel of experts with frontline experience and perspectives on an international, sub-national and NGO level. Panellists discussed public health challenges as the number of displaced people has increased to 103 million in mid-2022, with refugees becoming more mobile while restrictions to asylum seekers and migration have increased. Panellists also highlighted the disparity between the response to Ukrainian refugees and those coming from other countries, and that the influx of people from Ukraine showed that we can mobilise resources if we are willing to do so. The session also covered the effects of migration policies on public and individual health, highlighting how effective measures, services and digital solutions can help, and discussing the adverse effects that poor living conditions, detention centres and criminalisation have on displaced people. The panellists concluded that support from the medical community was essential in protecting refugee health, and that we need to vaccinate ourselves against indifference and fear.

"What we can learn from the Ukrainian refugee crisis is that if we want, we can. We can offer health care, we can provide a good response." – Aurélie Ponthieu, Analysis Department Director, Médecins Sans Frontières, speaking in Plenary B on promoting and protecting the health of displaced people

The day was closed with a wrap-up session, in which a panel of ESCAIDE participants gave their highlights of the day – focussing mostly on the enjoyment of being back together again in-person. This was followed by a networking cocktail in the venue, with views from Münchenbryggeriet over Stockholm in the snow.



[ESCAIDE 2022 Vox Pop - Day One - YouTube](#)

Thursday 24 November Day 2

The second day of ESCAIDE began with a plenary covering different perspectives on the innovations in vaccines over the last 2 and half years: discussing the development of mRNA vaccines, describing the psychology of vaccination and the tools used by public health authorities for increasing vaccination uptake.

THL Finland Chief Physician, Hanna Nohynek, gave a look back on the revolutionary development of mRNA vaccines, thanks to work done before and during the pandemic, which rapidly produced vaccines with a remarkable efficacy in preventing severe disease and death.

Cornelia Betsch, a professor of health communication at the University of Erfurt, Germany, pointed out that vaccination status has become part of people's identities, leading them to become more entrenched in their views and widen the polarisation.

Jeremy Ward, an associate researcher at INSERM, France, spoke about the French context, where initially only 40% of the population intended to vaccinate against COVID-19, with fears of the safety of new mRNA technologies. However, a 90% primary course coverage was achieved, as mRNA vaccines became the most trusted due to their demonstrated safety and efficacy, and with the mandating of vaccination through the COVID Pass; but the public relationship with vaccination remains complex. Participants also discussed the role of public trust in institutions in promoting vaccine uptake, especially among marginalised groups.

“We would like to see vaccine development for vaccines targeting more broad-based immunity for COVID-19, so we are better prepared for more variants in the future.” – Hanna Nohynek, THL Chief Physician, Finland, speaking in Plenary C on Revolutions in vaccination in the age of COVID-19



Vaccines specialist Hanna Nohynek speaks in Plenary C, from her perspective in her prominent role in Finland during the COVID-19 pandemic as the Chief Physician of the Institute for Health and Welfare (THL).

Participants had again the opportunity to learn more about scientific studies in the day's fireside and poster sessions, which focused on COVID-19, intervention and health promotion and antimicrobial resistance. At the surveillance poster tour, researchers presented various systems and programmes across Europe, including an evaluation and comparison of statistical algorithms for monitoring COVID-19 case and death trends in EU/EEA Member States.



Poster tours and Fireside sessions gave researchers and public health professionals an opportunity to share their work, take questions from the audience and make connections with other participants to explore future collaborations.

Plenty of activities took place during lunch, with a Vitamin Groove dance session giving people a chance to get out some energy, as well as video chat rooms on Swapcard for online attendees to meet and discuss the sessions of the day. There was an opportunity to view an additional format of abstract at ESCAIDE 2022, the online-only posters, which allowed for even more content to be shared than could be fit into sessions in the programme.

This year's Funding Initiative participants, six early-career abstract presenters who were supported by ECDC to attend in-person, gathered to meet and share their work. They gave presentations in Fireside sessions and Poster tours throughout the conference, on topics including, antimicrobial resistance, measles and the impacts of COVID-19 on cervical cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment.



The 2022 Funding Initiative participants – Demi Pagen, Famke Houben, Joana Moreira da Silva, Giulia Dallagiacomma, Jasper Van Heuverswyn and Kevin Blik Bueno – presented abstracts in Fireside sessions and Poster tours throughout the conference.

“The public has to understand that science is a process and does not offer absolute truths.” – Pampa García Molina, Head of Science Media Centre Spain, in the *Eurosurveillance* seminar on communicating science

The afternoon sessions kicked off with the 10th *Eurosurveillance* seminar on the possibilities and challenges in science communication, in the media and on social media, including in the context of increasing mis- and disinformation and how fast it spreads, and how algorithms are not built for positive community-building. Isabella Eckerle, a clinical virologist at the University of Geneva, spoke on her experiences communicating science on social media during the pandemic, while running a WHO reference laboratory for COVID-19 testing. Pampa García Molina described the development and work of the Science Media Centre Spain, in supporting journalists to better communicate science to the public. They also spoke about the difficulties for scientists find time alongside their research to communicate science, particular difficulties faced by women in these positions and the danger for scientists when they are cited incorrectly or in a misleading way.

Meanwhile, a side session held by MediPIET, an ECDC training programme, focused on the development and impact of new national field epidemiology training programmes (FETPs) in the European Neighbourhood regions. One takeaway from the session is that while brain drain can be a challenge for countries sending experts for training abroad, it can be seen as a gain for global health security if national experts return to their home countries.

The second day closing plenary session discussed misinformation, disinformation, infodemics, and the use of resilience approaches to promote health literacy and public trust and to respond to these issues.

Alma Tostmann, an epidemiologist at Radboud University Medical Centre, Netherlands, described how she took on the role during the COVID-19 pandemic to explain the epidemiological context in the Dutch media, while working in the infection prevention and control unit of a hospital. Her role allowed her to have scientific authority while remaining depoliticised, as she was not involved in decision-making and encouraged others in the public health community to participate more actively in communications.

Paediatrician Mihai Craiu talked about the challenging context in Romania for health communications, where there is lower vaccine uptake and significant brain drain of physicians. In Romania, many look to the internet for health information, where they find misinformation, so he developed a Facebook page to share concise and clear science, which gained a wide audience. He utilised this platform to communicate to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also highlighted that the public often trust most certain groups or institutions that you might not expect, such as the army, the church and sports people, so the public health community should work with these groups to engage them to help communicate health information.

Neville Calleja, Director at the Maltese Health Ministry, discussed his role in developing infodemic management strategies and training in Malta, the role of social media in public discourse, and how Malta's court were flooded by cases from vaccine sceptics. Speakers described various strategies for building trust, and emphasized the importance of having healthcare professionals communicating effectively with the public.

“Never raise your voice while debunking, do not go to the low levels of your challengers, they're not the people you are after. Inoculation on social media works. Don't feel like a voice in the desert. Speak to the silent comment-scrollers.” – Neville Calleja, Director of Health information and research at the Maltese Ministry for Health, speaking in Plenary D on the role the role of Public Health experts in managing an infodemic

In the closing wrap-up session, the panel of participants discussed how a key theme of the day was how public health professionals and researchers can better engage and communicate with the public to improve scientific literacy and the impact of public health responses.

In the evening, BarCamp returned with a packed audience in the room and people attending online. From the many suggestions of topics made by ESCAIDE participants, the highest voted were discussed, including how to ensure epidemiologists have enough “field” experience, how to retain staff in public health and provide enough recognition for their work, and how to transition from the COVID-19 acute emergency to more routine surveillance, while workloads remain high, discussing burnout and way to protect yourselves and teams. The audience contributed to a lively discussion and shared personal stories.



In the evening of Day 2, participants gathered for BarCamp to discuss topics suggested by the audience.



[See the ESCAIDE 2022 side events](#)



[ESCAIDE 2022 Vox Pop - Day Two - YouTube](#)

Friday 25 November

Day 3

The third day of ESCAIDE opened with this year's final plenary, which illustrated how data from electronic health records can contribute to communicable disease surveillance, how genome sequencing has contributed to our assessment and response activities relating to COVID-19.

Considering recent advances following the COVID-19 pandemic, speakers also discussed the implications for the future surveillance of acute respiratory infections. Silke Buda, the deputy head of the Respiratory Infections Unit at RKI, Germany, discussed sentinel ARI/SARI surveillance in Germany, where electronic health records are used in primary and secondary care, and data is collected through specific networks, anonymised and centralised. According to Buda, integrated surveillance allows for timely detection of trends in respiratory infections.

Søren Alexandersen, Executive Vice President for Diagnostic Preparedness at SSI, talked about COVID-19 sequencing in Denmark, large scale PCR testing and how PCR testing capacity is crucial to ensure efficient vaccination roll-out. Whole genome sequencing in Denmark allowed researchers to study human-to-mink transmission, identify outbreaks, perform contact tracing, and give forecasts on what variants would be dominant.

Prominent Spanish epidemiologist Fernando Simón described the ARI-SARI surveillance during the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain, and spoke about the importance of systematic collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of data for decision-making. Fernando stressed importance of simplifying surveillance systems and integrating clinical, laboratory and public records in the same system.

"In the past, taking 500 PCR tests was considered quite a lot. The COVID-19 pandemic was different. Danish testing initially started with 2000 samples/day quickly picking up the speed (90k-270k samples a day at maximum)." – Søren Alexandersen, Executive Vice President of Diagnostic Preparedness, Statens Serum Institut, Denmark, speaking in Plenary E on the COVID-19 pandemic as a surveillance game changer

At the end of the plenary, ECDC Director, Andrea Ammon, together with representatives from Spain including Fernando Simón (Ministry of Health), announced the successful bid from Spain, to host ESCAIDE 2023 in Barcelona. The conference will also travel to Warsaw, Poland in 2025 and Prague, Czechia in 2027, returning to Stockholm in intervening years.

"Spain is really committed with preparing ESCAIDE. In Spain we really believe in building the European public health community and we think that ESCAIDE is one of the best ways to do this." – Fernando Simón, Director of the Coordination Centre for Health Alerts and Emergencies of the Ministry of Health Council, on the announcement of the hosting of ESCAIDE 2023 in Barcelona



[Read more about ESCAIDE future hosting sites](#)

Lunchtime gave a chance to ask questions at info-stands of organisations attending ESCAIDE. There was a yoga session in the venue and a last opportunity to converse with other attendees in-person and on the online platform.

On another lunchtime side event, moderated by John Paget, from Nivel, the Netherlands Institute for Health Services Research (Nivel), speakers at the social sciences session discussed the use of social science methods to support prevention of control of infectious diseases in Europe and shared their experiences of specific projects. ECDC behavioural expert John Kinsman introduced the session by sharing ECDC findings on the geographical disparities in the EU in capacity in social and behavioural sciences. Danny de Vries from the Amsterdam Institute for Global Health and Development emphasised that while progress has been made over the past two years, more is needed to bring social and behavioural sciences more fully into the decision-making process.

Fireside sessions and poster tours included a mix of research on the COVID-19 pandemic, food- and waterborne disease and zoonoses outbreaks, surveillance, and late breakers. In the food- and waterborne diseases fireside session, two presentations were given, from the United Kingdom and Belgium, showing how they collaborated internationally to coordinate their investigation of a salmonella outbreak linked to chocolate products. One study at the poster tour on COVID-19 burden of disease investigated the effects of the pandemic on mental health, indicating that effects were more severe on younger people.



Abstract presenter Angela Rose (Epiconcept) presenting in a Poster tour covering vaccine effectiveness.

A screenshot of a video presentation. On the left, a slide titled 'Context' lists bullet points about SARS-CoV-2 infection in children in Italy. On the right, a small video window shows Alberto Mateo Urdiales speaking. To the far right, a chat window displays several questions from the audience.

Context

- SARS-CoV-2 infection usually mild in children, yet up to date, over 4,500 hospitalisations, 179 ICU admissions and 19 deaths in children aged 5-11 in Italy
- EMA approved the use of Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine in children aged 5-11 (with reduced dosage) in December 2021.
- Yet, up to now, only 38% of children have had at least one dose, compared to over 90% of those aged 12+

Alberto Mateo Urdiales

Chat

Emily Kruger
Question
Very interesting work, Alberto!
What variables did you adjust for and how did you choose these variables?

Natalie Fischer
Very interesting work Alberto!

Adam Mitchell
Question
What confounders did you adjust for in your models? Did they differ from the logistic model to the weighted model?

Caterina Marchi
Question
Very interesting study across Italy. Where there access differences between areas?

Maria Fournier
Great work Alberto thank you, why do you think you found this heterogeneity? Are there specific policies/schemes in these areas that are resulting in higher coverage?

Alberto Santos
Question
Scroll to bottom

Abstract presenter Alberto Mateo Urdiales (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Italy) presenting in a Fireside session on COVID-19 interventions and health promotion.

Towards the end of the day, ESCAIDE concluded with a wrap up session. Speakers agreed that ESCAIDE showed how much was learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes a deepened understanding the interdisciplinary nature of public health, possible improvements in data collection, the importance of collaboration, and how to communicate with the public. Panellists agreed on the value of the hybrid format for ESCAIDE which allowed for more interactive experiences both in-person and online, and are more accessible. Stine Nielsen, member of the ESCAIDE Scientific Committee, described ESCAIDE as a special place, and highlighted the value of allowing people to attend online for free.

"I joined online as I cannot easily travel with my young child. I suffered a little from "not in Stockholm syndrome", but it's wonderful to have this hybrid opportunity, and it has worked really well for me. I still feel I have been able to participate, with interactive sessions, and benefit from the learning." – Georgia Ladbury, Epidemiologist at Public Health Scotland, giving reflections on ESCAIDE 2022 as an online participant in the final wrap-up session



A panel of participants discuss their experience in the final wrap-up session and ECDC Director Andrea Ammon closes ESCAIDE 2022

The winners of the EAN photo contest and best oral presentation were announced in the awards ceremony. The winners were presentation "Wastewater surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 closely mirror incidence data: results from national surveillance data in Denmark, October 2021-May 2022" by Oliver McManus, and the picture by Marius Linkevicius, "Planet Measles".



Registered participants can access the [online platform and view all session recordings](#)



[Visit the ESCAIDE 2022 archive](#)

"We need to become more multi-disciplinary to embrace the One Health approach. We need more international cooperation, within and beyond the EU." – ECDC Director Andrea Ammon, closing ESCAIDE 2022

After three days packed with sessions and discussion, ECDC Director Andrea Ammon, closed ESCAIDE by highlighting how the pandemic changed the landscape in how we collect and analyse data, and how we communicate. She also emphasised the need to become more multidisciplinary and embrace the One Health approach, cooperate more internationally to conduct investigations together, and advocate for governments to invest to prepare for future pandemics.



Vox pop video – Day 3



[View ESCAIDE 2022 photos](#)

Engagement and social media

From early on Day 1, through to the end of Day 3, there was a brilliant atmosphere at the conference, with packed audiences at sessions and participants noticeably pleased to be meeting in-person again. The attendance and participation online were high throughout. Many questions and comments were sent by participants during sessions through the app.

Networking took place in-person, during the coffee breaks, at the end of sessions, at lunch, and in events such as the networking cocktail. Online, there were messages exchanged between participants, and lunchtime Talkspaces to continue discussions from sessions.

There was a buzz on social media around ESCAIDE, which could be seen on the Social Media wall displayed in the venue and online. It was great to see participants sharing their personal highlights, promoting their presentations and making connections.



[Check ESCAIDE 2022 Social media wall](#)

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the ESCAIDE 2022 Rapporteurs who worked hard throughout the conference to capture the content of sessions and lively discussions, which enabled us to produce this Highlights Report. We offer huge thanks to the session speakers, abstract presenters, moderators, Scientific Committee, side event organisers and info stand support, for your contributions to the diverse conference programme.

ESCAIDE is what it is because of the engagement of the audience – there were floods of questions and comments this year, from both the in-person and online audience. Thank you for your participation!

Feedback survey

The feedback survey closed on 7 December. Thank you to all who contributed, we have reviewed your responses and appreciate the time taken to give specific feedback. This has helped us to understand the experience of ESCAIDE 2022 of attendees, speakers, presenters, moderators and organisers, and online and in-person attendees.

Over 750 responses were submitted, with overwhelmingly positive feedback – 94% of respondents indicated they were 'extremely' or 'very much' satisfied with the event. Respondents commented that it was an engaging and interactive event with high quality speakers and relevant discussions. Many appreciated that the event was held in hybrid, and it was found to be well implemented and resulted in a good experience for in-person and online attendees. We also took note on suggested areas of improvement, including the Poster tour format, which was not well received by some online participants, for COVID-19 to be less dominant in the programme, and for more time to be allocated to discussions and Q&A. You can read the full analysis of the results in the evaluation report.



[Read the ESCAIDE 2022 evaluation report](#)

Stay tuned and get involved in ESCAIDE 2023!

Follow @ESCAIDE on social media and check out the website to stay up to date with news and announcements throughout the year.

Subscribe to ESCAIDE newsletter by sending an email to escaide.conference@ecdc.europa.eu.

Submissions for abstracts to ESCAIDE 2023 will be opened again in the spring.

See you at ESCAIDE 2023! Barcelona and online, 22-24 November