

ESCAIDE

European Scientific Conference
on Applied Infectious Disease Epidemiology
16-19 November 2021

ESCAIDE 2021 Summary report | 14 December 2021

A look back at ESCAIDE 2021

From 16 to 19 November, members of the infectious disease public health community came together to discuss the latest scientific research and challenges in the field. We thank everyone who attended and contributed to making ESCAIDE 2021 the biggest edition yet. Online for the second year, we saw the impact this has on the accessibility of the event, with over 3000 registrations and about 2500 active participants.

ESCAIDE 2021 registered participants indicated they were from 29 countries inside EU/EEA (2076) and from 94 countries outside EU/EEA (965). Similarly to last year, when ESCAIDE went online for the first time, this is again an indication that the online format has created more opportunities for attendance for participants who might not attend in normal circumstances due to costs, travel, etc.

"It is now more important than ever to host events like ESCAIDE to share experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, to talk about the public health challenges and learn from each other" – Andrea Ammon, ECDC Director, opening the first day of ESCAIDE 2021

Highlights of the conference

ESCAIDE 2021 offered more than 100 sessions, with more than 200 speakers, resulting in over 40 hours of content. Recordings of all sessions and the abstract pitches and poster exhibition are available on the ESCAIDE 2021 web and mobile apps (hosted by Swapcard) until the end of December.

Many of the plenaries, side events and abstract presentations focused on the COVID-19 pandemic – exploring aspects including surveillance, preparedness, modelling, digital health and inequalities – and how to translate lessons learned into public health actions that, going forward, could enable us to respond with greater speed and effectiveness to the pandemic and other communicable disease threats. There was also a balance of sessions on areas of the field such as antimicrobial resistance and other infectious diseases, providing a platform to allow continual discussion of research, despite the ongoing pandemic.

Plenary sessions

Prominent, multi-disciplinary speakers from across Europe and the world contributed to the plenary sessions, put together by the ESCAIDE Scientific Committee to provide a platform to discuss and debate topics with significant current importance in infectious disease public health.



Speakers in Plenary A and Plenary B

"A key question is how to counter misinformation. Healthy scepticism is a fundamental part of democracy – but listen to understand. When we have understood the root causes – only then we can develop inventories and target our interventions." – Peter Piot, Special Advisor on COVID-19 to the European Commission, speaking in Plenary A on tackling distrust and misinformation in science during health crises to improve public support for interventions.

The keynote plenary of ESCAIDE 2021 was opened by Professor Peter Piot, a renowned figure in global and public health. He discussed his experience of handling and communicating uncertainty, complexity, and rapidly changing facts in his role as Special Advisor on COVID-19 to the President of the European Commission. Peter Piot drew on his experiences of tackling misinformation in other epidemics, such as HIV. He noted that never before has science been so prominent in decision-making and that trust in scientists is high – while we have this platform, we must take this opportunity to counter misinformation and distrust. The panelists then brought in their perspectives.

This year, advances in mathematical modelling and digital health technologies were brought to the forefront of conversations at ESCAIDE, with experts sharing their experience and challenges, allowing the community to make full use of these innovations to see us into a future where we maximise their potential to improve public health.

In the session on mathematical modelling of infectious diseases, long standing experts in the field discussed the increased recognition of modelling during the pandemic, the advances that have taken place in the field, what models can and can't do and how to communicate this.

In the plenary on digital health, experts presented apps and platforms developed for digital COVID-19 contact tracing in Norway, Malta and Israel, and how the lessons learned can be taken forward and applied to other infectious diseases. The message was clear: these technologies exist in the here and now, so what is important is building public trust to ensure their potential is reached in public health.



Speakers in Plenary C and Plenary D

In the final plenary on inequality in the COVID-19 pandemic, inequalities exposed during, and further deepened by, the pandemic were discussed across a broad scale – from within one city, to across the world. Speakers reflected on the importance of collecting the right data to gauge a better understanding of health inequalities. They discussed how involving communities in decision-making not only improves engagement with interventions such as vaccination campaigns, but also means decisions are made that better tackle the root of inequalities to improve health outcomes. The lack of commitment to a global approach to tackle the pandemic by governments in high-income countries, and how this is not only an immoral but also ineffective route out of the pandemic, was also highlighted.

Throughout these sessions there was fantastic engagement from the audience, with questions and comments shared in the live discussion box.

"We need to engage with target groups and strengthen cultural competence resources, so that all communities can benefit from any measure we take and can also see their own communities reflected in things we publish and decide." – Kevin Fenton, Regional Public Health Director for London, speaking in Plenary D on how we can work with communities to better tackle inequities in the COVID-19 pandemic and future health responses.

European Antibiotic Awareness Day (EAAD) event

The European Antibiotic Awareness Day was launched with a dynamic event, which was opened by Andrea Ammon, Sandra Gallina from DG SANTE and Hans Kluge from WHO Europe, who each stressed the importance of decisive and immediate action to tackle rising antimicrobial resistance, in Europe and across the world, even as the coronavirus pandemic continues to place a huge pressure on public health systems.

This was followed by a panel discussion from key experts, who presented new data from ECDC and discussed the continual need to increase awareness among medical professionals, policy makers and the public. The campaign continued online – you can [read more here](#).



Speakers in the European Antibiotic Awareness Day event

"Antimicrobial resistance will have the same impact and cost as much, if not even more, as COVID-19 and will be an annual fight." – Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, speaking at the European Antibiotic Awareness Day event on the potential impact of AMR

Eurosurveillance seminar

On the final day of ESCAIDE, *Eurosurveillance* celebrated their 25th anniversary with a seminar focused on examples of the interplay between generating hypotheses from observation, researching associated virological and immunological mechanisms, and translating the knowledge gained into public health interventions. Andrea Ammon, ECDC Director and Ines Steffens, *Eurosurveillance* Editor-in-Chief, gave opening reflections on the past, present and future of the journal.

The three cutting edge papers presented covered influenza, measles and COVID-19 respectively, through a mix of epidemiological, virological, immunological and public health policy perspectives. Intense debates and a flurry of questions came from the comments section for each of the three papers, as the novel insights being presented on infectious disease epidemics are directly relevant to the reality that we are all currently living with.



Speakers and presentations at the *Eurosurveillance* seminar

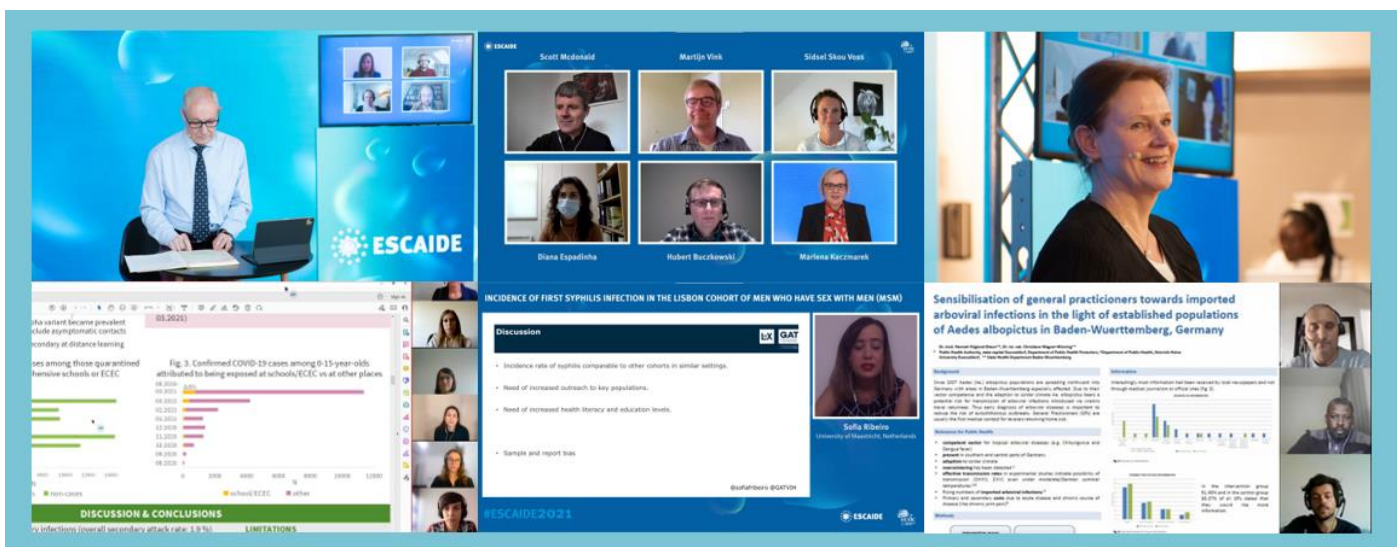
"The strong and growing network of contributors not only from across Europe, but really beyond, has been and hopefully will remain a strength of the journal." – Andrea Ammon, ECDC Director, on the 25th anniversary of *Eurosurveillance*

Abstract sessions

In 2021, 316 abstracts were submitted to ESCAIDE and reviewed by a group of reviewers and the Scientific Committee. From those selected (165), 112 posters were presented across 22 poster tour sessions and 53 abstract pitches were presented at 11 fireside sessions, representing the latest in cutting-edge research from a broad spectrum of fields. We would like to extend our thanks to all presenters and moderators, and to the session participants for their constructive questions.

The ESCAIDE 2021 [abstract book](#) is available on the conference website.

During the conference you were invited to vote on the best poster or oral abstract presentation and the winners were announced in the closing ceremony. The winning poster was presented in a poster tour on surveillance of respiratory viruses by Heather Mutch, Public Health Scotland, who discussed *Enhanced surveillance of COVID-19 in secondary care in Europe: a tale of two waves*. The winning abstract pitch was presented in a fireside session on COVID-19 field epidemiology by Ryszhan Taubayeva, US CDC Central Asia Field Epidemiology Training Programme, Kazakhstan, who discussed *Factors associated with an outbreak of COVID-19 in oilfield workers, Kazakhstan, June-September 2020*. We offer our congratulations to the winners and to all abstract presenters at ESCAIDE 2021 – we hope this provided a valuable opportunity to share your research. You can also [read winners' interviews](#) of the audience vote for best abstract pitch and poster presentation at ESCAIDE 2021.



Presenters, moderators and presentations from abstract sessions at ESCAIDE 2021

Side events

Alongside a packed scientific programme, many side-events were hosted at ESCAIDE this year. The EPIET Alumni Network hosted a session discussing opportunities for career development for conference attendees and a BarCamp session. ECDC held a session to share lessons learned in gathering information on non-pharmaceutical interventions and another one on the impact of the MediPIET programme in neighbourhood countries. The SONAR-Global project shared results on using social science methods for infectious disease prevention and control. These were very well attended and engaged with by attendees at ESCAIDE 2021!



Discussions at side events at ESCAIDE

+2700 questions and comments

There was fantastic engagement on our online platform during the conference, with many questions asked during sessions and messages exchanged between participants. We were pleased that the dynamic exchange of ideas, support and debate could still take place in the online environment. This makes ESCAIDE what it is, so thank you for your contributions to the conference!



Comments made in the live discussion box during sessions at ESCAIDE

#ESCAIDE2021 on social media

Our Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn were flooded with tweets from participants, presenters, moderators, speakers, and organisers who publicised events, commented on research and created an online buzz about ESCAIDE. It was great to hear directly from the audience and see peer support within the infectious disease community!



Posts on Twitter and Facebook from ESCAIDE attendees, speakers and organisers

Survey and looking towards the next ESCAIDE

The ESCAIDE 2021 Feedback Survey has closed on 30 November. 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 2021 of attendees, speakers, presenters, moderators and organisers.

From the 558 respondents, 93% indicated they were “very” or “extremely” satisfied with the event. The large majority found the conference to have quality (93%) and relevant for their working practice (93%) – with high quality speakers and content of relevance in the field. There was keen interest in an in-person aspect to return (52%).

We also took notes of areas for improvement, including the discussion time, networking opportunities offered and a few aspects of the online platform. As it is very likely that there will be an online aspect in future conferences, these comments will help us to continue to shape and improve the online experience.

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	Score
Quality	2 0.4%	2 0.4%	20 3.6%	170 30.5%	364 65.2%	4.6
Relevance	1 0.2%	1 0.2%	28 5.0%	118 21.2%	410 73.5%	4.7
Format	4 0.7%	18 3.2%	66 11.8%	180 32.3%	290 52%	4.3
Duration (4 days)	2 0.4%	21 3.8%	78 14%	180 32.3%	277 49.6%	4.3
Online implementation	6 1.1%	9 1.6%	53 9.5%	168 30.1%	322 57.7%	4.4
Online platform (Swapcard)	6 1.1%	8 1.4%	68 12.2%	170 30.5%	306 54.8%	4.4
Organisation/organisers	3 0.5%	3 0.5%	25 4.5%	137 24.6%	390 69.9%	4.6



Missed out on content?

You can access all session recordings, abstract pitches, posters and info stands, and view and contact other participants, on the Swapcard platform until the end of December.

The [ESCAIDE 2021 archive page](#) on our website hosts all content from this year’s conference, including the daily summaries. Recordings of the plenaries and side events will also be available here and on the [ECDC YouTube channel](#).

Stay tuned!

So that’s all for 2021! Follow @ESCAIDE on social media and check out the [website](#) to stay up to date with news and announcements throughout the year, including dates for ESCAIDE 2022 and abstract submissions.

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

