



co-funded by the EU



share and move to face nasty bugs

Citizens Have Their Say on Epidemic and Pandemic Threats - Results of a EU-funded citizen consultation -

- For the first time, EU citizens were involved in discussing societal issues related to epidemics and pandemics in eight European countries. **This is not a poll, but an innovative method of engaging citizens on complex issues, providing them with information before asking questions.**
- More than 82% of the informed, consulted citizens, consider that public services such as schools and offices should be closed in case of a pandemic such as Zika or Ebola.
- Only 29% of the consulted citizens are satisfied with the information from public health authorities during epidemic threats in recent years
- The most trusted sources of information for the citizens during a pandemic outbreak are the general practitioners (74% of trust), European health authorities (70%) and national health authorities (70%). The least trusted are newspapers (48%), the Internet (49%) and TV (52%).

Brussels, 26th April 2017 --- The ASSET project, *Action plan in Science in Society in Epidemics and Total pandemics*, presented today its Policy Report at the European Parliament. The EU-funded project has performed **a citizen consultation in eight different European countries to engage citizens in preparedness and response towards crises caused by emerging outbreaks, epidemics, and pandemics**. The countries are: Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Norway and Switzerland.

The results from the citizen consultation shows a clear consensus among the majority of the 400 people who participated in the consultations, in terms of transparency and public health safety during an emerging outbreak. ASSET also presented today policy recommendations, to politicians and decision-makers across Europe, based on **citizen input**. Some of the suggestions are: clearer risk communication to restore trust in society; public health interests being given priority over individual freedom in an emergency situation; and public health authorities devoting more resources to collecting citizen's input on policies regarding epidemic preparedness and response.

Public health safety is essential in case of an infection threat

According to the citizen consultation results, more than 82% of consulted citizens consider that public services, such as kindergartens, schools, and offices, should be closed in case of a pandemic. Denmark leads this question with 93%, while France is the least determinant, with only 60%.

Previous outbreaks such as 2009 A(H1N1) pandemic flu, Ebola and Zika have had an effect on large international events. The citizen consultation included a question in this regard. 69% of the consulted European citizens think that large international events, such as the Olympic games, should be cancelled during a similar outbreak.

It is also relevant to highlight the consensus about mandatory flu vaccination for healthcare workers in case of a pandemic or epidemic risk. 85% of the European consulted citizens said that public health authorities should be mandatory for every single health professional.

www.asset-scienceinsociety.eu



co-funded by the EU



share and move to face nasty bugs

Communication between citizens and public health authorities should be improved

Risk and crisis communication channels are important for European citizens. Only 29% of consulted citizens are satisfied with the information from public health authorities during epidemic threats like Zika in recent years. The consultation reveals two exceptions: Denmark with 48% and Norway with 64% of satisfied citizens.

In case of a pandemic outbreak, citizens considered that the most important piece of information from the public health authorities is what to do (67%), and secondly, routes of transmission (19%). Authorities should use this piece of information in their future communications strategy during a outbreak.

The citizens believe that honesty and good communication can increase public trust (no matter how bad the situation is), and that it is their right to know and understand the situation accurately. They can even accept uncertainty, if this is well explained.

The general practitioner is still the preferred source of information

Another theme addressed in citizen consultations has been the sources that the European citizens used to acquire knowledge and their most trusted sources of information on the recent Zika epidemic.

The general results show a clear preference for the general practitioner as source of information. However, we observe a different perception of the Internet as source of information in the north of Europe (Ireland, Denmark and Norway). In these countries, we see how the Internet is playing an important role. 31% of the people prefer the Internet, versus 34% that prefer information coming from the general practitioner in Denmark, 37% versus 25% in Ireland, and 42% versus 42% in Norway.

In terms of sources of information, the most trusted for the citizens are the general practitioner (74% of trust), European health authorities (70%) and national health authorities (70%). The sources that are the least trusted are newspapers (48%), the Internet (49%) and TV (52%), during a case of pandemic.

All the data, by country, can be examined at this [web tool](#) on the ASSET website.

You have access to the Policy Report [here](#).

About ASSET Citizen Consultation:

The citizen consultation was performed by the Danish Board of Technology inspired by the [WWWViews method](#). More than 50 citizens in each of the eight countries participated in the consultation. All of them received the same information material in advance and on the day of the meeting, which takes place with the same identical design, at the same time, in different countries.

Prior to the citizen consultations, participants received balanced information from a 20-page booklet written by the Danish Board of Technology in close collaboration with the ASSET project partners. The booklet provided basic information about the controversies on pandemic preparedness and response, and different points of view on how to deal with it.

www.asset-scienceinsociety.eu



co-funded by the EU



share and move to face nasty bugs

Information videos (each 4-10 minutes long) were made by the Danish research and science communication company GoVisual for the four closed themes, repeating the most essential information available in the booklet and ensuring that all citizens would participate in the meetings with the necessary information. All information material was translated into local languages.

About the ASSET project:

ASSET (Action plan in Science in Society in Epidemics and Total pandemics), is a European Union co-funded transdisciplinary, Mobilisation and Mutual Learning Action Plan project being executed by 14 consortium partners from 11 countries involving 70 researchers during 2014 to 2017.

It serves as bridge between stakeholders, experts, public health authorities, and the general public, in order to encourage improved dialogue and enhance mobilisation in case of infectious threats.

ASSET combines public health, vaccine and epidemiological research, social and political sciences, law and ethics, gender studies, science communication, and media, in order to develop an integrated, transdisciplinary, strategy for pandemic and epidemic preparedness at local, national, and international levels.

PRESS CONTACTS:

Roberta Villa

Communications Manager

Tel: 0039 3398182219

Email: villa@zadig.it

Francisco Milán

Communications Manager

Tel: 0032 483 70 99 95 / 0034 629 53 94 56

Email: Francisco.milan@shepard-fox.com