



share and move to face nasty bugs

## ENJOY READING THE ASSET NEWSLETTER

Providing you with news on Responsible Research and Innovation in the field of antiviral drugs and vaccines, in the framework of the ASSET project!

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## EVENTS & NEWS

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the ASSET Summer School 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> June 2016 Roma, Italy

The aim of our annual Summer Schools is to establish an interactive learning space for professionals involved in Science in Society (SiS) related issues in Pandemics; share and exchange issues related to conducting and communicating research in SiS according to a transdisciplinary perspective, ranging from public health to social science and communication; address and critically discuss current discourses on research methodologies and findings as well as on practice-based cases.

Look at the 1<sup>st</sup> course [report](#) of the 2015 edition

The [Verbier Festival](#), the most famous classical music international event in **Switzerland**, will host an ASSET event on **July 30<sup>th</sup> 2016**, a public workshop dedicated to Science and Music. Moreover, a "Conference&concert" open to the general public will be organized alternating talks about epidemics/infectious diseases and a piano concert by an international artist.

**ASSET High Level Policy Forum** - brings together selected European policy-makers at regional, national and EU levels, key decision makers in health agencies, the pharmaceutical industry, and civil society organisations, in a unique and interactive dialogue to promote on-going reflection on EU strategic priorities about pandemics.

The second meeting was organized in Copenhagen 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Here is the detailed [agenda](#)

Minutes from the second meeting coming soon !

Have a look at the **ASSET Pandemic Preparedness and [Response Bulletin "Share and move"](#)** an updating tool on policy initiatives concerning pandemics and related crisis management, developed at local, national and international levels.

## EDITORIAL – Bring some “Science in society” themes into the public debate on epidemic preparedness and

To build a more resilient society able to tackle epidemics and pandemics, it is of paramount importance to create conditions of co-operation between stakeholders, decision makers, health professionals, scientists and the citizens. For that purpose, during the last few years, the European Commission has promoted a “Science **with** and **for** Society” approach.

Consequently, a particular project approach called the Mobilization and Mutual Learning Action Plan (MMLAP) was promoted by the European Commission to create potentially useful co-operation conditions between the scientific community, policymakers, citizens and their stakeholders.

**ASSET Action Plan Handbook** is a concise and practical executive manual, which includes detailed description and timetable of Mobilisation and Mutual Learning actions. Its main objective is to explain clearly and practically how ASSET project could contribute to bring some “Science in Society themes” (i.e. Crisis Participatory Governance, ethical and gender issues, transparency, and so on) into the public debate on pandemic and epidemic preparedness and response.

The action plan is composed of action steps and includes a specific plan on competence development aimed at enhancing awareness, knowledge, commitment and capacity necessary to incorporate gender perspectives, ethical considerations, science communication, citizens participation, in flu pandemic preparedness strategies and actions.

Action plan handbook is based on the objectives, strategies and actions outlined by the “**ASSET Strategic Plan**” and by the “**Roadmap towards responsible and open, citizens-driven research and innovation on vaccines and antiviral drugs**”. All of these three tasks take advantage of the capacity building activities of “Dialogue and participation” (WP1) and are based on the results of “Study and Analysis” (WP2). Tools mentioned in this plan will be further described in the “**ASSET toolbox**”.

The Action plan coordinates the scheduled activities of citizens’ consultation (WP4), mobilization and mutual learning (WP5), policy watch (WP6) and communication (WP7), in order to improve their efficacy and effectiveness under the monitoring of internal and external evaluation (WP8), with some proposals for a legacy of ASSET project (WP9).





## FOCUS: Industry in the process of preparedness and response to epidemic & pandemics

**The example of “A catalogue of good practice standards in RRI” – RRI Tools European project (FP7)**

This catalogue constitutes one of the tools for the toolkit that RRI Tools is developing. The goal of the catalogue to instruct stakeholders in research and innovation (R&I) provided us with part of the rationale for including practices in this catalogue. That is to say, it could be argued, when looked at from the conceptualization of RRI developed in the RRI Tools project that many of the practices in this catalogue could still be improved upon. Nevertheless, they all deserve their place in this catalogue insofar as they provide inspiration to others who work in research and innovation on how to put into practice one or more aspects vital to RRI. Aspects that matter in this regard are rather wide-ranging. They include the requirements that R&I processes should fulfil to promote responsibility, various types of outcomes characteristic of responsible research and innovation, the policy agendas that the European Commission has identified (Ethics, Gender, Governance, Open Access, Public Engagement, and Science Education), and the Grand Challenges that have likewise been singled out by the European Commission (in short, Health, Food security, Energy, Transport, Climate, Europe in a changing world and Security).

ASSET wants to communicate and mobilise **all the actors** involved in the processes of preparedness and response to epidemic and pandemics, but language, tools and contents of these actions **need to be diverse**. We have defined six groups of possible stakeholders, even if some of them include different actors with different roles in epidemics and pandemics. An actor may be included in more than one group, as well. However, here we are concerned with the groups, and not individual actors.

**Pharmaceutical industry** is an important stakeholder in the management of an infectious crisis. Especially in a historical phase when public research funding is increasingly being cut by governments because of scarcity of resources, the role of private companies is the key not only for producing and supplying, but also for developing new antivirals and vaccines.

Modern technologies, such as reverse vaccinology, could further accelerate the process in case of an emerging virus, when time is the key for efficacy and effectiveness of vaccination. In 2009, for example, vaccines could be supplied only after the peak of the pandemic, making them less useful. Now, it would be easier to have them in a shorter time.

**Clear and transparent agreements** with big firms currently working on vaccines are therefore essentials for WHO, but should also be signed by any country. A coordinated effort by all EU Member states, with a common negotiation, could obtain better conditions in terms of costs and flexibility.

Since the public always considers relationships between big pharma and public health authorities with suspect, **a strict policy on potential conflicts of interests** should be developed and transparency should be always pursued.

At last, in a Science-with-and-for-society perspective, along with pharma industry, also **diagnostics sector, airlines, farming, livestock, and many other economic activities** could be possibly impacted in different ways and cases by an infectious outbreak and should be therefore addressed in complete and integrated preparedness plans.





## BEYOND THE ASSET PROJECT

### *Zika, the burden of uncertainty*

R. Villa. *Clin Ter* 2016; 167 (1):7-9.

In the first phases of an infectious outbreak, health authorities have to face the challenge of communicating uncertainty. Just when the attention of the public is at the top, information about what is going on is usually still missing. This is the case of Zika crisis in Latin America, where an association with microcephaly in newborns and neurological complications have been described, but not yet confirmed. Despite this, and even if the risk would be mainly limited to pregnant women, Zika threat is perceived by the general public as greater than others, such as those from dengue or flu. Some peculiarities of this outbreak explain such a gap between real and perceived risk. Nevertheless, in such a situation, WHO and other health authorities have the duty to act out of an abundance of caution, aware of the lose-lose game they are going through: if they raise alarm, and this subsided, they could be accused to fuel people's fears because of economic interests, as it happened in 2009 A (H1N1) pandemic; if they underestimate the threat, they could find themselves in front of a global tragedy.

*More information here*

## ASSET PROGRESS: CREATION OF CONCRETE RRI TOOLS

### Strategic plan lines of actions:

The ASSET partners implemented an extensive and inclusive process to develop a strategic plan aimed to outline in the field of Pandemics or Infectious Emergencies the priorities for the Mobilisation and Mutual Learning Plan of Action following 6 main cross cutting themes indicated by the RRI. For the aspects considered as priority, a strategy action line has been consequently developed:

- Improving **governance** to increase trust between policy makers, the media, and the public
- Engaging the **research community** with the **public** and other stakeholders to establish priorities based on appropriate values, and to provide open and understandable access to scientific outcomes
- Increasing influenza pandemic **awareness** among healthcare workers, and among the broader public, especially high-risk groups
- Engaging the public, policy makers, and other stakeholders to promote **ethical best practices** in the event of public health emergencies, balancing fundamental personal rights, duties and responsibilities, societal issues and priorities, and political considerations
- **Improving vaccination rates** among women, and better representing women in research and clinical trials
- Promoting policies across Europe to coordinate and **standardize** research into and **response to intentionally caused outbreaks**, engaging the public to develop approaches that balance security, personal freedom, and community perceptions and priorities.

A set of relevant tools (toolbox) is being developed, including standard operating procedures (SOPs), checklists, templates, detailing the processes described in the Action Plan Handbook.

The toolbox will be available soon.

Give us your opinion on the RRI Newsletter to improve it:

*Is it bringing to you useful information about RRI?*

*What would you like to add or modify?*

*Visit the [ASSET website](#) to discover more about the activities of the project!*



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