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# A RESOURCE IN CASE OF INFECTIOUS THREATS



co-funded by the EU

ASSET project offers Public Health Authorities its research, expertise and tools to consider Science-in-Society issues in epidemic and pandemic preparedness plans, as requested by CE Decision 1082/2013/EU.

It can be a bridge between stakeholders, public health authorities and the general public, also through social media, in order to encourage listening, improve dialogue, facilitate mutual learning and enhance mobilization in case of an infectious threat.



The experience of 2009 A(H1N1) pandemic showed that, despite the efforts made after SARS and bird flu crises, preparedness to epidemic and pandemic threats in European member states was not completely adequate yet.

Preparedness plans lacked flexibility and did not take into account the growing role of social media in spreading both information and misinformation.

Gaps in communication among different stakeholders, through media to the general public and even within national health systems and supranational health organizations contributed, along with other factors, to the creation of a dangerous lack of trust, still persisting nowadays.

## ASSET project

The “main challenge was in dealing with the perception and communication of risks. In future, those involved in risk communication need to develop ways of better involving the scientific community and civil society”\*.

This is exactly the final aim of ASSET (Action plan in Science in Society in Epidemics and Total pandemics), a EU funded, 48 month Mobilisation and Mutual Learning Action Plan (MMLAP) project. It 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, regional and national levels.


Such a strategy, that will be resumed into the ASSET Action Plan, cannot be adequately defined without a cooperation and an exchange of views with public health authorities.

\*European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The 2009 A(H1N1) pandemic in Europe. Stockholm: ECDC; 2010.

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ASSET will listen to public health authorities in order to understand their research needs and to know about real challenges emerging on the field.

On the other hand, it can offer different and new perspectives on the issue.



### CE Decision 1082/2013/EU

According to CE Decision 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border threats to health, “inconsistent or confusing communication with the public and stakeholders such as healthcare professionals can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the response from a public health perspective as well as on economic operators”.

According to the decision, every three years all Member States must provide the Commission with an update on the latest situation with regard to their preparedness and response planning at national level, in an intersectoral dimension.

ASSET project provides **research, experiences, proposals and tools** that could be useful to incorporate Science-in-Society issues into these plans.

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ASSET research on communication and other Science-in-Society issues is available to public health authorities, media and other stakeholders involved in infectious outbreak-related emergencies.

ASSET takes up the torch from [TELL ME](http://www.tellmeproject.eu/) (Transparent communication in Epidemics project: Learning Lessons from experience, delivering effective Messages, providing Evidence). TELL ME was a 36 month EU co-funded collaborative project, which aimed to provide evidence and to develop models for improved risk communication during infectious disease crises.

<http://www.tellmeproject.eu/>

Both projects focus on communication, notably by new social media, and explore ethics and human rights in infectious outbreaks, including gender issues.

As the ebola crisis has recently shown, these factors, such as those related to stigma and discrimination, need to be considered when preparing national and transnational emergency plans for infectious threats, not only as a matter of principle, but also because they can have a great impact on the spread of the disease.

## ASSET project



Related documents are available which could be included, kept in account or give some suggestions in drawing preparedness plans:


## TELL ME main documents

- [Population behaviour in epidemics](#)
- [Components of outbreak communication](#)
- [Vaccine acceptance/refusal](#)
- [New social media](#)
- [Narratives and urban myths](#)
- [Human rights, stigmatisation and risk of discrimination](#)

## ASSET main documents

- [Governance](#)
- [Crisis participatory governance](#)
- [Ethics, law and fundamental rights](#)
- [Gender issues](#)
- [Intentionally caused outbreaks](#)
- [Unsolved scientific questions on epidemics and pandemics](#)





Communication studies have made clear that risk and/or outbreak communication is not only about providing information on the disease and on how to face it. A one-way top-down communication has proved to be ineffective, prone to create untrust and let rumours going on.

Therefore, public health authorities need a two-way communication with all the different stakeholders and the general public, listening to their beliefs, perceptions and attitudes before conveying them any message.

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## For this purpose, ASSET can provide:

- An algorithm developed between TELL ME and ASSET projects, which allows an innovative way of Twitter analysis, in order to identify different categories of “influencers”. This was included among the most interesting outcomes of European research in ebola crisis. ASSET is now ready to use it, with appropriate keywords, on the issues related to the project.

- The results of ASSET project transnational citizens’ consultations. These will be held with simultaneous national face-to-face 1-day meetings with a web-based framework for transnational comparison of the national results. The method delivers a transnational overview of how citizens in the involved countries answer a set of pre-defined questions, and which messages they want themselves to send to policy-makers. Citizen meetings with around 50 people each will be held in

8 of the partner countries (Denmark, Italy, Ireland, Switzerland, France, Bulgaria, Romania, Norway).

[Suggestions by the Health Security Committee and by national public health authorities for issues to be dealt with and questions to be asked within such consultations are very welcome in this phase.](#)

- Other activities within the project aim to involve stakeholders and the general public through different interventions in schools, cultural events and so on.

At the end of the project, all the results of this dialogue will be shared, providing useful information about perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of European citizens towards infectious outbreaks emergencies, antivirals and vaccines.



While carrying on its work, ASSET keeps on disseminating TELL ME products, which are:

- [A new framework model for risk communication](#)
- [A communication practical guide](#)
- [A proposal for a new pandemic threat index](#)
- [Two online courses for primary care staff](#). One is about ebola virus disease, the other about seasonal flu and emerging infectious threats. Both focus on the risk of stigma and on counselling (i.e. in addressing vaccine hesitancy).

The first product of ASSET is its website: on a regular basis it provides features and useful resources. The website is also a tool for discussing a common strategy with stakeholders and other EU funded projects in Science-in-Society issues.

Moreover, ASSET is preparing a mailing list of the main stakeholders in the field of risk communication and infectious outbreaks.

A Roadmap to open and responsible research and innovation in pandemics will soon introduce an Action Plan handbook, for all the stakeholders involved in the issue.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ASSET could provide public health authorities with resources, suggestions and tools about Science-in-Society issues, which could help them in drawing and reviewing national and transnational pandemic and epidemic preparedness plans.

It also makes available a qualified and diverse network of experts in disaster management, public health and risk communication, some of whom have already cooperated within TELL ME project.

Public health authorities are asked to give their advice on ASSET work and further Science-in-Society issues. On these themes ASSET could detect and monitor the public opinion, both through citizens' consultations and the social media.

In this way, ASSET project, mainly through its website, could act as a means of communication and a platform of discussion among different stakeholders, the general public and other projects related to Science-in-Society, MMLAP and/or infectious threats.

[www.asset-scienceinsociety.eu](http://www.asset-scienceinsociety.eu)



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