



ESCAIDE 2024 Highlights Report

A look back on the conference

SUMMARY

For the third consecutive year, ESCAIDE was held as a hybrid event, bringing people together in person and continuing to provide online access. Here, we talk you through the sessions and discussions across the three days of the conference, which took place from 20 to 22 November, in Stockholm.

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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 mission 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, mathematical modellers, statisticians, social scientists, policymakers and others.

It has been held as an in-person conference since 2007, 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.

In 2022 and 2023, ESCAIDE was held as a hybrid event, bringing people back together again in-person, but continuing to provide online access. ESCAIDE 2024 similarly took place as a hybrid event, hosted in Stockholm and online.



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ECDC Director, Pamela Rendi-Wagner, opening ESCAIDE 2024.

ESCAIDE 2024 hybrid **20-22 November, in Stockholm and online**

ESCAIDE 2024 had almost 750 participants gathering in-person across the three days at Münchenbryggeriet, in Stockholm, Sweden, and over 4 300 people registering to join online. ESCAIDE 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 ESCAIDE this year remained high, and that, after the success of ESCAIDE 2022 and ESCAIDE 2023, conducting the conference in a hybrid mode allowed the larger audience that was 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.

In total, 122 countries were represented at ESCAIDE 2024. In-person participants came from 54 countries (27 EU/EEA countries and 27 outside EU/EEA), and online participants came from 120 countries (29 EU/EEA countries and 91 outside EU/EEA).

The programme included five Plenaries, 12 Fireside sessions, 24 Poster tours, side events, info stands and many other activities. For many, this was the chance to reconnect and network with colleagues, to take the time to learn from one another's work, and exchange experiences from the past year. The conference allowed for meaningful discussions to take place on topics directly related to infectious disease epidemiology, but also on the camaraderie and wellbeing of the public health workforce.

Read on to see the highlights of the events and discussions across the three days of ESCAIDE 2024.

Wednesday 20 November Day 1

The first day of ESCAIDE started with an opening ceremony featuring remarks by ECDC Director Pamela Rendi-Wagner and ECDC Chief Scientist Piotr Kramarz. In her speech, Dr. Rendi-Wagner emphasised the importance of prevention, trust in public health institutions, and communicating effectively with a broader audience.

This was followed by the first plenary session of the conference, on the role of prevention vs. cure in public health. Keynote speaker Chris Dye, Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Oxford, drew insights from across disciplines to highlight the importance of prevention, and how to better prioritise it. According to Dye, there is a reluctance to spend money on prevention, and there needs to be a realignment of incentives to shift policy away from healthcare, and focus instead on health.



Plenary A was chaired by Scientific Committee members Jet de Valk (Santé Publique France) and Kateřina Šédová (Loono, Czechia).

“A lot of prevention happens outside the health sector, which highlights that we need to work closer with other sectors.”— Chris Dye, Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Oxford, speaking in Plenary A

In keeping with the theme of the first plenary, the session was followed by the launch of ECDC’s Community of Practice on prevention: the Lighthouse. Scientific Committee member and ECDC expert on prevention, John Kinsman, introduced this as an online collaboration space where professionals working in the prevention of infectious diseases come together, driven by the shared goal of integrating social and behavioural sciences in their public health work, and invited ESCAIDE participants to get involved.



Fireside sessions were composed of 7-minute oral presentations on a specific topic, followed by a Q&A, moderated by an expert in that field.

After a coffee break, two Fireside sessions were held, featuring abstracts in the fields of healthcare-associated infections and COVID-19. During the lunch break, onsite participants were offered two 'Refresh and recharge sessions', one on singing and another on dancing. The Fireside sessions after lunch covered the topics of food- and waterborne diseases and the burden of disease. The moderator for this latter session, Ajibola Omokanye, noted that these "talks demonstrated a range of approaches to measure and report burden to guide public health decision-making and highlighted the importance of standardisation to facilitate comparisons over time and between population groups".

The first set of Poster tours then took place, in which over 50 abstracts were presented to onsite audiences, on topics ranging from emerging and vector-borne diseases to childhood vaccinations and disease outbreaks. In parallel, participants could also attend a side session on the expanding role of mobile laboratories in global health crises. Speakers discussed the development and deployment of mobile laboratories, which offer several advantages for preparedness and response in areas that are remote and/or lack diagnostic capacity. Moderator Florian Gehrer presented the EU-funded MOBILISE project, which is works developing and deploying green mobile labs that support a One Health approach.



[Browse the ESCAIDE 2024 Abstract book](#)

In the last plenary of the day, a panel of speakers discussed the public health challenges during the war in Ukraine. Ihor Kuzin, Ukraine's Deputy Health Minister, began the plenary by explaining the war's unprecedented effect on public health, access to healthcare, population displacement, injuries and illnesses and healthcare infrastructure. Olga Gvozdetska, who is the Deputy Director General of the Public Health Center at the Ukrainian Ministry of Health, emphasised that "the war has changed everything", but stated that Ukraine has been able to meet the challenges, by ensuring the availability of services, returning patients to medical surveillance, and ensuring the availability of medicines and reagents. Finally, Katarzyna Drażek-Laskowska from Poland's Ministry of Health spoke about Poland's support to Ukrainian refugees.

“The Ukrainian crisis is an example of international solidarity.” – Katarzyna Drążek-Laskowska, Director of the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Health of Poland, speaking in Plenary B on the support given to Ukraine



The speakers in Plenary B shared lessons learned, such as the importance of developing response and contingency plans and developing clear health communications strategies.

The day ended with a networking event for in-person attendees, in which participants could discuss the day's events and meet field epidemiology fellows and trainees from around the world. This year also featured an epidemiology-themed stand-up comedy set, by ECDC's Principal Expert in sexually transmitted infections, Lina Nerlander.



[Consult the ESCAIDE 2024 Programme](#)

Thursday 21 November Day 2

Following a short Morning Boost, day 2 of ESCAIDE opened with Plenary Session C, on the advancements in infectious disease surveillance. Speaker Lieke van Alphen from Maastricht University, introduced whole genome sequencing, describing the data needed for hospital surveillance, WGS workflows, and how it can help us better understand disease transmission and epidemiological links between cases. André Charlett from the UK Health Security Agency spoke about surveillance, outbreak detection, and the impact of unexpected 'shocks' in disease transmission that can pose challenges for surveillance and require adaptation of methods, such as the changes observed in human behaviour caused by the COVID-19 lockdowns. Lastly, Caterina Rizzo from the University of Pavia presented a project focused on hospital-acquired infections surveillance and prevention, which used Natural Language Processing (NLP) to analyse unstructured text of hospital discharge letters for surgical site infections identification and risk-stratification.

“Capacity building and training in Europe is important. We need to bring the expertise to where it is needed.”– Lieke van Alphen, Molecular Microbiologist at the University of Maastricht, Netherlands, speaking in Plenary C on barriers for implementing Whole Genome Sequencing



Plenary session C was chaired by Scientific Committee members Ágnes Hajdu and Alicia Barrasa, and featured speakers from different fields related to infectious disease surveillance.



Throughout the conference, participants could visit onsite (and online) info stands to learn more about different projects and initiatives.

The two morning Fireside sessions brought together abstract presentations on the topics of surveillance and modelling and biostatistics. These were followed by the *Eurosurveillance* Lunch Seminar, on the importance and benefits of diversity and inclusion in research and scholarly publishing. Shirin Heidari from GENDRO highlighted the potential harms of gender bias in scientific research and development of AI models. Heidari also introduced the 2016 SAGER guidelines, which were developed to promote systematic reporting on sex and gender in all research involving human, animal and related materials. Gowri Gopalakrishna, from the University of Maastricht, emphasised the critical role of diversity, equity and inclusion in research.

“Without inclusion, diversity is tokenism. (...) Inclusion means fostering belonging, respect, and engagement—without it, diversity cannot thrive.”—Gowri Gopalakrishna, Assistant Professor at the University of Maastrich, speaking at the *Eurosurveillance* Lunch Seminar



The Eurosurveillance Seminar addressed aspects related to sex, gender and geographical representation when generating and reporting scientific findings.

Further abstract presentations took place on Day 2 during Fireside sessions on vaccine-preventable diseases and preparedness, and poster tours on AMR, social and behavioural sciences, STIs and vaccination programmes. Several of these sessions featured abstract presentations by the seven recipients of the ESCAIDE Funding Initiative, who were invited to Stockholm to present their accepted abstracts, on topics including COVID-19, mpox vaccine hesitancy, refugee health and healthcare-associated infections. These presenters represented several countries that are usually less represented in ESCAIDE, such as Eastern and Southern Europe.



[Read more about the Funding Initiative](#)

The afternoon side session featured Georgia Ladbury and Irina Ljungqvist, who also led the morning boosts and refresh and recharge sessions. They facilitated an interactive workshop in which participants learnt about, and experienced first-hand, the benefits of singing and dancing for wellbeing and health promotion.

The second day concluded with the plenary session on 'Disease X: the unknown pathogen that could cause the next pandemic'. Ana Maria Henao-Restrepo from the World Health Organization (WHO) explored the differences between priority pathogens, prototype pathogens and then an unknown pathogen X. She also emphasised the importance of collaboration and openness in research, as they can be critical in identifying the different pathogens that could cause the next pandemic. Mika Salminen from the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare (THL) then explained how to approach preparedness, giving the example of the recent influenza A(H5N1) fur farm outbreak in Finland and the vital role that One Health plays in preventing zoonotic outbreaks. Christian

Drosten from Charité touched on different topics to strengthen the detection of outbreaks, including genomic surveillance, the need to research continuously, the importance of promoting accurate information on health and the role of science in moderating conflicting opinions. In a poll at the end of the plenary, influenza was voted by the participants as the disease most likely to cause the next pandemic.

“Don’t expect to be able to foresee everything that will happen – the first thing about pandemic preparedness is that there will be surprises.”– Mika Salminen, Director of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), speaking in Plenary D on how to prepare for Disease X



Ana Maria Henao-Restrepo spoke in Plenary D about how to identify priority pathogens that could cause the next pandemic.

For those participants in Stockholm, the day closed with a lively and engaging BarCamp. This was an opportunity to network and exchange ideas in a relaxed setting. Participants submitted topics in advance and voted for their favourites. The topics discussed included the role of global and public health with the incoming US administration, AI skills needed for epidemiologists, and barriers to progress in the de-colonisation of epidemiology. Participants agreed that skills and judgment are still needed when using AI, and some believed that economic interest could incentivise prevention in a challenging political climate.



[See the ESCAIDE 2024 side events](#)

Friday 22 November Day 3

This year's final plenary explored the future of known infectious diseases, as many have re-emerged in recent years. Nienke Beerlage-de Jong, from the University of Twente, explained the impact of climate change, land use and land coverage as well as human movements and urbanisation in the rise of vector-borne diseases. She also highlighted other factors, such as lack of testing and data, underuse of risk mapping, as well as legal, ethical, financial and technological challenges. Tomasz Sobierajski, from the University of Warsaw, discussed socio-medical aspects of public health by using the example of the COVID-19 pandemic, which showed the need to consider sociology in medicine. Maria Wessman, from Denmark's Statens Serum Institute, discussed the increase in STIs among younger people, particularly among young women and heterosexual men. She explained that while surveillance is important, it is not enough, as prevention is multifaceted and there is a need to understand the causes of this resurgence.



The speakers and moderators of Plenary E explored various reasons for the recent resurgence of known infectious diseases.

“The information is out there. The information is correct. It is now more about how to we reach the right audience, at the right time, with the right message, in a way that appeals to them.” – Nienke Beerlage-de Jong, Assistant Professor at the University of Twente, speaking in Plenary E on the importance of data, communication and collaboration in infectious disease surveillance

Following the coffee break, two Fireside sessions shined the spotlight on research on antimicrobial resistance and sexually-transmitted infections. The latter included a presentation on an hepatitis A virus outbreak, primarily among men who have sex with men in Portugal in 2023-2024, which highlighted how pathogens not traditionally considered STIs can spread through sexual contact, in particular in high-risk networks.

During the lunch break, participants once again had the opportunity to sing or dance together in the Refresh and recharge sessions. This year's Career Compass also took place, featuring a diverse panel of EPIET and EUPHEM alumni, speaking about their own career paths, and decisions that shaped them. The panel highlighted the importance of persistence, stepping out of your comfort zone, and taking career opportunities. They also encouraged public health professionals to have a strong opinion on their work, and not to be afraid to speak out.

The afternoon Fireside sessions focussed on childhood vaccinations and late breaker abstracts, including presentations on a variety of recent disease outbreaks in various countries. The final set of Poster tours covered research on international health and migration, AMR, food- and waterborne diseases, modelling and surveillance, among others.



Throughout the conference, 24 Poster tours brought together a series of short oral presentations on a specific topic, followed by a moderated Q&A session.

The final side session of the conference was titled 'Risk Communication, Community Engagement and Infodemic Management: What health emergency teams must know'. It was co-organised by ECDC and WHO-EURO, and featured a multidisciplinary panel of speakers, who discussed approaches to risk communication and community engagement, and cited examples from past outbreaks and the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Both medical experts and social scientists need to learn each other’s languages.” – John Kinsman, ECDC Expert in Prevention and Behavioural Change, on the importance of cross-disciplinary collaboration in the final side session

The conference concluded with the closing ceremony, in which the winners of the EAN Photo Contest and best oral presentation were announced. ECDC Chief Scientist Piotr Kramarz thanked all participants and organisers, and spoke of the importance of cross-sector collaboration and solidarity in public health. He referred to the previous three days as “full of ideas, inspiration, and a strong sense of purpose” and encouraged participants to build bridges, not just professionally but also personally. Finally, representatives of the ESCAIDE 2025 host city – Warsaw, Poland – also invited participants to attend the next edition of the conference in the vibrant European capital.



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



ECDC Chief Scientist Piotr Kramarz also chairs the ESCAIDE Scientific Committee, and delivered the closing statement.

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. 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 participants took part in discussions through the conference platform, both during and between sessions, with several hundreds of connections made between participants' profiles and thousands of messages exchanged.

There was a lot of activity on social media around ESCAIDE, showcased on the Social Media Wall both at the venue and online. It was wonderful to see participants sharing their personal highlights, promoting their presentations, and connecting with others across various platforms.



[Explore the ESCAIDE 2024 Social Media Wall](#)

Sustainability and wellbeing at ESCAIDE

Special attention to sustainability and wellbeing was given at this year's conference. To offset the carbon emissions from the conference, participants were offered the chance to adopt a tree in the ESCAIDE forest, which was planted through the Treedom initiative. In-person attendees were also given opportunities to refresh and recharge throughout the conference, whether through the yoga, singing or dancing sessions over lunch, or in the Morning Boosts at the start of days 2 and 3.

Feedback survey

The feedback survey closed on 9 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 2024 attendees, speakers, presenters, moderators and organisers, and online and in-person attendees.

Over 1 400 responses were submitted, with overwhelmingly positive feedback – over 95% of respondents indicated they were 'extremely' or 'very much' satisfied with the event. Similar to the feedback received in previous years, respondents appreciated the hybrid nature of the conference, which allowed many to participate remotely, and revisit the content afterwards. In-person participants were generally pleased with the venue choice and organisation, although we take note of the difficulties caused by the Swedish weather. We very much appreciate the constructive feedback on how to encourage the involvement of the online audience and refine the functionalities of the conference app and platform, as well as the ideas for future topics to be explored. The full analysis of the feedback survey results is available in the evaluation report on the ESCAIDE website.



[Read the Evaluation Report](#)

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the ESCAIDE 2024 Rapporteurs and summary writers 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 members, side event organisers and info stand support, for your contributions to the conference programme.

Last but not least, ESCAIDE is what it is because of the engagement of the audience – the many questions and comments submitted by both the in-person and online audiences helped shape many fruitful discussions throughout the conference. Thank you for your participation!

Stay tuned and get involved in ESCAIDE 2025!

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

Subscribe to the ESCAIDE newsletter [here](#).

Submissions for abstracts to ESCAIDE 2025 will be opened again in the spring.

See you at ESCAIDE 2025! In Warsaw and online, 19-21 November.



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



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