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ASEF-ASAP: Scenarios and strategies on future pandemics and their application to the passenger air transport sector

An international panel of key actors from the passenger air transport sector, brought together by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), supports a new, future-oriented approach to pandemic preparedness and public health emergencies. The approach put forward in the Accurate Scenarios, Active Preparedness (ASAP) project, which was initiated by the ASEF in 2010, was based on the Prospex scenario method and has first been applied in pandemic preparedness across two world regions.

The 2011 E. Coli outbreak and 2009 A/H1N1 flu pandemic have demonstrated that, in complex modern societies, governments left on their own cannot comprehensively handle complex public health emergencies. A responsible approach from all other actors in society to complete the efforts of governments is essential in dealing successfully with future public health threats.

Conscious of the crucial role of passenger air transport in pandemic preparedness and recognising the importance of business continuity planning, the panel* of key actors representing commercial airlines, air traffic controllers, public health authorities, airport and civil aviation authorities gathered in Budapest (Hungary) on 15-16 December 2011. They explored the scenarios and developed strategic options for the sector. Applying the approach to Asia and Europe, the panel recommends taking a series of actions for preparedness of pandemics and large-scale public health emergencies:

New passenger driven surveillance and response system

Developing a global, self-sustaining and passenger driven centralised reporting system and database on movement of passengers for contact tracing. The system and database is to be run by an independent public-private agency.

Advanced IT emergency communication tools

Making use of modern IT-technologies to prepare communication tools, which can be easily activated during a public health emergency.

Increased Networking for effective pandemic response

Establishing strong, trustworthy, personal relationships, which foster cooperation in the passenger air transport sector.

Shared robust business continuity and preparedness planning with certification and coordination of regulation

Coordination of pandemic preparedness regulations, development of scenario robust business continuity and preparedness plans by all actors with common certification of these plans.

The ASEF-ASAP scenario approach - an open invitation for application

Different kinds of pandemics are included in the scenario approach. The range of preparedness is broadened from influenza-type viruses to all other possible types of disease, including different kinds of biological and non-biological agents - from prions even to possible cybernetic infections.

ASEF-ASAP calls for players in multiple sectors, including business and civil society representatives, to actively take part in pandemic preparedness - rather than being mere recipients of information. Preparedness addresses key uncertainties and needs to address different possible future contexts for public health emergencies. ASEF-ASAP provides a concrete approach to make better preparedness a reality across Asia and Europe. Key players in government, business and civil society are enabled to apply and further elaborate the approach for their specific setting. ASEF openly invites players in and across diverse sectors to use the scenarios, recommendations and materials for testing and developing preparedness plans for pandemics and public health emergencies in their countries, regions, sectors and organisations. For more information and support please contact the ASEF-ASAP project at www.asef.org.

The ASEF-ASAP panel of key actors who developed the set of scenarios comprised participants from both health and non-health sectors across Asia and Europe: from civil society, business, governments and International Organisations. The process was facilitated by Prospex (www.prospex.com), the international consultancy specialised in participatory foresight and strategy processes.

ASEF is the only institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which includes governments from 46 countries plus the European Commission and the ASEAN secretariat.

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**The panel in the passenger air transport sector comprised representatives from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, Liszt Ferenc International Airport Budapest, Federal Ministry of Public Health of Belgium, Office of the Chief Medical Officer, Lufthansa German Airlines, Air India, German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development, Department of Civil Aviation of Malaysia, Eurocontrol, Indira Ghandi International Airport, Europe Regional Office of World Health Organisation, Suvarnabhumi Airport, Air France, International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO); Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, Fraport AG Germany, The Brussels Airport Company.