Technical Advisory Group on Tuberculosis for The WHO European Region

Report of the Fourteenth Meeting

19–21 May 2020

Virtual meeting hosted out of Copenhagen, Denmark
Abstract

The fourteenth Meeting of the European Technical Advisory Group on Tuberculosis Control (TAG-TB) was held on 19-21 May 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually, allowing for all participants to participate remotely. The objectives of the meeting were to (i) advise on prioritized actions to respond to TB, DR-TB and TB/HIV co-infection during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond; (ii) review the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the 13th Meeting of the TAG-TB; (iii) review the final report of the implementation of the Tuberculosis Action Plan for the WHO European Region 2016–2020, the proposal for the extension of the plan, and the renewed Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MAF); and (iv) advise on the new interventions, which WHO/Europe shall embark on and/or intensify its work to contribute to achieving a highest impact at population level and end tuberculosis in the Region.

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Content

ABBREVIATIONS ................................................................................................................................. 3
INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................................... 4
RECOMMENDATIONS ............................................................................................................................ 5
  GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ........................................................................................................ 5
  TB DIAGNOSTICS ............................................................................................................................. 6
  TB TREATMENT ............................................................................................................................... 7
  TB PREVENTION ............................................................................................................................ 8
ANNEX 1 – SCOPE AND PURPOSE ................................................................................................ 9
ANNEX 2 – PROGRAMME .................................................................................................................. 10
ANNEX 3 – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS ............................................................................................... 14
Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>corona virus disease 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>DR-TB</td>
<td>drug-resistant tuberculosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>DST</td>
<td>drug-susceptibility testing</td>
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<td>ERI-TB</td>
<td>European Tuberculosis Research Initiative</td>
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<td>GDF</td>
<td>Global Drug Facility</td>
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<td>LTBI</td>
<td>latent tuberculosis infection</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAF</td>
<td>multisectoral accountability framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDR-TB</td>
<td>multidrug-resistant tuberculosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIC</td>
<td>minimum inhibitory concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMTPT</td>
<td>programmatic management of tuberculosis preventive treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR-TB</td>
<td>rifampicin-resistant tuberculosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLDs</td>
<td>second-line drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAG-TB</td>
<td>Technical Advisory Group on Tuberculosis Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>TB</td>
<td>tuberculosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>UHC</td>
<td>universal health coverage</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>VOT</td>
<td>video-observed therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>XDR-TB</td>
<td>extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis</td>
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Introduction

The Fourteenth Meeting of the European Technical Advisory Group on Tuberculosis Control (TAG-TB) took place on 19-21 May 2020. TAG-TB meetings are organized by the secretariat at WHO Regional Office for Europe on an annual basis usually in a face-to-face format. Due to the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the Meeting of 2020 was conducted virtually, using a web-conferencing platform. The format ensured the inclusive participation of all attendees, including Members of the TAG-TB, observers to the Meeting and WHO staff to maintain the TAG-TB convention format and original modus operandi. All documents were made available for the participants to access both prior to, during and after the Meeting, as were recordings of the Meeting.

The overall objective of the TAG-TB is to provide independent review and expert technical opinion in prevention and care of tuberculosis (TB), drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) and HIV associated TB (TB/HIV) to the Regional Director of the WHO Office for Europe.

The specific objectives of the Fourteenth Meeting of the TAG-TB were to:

1. advise on prioritized actions to respond to TB, DR-TB and TB/HIV co-infection during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond;
2. review the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the thirteenth Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group for Tuberculosis (TAG-TB);
3. review the final report of the implementation of the Tuberculosis Action Plan for the WHO European Region 2016–2020, the proposal for the extension of the plan, and the renewed Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MAF);
4. advise on the new interventions which WHO/Europe shall embark on and/or intensify its work to contribute to achieving a highest impact at population level and end TB in the Region.

The scope and purpose, programme and the list of participants of the Meeting can be found in Annex 1-3. The Meeting was chaired by the chairperson of the TAG-TB, Professor Alberto Matteelli.

The TAG-TB congratulated the WHO Regional Office for Europe and its Member States on the achievements made over the past year. The actions taken by the Regional Office and consequently by Member States have contributed to the achievement of significant results, with TB incidence and mortality rates decreasing across the Region since 2015. However, challenges remain: first and foremost, the high proportion of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) cases in the Region and the relatively low treatment success rates of X/MDR-TB continues to be a challenge,
as well as the number of TB/HIV coinfection cases, which continues to rise. Secondly, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is a challenge, as it severely affects the Region, in particular people with underlying health conditions, including TB, and impacts on health-care systems and delivery of essential health services as well as national and local economies. These challenges must be addressed.

Recommendations

This section lists the main recommendations of TAG-TB to the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The recommendations are organized under the headlines (i) general recommendations, (ii) TB diagnostics, (iii) TB treatment and (iv) TB prevention. All recommendations are developed considering the impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of priority is indicated for each recommendation.

General recommendations

1. Support Member States in maintaining the implementation of national TB programmes by ensuring uninterrupted and sustainable TB prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic.

   *Priority level: High*

2. Ensure that TB is included in ongoing e-learning platforms for strengthening the professional capacity of health care providers.

   *Priority level: High*

3. Develop a system or mechanism to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on TB case finding, prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, including modeling of the trends of the main TB indices, assess gaps and barriers to successful collaboration between TB, HIV, viral Hepatitis programmes and the COVID-19 pandemic responses. Develop a dashboard for funding and human resource monitoring for TB.

   *Priority level: High*

4. Support Member States in completing the multisectoral accountability framework (MAF) baseline self-assessment check list and provide guidance on adapting and implementing the monitoring and evaluation framework at country level.
5. Support the development of a framework to promote a sustainable drug procurement system for Member States, taking into consideration the experiences of existing sub-regional procurement systems and encourage the use of the Global Drug Facility (GDF) for increased access to high-quality and affordable TB treatment and diagnostics for populations in need (as stipulated in the Political declaration of the 2019 United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on TB).

6. Support Member States in ensuring the biosafety measures necessary for TB laboratory diagnosis during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the development of guidance documents, virtual trainings (e-learning) for laboratory specialists, health and community workers.

7. Develop guidance documents and provide training (e-learning) for laboratory specialists, health and community workers in delivering quality assured phenotypic and genotypic drug-susceptibility testing (DST), including new and repurposed drugs.

8. Support Member States in scaling-up access to diagnostic services for vulnerable populations at increased risk of TB, HIV, viral Hepatitis and COVID-19, through an integrated approach and closer to point-of-care (e.g. developing a regional technical guidance document on the use of mobile laboratories and multi-diseases testing platforms).

9. Support Member States in implementing operational research and surveillance activities to strengthen the capacity in using next generation sequencing in combination with phenotypic DST (minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC)).
**Priority level: High**

**TB Treatment**

10. Together with Member States advocate for aligning national TB strategic plans and wider universal health care (UHC) initiatives with the commitments made at the 2019 United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on TB, including defining country diagnostic, treatment targets and improve reporting on disaggregation on age category and TB resistance profile.

**Priority level: High**

11. Support Member States in the introduction and implementation of the latest WHO guidance on treatment of DR-TB, with a focus on:
   a. Universal access to rapid molecular diagnostics for all TB suspects and DST for all patients at the start of treatment;
   b. DST to second-line drugs (SLDs) including new drugs for all patients with rifampicin-resistant (RR)/MDR-TB;
   c. Scaling up access to fully-oral treatment regimens, including modified shorter treatment regimens (mSTR) for MDR-TB and shorter regimens for XDR-TB under operational research conditions;
   d. Monitor and accompany Member States throughout the implementation, data collection, document progress and the involvement of civil society and affected communities.

**Priority level: High**

12. Develop guidance documents for Member States to support the roll-out of people-centered models of TB care, prioritizing full outpatient treatment also for DR-TB cases. Undertake comprehensive national and sub-national assessments of needs in TB hospital capacities and develop shorter-, medium- and longer-term optimization and quality improvement plans or programmes for outpatient TB care and people-centered models of care. Support Member State to incorporate these interventions in Global Fund funding calls.

**Priority level: High**
13. Support Member States in addressing issues of mental health among TB patients, including alcohol and drug addiction, psychiatric disorders, and develop a mechanism for evaluating the magnitude of the problem at national and regional level.

*Priority level: High*

14. Support Member States in scaling up the appropriate use of video-observed therapy (VOT) as part of people-centered care.

*Priority level: High*

**TB Prevention**

15. Explore best ways of rolling-out the Programmatic management of TB preventive treatment (PMTPT) for additional groups such as adult contacts, immunocompromised people, prison inmates and consider conducting operational research on:
   a. The cost-effectiveness and efficiency of investments in PMTPT;
   b. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on latent TB infection (LTBI) by using mathematical models.

*Priority level: High*

16. Lead or facilitate the framework of the European Tuberculosis Research Initiative (ERI-TB), inter/country research on the state of preventive TB treatment in children and adult contacts of RR/MDR-TB cases.

*Priority level: High*

17. Develop a plan for analysis of the LTBI cascade of care data collected in WHO Region for Europe and follow-up with selective Member States on the existence and use of national tools to monitor the LTBI cascade of care.

*Priority level: Medium*
Annex 1 – Scope and purpose

Technical Advisory Group on Tuberculosis (TAG-TB)
for the WHO European Region – 14th Meeting

Online Meeting: 19-21 May 2020

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

Main objective
To provide independent review and expert technical opinion in prevention and care of tuberculosis (TB), drug resistant (DR) TB and HIV associated TB (TB/HIV) to the Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Specific objectives of the TAG-TB 14th Meeting

1. To advise on prioritized action to respond to TB, drug resistant TB and TB/HIV coinfection during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond;

2. To review the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the 13th Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group for Tuberculosis (TAG-TB);

3. To review the final report of the implementation of the Tuberculosis Action Plan for the WHO European Region 2016–2020, the proposal for the extension of the plan, and the renewed Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Framework;

4. To advise on the new interventions which WHO/Europe shall embark on and/or intensify its work to contribute to achieving a highest impact at population level and end TB in the Region.
Annex 2 – Programme

Technical Advisory Group on Tuberculosis (TAG-TB) for the WHO European Region – 14th Meeting

Copenhagen, Denmark, 19–21 May 2020

Programme

DAY 1
19 May 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SESSION 1: Opening</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:10</td>
<td>Opening and introductions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dr Masoud Dara</strong>, Coordinator, Communicable Diseases &amp; Programme Manager, Joint Tuberculosis, HIV &amp; viral Hepatitis (JTH) <strong>Dr Teresa Kasaeva</strong>, Director, Global TB Programme, WHO HQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10 – 10:20</td>
<td>Scope of purpose of the TAG-TB meeting, agenda of the meeting, declarations of interest. Election of Chair and Co-Chair of TAG-TB for 2020-2022.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dr Askar Yedilbayev</strong>, TB Unit Lead, Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis Programme (JTH) <strong>Dr Masoud Dara</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10:20 – 10:40</th>
<th>Epidemiology of TB in the WHO European Region in light of COVID-19 pandemic</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dr Giorgi Kuchukhidze</strong>, Epidemiologist, JTH Programme</td>
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<td>Time</td>
<td>Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:40 – 10:50</td>
<td>Update on Progress report of TB Action Plan for the WHO European Region, 2016-2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:50 – 11:00</td>
<td>A new Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for TB Action Plan for the WHO European Region post 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00 – 11:15</td>
<td>National assessment checklist for the Multisectoral Accountability Framework for TB (MAF-TB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:15 – 11:25</td>
<td><strong>BREAK</strong></td>
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| 11:25 – 12:40 | • Discussants: **Q1.** What aspects and strategic directions of TB and DR-TB prevention and control in Region should be prioritized by the Regional Office? • Draft of recommendations | Discussants:  
  **Professor Alberto Matteelli,** Director, WHO Collaborating Centre on TB/HIV and TB Elimination, Department of Infectious and Tropical Diseases, University of Brescia and General Hospital, Italy  
  **Professor Natalya Nizova,** Advisor, Public Health Center, MOH, Ukraine |

**SESSION 3: TB and COVID-19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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Dr Askar Yedilbayev                                                                 |
| 12:50 – 13:00 | Statement for action of Regional Collaborating Committee on TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis on response to COVID-19 pandemic. | Ms Yulia Chorna, Executive Director, TB Europe Coalition, Kyiv, Ukraine      |
| 14:00 – 15:30 | **Breakdown session:** Drafting recommendations for Discussion Q1 (discussants and presenters only). | Professor Alberto Matteelli  
Professor Natalya Nizova  
Dr Masoud Dara  
Dr Askar Yedilbayev  
Dr Giorgi Kuchukhidze |
### SESSION 4: Diagnosis

**10:00 – 11:15**
- Foreword on laboratory diagnosis and drug-resistance in the Region during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Discussion: Q2: What the WHO EURO should do to improve TB diagnosis in light of the impact of COVID-19?
- Draft of recommendations

**Presenter:** Dr Soudeh Ehsani, Technical Officer, JTH Programme

**Discussants:**
- **Dr. Leen Rigouts**, Director, Unit of Mycobacteriology, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium
- **Dr. Gulmira Kalmambetova**, Head of National Reference Laboratory, National TB Programme, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

**11:15 – 11:25 BREAK**

### SESSION 5: TB Treatment and care

**11:25 – 12:40**
- Draft of recommendations

**Presenter:** Dr Askar Yedilbayev

**Discussants:**
- **Dr Nana Kiria**, Deputy Director, National TB Programme, Georgia
- **Professor Lee Reichman**, Adjunct Professor of Medicine, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Professor of Epidemiology, Rutgers School of Public Health, Senior Advisor, NJMS Global TB Institute, USA

**14:00 – 15:30**

**Breakdown session A:** Drafting recommendations for Discussion Q2 (**discussants and presenter only**).

**Professor Leen Rigouts**  
**Dr Gulmira Kalmambetova**  
**Dr Soudeh Ehsani**

**Breakdown session B:** Drafting recommendations for Discussion Q3 (**discussants and presenter only**).

**Dr Nana Kiria**,  
**Professor Lee Reichman**  
**Dr Askar Yedilbayev**

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**DAY 2**  
**20 May 2020**

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**DAY 3**  
**21 May 2020**
### SESSION 6: TB prevention

**10:00 – 11:15**

- Foreword on TB prevention in the Region during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Discussion: Q4 What the WHO EURO should do to improve TB prevention in light of the impact of COVID-19?
- Draft of recommendations

**Presenter:** Dr Andrei Dadu, Medical Officer, JTH Programme

**Discussants:**
- Professor Alberto Matteelli
- Dr Alexandre Lourenço, Hospital Administrator, Coimbra Hospital and University Centre, Coimbra, Portugal

**11:15 – 11:25** BREAK

### SESSION 7: Recommendations of TAG-TB and Closing

**11:25 – 12:40** Discussion of recommendations to the Regional Director (Q1-Q3)

**Professor Alberto Matteelli**

**Dr Askar Yedilbayev**

**12:40 – 12:50** Final remarks, next steps

Closing of the 14th TAG-TB meeting.

**Dr Masoud Dara**

**Dr Askar Yedilbayev**

**14:00 – 15:30** Breakdown session: Drafting recommendations for Discussion Q4 *(discussants and presenter only).*

**Professor Alberto Matteelli**

**Dr Alexandre Lourenço**

**Dr Andrei Dadu**
Annex 3 – List of Participants

European Technical Advisory Group on Tuberculosis Control (TAG-TB) – 14th Meeting

Copenhagen, Denmark, 19–21 May 2020

List of participants

TAG-TB MEMBERS

Prof Alberto MATTELLI (Chair)
Associate Professor
Clinic of Infectious and Tropical Diseases
University of Brescia and Brescia Spedali Civili General Hospital
WHO Collaborating Centre, TB/HIV and TB Elimination
Italy

Ms Delia BOCCIA
Lecturer
Faculty of Epidemiology and Population Health London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine London
United Kingdom

Dr Sarah R ANDERSON
Head of National TB Office
National Infection Service, Public Health
United Kingdom

Ms Yuliya CHORNA
Executive Director
TB Europe Coalition
Ukraine
Dr Gulmira KALMAMBETOVA  
Head of National Reference Laboratory  
National TB Programme  
Kyrgyzstan  

Dr Maya KAVTARADZE  
Demand technical assistance and Capacity Building Team Leader Global drug Facility  
Stop TB Partnership  

Dr Nana KIRIA  
Deputy Director  
National Center for Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases  
Georgia  

Mr Alexandre LOURENCO  
Hospital Administrator  
Coimbra Hospital and University Centre  
Portugal  

Mr Safarali NAIMOV  
Executive Director  
Stop TB Partnership  
Tajikistan  

Prof Natalya NIZOVA  
Honoured doctor of Ukraine  
Public Health Center  
Advisor  
Global fund board member  
EECA  
Ukraine  

Prof Lee B. REICHMAN  
Adjunct Professor of Medicine  
Rutgers New Jersey Medical School  
Rutgers School of Public Health  
NIMS Global TB Institute, Newark NJ  
USA  

Dr Leen RIGOUTS  
Director  
Unit of Mycobacteriology, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp  
Belgium
Prof Irina A. VASILYEVA
Director, National medical research centre of phthisiopulmonology and infectious diseases
Chief TB Specialist, Ministry of Health
Russian Federation

Dr Viorel SOLTAN
Team Leader
Country & community support for impact
Stop TB Partnership
Switzerland

Observers/Attendees

Dr Jay ACHAR
Global Health & Infectious Diseases Consultant
Sweden

Dr Sevim AHMEDOV
Prevention and M&E Team Lead, TB Division
USAID, Bureau of Global Health
United States of America

Dr Riccardo ALAGNA
Emerging Bacterial Pathogens Unit
WHO Collaborating Centre in Tuberculosis Laboratory Strengthening - Supranational Reference Laboratory for TB
Italy

Dr Raquel BESS DE NELO
Pulmonologist
Hospital Centre of Vila Nova de Gaia/Espinho
Vila Nova de Gaia
Portugal

Dr Stela BIVOL
Director
Centre for Health Policies and Studies
Republic of Moldova

Dr Liliana CARAULAN
Centre for Health Policies and Studies
Republic of Moldova

Dr Lella COSMARO
COSMARO Fondazione LILA Milano ONLUS
Italy
Dr Daniela Maria CIRILLO  
Head of Emerging Bacterial Pathogens Unit  
WHO Collaborating Centre  
TB Supranational reference Laboratory  
San Raffaele scientificinstitute  
Italy

Prof Francis DROBNIEWSKI  
Professor of Global Health and Tuberculosis  
Infectious Diseases and Immunity  
Imperial College London, United Kingdom

Ms Irina FELKER  
Senior Researcher  
Novosibirsk TB Research Institute  
Russian Federation  
Dr Sergii FILIPPOVYCH  
Project Director Alliance for Public Health  
Alliance for Public Health  
Ukraine

Dr Jose MARÍA GARCIA  
Independent expert, Clinician  
Universitary Hospital San Agustín  
Spain

Dr Lasha GOGUADZE  
IFRC  
Switzerland

Dr Elmira GURBANOVA  
WHO collaborating centre on prevention and control of tuberculosis in prisons  
Azerbaijan

Dr Malgorzata GRZEMSKA  
Independent Consultant  
Poland

Dr Araksya HOVHANESSYAN  
Epidemiologist  
Independent Consultant  
Armenia

Dr Sandra IRBE  
Global Fund  
Switzerland
Dr Asgar ISMAYILOV
Advocacy & Technical Officer
Stop TB Partnership
Switzerland

Dr Yulia KALANCHA
Patients of Ukraine
Ukraine

Dr Gunnila KÄLLENIUS
Senior Professor
Karolinska Institutet
Sweden

Dr Michael KRONE
Programme Manager
AIDS Hilfe
Germany

Dr Liga KUKSA
Head of MDR TB department at TB and Lung
disease center of Latvia
Independent Consultant
Latvia

Dr Dumitru LATICEVSCHI
Regional Manager
Easter Europe and Central Asia Team
Global Fund
Belgium

Dr Nino LOMTADZE
Pulmonologist
Independent Consultant
Georgia

Prof Andrei MARIANDYSHEV
Chief department phthisipulmonary
Northern State Medical University
Trotisky
Russian Federation

Dr Giovanni Battista MIGLIORI
Chair of ERI CG
Director
WHO Collaborating Centre
for Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases
Italy
Prof Uldis MITENBERGS  
Department of Public Health and Epidemiology  
Riga Stradins University  
Latvia

Dr Inna MOTRYCH  
Independent Consultant  
Ukraine

Dr Andrei MOSNEAGA  
Regional Adviser  
Country and Community Support for Impact  
Stop TB Partnership Secretariat  
Switzerland

Dr Davron Mukhamadiev  
Regional Health and Care Coordinator  
IFRC Europe Region  
Hungary

Dr Svetlana NICOLAESCU  
PAS  
Republic of Moldova

Dr Vladyslav NIKOLAYEVSKYY  
Project Leader and Senior Clinical Scientist  
National Mycobacterium Reference Service South (NMRSS), Public Health England  
United Kingdom

Mr Gennady ROSHCHUPKIN  
Eurasian Coalition on Male Health (ECOM)  
Ukraine

Dr Zoya SHABAROVA  
AHF Europe  
Europe Bureau Chief  
The Netherlands

Dr Alena SKRAHINA  
Deputy Director  
Republican Research and practical centre for Pulmonology and Tuberculosis  
Belarus

Dr Paul SOMMERFELD  
Chair of TBEC Board  
TB Europe Coalition (TBEC)  
United Kingdom
Prof Giovanni SOTGIU
Associate Professor of Medical Statistics and Clinical Epidemiology for the Department of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Sassari, Italy

Dr Raminta STUIKYTE
Representative Office of Prof Michel Kazatchkine Special Advisor to the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia Switzerland

Dr Yana TERLEIEVA
Head of department TB Programme Coordination Public Centre, Ministry of Health, Ukraine

Dr Simon TIBERI
Infectious Diseases Consultant Newham University and Royal London Hospitals United Kingdom

Ms Nestani TUKVADZE
Director of Research National Center for Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases Georgia

Mr Juan Fernando VESGA
Consultant Imperial College of London United Kingdom

Dr Marieke VAN DER WERF
European Centre for Disease prevention and control (ECDC) Sweden

Dr Anna Żakowicz
AHF Europe Deputy Bureau Chief and Director of Programmes The Netherlands

Dr Dominik ZENNER
Senior Migration Health Advisor Regional Office for the EU/EEA
Migration Health Division
International Organization for Migration
Belgium

WHO Headquarters
Geneva, Switzerland

Dr Tereza KASAEVA
Director
Global TB Programme

Ms Diana WEIL
Cross-unit lead, Strategy and multi-sectoral accountability
Global Tuberculosis Programme

Ms Marzia CALVI
Global Tuberculosis Programme

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Regional Office for Europe

Dr Masoud DARA
Coordinator, Communicable Diseases
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Andrei DADU
Medical Officer
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Ms Lea CLAPIER
Consultant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Soudeh EHSANI
Technical Officer
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Ogtay GOZALOV
Medical Officer
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Sayohat HASANOVA
Technical Officer
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme
Ms Marina HANSEN
Programme Assistant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Ms Mia HARLEY
Consultant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Tifenn HUMBERT
Technical Officer
Health Systems and Public Health Programme

Mr Oleksandr KOROTYCH
Consultant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Giorgi KUCHUKHIDZE
Epidemiologist
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Antons MOZALEVSKIS
Medical Officer
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Mr Marcelo NAVEIRA
Consultant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Mr Sergis NIKKIS
Consultant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Ms Ayodele OYEDOKUN
Programme Assistant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Ihor PEREHINET
Technical Adviser
Health Systems and Public Health Programme

Mr Bhim PRADHAN
Programme Assistant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Ms Maria RUNDSTROEM
Programme Assistant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Nicole SEGUY
HSV Team Lead
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Ms Lana SYED
Consultant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Elena VOVC
Technical officer
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Ms Svitlana VYSHNEVSKA
Programme Assistant
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

Dr Askar YEDILBAYEV
TB Team Lead
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis programme

WHO Country Offices
Joint TB, HIV and viral Hepatitis Programme

Ms Bibigul AUBAKIROVA
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office Kazakhstan

Dr Cassandra BUTU
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Romania

Mr Dato CHORGOLIANI
WHO Consultant
WHO Country Office, Georgia

Mr Anna CIOBANU
WHO Consultant
WHO Country Office, Republic of Moldova

Mr Martin DONOGHOE
Senior Advisor
WHO Country Office, Ukraine

Mr Georgii DYMOV
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Ukraine

Dr Zafar FAYZIEV
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Uzbekistan

Dr Jamshid GADOEV
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Uzbekistan

Dr Stela GHEORGHITA
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Republic of Moldova

Dr Gayane GHUKASYAN
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Armenia

Dr Aleksandr GOLIUSOV
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Ukraine

Dr Viatcheslav GRANKOV
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Belarus

Dr Khurshid IBATOV
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Uzbekistan

Ms Nino MAMULASHVILI
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Georgia

Dr Artan MESI
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Albania

Mr Mirza MUNINOVIC
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Kyrgyzstan
Ms Andreea POPESCU
Consultant
WHO Country Office, Romania

Mr Abdulakhad SAFAROV
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Tajikistan

Mr Lela SEREBRYAKOVA
WHO Consultant
WHO Country Office, Georgia
Mr Bahadir SUCAKLI
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Turkey

Dr Javahir SULEYMANOVA
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Azerbaijan

Mr Sona VALIYEVA
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Turkmenistan

Mr Arkadii VODIANYK
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Ukraine

Mr Saltanat YEGEUBAYEVA
National Public Health Officer
WHO Country Office, Russian Federation

Dr Gazmend ZHURI
National Public Health Officer
WHO Office, Pristina

**Rapporteur**

Ms Nina Bjerglund ANDERSEN
Communication consultant
Public Health Science Communication,
Copenhagen, Denmark
The WHO Regional Office for Europe

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