
Third Task Force Training

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**Conclusions from the implementation of the
MEDSTAT II training programmes**



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Background

The ITP 2007 and 2008/09 were vast training programmes which were highly appreciated by the MPCs. Most indicators were very positive, especially those coordinated by the European Commission (trainers and course material). However, there is still room for improvement to be achieved in some areas in order to meet the expectations of all the participants and to make the training programmes more successful.

The following conclusions and recommendation are intended to serve this objective:

1. Planning of the annual training programme

The announcement of the training programmes was made early in advance by the EC in order to give enough time for the MPCs to plan their participation in the different courses.

The Directors Committee discussed this issue during its meeting of February 2008 in Luxembourg, and MPCs requested an early announcement of MEDSTAT II activities so as to allow better planning of their activities.

The annual planning of training activities should include a document recording the dates of the courses and the dates for the selection of candidates in order to meet the deadlines. This will allow candidates to be informed early enough to plan their availability and organise their duties accordingly.

2. Registration of candidates

Some MPCs requested an official invitation in addition to the announcement received from EuropeAid in order to launch the registration procedures. Solutions were found with the NCs for the provision of customised invitations.

Despite the early announcement of the ITP 2007 and 2008/09, the registration deadlines for the training courses — which had been provided in the announcement — were rarely met. Indeed, contacts and reminders were made in order to secure the registration of candidates from all MPCs.

If the registration deadlines are not met, all the subsequent organisational steps will be delayed, including:

Selection procedures,

Sending of individual invitations,

Visa procedures (all the EU embassies have to apply strict rules for visa applications)



Travel arrangements (airline tickets can be more expensive if booked late, and direct flights can be fully booked).

3. Selection of participants

The selection of participants is a key element that contributes to the success of a training course. Indeed, careful selection of candidates will help form homogeneous groups in terms of:

- language skills

- background skills that should match the course level (course description).

MPCs should also play a role here, since the Commission and contractors do not know the real skill levels of the candidates.

Registration forms are often not filled in properly, especially the preparatory part. The NCs should therefore explain the objective of this part and refuse to transmit registration forms not duly filled in.

This part provides the Commission and the training course organisers with a general idea of the skill level of the candidates.

In regional programmes the selection procedure should be given more emphasis in order to maximise the benefits from the training course. Working in a very heterogeneous group cannot fully satisfy all participants' expectations, even if the trainers are very qualified.

The immediate supervisor of the candidate should be involved in the selection phase with the NC.

4. Dissemination of course material

The dissemination of course material should be checked through the implementation of a system enabling participants to acknowledge receipt of course material. This can only be done if all participants have an e-mail address; otherwise reception and dissemination should be checked by the NC.

Without the appropriate course material, participants will not be prepared to attend the course.

5. Preparation of the participants

A good preparation is certainly the best way to play an active role in the training course.

Participants should be supported by their respective organisations and be given enough time to prepare and read the course material.

Good preparation makes it possible to use the training course to clarify difficult issues and to discuss relevant points with the trainer and other participants.



This preparation period should be closely followed by the training course organisers.

6. Course balance (theory and practice)

The part devoted to practical work and exercises should be increased; trainers should prepare many study cases and foresee the use of statistical software when possible.

The part related to theoretical concepts and presentations should be shortened; in any case, this part should be mastered by the participants during the preparation before the course. It should be noted that this part remains fundamental for the course; if it is not mastered by the participants, huge mistakes could be made in applying the concepts, thus affecting the quality of the work carried out. This is especially valid for data collection (sampling techniques and procedures).

The participants should play an active role in the preparation of the practical exercises. They should prepare a set of data and send it in advance in order to give the trainers the opportunity to study them and prepare study cases; this input can spark useful discussions and exchanges of best practices.

Groups work should always be foreseen in the practical part; working in groups is useful to discuss issues and to reach common conclusions to be presented in a plenary session.

The use of PCs should be the rule for all training courses: hands-on training courses are always highly appreciated by course participants.

7. Course language and interpretation

As a rule, the training course should be held in only one language. Indeed, a common language is essential to maximise benefits from the course content and to actively participate in discussions and experience sharing.

Simultaneous interpretation is not always an ideal solution, and it should only be used for non-technical courses. Indeed, it is impossible to find interpreters specialised in statistics.

None of the MPCs use English as a working language; the main languages used in daily work are Arabic and French.

If the expertise is not available in those languages, the training organisers should follow closely the translation of course material and the preparation with the interpreters. In this respect, working with the same interpreters by providing them the course material in advance can greatly reduce the risk of errors in the interpretation.



8. Logistics issues

8.1 Training facilities

The environment of the training site has a proven impact on the general satisfaction derived from a training course.

When a course is organised in a training institute or in an NSI, few problems generally occur, and they can be solved promptly.

Cooperation with training institutes should always be sought for the success of the training courses. Moreover the training facilities provided by NSIs are generally cheaper than those provided by hotels.

8.2 Invitations and visa

A timely registration allows course participants to receive individual invitations sufficiently in advance to apply for and receive a visa. In this respect, invitations should be sent at least one month before the start of the course.

All the EU embassies must apply strict rules for visa applications; accordingly, course participants who apply for a visa too late may not get a visa in time to attend the course.

In many cases, when a visa is not delivered in time, the MEDSTAT II budget bears the cost of all or part of the airline ticket.

The organisation of events in new the Member States should be given particular attention. Indeed, new Member States generally have very few diplomatic representations in the MPCs.

9. Training packages

Specific solutions for the organisation of all-inclusive training packages should be studied in order to reduce the cost of training events. Indeed, by making an agreement with one or two training institutes for all training events it is possible to negotiate special rates for accommodation, meals and training facilities that are cheaper than distributing per diem allowances and paying for the training facilities separately.

The aim is to provide high-quality facilities and to reduce the total cost of each event, which makes it possible to organise more training events with the same budget allocated by the European Commission.

Past experience has shown the efficiency of such solutions.



10. Restitution of knowledge:

It is important to organise the restitution of knowledge acquired during the training courses at national level. This enables knowledge to be shared more widely among NSI staff and NSS.

11. Training of trainers:

This format of training is very popular among MPCs. In order to maximise the benefits from this exercise, trained persons should be supported to be the leaders for organising training courses at national level within NSIs and NSS; All trained persons were motivated to do so, and agreed to organise at least two training courses at national level.

The aim is to ensure that MPCs are able to satisfy their training needs independently via training courses on the topics covered by Medstat II and that future MEDSTAT training programmes should only focus on other training topics (those not covered by the training courses for trainers).

12. E-learning courses:

The experience under MEDSTAT was successful. E-learning courses can satisfy some training needs, but they cannot fully replace the face-to-face courses.

E-learning courses should always be foreseen in future training programmes and MPCs should provide technical equipment to participants in order to be able to follow e-learning courses in good conditions.

