

Invited talks: Crisis communication

Capacity-building and training needs

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“We have to start in kindergarten with health literacy, with statistical literacy, etc. And (...) it goes together with a certain robustness against fake news. I think in kindergarten and primary schools, children should set up experiments, gather data, analyse data, because then later, if somebody ever talks about the data analysis, they have their own frame of reference, if it's properly done.”

(Interview with an academic scientist)



1. Introduction

I3h INSTITUTE (ULB)

10 years of experience in developing interdisciplinary educational programs in healthcare innovation-More than 1,000 participants have taken our course!

KEY RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Identify **training needs** and recommend capacity-building **modules** to strengthen pandemic communication and preparedness among young people in Belgium

METHODOLOGY: COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES

- Literature review
- Mapping of existing training initiatives in Belgium (and online)
- Main outputs of interviews conducted by our ReSIC colleagues (ULB)
- Informed by the expertise of the I3h Institute in building educational programs
- Input from Professors Michel Goldman and Mathias Dewatripont who were involved in Belgium's COVID-19 response



2. Scope: COVID-19 as a reference for pandemic preparedness

- **Focus on a COVID-like scenario:** a rapidly spreading respiratory pandemic, with transmission possible before symptoms appear
- **Characterised by a communication challenge:** collective prevention in the context of uncertainty and rapidly evolving public-health guidance
- **Young people (5-18 years):** as they experienced disruption to education, social life and mental well-being, alongside accelerated digitalisation
- **Our goal: develop an useful framework of transferable interdisciplinary skills for future pandemics, beyond a repeat of COVID-19.** These interdisciplinary skills could also be a preparation for other disasters (e.g.: heat waves, etc.)



3. Mapping of existing training: key outcomes



1. Existing Belgian training

Diverse science communication courses, mainly targeting **researchers and scientific professionals**



2. Emerging approaches

Growing emphasis on **risk communication, community engagement** and **infodemic management**



3. Gap

Only a few programmes integrate pandemic preparedness, interdisciplinarity & communication, **particularly for young people**



4. BE-PIN opportunity

We recommend offering **modular, age-adapted resources** to schools, made freely available on the platform, tomorrow!



4.a. The role of young people in pandemic preparedness

Context: COVID-19 caused **unprecedented disruption** to children's daily lives through school closures, online learning, and social distancing. It highlighted the critical **social, educational and mental-health impacts** of pandemics on them



1. They care about the planet's future

Already **mobilised** around climate and environmental issues linked to pandemic risks



2. They can become informed & active actors by:

- recognising **risks** & **symptoms**
- understanding **transmission modes, prevention & vaccination**



3. They can become active partners & influencers by:

- promoting **hygiene** and **vaccination**
- sharing reliable **information** at home and on social media



4. They can contribute to preparedness governance

Through **direct dialogue** between governments and the younger generation

Examples: Norway and Latvia



4.b. Four key insights from stakeholders' interviews



1. Opportunity to address training gaps

Competencies currently acquired through
“learning by doing”

“We never learned [...] how you compile scientific evidence into advice.”

— **Scientific advisor**



2. Through an interdisciplinary approach

Help scientists, policymakers & journalists master
evidence communication



3. Start early

Build **health, scientific & data literacy** from early education

“We have to start in kindergarten with health literacy, with statistical literacy.”

— **Academic scientist**



4. By making learning practical

Use experiments, data activities & **critical assessment**

“Prevention is also about training: how to detect fake news.”

— **Journalist**



5. Recommendations: Design principles for youth engagement



1. Build preparedness skills in everyday life, starting tomorrow

Prepare young people before a crisis through short modules



2. Interdisciplinary as core competency

Connect biomedical and societal perspectives to inform decisions on health, education and society



3. Integrate uncertainty

Understand what is *known*, what is *unknown* and why public-health advice may *evolve*



4. Interactive & scenario-based

Use realistic, evolving outbreaks, practical challenges and group discussions



5. Digital-first & inclusive

Combine flexible learning activities with free online access in various languages



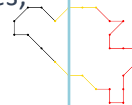
5. Recommendations: Proposed BE-PIN capacity-building modules

A mock-up website has been created: <https://eu4health.my.canva.site/be-pin-mockup-en>



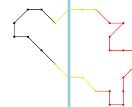
5. Recommendations: Proposed BE-PIN capacity-building modules

Competencies	Key objectives	Content
Module 1: Health and scientific literacy	<i>"I understand what is happening"</i> Understand the basics of infectious diseases, pandemics and transmission.	Introduction to microbes: What they are; transmission; prevention and hygiene (hand, oral, respiratory); Introduction to pandemics: testing; vaccination; individual vs collective risk (especially relevant for the younger generation).
Module 2: Science communication	<i>"I can discuss the health crisis constructively"</i> Raise awareness; understand why scientific recommendations change and communicate uncertainty without panic.	How to explain reliable information clearly to peers and families; how to adapt communication to audiences; how to communicate publicly.
Module 3: Misinformation and social media	<i>"I am able to verify the information"</i> Evaluate the information and sources; provide social media guidelines.	How to evaluate websites, posts, videos, influencers, etc.; how to recognise fake news; how to create accurate and engaging content for peers and families; who is the source, and is it independent?



5. Recommendations: Proposed BE-PIN capacity-building modules

Competencies	Key objectives	Content
Module 4: Mental-health resilience	<i>"I can understand one's emotions"</i> Understand how I and others feel, and how to help them.	Recognise and understand one's emotions (stress, fatigue, isolation, etc.); the importance of empathy and solidarity in such a context.
Module 5: Practical preparedness	<i>"I can act and participate"</i> How to be take an active part in preparedness.	Know what to do during an outbreak; how to prepare personally and within their families.
Module 6: One Health approach	<i>"I can see the broader picture of the health and planet's crisis"</i> Understand the importance of an interdisciplinary approach and the interactions between human health, animal health & environmental health.	Understand how the health of humans, animals and the environment is closely linked; basic knowledge of zoonotic diseases and their risks; how to protect the environment and the health of humans and animals.



5. Recommendations: Proposed format and implementation model



Centralised digital entry point

One platform for preparedness learning and crisis updates, with downloadable materials



Multiple pedagogical formats

Combine videos, quizzes, infographics, simulations, and interactive games



Peer-to-Peer component

(volunteer) Youth Preparedness Ambassadors to share information and gather feedback



Multilingual & inclusive implementation

Offer accessible materials in French, Dutch, German and other languages



Crash course & microlearning

A 2–3-hour introductory course, followed by short modules as new needs emerge



Train-the-Trainer model

Equip teachers with ready-to-use packages



Technical & local support

Provide a helpdesk for those needing digital support



Continuous evaluation & adaptation

Use quizzes, practical tasks and youth feedback to continuously improve training



6. Conclusions



Opportunities

- **Build skills for beyond pandemics, including critical thinking, risk communication and collaboration**
- Turn the COVID-19 experience into lasting preparedness resources
- Encourage collaboration between Belgium's three education systems
- Create a channel for youth participation
- Connect preparedness with existing educational priorities
- Next step: Test a beta version with selected schools in Brussels



Limitations and challenges

- Belgium's institutional complexity
- Digital inequalities → provide offline materials, local access and technical support
- Teacher and trainer workload → offer short, ready-to-use teaching packages
- Maintaining content between crises → keep resources updated as attention declines
- Funding and long-term sustainability



6. Conclusions



Build on young people's engagement: connect pandemic preparedness with their concerns about climate change & environmental degradation (and the risk of zoonotic diseases)



Learn from COVID-19: young people need the knowledge and skills to protect themselves and contribute to collective responses



Start in primary school: progressively introduce infectious diseases, transmission, vaccines and public-health measures through age-appropriate learning



Develop critical thinking: teach young people to assess who is communicating, what evidence supports a message and what remains uncertain—and to identify trusted sources during a crisis



Thank you for your attention

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