



## Letter to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on how the ECDC gathered and assessed information during the COVID-19 crisis

Correspondence - 24/07/2020

Case OI/3/2020/TE - **Opened on 24/07/2020**

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) Dr Andrea Ammon Executive Director

Strasbourg, 24/07/2020

OI/3/2020/TE

**Subject:** How the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control gathered and assessed information during the COVID-19 crisis

Dear Dr Ammon,

I am writing to you at a time when the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is making extraordinary efforts to provide the European Commission and EU Member States with the necessary independent scientific advice and assistance to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts, which rely on the personal and professional commitment of you and all the Agency's staff, are key to enabling the EU to deal with the crisis.

As Ombudsman, it is my role to ensure that the EU administration is working in a transparent, efficient and independent manner and that it adheres to the principles of good administration. It is particularly important that, during a crisis, the EU and its institutions maintain their high standards so as to ensure trust in public authorities and citizens' cooperation with the difficult measures that are requested of them. I have therefore been monitoring the EU administration during this period and, in particular, the EU institutions, bodies and agencies on the front line.

Given the ECDC's central role, I have been examining your work during this global health emergency, with a particular focus on how the ECDC has been able to gather and assess the data that underpins its work. In order to proceed further with this examination, it is necessary for my Office to review certain documents in the context of an inquiry [1]. This inquiry is intended to assist the ECDC now and in the aftermath of the crisis by providing, as indicated above, an independent assessment of its information gathering capacity.



As a first step, I consider it useful to inspect [2] copies of the following documents:

- the requests for scientific opinions that the ECDC received from the Commission and Member States related to COVID-19, in January 2020;
- the COVID-19-related surveys that the ECDC sent to Member States, including the Member States' replies to these surveys;
- Cooperation agreements between the ECDC and the China CDC, the US CDC and the WHO/WHO Europe; and
- the updates and information the ECDC received via the Early Warning and Response System in January 2020, following DG SANTE's opening of an alert notification on 9 January 2020.

I would be grateful if the ECDC could provide my Office with the above documents, preferably in electronic format, by **30 August 2020** .

If there are any additional documents or information which the ECDC considers relevant to my inquiry at this stage, please feel free to include them.

Information or documents that your institution considers to be confidential will not be disclosed to any other person without the prior agreement of the ECDC. Information and documents of this kind will be deleted from the European Ombudsman's files shortly after the inquiry has ended [3] .

Following the inspection of the above documents, it might be useful to arrange a meeting between my inquiry team and ECDC staff to obtain further clarifications and discuss any outstanding issues. My Office will take contact about this in due course.

Should the ECDC require any further information or clarifications at this stage, including concerning the modalities of transmitting the relevant documentation, your staff can contact the Strategic Inquiries Unit (Ms Tanja Ehnert, Tel: +32 228 46768, [tanja.ehnert@ombudsman.europa.eu](mailto:tanja.ehnert@ombudsman.europa.eu) or Ms Dorien Laermans, Tel: +32 228 33441, [dorien.laermans@ombudsman.europa.eu](mailto:dorien.laermans@ombudsman.europa.eu)).

Thank you for your cooperation on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Emily O'Reilly

[1] Beyond inquiries into specific complaints, the European Ombudsman also has the power to carry out investigations on her own initiative. These inquiries aim to look into wider systemic issues affecting the EU administration.



[2] Information gathering and inspections of documents are carried out on the basis of Article 3(2) of the Statute of the European Ombudsman ( <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/resources/statute.faces#hl2> ) and Article 4 of the European Ombudsman's Implementing Provisions: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/resources/provisions.faces#hl3>.

[3] In accordance with Articles 4.8 and 9.4 of the European Ombudsman's Implementing Provisions: <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/resources/provisions.faces>