

The Secretary-General's Mechanism

Issue 3, January 2022



UN Photo/Mark Garten

Newsletter for Nominated Experts and Analytical Laboratories for the Secretary-General's Mechanism for the Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons

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Dear Colleagues,

We hope that the New Year finds you all happy and healthy.

2021 was a challenging year for many as the world grappled with the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we take stock of what we were able to accomplish last year, UNODA is proud to report that efforts to strengthen the UNSGM continued despite these challenging circumstances. We would like to emphasize that we could not have made such progress without the strong support of our partners and friends. We remain extremely grateful for our training partners that adapted events and activities to virtual formats when feasible; the experts across many time zones that woke up early or stayed up late to join virtual table-top exercises and workshops; and our donors for their support and flexibility as in-person events remained on hold. In this issue, we've highlighted a few of last year's activities in particular – UNODA's briefing for Member States and virtual workshops for nominated expert consultants and qualified experts – and also provided an overview of other activities conducted in the second half of 2021. We are also very pleased to include an interview with Gabriele Kraatz-Wadsack, an expert in microbiology and disarmament who presented at UNODA's virtual roundtable discussion for qualified experts on her experiences leading biological weapons verification and monitoring inspections.

As we look ahead to 2022, we remain confident that efforts to strengthen the UNSGM will continue, through virtual, hybrid and (should the situation allow) in-person activities. Plans for upcoming activities are outlined in the final section of this newsletter.

In addition, one of our aims for 2022 is to continue to increase the number of nominations of experts and laboratories from underrepresented regions and to strengthen the diversity of expertise and specializations represented on the roster. Therefore, we thought we would begin this issue of our newsletter with some more detailed information on the nomination process and current status of the UNSGM roster.

As always, we hope you enjoy this newsletter and please let us know if you have any feedback.

Your UNODA team in support of the UNSGM

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UNODA briefing for Member States on the UNSGM



As custodian of the UNSGM, UNODA annually sends a request to all Member States for nominations of experts and laboratories for the UNSGM roster (*the request is sent via Note Verbale, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section of the newsletter*). In November 2021, in advance of sending this request, UNODA organized a briefing on the UNSGM for Member States at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, delivered [opening remarks](#) at the briefing, in which she highlighted the crucial role Member States play in maintaining and strengthening the mechanism. She also encouraged “States who have not been involved with activities to support the mechanism in the past to consider ways in which they could become involved going forward.”

The remarks were followed by a [presentation](#) by the UNODA team in support of the UNSGM, which aimed to provide participants with information about the mandate and relevance of the UNSGM; activities related to strengthening

the operational readiness of the mechanism; and the role of Member States in supporting the mechanism, in particular the nomination of experts and laboratories to the roster. UNODA outlined the nomination process for the UNSGM roster and highlighted the additional ways in which Member States can support the mechanism, such as hosting training events (including offering a venue or location), financial support for activities, and political support for preserving the independence and strengthening the preparedness of the UNSGM.

Following the briefing, UNODA distributed the Note Verbale requesting the nomination of experts and laboratories for the roster to all Member States. The UNODA team in support of the UNSGM also offered to conduct bilateral discussions following the briefing with Member States that had further questions about the information presented. *Any Member State that wishes to have a discussion about the nomination process is encouraged to reach out to the UNODA team at UNSGM@un.org.*

The UNSGM roster and nomination process

Nomination process for the UNSGM roster

The roster of experts and laboratories that could be called upon in the event of an investigation is a cornerstone of the UNSGM. When [establishing the mechanism](#), the General Assembly requested that the UN Secretary-General “compile and maintain lists of qualified experts provided by Member States whose services could be made available at short notice to undertake investigations [of alleged use of chemical, biological and toxin (CBT) weapons] and of laboratories with the capability to undertake testing for the presence of agents the use of which is prohibited.”

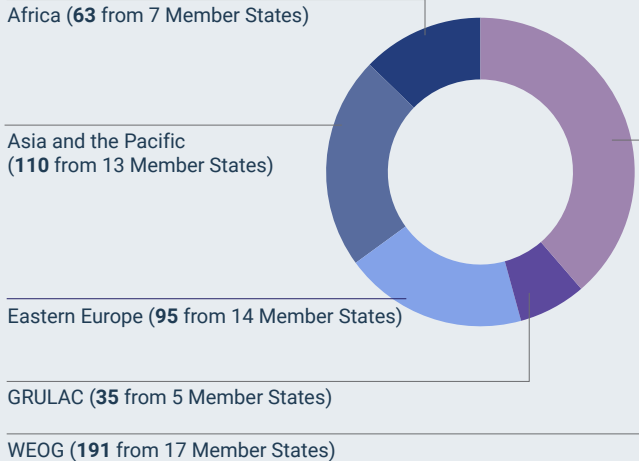
As custodian of the UNSGM, UNODA regularly sends a request to all Member States (via Note Verbale) for

nominations of experts and laboratories for the UNSGM roster. Only Member States can nominate experts and laboratories to the roster, and they do so by official communication (i.e., Note Verbale to UNODA). Experts and analytical laboratories cannot self-nominate. Member States can submit new nominations or update their nominations at any time.

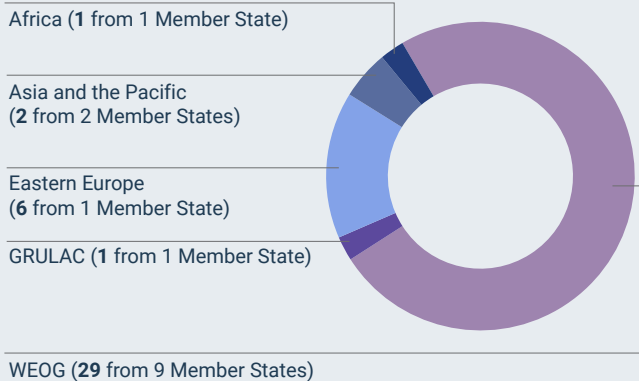
Member States can also nominate points of contact. This is especially helpful for nominated laboratories. Points of contact at missions in New York and/or in Foreign Ministries are also helpful to facilitate requests and communications with UNODA regarding the UNSGM.

Status of the UNSGM roster: Nominations of Qualified Experts, Expert Consultants and Analytical Laboratories (as of 23 December 2021)

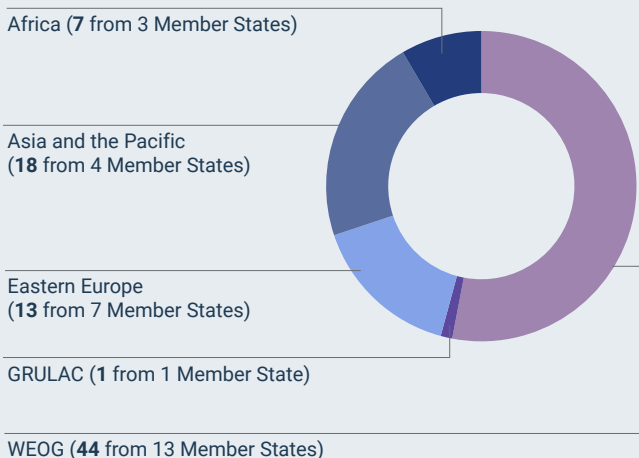
494 QUALIFIED EXPERTS



39 EXPERT CONSULTANTS



83 ANALYTICAL LABORATORIES



Expertise represented on the UNSGM roster

The recommended areas of expertise for qualified experts and specializations for analytical laboratories for a UNSGM investigation are outlined in the [appendices](#) to the Guidelines and Procedures. [Appendix IV](#) lists the principal areas of expertise in which Member States could nominate qualified experts such as medicine, veterinary medicine, plant health, microbiology, chemistry, toxicology and epidemiology. The updated [Appendix V](#) lists the diagnostic and analytical laboratory specializations in which Member States could nominate laboratories such as toxicology, microbiology and analytical chemistry.

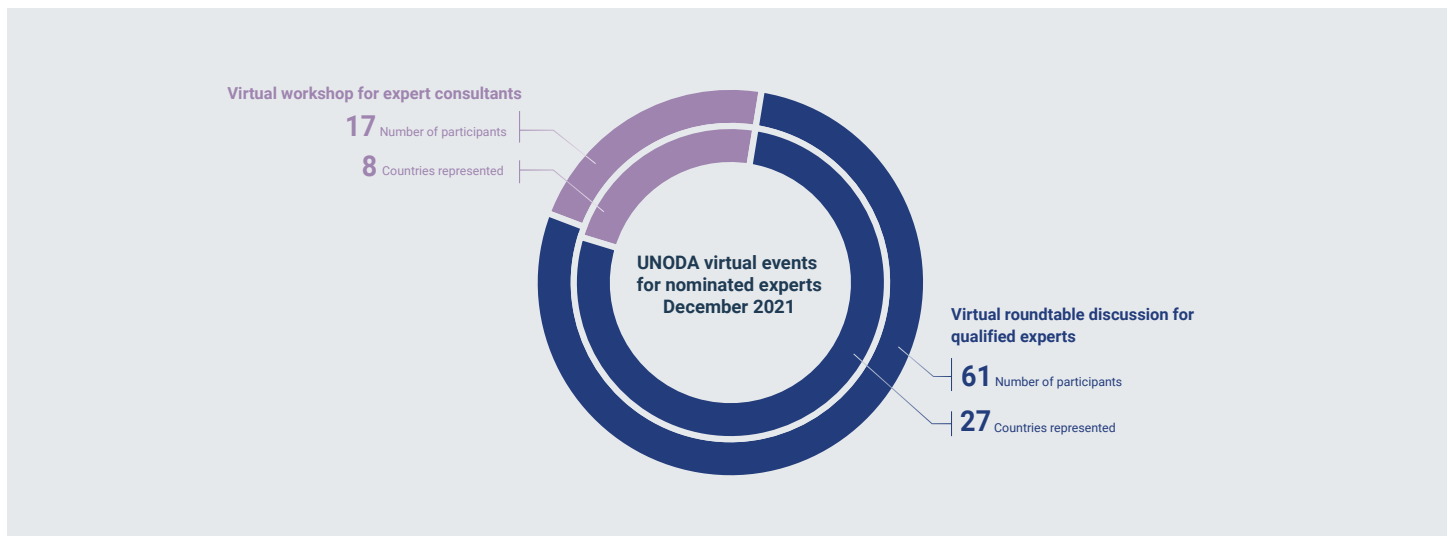
Once a Member State submits nominations, UNODA requests standard forms from qualified experts and laboratories to collect more information, including about areas of expertise and/or specializations of the experts and laboratories nominated. This information is collected and reviewed by UNODA in order to determine the expertise represented on the UNSGM roster and to select participants for training. This information also helps UNODA in advising Member States as to which areas of expertise and specializations would be particularly beneficial for future nominations.

Nominations are particularly requested in the biological area, as the UNSGM is the only instrument that provides a framework for an international investigation of possible use of biological weapons. In addition, as highlighted in the most recent request for nominations, at this time UNODA would particularly welcome the nominations of qualified experts in the following areas: evidence/investigation data management; civilian law enforcement with expertise in specialties such as forensic sciences, crime data analysis and investigative interviewing; health and safety (e.g., emergency medical technicians (EMT) and paramedics) as well as relevant life science disciplines (e.g., advanced sequencing technology, synthetic biology). UNODA would also welcome the nomination of expert consultants, in CBT areas, who would advise and assist the UN Secretary-General, as requested, in the relevant legal, scientific, military, logistical and other questions related to reports of alleged use.

Virtual workshops for qualified experts and expert consultants

On 13 December 2021, UNODA hosted a **virtual workshop for expert consultants** nominated to the UNSGM roster. Seventeen expert consultants from eight countries joined the workshop. The participants were given a brief update by UNODA on recent work and activities to support the UNSGM. Then, the main part of the workshop was an interactive discussion on the training programme for nominated qualified experts. UNODA shared data on past training courses and outlined the strategic approach of the training programme. Participants engaged in discussions

and provided feedback on various aspects of training including topics that should be covered as part of basic training, the format of basic training courses, topics for specialized skill training courses, partners for training activities, e-learning for experts, and training topics that could be covered in virtual or hybrid format. Going forward, UNODA plans to turn this workshop for expert consultants into an annual event, with the aim of regularly bringing together nominated expert consultants to discuss and engage on topical issues for the mechanism.



On 16 December 2021, UNODA hosted a **virtual roundtable discussion for qualified experts** nominated to the UNSGM roster. Sixty-one qualified experts from 27 countries joined the workshop. UNODA provided updates and outlined plans for activities in 2022. Then, the first section of the meeting was a presentation by Gabriele Kraatz-Wadsack on her experiences and insights for qualified experts. We are very happy that Gabriele has agreed to provide a short interview for this newsletter based on her presentation at the meeting (see insert).

After this presentation, the UNODA team led two short scenario-based discussions on aspects that may arise during a UNSGM investigation – sources of information that would be used to develop the mission plan and prioritizing witness interviews.

In the future, UNODA plans to resume hosting in-person skills training courses for qualified experts as soon as the health and travel situations allow. However, we also plan to continue with new activities, such as this virtual discussion, to provide additional opportunities for qualified experts to engage with each other and the UNODA team on the UNSGM.

Interview with Dr. Gabriele Kraatz-Wadsack

During the virtual discussion for UNSGM qualified experts, UNODA was very pleased to invite **Dr. Gabriele Kraatz-Wadsack** to give a presentation to the attendees on her experiences leading biological weapons verification and monitoring inspections and to provide her insights on the tools available to inspectors that might also be relevant for a potential UNSGM investigation.

After her initial career in microbiology, Gabriele has had over 30 years of experience in international disarmament and non-proliferation. In 1995, she joined UNSCOM (the United Nations Special Commission), which had been established to carry out inspections and verification to ensure the elimination of chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles in Iraq. Over the course of her time with UNSCOM, Gabriele carried out 25

biological weapons inspection missions, including eight missions as the Chief Inspector. When UNSCOM was replaced by UNMOVIC (the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission), Gabriele was appointed as the Chief of the biological operations group and also served as the main instructor for several biological training courses. In 2006, Gabriele joined UNODA as the Chief of the Weapons



of Mass Destruction Branch. Among other initiatives, Gabriele launched the revival process of the UNSGM. In 2013, she was involved at UN Headquarters in support of the mission on alleged use investigations of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, which was the most recent application of the UNSGM. Gabriele also served as the Chief of Staff in the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), which was established by the UN Security Council in response to the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Gabriele is still actively engaged on biological weapons issues, and recently published [an article in the Nonproliferation Review](#) proposing an innovative approach to strengthening the BWC.

The following interview answers were provided by Dr. Kraatz-Wadsack and represent her views.

UNSCOM, as well as UNMOVIC, had a mandate that is quite different than the UNSGM. However, are there lessons that can be learned from these experiences that could be valuable for future UNSGM investigations?

UNSCOM and UNMOVIC were established as a subsidiary body of the UN Security Council and tasked with carrying out on-site inspections of Iraq's biological, chemical (CBW) and missile capabilities.

The verification activities under the Security Council mandate had two pillars: disarmament validation and ongoing monitoring and verification (OMV). Disarmament validation sought to verify that all prohibited weapons, items, materials and facilities in Iraq were destroyed or rendered harmless. The second pillar consisted of establishing and operating OMV to continuously ascertain that Iraq did not divert non-proscribed assets to reconstitute or start prohibited activities.

While all of the above may seem straight forward, it is challenging to translate these high-level tasks into field operations and on-site inspection activities. This is also true for the mandate of the UNSGM. If triggered by a UN Member State and the UN Secretary-General decides to launch an investigation, it is important to have a clear understanding of the tasks ahead and have a well prepared, adjustable operational plan since the situation on the ground may well be different than it was anticipated. As it was the case in UNSCOM, international experts might meet each other for the first time to conduct field operations as a team at locations they are not familiar with. Everyone comes from a different background – education, employment and training, communication skills, language etc. Therefore, besides the operational plan, it is most important to create an environment for team coherence with clearly assigned mission tasks. Besides these operational and logistical hurdles to conduct investigations by an international team, a major component of any such investigation will be political overtones. The investigation will depend on cooperation of a concerned party. This will include access to areas to be investigated, people, documents and other information. However, in such a highly charged political environment, access and information requested by the team for technical reasons may be disputed by the host country or even beyond this by a political body such as the Security Council or its

members. This could cause friction not only at the site but also overall for the planning and conduct of the investigation.

This kind of scenario affecting the missions should be kept in mind while planning for and conducting specific investigation inspections.

You just mentioned the political overtones and the international character of UNSCOM inspections and how a UNSGM investigation would operate in a similar context due to its mandate. Why is this so important to highlight for experts on the UNSGM roster?

International investigations and inspections by the United Nations are mandated either by the UN Security Council, the General Assembly or launched by the UN Secretary-General. These types of missions start and end political. Such missions will most probably take place within a broader political context such as an Interstate war, an internal conflict, criminal acts, or international terrorism. Political actors have already taken positions in such conflict situations.

Investigations under the UNSGM in the biological weapons area would be launched in a highly political environment. An allegation of biological weapons use is by itself already a grave accusation and highly political as it deals with a possible breach of not only a legal norm but of the globally recognized strong taboo in international behaviour.

Everyone on such a mission must be aware that the context is not solely technical. Most likely, the team would operate under a lot of global attention. There may be pressure to shorten the time for presenting results, even if for technical analyses, more time would be needed. In a fast paced, political decision awaiting environment, time is not on the team's side. There will be attention by the media which would be eager to report on daily progress. While the experts must conduct the investigation according to the best scientific and technical methods, they should also know that the resulting findings may not be enough to be acceptable to a political body. In principle, the methods applied in such an investigation should leave no doubt about the technical findings and no room for political interpretation.

In such a politicized context, what should UNSGM experts keep in mind when it comes to reporting the results of sampling, or other technical analysis such as satellite imagery, in a political context?

While the UN investigations are considered technical fact-finding missions, the evidence will finally be presented and assessed by a United Nations political body. The evidence a technical expert might think to be absolutely convincing to other scientists including those outside the inspection team may be viewed differently by the Security Council. It is therefore important to determine from the beginning what type of evidence would be convincing for a political body and where and how to collect such evidence during the mission.

The results of sampling will be provided by the laboratories which the UN Secretary-General will engage. These technical data will

need to be translated so that diplomats can easily understand the meaning of the results. While they will engage with their own national technical experts, it is important how the official UNSGM team report will translate the mission findings into specific conclusions. For satellite imagery, it is subjective interpretation by an imagery analyst and leaves even more room to interpretation. In a political context, such interpretation provided in a UN report may be disputed.

In addition to the political context, the international character of the investigations has some very practical impacts on the investigation team.

The international character of a team may affect even basic issues such as safety. An international team will be composed of experts with different cultural backgrounds, specific skills in certain areas and training at national standards including safety training. During UNSCOM inspections, some experts brought their nationally procured personal protective equipment (PPE) for specific tasks. The experts also came with different understanding of safety risks. Ideally, there would be a stock of PPE for different bio risk situations and an international team would have been trained on it before deployment. Furthermore, what will the host country representatives have as a protection? They may also adhere to different safety requirements. All these factors need to be considered before and during deployment.

Interviews may play out differently in international investigations compared with national investigations that experts might be more familiar with. What are some of these differences and what should experts be prepared for?

UNSCOM was given the unprecedented right to question any government official as well as scientists, managers and even private citizens. This right is not clear under the SGM mandate. Such questioning or interviews are very difficult to conduct and UNSCOM/UNMOVIC inspectors were not well prepared. Therefore, interview outcomes varied according to an individual inspector's skills and even personality.

While the way of questioning resembles a national police interview, in an international setting it is very difficult to conduct because nothing is under the interviewer's control. The host country will control the setting, the selection of the interviewee, the types of questions which are acceptable and not acceptable, they may turn hostile against the interviewer, etc. Interviewees are under no obligation to tell the truth and may suddenly leave the interview. In addition, the host country most likely would have pre-briefed any interviewee.

However, even when conducted under the host country supervision and control, interviews were and probably remain a unique inspection tool. A skilfully conducted interview could still yield extremely useful information.

Training courses for experts were implemented with UNMOVIC, based on lessons learned from the UNSCOM inspections. Later, you also instituted UNODA's training programme for experts on the UNSGM roster. Could you tell us a little more about the aims of these training programmes and why training is such an important tool for investigators?

In UNSCOM, we trained ourselves on the job. Failures and misses during inspections did not result from insufficient legal rights or technical tools or technical expertise but mainly from a lack of specific inspection skills among the technical experts performing inspections.

UNMOVIC therefore institutionalized training which primarily aimed to supplement existing technical knowledge of government-nominated experts with specific skills required for preparing, planning and conducting international on-site inspections. At the time of UNMOVIC's dissolution, we had conducted some 30 training courses starting from basic training to enhanced and advanced training which included many practical exercises. In the biological area, training aspects included planning and execution of specific types of inspections, recognition of dual-use equipment and technologies and their possible application for weapons purposes and collection of information through on-site inspections, interviews and document searches. During training, numerous practical drills, table-top exercises and mock on-site inspections were held to include practices of site exploitation and evidence collection. An additional benefit of the training was that potential inspectors could work together as a UN team before entering Iraq. Even a short-term in-country experience of UNMOVIC showed the benefits of having a cadre of well-trained inspectors.

Specific training was also established for SGM experts on the roster since 2009 as an integral part of UNODA's policy to revitalize the SGM. This was done with the support of Member States hosting training courses and conducting certain types of training. It is encouraging that UNODA continues the training. I strongly encourage everyone on the SGM roster to actively participate in the SGM training courses and not miss the opportunity to acquire and improve the skills to conduct effective international investigations.

Other UNODA activities (August–December 2021): UN Internal Task Force coordination meeting and presentations on the UNSGM

On 20 October 2021, UNODA organized a **virtual coordination meeting for the UN Internal Task Force (ITF)**. The ITF is composed of points of contacts to the UNSGM from various departments in the UN Secretariat and other UN entities that will be critical for the successful implementation of a mission in response to a request from Member States. This meeting brought together representatives from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG), Department of Safety and Security (DSS), Department of Operational Support (DOS), Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), Department of Peace Operations (DPO), Office of Legal Affairs (OLA), UN Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC), and UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to discuss issues related to enhancing the operational readiness of the UNSGM. UNODA provided updates on recent work and activities completed. Then, participants engaged in interactive discussions on equipment for the UNSGM and the process for onboarding experts for a UNSGM mission.

As part of efforts to increase outreach activities, UNODA also provided several presentations on the UNSGM during the second half of 2021.

On 27 October, UNODA organized a **joint session at the seventh African Conference on One Health and Biosecurity, organized by the Global Emerging Pathogens Treatment Consortium (GET)**. The session was held under the theme “The Global Non-proliferation Framework and Biosecurity” and aimed to raise awareness among participants on the international disarmament and nonproliferation regime, in particular the Biological Weapons Convention, UN Security Council Resolution 1540, and the UNSGM. UNODA is grateful to the Government of Canada for their support in making UNODA’s participation in this event possible.

UNODA was invited to present at the **OPCW Temporary Working Group on biological toxins** on 11 November 2021. UNODA briefed the working group on the background and mandate of the UNSGM, as well as the agreements between the OPCW and the UN on cooperation with respect to an investigation into alleged use of chemical weapons.

On 22 November 2021, UNODA joined a **virtual side event hosted by the Robert Koch Institute at the Biological Weapons Convention Meeting of States Parties (BWC MSP)**, which focused on Germany’s activities to support the UNSGM. In addition to UNODA’s presentation, there were presentations by the RefBio project team at RKI and the project team at RKI that is working to help strengthen the UNSGM by hosting training events, including the Capstone Field Exercise, and developing e-learning modules for experts on the roster.

In addition, as one of the outcomes of the GET conference in October, **UNODA and GET co-organized a virtual side event at the Biological Weapons Convention Meeting of States Parties (BWC MSP)** on 24 November 2021 entitled “The Global Disarmament and Non-proliferation Framework and Biosecurity: Connecting Political Commitment and Effective Health Security in Africa.” The event gathered practitioners and policymakers from the African region to present some of the national and regional approaches to implementing nonproliferation instruments, in a manner that complements and reinforces broader health security objectives. In addition, UNODA gave a short presentation on the UNSGM, encouraging additional nominations of African experts and laboratories to the roster.



Partner activities (August–December 2021)

- In August 2021, The Robert Koch Institute hosted a series of **virtual table-top exercises** for qualified experts. Five exercises were set up for different time zones to encourage broad participation of experts on the roster. During the exercises, experts engaged on practical aspects of mission planning for the UNSGM, in particular developing a sampling plan and an interview plan for the mission.
- In September 2021, Spiez Laboratory hosted the sixth **UNSGM Designated Laboratories Workshop**. The workshop featured presentations on the ongoing and future laboratory exercises to support the UNSGM and informative discussions on some key topics of interest to laboratories nominated to the UNSGM roster. A report of the workshop is available [online](#).
- In September 2021, the Danish Technical University (DTU), the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), and the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) organized a **dry-lab external quality assurance exercise (EQAE)** on analysis of viral sequences (the first of two EQAEs in this programme).
- In October 2021, the RefBio Project at the Robert Koch Institute launched **three EQAEs – on biotoxins, bacteria and viruses, respectively**. RKI also hosted a RefBio Project workshop in October 2021 to discuss the results and experiences of the SARS-CoV-2 EQAE conducted in 2020–2021.
- In November 2021, the Robert Koch Institute hosted a **Hazardous Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) refresher course** for nine experts on the UNSGM roster.

Planned activities for 2022

The dates for events and registration details will be confirmed and circulated in due course. Should you have any questions regarding upcoming events listed, please feel free to reach out to UNODA and we can put you in touch with the relevant organizer(s).

- **Table-top exercise on sample transfer:** The U.S. State Department will host a virtual table-top exercise on biological sample transfer in a UNSGM mission in early 2022.
- **Outreach:** UNODA will host virtual outreach workshops and follow-up in-person workshops when the travel situation allows in Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.
- **Capstone exercise:** The Capstone exercise organized by Germany has been rescheduled for 2022. Dates will be confirmed once there is more certainty regarding the health situation and travel restrictions. The focus of this exercise is an on-site investigation of the alleged use of a biological weapon in a (fictitious) country. Theoretical considerations regarding the mission-planning as well as organizing supplies and equipment already took place during a table-top exercise in November 2020. The 10-day full-scale exercise will cover several other main aspects of a UNSGM investigation, including border crossing and negotiation with the host country, interviewing, sampling, decontamination, chain of custody and sample transport.
- **Skills training:** Should the situation allow, South Africa will host a basic training course for nominated experts in June 2022. Other skills training workshops that must be held as in-person events will be rescheduled as soon as it is safe to do so.
- **Laboratory exercises:** The second dry-lab EQAE on analysis of viral sequences hosted by the Robert Koch Institute (Germany), the Technical University of Denmark (DTU Food) and the Swedish Defence Research Agency will begin in May 2022; the “Disease X Testing” EQAE led by China’s State Key Laboratory of Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control (SKLID) will begin in May 2022; workshops and EQAEs under the RefBio Project will also continue in 2022.

Supporting the UNSGM

UNODA’s work to ensure the readiness of the UNSGM is made possible by generous financial support and in-kind contributions, such as the provision of training material and hosting events, from Member States. We are especially grateful for the support from Canada, Germany, Japan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. We also appreciate the support from our international partner organizations, including INTERPOL, OPCW, WHO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). This voluntary support from Member States and organizations is a cornerstone for ensuring and improving operational readiness of the UNSGM.

Thank you for your interest in our newsletter. We plan to send this newsletter twice a year and we would welcome your contributions to future editions.

Contact us

Questions, concerns, suggestions? Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding supporting the UNSGM or if you are interested in participating in activities.

We would love to hear from you! Please contact us here:

