

Exceptional rules for ESEVT Visitations planned in 2023 considering the extraordinary circumstances linked to the COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

Extraordinary circumstances and regulations linked to the COVID-19 crisis continue to affect the EAEVE member VEEs and are likely to remain in place during the course of 2023 as well. In response to this, and at the same time recognising the need to maintain an efficient evaluation system serving the needs of the member VEEs and their students, ExCom has extended the current exceptional rules for ESEVT Visitations. The approved necessary adjustments aim to ensure the smooth running of the ESEVT evaluation process in full compliance with the relevant national and international health and safety recommendations, and the high level of quality of the evaluation system.

The amendments take into account the evolution of the pandemic in the past months and the related regulations and recommendations. They also draw on EAEVE's experience from the Visitations completed in 2021 and 2022 in agreement with the 'Exceptional rules for ESEVT Visitation'. The amended procedure concerns the Visitation process in 2023 and depending on the evolution of the pandemic and the related health and travel regulations, it will be revised and adjusted as necessary.

The same applies to the rules for Visitations planned to take place in 2024, which will be revised and updated as needed during the course of 2023. For the time being, the rules for the preparation of the SER and other Visitation-related documents remain as per the 'Exceptional transitory amendment of the SOP (due to COVID-19)', approved by ExCom in December 2020. For easier reference, they are incorporated in the current document.

1. Exceptional rules for ESEVT Visitations planned in 2023

- a) Due to the nature of the ESEVT evaluation process and the practical challenges in conducting a review of a VEE entirely online, 100% virtual Visitations (FV, RV and PV) are not considered an option.
- b) Three options for Full Visitations (FV) are to be considered:
 - **Option A** (which remains the default option): maintain the FV as originally planned with all experts present in person.
 - **Option B**: maintain the FV but with a mix of onsite experts (working at the VEE) and remote experts (working from home).
 - o The number of onsite experts must be minimum three, i.e. one Chairperson (the one planned previously or another experienced expert from the team if the

Chairperson is not available), one Coordinator (the one planned previously or another Coordinator if the former is not available) and one experienced expert of the team. Everything possible will be done, however, to have a full team onsite if the circumstances allow it.

- In this case a dedicated organisation will be set to allow virtual meetings both before, during and after the FV (for the exact details, please refer to the information in ‘Timetable and guidelines for the Visitation’ below). The rest of the process is fully compliant with the ESEVT SOP.
- **Option C:** postponement of the FV following a "case of force majeure" with consideration by ECOVE of extension of the VEE’s ESEVT status. For this option, the conditions for consideration of “case of force majeure” are:
 - borders of the country of the VEE closed;
 - and/or extended restriction of circulation of people in the country of the VEE;
 - and/or when the VEE can/may not organise its practical and clinical teachings at the time of the FV;
 - and/or impossibility for the EAEVE Office to fix a team with enough experts who are allowed to freely travel to and from the visited country.
- c) The same three options apply to Re-visitations (RV) and Preliminary Visitations (PV) as well, with the only difference being the minimum number of onsite experts, i.e. one (either Chairperson or Coordinator) for both RVs and PVs.

The Chairperson and the Coordinator will be in close contact with the VEE, which not later than 4 weeks before the start of the visitation must provide a detailed update regarding the latest national regulations and information on the relevant travel restrictions for the team members, including details if COVID-19 testing before arrival/departure and/or before entry to the country of the VEE is mandatory.

Based on the provided information, the Chairperson and the Coordinator will discuss the possible options for the visitation. The discussion shall be followed by an in-depth discussion with the Head of the VEE and the Liaison Officer of the visitation.

The Chairperson and the Coordinator will then propose one of the above options (A, B or C) to the Director of ESEVT and the EAEVE Office. The final decision about the visitation will be made by ECOVE not later than 3 weeks before the start of the visitation and will be immediately communicated to the VEE and the team members by the EAEVE Office.

However, as the COVID-19 situation is highly volatile, changes in the above-mentioned information and regulations may result in a re-consideration by ECOVE at the last minute, resulting in either Option B or Option C.

When the postponement is considered by ECOVE as a case of force majeure, the evaluation fees already paid by the VEE (separately or as part of the Merged Membership and Evaluation Fee (MEF) system) will not be lost and will be kept for the rescheduled visitation.

All team members and visited VEEs for Visitations in 2023 will be notified in writing by the EAEVE Office of the Exceptional Rules.

2. Exceptional rules for the timetable and guidelines for all visitations taking place in 2023

2.1. Adaptation of the timetable for the visitation (FV, RV, PV)

It is the duty of the Chairperson, the Coordinator and the Liaison Officer of the visitation, trusting the good sense, to adapt the programme as needed in order to make it safe for everybody involved in the visitation. The programme must be modified as necessary to consider the following requirements:

- The VEE should send the VEE's policy on the prevention of COVID-19 to all team members before arrival.
- Transfer from/to the airport on arrival and departure should be arranged carefully to avoid long waiting times at the airport.
- All team meetings should be completed through webinars organised by the Coordinator.
- All meetings between the team members and local persons (from both the VEE itself and external participants) should be completed through webinars organised by the VEE. Ideally, the webinar should be displayed on a large screen connected to one personal computer with omnidirectional microphone in the team meeting room. Alternatively, and in case the experts prefer to use their own devices, the use of earphones is strongly recommended to avoid echoes and Larsen effects.
- In case of physical meetings, the number of local people should be reduced to the strict minimum and preventive measures should be fully implemented, e.g. compulsory face-masks, large and well-ventilated rooms for respecting social distancing, availability of hydro-alcoholic solutions.
- The formal dinners on Monday and Wednesday should be cancelled and the meals for the onsite experts should be served in an isolated environment.
- The VEE should provide videos (available for both onsite and online experts) on facilities, equipment and procedures used for theoretical, practical and clinical teaching, both intramural (e.g. classrooms, practical teaching rooms, VTH, etc.) and extramural (e.g. slaughterhouses, shelters, teaching farms, etc.). These videos should be "delivered" by the relevant teacher(s) who could then answer questions from the team.
- It is strongly suggested to organise a teleconference between the team members and the Liaison Officer the week before the start of the Visitation. This e-meeting will be organised and chaired by the Coordinator, with the support of the EAEVE Office, and will focus on a reminder of the SOP valid for the visitation, the finalisation of the visitation programme and the description of the preventive measures to be implemented for ensuring the health

and safety of all concerned persons and for respecting the relevant international and national regulations/recommendations.

- Flexibility should be expected from both the visited VEE and the Visitors for last-minute amendments of the visitation programme in agreement with the Exceptional Rules and legal regulations.

2.2. Health and safety measures during the Visitation

It is the duty of the VEE with support from the Chairperson, the Coordinator and the Liaison Officer of the visitation to ensure that the local health and safety regulations are strictly adhered to during the visitation. In addition, the following minimum requirements for ensuring the health and safety of all participants in the visitation process and for preventing the spread of the COVID-19 are to be implemented:

- The VEE should provide high quality face masks to the onsite experts.
- The onsite experts and the staff members of the VEE should wear face masks at all times when physical distancing is not possible.
- Latex/plastic gloves (S/M/L) should be available to those team members who wish to use gloves.
- Hydro-alcoholic solutions, paper towels and disinfectants should be available in all meeting rooms, which should be large enough for implementing social distancing and well ventilated.
- The VEE should make sure that objects and surfaces that are touched/used regularly are cleaned and disinfected at least once a day.
- Toilet facilities should be available only for the team members and cleaned and disinfected at least once a day.
- A distance of at least 1.5 meter should be maintained between individuals.
- The VEE should provide COVID-19 self-tests in case any of the team members or the VEE staff in contact with the team members tests positive for COVID-19 during the visitation.

2.3. Travel, accommodation and other practical arrangements for the team members

In accordance with the ESEVT SOP, all travel and accommodation arrangements are made and financed by the VEE to be visited. During all travels in the visited country, preventive measures should be fully implemented.

All costs related to other arrangements that might be necessary in order to be compliant with the relevant national and international regulations linked to the prevention of COVID-19 (e.g. COVID-19 testing before/after visiting the country of the VEE) are to be covered/reimbursed by the VEE.

It is also strongly recommended that the VEEs take out a cancellation insurance when making the travel and accommodation arrangements, in order to avoid potential financial losses linked to postponement of the visitation due to last-minute changes in the respective travel restrictions.

3. Exceptional rules for the preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for all types of visitations due to take place in 2023 and 2024, for which the SER is being/will be prepared

- a) In the SER, the VEE must provide information on the last three complete academic years (AYs) (for instance AYs 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 for visitations organised in 2023) and fill in the relevant tables in the SER. The VEE must also provide an updated list of Indicators in the SER, based on the last three complete AYs.
- b) However, in case the AY 2019-2020 was heavily affected by the pandemic, the VEE must also include an Addendum explaining the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and what was done to compensate for it. In addition, the VEE must fill in the amended ESEVT Indicators' table focusing on the last two complete COVID-19 free AYs.

The Addendum is compulsory; the exact format and length – one single addendum/annex or separate comments in the Comment Section for each Standard – is to be decided by the VEE; however, the Addendum should be concise and free of unnecessary details.

Ideally, the information should be included both in the Comments Section of the relevant Standard (to facilitate the work of the visitation team) and as a brief Addendum (for the sake of clarity and in order to have an accurate representation of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis for the general public who will read the SER in the future). Failure to comply and provide the requested information could be considered as a minor deficiency by ECOVE.

The SER including the Addendum is to be submitted to the team members and the EAEVE Office 2 months before the visitation at the latest.

- c) In the event that a visitation needs to be postponed due to COVID-19, the VEE must provide a brief Addendum to the SER focusing on the period between the original visitation dates and the rescheduled visitation. The Addendum must be submitted to the team members and the EAEVE Office not later than 1 month before the visitation and will be published on the VEE and EAEVE websites together with the SER and Visitation Report.

4. Exceptional rules for the preparation of the Interim Report (IR) including data on academic year 2019-2020

- a) The IR must be completed in agreement with the guidance provided in Annex 14 of the SOP 2019 as amended in September 2021 (Template and guidelines for the IR) and the template in Appendix 1 of the SOP 2019 as amended in September (Template IR).

- b) The VEE must provide information on the last three complete AYs and fill in the ESEVT Indicators' table accordingly. In case, AY 2019-2020 was heavily affected by the pandemic, the VEE must provide an updated list of Indicators based on the data from the last two complete AYs following AY 2019-2020. The data is to be filled in in the adjusted ESEVT Indicators' table. The raw data for AY 2019-2020 is to be provided separately (e.g. in a table in Word format). The data will be used only for information and will not be taken into consideration for the calculation of the Indicators.

5. Exceptional rules for the preparation of the Visitation Report (VR) and the calculation of the ESEVT Indicators

- a) The work on the VR will not be too greatly affected, since it is already the normal practice for the team members to work individually on their respective chapters in an online document editor and discuss the draft Reports and visitation-related matters via e-mail and in webinars, organised by the Coordinator before the start of the visitation, where any questions linked to the upcoming visitation, the extraordinary circumstances and the VR can get addressed
- b) The VR should include an explanation of the decisions made to adapt the programme linked to the exceptional circumstances.
- c) For the calculation of the ESEVT Indicators, the academic year 2019-2020 should be neutralised in case it was heavily affected by the pandemic – i.e. the data linked to this academic year should not be taken into consideration. Thus, the focus for the comparison with the ESEVT median and minimal values will be on two academic years instead of three. The ESEVT Indicators' table (Excel file) has been amended accordingly.

6. COVID-19 Internal Policy of EAEVE (as approved by ExCom on 18 October 2021, amended on 31.03.2022)

As an organisation, EAEVE is dedicated to the welfare and health of any person involved in onsite Visitations, which are organised following the SOPs.

EAEVE is committed to the principle that any person appointed to take part in a Visitation strictly respects all rules of biosafety as described in the 'Exceptional Rules for ESEVT Visitations'. Safety rules and regulations implemented by the local VEE must be strictly adhered to and respected.

As an organisation of scientists and researchers, which is highly engaged with the One Health Concept, EAEVE strongly recommends that any person employed or appointed should be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 with a vaccine approved by the World Health Organisation.

We request that any person appointed by EAEVE should adhere to the following recommendations:

- to fully respect EAEVE safety rules and regulations during the Visitation;
- to fully respect local safety measures required by the visited VEE;
- to fully accept any potential risk in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic during the Visitation.

‘I, the undersigned, hereby declare that that I am fully aware of the safety rules and regulations as stated by EAEVE as an organisation and by the local VEE I am appointed to visit. I accept to attend this Visitation and any potential issues that could arise following this Visitation due to the COVID-19 pandemic will be my own responsibility. Whatever my vaccination status against COVID-19, I fully relieve EAEVE as an organisation and any of its officers from any further responsibility regarding potential exposure to COVID-19 during the Visitation and the trip to and from the VEE.

Furthermore, I am aware that the EAEVE corporate travel emergency insurance policy covers only the risk of accidents that may occur during travel and the Visitation itself.’

Tracking system

Temporary amendment of the ESEVT SOP 2019

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