



Factsheet

Network of Nominated Biological Laboratories for the UNSGM

The UNSGM Guidelines and Procedures¹ describe in paragraphs 76-80 the capabilities expected from the laboratories nominated to the UNSGM roster. Paragraph 77 specifically mentions participation of nominated laboratories in inter-laboratory calibrations. In the chemical field, this is implemented by the OPCW in the form of proficiency testing programs resulting in a trusted network of Designated Laboratories. In the absence of any comparable institutional resources in the biological field, any UNSGM investigation of biological weapons will have to rely on the rostered laboratories without any clarity about their quality standards and proficiency. Certainly, these expert laboratories around the globe have the capability to identify and characterise infectious microorganisms and toxins for various types of samples. However, they maintain their own quality systems and use reporting criteria that meet their customers' requirements. Therefore, analysis strategies and quality assurance requirements might not fully satisfy the expectations of the international community in case of an investigation of alleged use of biological weapons.

Sweden and Switzerland started an incentive in 2015 by organising workshops that have been bringing together rostered and other interested laboratories as well as experts with various backgrounds, with the goal to move the issue of inter-laboratory calibration forward through active engagement of Member States and their laboratories. These initial workshops clearly confirmed that developing a collaborative network of UNSGM bio-laboratories that provides transparency and confidence in the scientific competence, analytical skills, and quality assurance systems is a necessity.

To date, Switzerland has organised four workshops to further develop a network of trusted laboratories. All workshop reports are available on Spiez Laboratory's website². Since participants view these annual workshops as a useful format to further strengthen collaboration among bio-laboratories for the UNSGM, Switzerland is willing to continue to provide this dedicated workshop series. The platform is vital for the sharing of results and experiences and serves as a forum to circulate new ideas and plans among the bio-laboratories.

A further important goal is to increase the number and diversity of experts and to broaden the geographical distribution of participating laboratories that actively participate in future meetings. This will positively influence recently initiated and on-going activities. It is worth highlighting the fact that these workshops have resulted in a number of activities for rostered laboratories and laboratories interested in the UNSGM.

¹ General Assembly Document A/44/561 Annex I (4 October 1989):
[Guidelines and Procedures](#) for the Timely and Efficient Investigation of Reports of the Possible Use of Chemical and Bacteriological (Biological) or Toxin Weapons

² <https://www.labor-spiez.ch/en/rue/uno/index.htm>

The following activities tailored to specific aspects of UNSGM laboratory analysis are currently open for participation:

- A German project that provides External Quality Assurance Exercises (wet-lab) in the fields of bacteria, viruses, and toxins – point of contact is Roland Grunow from the Robert Koch-Institute (grunowr@rki.de and refbio-coordination@rki.de);
- A Danish-Swedish project that provides Confidence Building Exercises (dry-lab) through genomic data analysis of bacteria – point of contact is Jette Kjeldgaard from the Danish Technical University (jetk@food.dtu.dk);
- The OPCW's toxin exercises – point of contact is Marc-Michael Blum from the OPCW (marc.blum@opcw.org).

It is highly desirable that more activities covering additional aspects of relevance to bio-laboratories will be initiated. Switzerland therefore calls for the redoubling of collective efforts to spark new and continued active engagement by rostered laboratories and laboratories interested in the UNSGM. It also encourages joining on-going and future activities of relevance for strengthening a trusted network of nominated biological laboratories for the UNSGM.