Network for Communicable Disease Control in Southern Europe and Mediterranean Countries (EpiSouth)

Conference Aims:
The EpiSouth project aimed to create a framework of collaboration on epidemiological issues in order to improve communicable disease surveillance, communication and training across the countries of the Mediterranean and the Balkans.

Summary of the project

General objectives
The EpiSouth project aimed to create a framework of collaboration on epidemiological issues to improve communicable diseases surveillance, communication and training across the countries of the Mediterranean and the Balkans.

The objective was achieved by five strategic specific actions: the establishment of a network of public health institutions; the strengthening of the early response capacity to health threats and infectious diseases spread by training in field/applied epidemiology; the establishment of a common platform on cross-border epidemiologic intelligence alerts; the assessment of the access to immunization of migrant populations and immigrants; and a description of the epidemiology and preparedness to cross-border emerging zoonotic infections.

The surveillance and control of vaccine preventable communicable diseases across the countries of the Mediterranean and the Balkans was improved by the EpiSouth project through the creation of a framework for collaboration and exchange of information related to vaccine-preventable diseases and to specific approaches and national immunization strategies targeting under-immunized migrant groups and hard-to-reach populations, such as the Roma minority and other country specific nomads.
The specific objectives of the Episouth project on surveillance and control of vaccine preventable communicable diseases activities were:

- To assess the access of the migrant population to immunizations
- To collect data and establish a regular exchange of information on cases/outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases among migrant populations and immigrants in Mediterranean and Balkan countries

**Results achieved and expected**

The EpiSouth activities on surveillance and control of vaccine preventable communicable diseases have been documented with key documents made available on the Project web site,

Key deliverables produced
- Report on assessment survey for vaccine preventable diseases and migrant populations¹
- Recommendations for improving access to immunizations and exchanging data on vaccine preventable diseases (included in the Strategic Document)²

**Measurable outcomes at national and European level**

A country based assessment survey for vaccine preventable diseases and migrants among participating countries has been carried out and the results on country specific migrant groups, organization and performance of their immunizations and problems faced by the national public health system in this context are presented in a specific report.

Moreover, a strategic document on vaccine preventable diseases and migrant populations has been produced with guidelines for exchanging information on VPD among migrants and recommendations for improving the access to the immunization of migrant groups.

**Main public health benefits for the target group**

- The Episouth Network has increased awareness about the need for common policies, strategies and programs regarding Communicable Diseases Surveillance and Control in the area (i.e. Balkans, Middle East, Northern Africa, Southern Europe)

**Impact on Member States' health policy**

- The Strategic document on Vaccine Preventable Diseases has contributed to the integration of policies and programs about access to vaccination by migrants
- The Report on the assessment survey for vaccine preventable diseases and migrant populations contributes to clarifying the problem of access to vaccination by migrants

Use of the project results for the further development of public health programmes in participating countries

- The Episouth network has improved the exchange of information regarding Communicable Diseases among most Episouth participating countries.
- The within-country and inter-countries collaborative work during the survey for vaccine preventable diseases and migrant populations has facilitated the establishment of an informal network of experts involved in Vaccine Preventable Diseases surveillance, prevention and control in participating countries.
- A new phase of the Episouth Network activities has been approved and started on 15 October 2010 and is expected to last until 15 April 2013 – Episouth Plus Project (2010-13). The new phase implies a shift of the Network’s activities to a wider approach. Building on the knowledge of regional gaps and needs identified during the first Episouth implementation, the new Episouth Plus Project aims at contributing to the control of public health threats and other bio-security risks in the Mediterranean region and South-East Europe.

Dissemination of project

- The creation and update of the Episouth web-site
- The Episouth electronic bulletin summarises the information presented in the project's web-site, in 12 issues³
- The Episouth electronic Weekly Epidemiological Bulletin - called e-WEB - a bulletin which provides a weekly summary of new health events
- Press coverage for Episouth activities in English and Arabic
- Scientific dissemination through abstracts for oral presentations and posters and participation in several national and international congresses, conferences⁴
- The Episouth Conference on Communicable Diseases and Public Health in Mediterranean and Balkans, 21-23 April 2010, Rome (Italy)⁵
- A large list of deliverables, including reports, surveys, training materials⁶

³ [http://www.episouth.org/epi_ebulletin.html](http://www.episouth.org/epi_ebulletin.html)
⁴ [http://www.episouth.org/wp7_presentations.html](http://www.episouth.org/wp7_presentations.html)
⁶ [http://www.episouth.org/deliverables.html](http://www.episouth.org/deliverables.html)
Administrative details

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- EUR 2 308 772.26

EC Contribution:
- EUR 1 719 032.68

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- 45 Months

Start date:
- 01/10/2006

End date:
- 30/06/2010

Associated partners:
- Azienda Ospedaliera di Padova (Padua GH), Veneto Region, Italy
- Instituto de Salud Carlos III (ISCIII), Spain
- Institut de Veille Sanitaire (InVS), France
- National Center of Infectious & Parasitic Diseases (NICPD), Bulgaria
- Hellenic Center for Infectious Diseases Control (HCIDC/KEEL), Greece
- Ministry of Health (MOH CY), Cyprus
- Ministry of Health (MOH MT), Malta
- Institute of Public Health (IPH/ISPB), Romania
- Institute of Public Health (IVZ-RS), Slovenia