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

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Workshop on Health Programme projects on Generic Preparedness planning and response in health emergencies, DGSanco/EAHC
Luxembourg - 30 September and 1 October 2009
The countries of the Mediterranean region have common sea borders in the remarkable ecosystem of the Mediterranean Sea, and, as a result, they share common public health problems and threats.
EpiSouth Project Objective

Episouth Network aims at creating a framework of collaboration on epidemiological issues in order to improve communicable diseases surveillance, communication and training across the countries in the area of Mediterranean and Balkans.
Project history

- In occasion of the Year of the Mediterranean (2005), 6 European Public Health Institutes agreed to elaborate a framework of collaboration

- In October 2006 the EpiSouth Project started with 9 European countries with a Grant Agreement with DG-Sanco

- In March 2007 countries from S.Europe, Balkans, N. Africa and Middle East, together with WHO and EC met in Rome to elaborate a new partnership, thanks also to EC TAIEX support

- In June 2007 the Italian MOH made funds available for non-EU countries participation
Areas of activities (WPs)

- The project is composed by 8 Work Packages (WPs)
- Each WP is led by a PH Institution
- and developed by a WP Steering Team, constituted by the WP Leader and those countries which have expressed their special interest for the related WP to facilitate participation
Project organisation

Country Focal Points (CFP)
Each country has identified and appointed 1 or 2 relevant persons, who act as CFPs of the Episouth Network and convey all the communication/information to the relevant officers in their respective countries.

Project Steering Committee (SC)
The project is led by a SC, composed by the WP leaders plus representatives of ECDC, EC-DGSanco, WHO-Euro, WHO-Emro, WHO-HQ and of non-UE countries as observers.
Main project achievements:

*Enlargement*

from a European Project to a

Mediterranean Project

in line with the EU’s external actions of Neighbourhood Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
Participant Countries and Organisations

As per September 2009, the EpiSouth Network is composed by:

- 26 Countries with 65 Focal Points
- and 4 Collaborating Institutions (ECDC, EC-DGSanco, WHO and Italian MOH)
EU Countries at the Project starting (Oct 2006)
Countries as per September 2009
Main project achievements: **Networking**

- Project Meetings → [on website]
- Project Steering Committee Meetings
- WP Steering Team Meetings & teleconferences
- Directory of participating Public Health Institution → [on website]
Main project achievements: **Networking II**

A web-based **Network Working Area**: a virtualised work environment where Network participants exchange documents and information in a secure way.

A controlled-access **suite of tools**:
- Meetings and events management
- Document workflow and storage
- Forum for open discussion
- List of contacts
- Data-entry
Main project achievements: Training in field epidemiology

- Training needs assessment for all countries (with ad hoc questionnaire) → Report 6/2008

- First training module (36 participants plus guests)
  Madrid, 10-14 September 2007 → on website

- Second training module (33 participants plus guests)
  Madrid, 2-6 June 2008 → on website

- Third training module (33 participants plus guests)
  Madrid, 15-19 2009

- Directory of training courses and fellowships (in progress)
Steering Team WP5
(8 Countries)

- Spain
- Romania
- Serbia
- Algeria
- Lebanon
- Turkey
- Egypt
- Syria
Main project achievements: Cross-border Epidemic Intelligence

- Pilot assessment of existing epidemic intelligence activities in participating countries (with ad hoc questionnaire) → Report 5/2008
- Epidemic Intelligence weekly bulletins and thematic notes → on website
- Website secured section on cross-border epidemic intelligence with alerts originating from partners (in progress)
Steering Team WP 6
(8 Countries)

- France
- Malta
- Croatia
- Morocco
- Tunisia
- Israel
- Jordan
- Montenegro
Main project achievements:

**Vaccine preventable diseases and migrant populations**

- Pilot assessment of vaccine-preventable diseases and migrant populations in participating countries (with ad hoc questionnaire)

- On-line survey on countries migration status profile and vaccination access of mobile population
Steering Team WP7
(8 Countries)

- Bulgaria
- Slovenia
- Albania
- B&H
- Serbia
- Morocco
- Lebanon
- Algeria
Main project achievements: Cross-border emerging zoonoses

- Assessment and selection of five zoonoses of priority in the Episouth countries (with ad hoc questionnaire) → Report 4/2008

- Situation report by country regarding: Brucellosis, Campylobacteriosis, Leishmaniasis, Rabies and West Nile Virus

- On-line questionnaire for contacts of countries Human and Veterinary PH officials

- Directory of Human and Veterinary PH officials (in progress)
Steering Team WP8
(9 Countries)

- Greece
- Cyprus
- Albania
- FYROM
- Kosovo
- Tunisia
- Jordan
- Egypt
- Syria
Main project achievements: Monitoring

- Monitoring of Network Development through questionnaires distributed during the 1st and 2nd Project Meetings → Report 3/2008

![Bar chart showing percentages of Q2, Q8, Q10, and Q14 questions across Rome, March 2007 and Athens, December 2007]
Main project achievements: Dissemination I

- EpiSouth Web Site [www.episouth.org](http://www.episouth.org)
- EpiSouth Quarterly Bulletins mailed to registered users → on website
Main project achievements: Dissemination II

- Presentation at Conference and Workshop → on website
- Articles, leaflet and outline → on website
Lesson Learned I

Project Organization

revised for sharing responsibilities with all the 26 countries (after the First Meeting)
Lesson Learned II

Countries expectations and needs

All WPs have developed pilot survey for assessing countries expectations and needs in related fields:

- training assessment needs
- epidemic intelligence in place in each country
- VPD and migrants profile in each country
- zoonoses priority for each country
Lesson Learned III

Countries and Institutions are willing to participate and to commit to the Network

(9 EU countries have signed Agreement with EC)

17 countries have voluntarily wrote a commitment letter to the project coordinator

4 institutions are participating in this partnership
Episouth Network

Added Values

- focuses on regional and countries cross-border issues
- succeeds in creating cohesion and concrete collaboration among 26 countries of South Europe, Balkans, North Africa and Middle East
- fills a geographical area with common public health problems (Balkans and Mediterranean Basin) that is not addressed, as a whole, neither by the European Commission nor by WHO
Balkans and Mediterranean basin

- **WHO**
  - Europe region: WHO-EURO (17/26): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, FYROM, Turkey
  - Africa region: WHO-AFRO (1/26): Algeria

- **European Commission**:
  - ECDC(9/26): Southern European Union Countries of Mediterranean: Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Spain
  - European Neighborhood Policy (18/26): all EU plus Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia
  - Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (23/26): all EU plus Albania, Algeria, Bosnia, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey
Episouth Network
Best practices

➤ the approach based on countries expectations and regional needs has facilitate interest in participation

➤ the methodology adopted has enhanced co-ownership of participant countries

➤ the presence of international institutions (ECDC, EC, WHO-EURO, WHO-EMRO, WHO-HQ) has allowed sharing views and facilitated interaction
Reaction to H1N1 health threat

- Directories of PH institutions and HPH and VPH officials available (WP4-8)
- Focal Points identified, trained and interacting each other (WP4-5)
- FPs willing to share data through the web-based Network Working Area (WP4-2)
- Information made available through Informative Notes on H1N1 (WP6-2)

Mediterranean countries has cooperated in a health threats situation (WP1)
Episouth Network
Development and perspectives

Discussion among partners for identifying priorities and strategies for the Network after the Project end (June 2010)

↓

New project proposals submitted to funding Institutions with new lines of intervention

Episouth-plus
EpiSouth-plus

Project proposal

aimed at increasing the health security in the Mediterranean Region and Balkans

by enhancing the preparedness to common health threats and bio-security risk

at national and regional levels

in the framework of the IHR implementation
Main Objectives (1)

i) Establishment of a Mediterranean Reference Laboratories network (including P4 Lab) in order to facilitate common threats detection in the countries involved

ii) Promotion of common procedures in Preparedness and Risk management plans to fit the IHR-2005 requirements and multi-country harmonic and prompt response
iii) Early Warning and alerts' platform able to share information between EpiSouth countries and with other Early Warning platforms

iv) Production of guidelines and strategic documents aimed at facilitate IHR implementation based on assessments and surveys conducted among the EpiSouth Countries
**Episouth-plus**

**Challenges for a real partnership**

- Formalizing partnership and commitment of different partners (MS, non-EU countries, international organizations, other projects)
- Sharing responsibilities, especially between EU and non-EU countries (e.g. WP leader and co-leader)
- Avoiding overlapping and enhancing complementary actions
- Needs of different source of funding to include EU and non-EU countries
Episouth-plus

Funding Strategies

A proposal presented to PH call with 9 MS Countries as Associated (with budget) and 17 non-MS Countries as Collaborating Partners (without budget) → currently under negotiation

A parallel proposal presented to EC DG Relex/AIDCO for the participation and funding of the 17 non-MS countries

Further requests are being presented to National MOH (e.g. France, Italy, Spain)
Invitation to interested people and projects in participating to:

**Final Project Meeting & Conference on CD in the Mediterranean Region**

in Rome on 21-23 April 2010

Presentation of 4 strategic documents focused on Mediterranean area for:

- Cross-border epidemic intelligence
- Vaccine-preventable diseases and migrant populations
- Epidemiology & preparedness to cross-border emerging zoonoses
- Training on field/applied epidemiology

Discussion of future development