



EpiSouth

Network for the Control of Public Health Threats
in the Mediterranean Region and South East Europe

EpiSouth Plus Project (2010-13)

Increasing the health security in the Mediterranean area and South-East Europe by enhancing and strengthening the preparedness to common health threats and bio-security risks at national and regional levels in the countries of the EpiSouth Network

PROJECT OUTLINE

EpiSouth-Plus is co-funded by the European Union DG SANCO/EAHC and DEVCO/EuropeAid together with the participating national partner Institutions.
The financial support of the Italian Ministry of Health and ECDC is also acknowledged.

The project is led by the Italian National Institute of Health and counselled by an Advisory Board composed by EC, ECDC, WHO and other international experts

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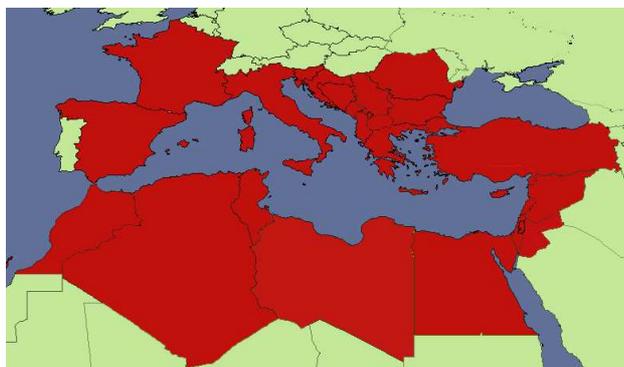
INTRODUCTION

The Countries of the Mediterranean area have common sea borders in the remarkable ecosystem of the Mediterranean Sea and, as a result, they also share common public health problems. Inhomogeneous approaches and tools, differences in definitions of same events, lack of a proper context and endeavour strongly affect the possibilities of sharing without reservations knowledge and many sensitive data/issues among Mediterranean Countries. This may ultimately have an impact mainly on the more fragile Countries and on the health of their citizens.

In occasion of the Year of the Mediterranean (2005), a number of countries that share the Mediterranean ecosystem and, as a result, have common public health problems, agreed to develop the project "EpiSouth", whose aim was to create a framework of collaboration on epidemiological issues in order to improve communicable diseases surveillance, communication and training in the Mediterranean region and South-East Europe.

The Project "EpiSouth" started in October 2006 with the financial support of the EU DG-SANCO together with the Italian Ministry of Health and has been closed on June 2010.

As per June 2010, EpiSouth is a Network of 27 countries (9 EU and 17 non-EU countries plus 1 candidate to enlargement country). It is therefore the biggest inter-country collaborative effort in the Mediterranean region.



Map of countries included in the EpiSouth Network



Final Meeting of the EpiSouth Project, Rome, April 2010

A new phase of the EpiSouth Network activities has been approved and started on 15 October 2010 and is expected to last until 14 January 2014. 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 in the fields of Epidemic Intelligence, Vaccine Preventable Diseases and Migrants, Cross Border Emerging Zoonoses, and Training in Field/Applied Epidemiology, 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.

OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the EpiSouth Plus project is to increase the health security in the Mediterranean area and South East Europe by enhancing and strengthening the preparedness to common health threats and bio-security risks at national and regional levels in the Countries of the EpiSouth Network and in the framework of the International Health Regulations implementation. The reinforcement of the relations of trust in the region is an objective and an instrument in the scope of Project's implementation.

The EpiSouth Network has highlighted many sectors where collaboration and interaction is not only useful but extremely needed in this geographical area, which encompasses EU Countries and non-EU Countries in three WHO regions. Four areas of activity were identified and are being developed through specific Work Packages (WP) according to the following specific objectives:

1. To establish a Regional Laboratories Network to support the priority diagnostic needs and facilitate common health threats detection (WP4).
2. To promote common procedures in interoperable Generic Preparedness and Risk Management Plans among the countries involved in the Network (WP5)
3. To enhance Mediterranean Early Warning Systems and cross-border Epidemic Intelligence allowing alerts and epidemic intelligence information sharing among EpiSouth countries and developing interoperability with other European Early Warning Platforms, especially the European Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), as forecasted by the current EU legislation (WP6).
4. To facilitate the implementation of the 2005 International Health Regulations (IHR) through the production of a strategic document with guidelines based on specific assessments for describing how national plans/legislations can interact with IHR requirements (WP7).

METHODS

Ensuring a successful response to this challenge requires a solid framework of collaboration and information exchange among the 27 participating Countries. The project EpiSouth Plus strengthens the countries' capacity to cope with health threats through concerted and coordinated actions, in accordance with contingency generic preparedness plans, based also on strategic approaches which can facilitate sharing of information, alerts and national procedures between EU and non-EU Countries of the Mediterranean area and South East Europe, in line with the existing EU legal acquits for the implementation of the EWRS/IHR.

The EpiSouth Plus project is articulated in seven Work Packages (WP). Three of those are mandatory horizontal WPs and include frameworks for the project related managerial aspects (Coordination - WP1), for the dissemination of the information produced by the project (Dissemination - WP2) and for the project evaluation (Evaluation - WP3). In addition to those, the project hosts four core WPs that are the hubs of the networking and capacity building activities required to accomplish the expected results and achieve the four specific objectives.

PROJECT NETWORK ORGANISATION

Each Project's WP is co-led by representatives of one EU and one non-EU Institution (**WP co-leaders**), with the exception of the WP3 "Evaluation", led by the only Institution not involved in the management and implementation of WPs activities (Local Health Unit of Turin, Italy).

In order to facilitate the WPs activities, each country actively collaborates with the WP co-leaders in one or two **Work Package Steering Teams (WPSTs)**. These teams are in charge of identifying the countries' needs, developing the tools and the conducive project environment in accordance with the specific objective and requirements of the related WP.

Each **Participating Country and International Partner** participates to the activities of one up to all WPs in accordance with their needs and interests.

Each country and international partner involved in the EpiSouth Network has officially appointed 1 or 2 representatives called **Focal Points (FPs)**. These people are selected among those involved in preparedness and risk management of Communicable Diseases and other Public Health threats, mainly at central level, and/or based in IHR or EWRS Focal Point departments. The EpiSouth FPs participate to all the Network's activities and convey all communications/information to concerned officers in their respective countries and Institutions. Moreover, they constitute the **General Assembly (GA)**, which is the forum where major strategic decisions on the Network's main orientations are taken.

The overall Project implementation is guided by a **Steering Committee (SC)** that includes the Project Leader, the WP co-leaders and the WPs technical officers/coordinators where present (namely in WP2, WP3, WP5 and WP6). The role of the SC is mainly managerial, with the aim of ensuring the implementation of all the planned activities.

In addition, the project is counselled by an **Advisory Board (AB)**, composed by representatives of the collaborating Institutions and other international experts not involved in the project's management and implementation, which supports the Project Management for the preparation of relevant documents and recommendations.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Based on the work done since the beginning of the Network's activities in 2006, EpiSouth-Plus will fill the gaps and needs that were identified in the previous years.

In particular, the laboratories in the Mediterranean region will be better connected and coordinated to ensure the development of cross-border laboratory services, enhance complementarities among vertical and fragmented laboratory networks, and facilitate the overcoming of national logistic and legislation constraints.

Common procedures in interoperable Generic Preparedness and Risk Management Plans will be promoted to reduce inter-country variability, enhance capacity building and cross-border concerted actions, and facilitate the elaboration of national plans and communication strategies.

Sharing of alerts and epidemic intelligence information among EpiSouth countries will be enhanced through the development of interoperability with other Early Warning Platforms and especially the European EWRS, as forecasted by the current EU legislation.

The requirements of the WHO IHR-2005 will be considered in EpiSouth-Plus and their implementation at country level will be facilitated through a strategic document based on assessments on how national plans and legislations can interact and interfere with these requirements.

ADDED VALUE

EpiSouth-Plus is unique among projects funded by the EU and other international initiatives in this field for its focus on the Mediterranean region as a whole, including non-UE countries and all three WHO Regional Offices that cover the Mediterranean.

The approach based on countries expectations and regional needs, facilitates interest in participation. In addition to facilitating epidemiological communication and practical training, this regional approach strengthens solidarity and cohesion within the European Community and between EU and non-EU countries, especially for information sharing regarding cross-border public health threats and for implementation of the IHR, which have among their challenges that of interacting with national procedures and legislations and facilitating a common international action in case of need.

Moreover, the adopted methodology enhances co-ownership of participating countries by bringing together EU and non-EU countries in all the planned activities, while the collaboration of international institutions (EC, ECDC, and WHO) allows sharing views while avoiding overlapping.

Ultimately, EpiSouth-Plus contributes to the stability of the region as well as to improve public health protection.

FUNDING

The EpiSouth Plus project is co-funded by the European Union DG-SANCO/EAHC and DEVCO/EuropeAid together with the participating national partner Institutions.

The financial support of the Italian Ministry of Health and ECDC is also acknowledged

PROJECT DURATION

The project officially started on 15 October 2010 and is expected to last for 39 months.

PARTNERS AND COLLABORATING INSTITUTIONS

Partners

ALBANIA, Tirana (Institute of Public Health);
ALGERIA, Alger (National Institute of Public Health);
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA (Ministry of Civil Affairs, Sarajevo; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska; Public Health Institute, Mostar, Federation of B&H);
BULGARIA, Sofia (National Center of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases; Ministry of Health);
CROATIA, Zagreb (Croatian National Institute of Public Health);
CYPRUS, Nicosia (Ministry of Health);
EGYPT, Cairo (Ministry Of Health and Population);
FYROM–Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Skopje (Institute for Health Protection; Clinic of Infectious Diseases);
FRANCE (Institute for Public Health Surveillance, Saint Maurice Cedex; Institute Pasteur, Paris);
GREECE, Athens (Hellenic Center for Diseases Control and Prevention);
ISRAEL (Center for Disease Control, Tel Hashomer; Ministry of Health, Jerusalem);
ITALY (National Institute of Health, Rome; Teaching Hospital, Padua; National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Lazzaro Spallanzani”, Rome; Intrauniversity Consortium CINECA, Casalecchio di Reno; Local Health Unit of Turin, Turin);
JORDAN, Amman (Ministry of Health);
KOSOVO UNSCR 1244, Prishtina (National Institute of Public Health);
LEBANON, Beirut (Ministry of Public Health);
LIBYA, Tripoli (National Center for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control);
MALTA, Msida (Ministry of Health, Elderly and Community Care);
MECIDS Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance;
MONTENEGRO, Podgorica (Institute of Public Health);
MOROCCO, Rabat (Ministry of Health);
PALESTINE, Ramallah (Ministry of Health);
ROMANIA, Bucharest (Institute of Public Health);
SERBIA, Belgrade (Institute of Public Health);
SLOVENIA, Ljubljana (Institute for Public Health);
SPAIN, Madrid (Carlos III Health Institute);
SYRIA, Damascus (Ministry of Health);
TUNISIA, Tunis (Ministry of Health);
TURKEY, Ankara (Ministry of Health);
WHO-GCR Global capacities, alert and response, Lyon, France.

Collaborating Institutions

ECDC-European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Stockholm, Sweden;
EAHC-European Agency for Health and Consumers, Luxembourg;
EUROPEAN UNION DG SANCO Public Health Directorate, Luxembourg;
EUROPEAN UNION DEVCO/EuropeAid, Brussels, Belgium;
MOH-Ministry of Health, Rome, Italy;
WHO–EMRO Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo, Egypt;
WHO-EURO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark.

PROJECT OFFICE

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