

**EPI SOUTH: A NETWORK FOR THE CONTROL OF HEALTH AND SECURITY
THREATS AND OTHER BIO-SECURITY RISKS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION
AND SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**

Project reference:

DEVCO: IFS/2010 / 238-194

SANCO/EAHC: EpiSouth Plus n° 2009 11 05

SANCO Grant Agreement Interim Report

15 October 2010 – 14 January 2012

Funded by the



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



This Project is led by The Italian National Institute of Health and counseled by an Advisory Board composed by EC, ECDC, WHO and other international experts

PROJECT FACT SHEET

Contract number:	DEVCO: IFS/2010 / 238-194 SANCO/EAHC: EpiSouth Plus n° 2009 11 05
Proposal title:	Episouth Plus: A Network for The Control of Public Health and Security Threats and Other Bio- Security Risks In The Mediterranean Region and South-East Europe
Acronym:	Episouth Plus

Starting date:	15/10/2010
Duration of the project:	30 months
Reporting period:	15/10/2010-14/1/2012 (15 months)

Main partner SANCO Grant Agreement: ISS – Istituto Superiore di Sanità (Italy)
WP1, WP2 and WP7 co-leader

Number of associated partners SANCO Grant Agreement:

1. Institut de Veille Sanitaire (InVS), France **WP6 co-leader**
2. Instituto de Salud Carlos III (ISCIII), Spain **WP5 co-leader**
3. Institut Pasteur (IP), France **WP4 co-leader**
4. Azienda Sanitaria Locale di Torino (ASLTO1), Italy **WP3 leader**
5. National Center of Infectious & Parasitic Diseases (NCIPD), Bulgaria
6. Hellenic Center for Infectious Diseases Control (HCDCP), Greece
7. Ministry of Health (MoH-CY), Cyprus
8. Ministry of Health (MOH-MT), Malta
9. Institute of Public Health (IPHB), Romania
10. Institute of Public Health (NIPH-IVZ-RS), Slovenia
11. Azienda Ospedaliera di Padova (Padua GH), Veneto Region, Italy
12. Istituto Nazionale Lazzaro Spallanzani (INMI), Italy
13. Cineca Consorzio Interuniversitario (CINECA), Italy
14. Croatian Institut of Public Health (NIPH-HR), Croatia

The contractor for DEVCO Service Contract : ISS – Istituto Superiore di Sanità (Italy)
WP1, WP2 and WP7 co-leader

Consortium DEVCO Service Contract:

1. Institut de Veille Sanitaire (InVS), France **WP6 co-leader**
2. Instituto de Salud Carlos III (ISCIII), Spain **WP5 co-leader**

3. Institut Pasteur (IP), France **WP 4 co-leader**
4. Azienda Sanitaria Locale di Torino (ASLTO1), Italy **WP3 leader**
5. Azienda Ospedaliera di Padova (Padua GH), Veneto Region, Italy

Collaborative Partners:

1. Institute of Public Health - Tirana, ALBANIA
2. Institut National de Santé Publique - Alger, ALGERIA **WP5 co-leader**
3. Ministry of Civil Affairs – Sarajevo, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
4. Public Health Institute of Republika Srpska - Banja Luka, Republika Srpska, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
5. Ministry of Health of Federation of B & H Mostar, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
6. Ministry of Health and Population - Cairo, EGYPT
7. Institute for Health Protection and Clinic for Infectious Diseases - Skopje, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM),
8. Ministry of Health and Israel Center for Diseases Control - Tel Hashomer, ISRAEL
9. Ministry of Health Amman, JORDAN
10. National Institute for Public Health of Kosova - Prishtina, KOSOVO UNSCR 1244
11. Ministry of Public Health - Beirut, LEBANON
12. National center for infectious disease prevention and control - Tripoli LIBYA
13. Institute of Public Health - Podgorica, MONTENEGRO **WP2 co-leader**
14. Ministry of Health - Rabat, MOROCCO
15. Public Health Central Laboratory - Ministry of Health Ramallah, PALESTINE
16. Institute of Public Health of Serbia "Dr. Milan Jovanovic Batut" - Belgrade, SERBIA
17. Ministry of Health - Damascus, SYRIA
18. Ministère de la Santé Publique - Tunis, TUNISIA **WP1 co-leader**
19. Ministry of Health - Ankara, TURKEY **WP 4co-leader**
20. MECIDS - ISRAEL, JORDAN and PALESTINE **WP6 co-leader**
21. WHO-LYO/HQ - Lyon, FRANCE **WP7 co-leader**

1. Executive summary

During the 1st semester the project activities focused on organising and establishing the ways of collaboration among the partners involved.

Agreements were consolidated between the partners of the consortium and the ISS and between all the WPs co-leaders.

In addition, Action Plans, describing how activities should have been performed and how responsibilities should have been shared between the WPs co-leaders, were prepared and presented at the 1st SC/Kick off Meeting in Luxembourg (February 3th, 2011).

Each WP has prepared background documents on which to build up the project's approaches and strategies (see the details in the WPs description parts).

We may note that some WPs (i.e WP5 and WP6) were facilitated in starting their activities because they were building on what was done in the previous phase of EpiSouth (i.e. WP5 and WP6 Steering Teams were already established, some working approaches and procedures were consolidated etc.).

Others (WP4 and WP7) had to establish ex-novo ways of working and the WPST composition.

For this reason WP4 and WP7 developed greatly their activities during the 2nd semester.

It has to be reported that the following 9 months of activities has been impacted very much in its implementation by the long lasting debate on WP6 procedures with SANCO/EAHC, started during the negotiation phase and finally solved in January 2012.

In the period February-July 2011, the ISS and InVS have replied to several requests of clarifications of the SANCO/EAHC (including the one sent on the 29 July with the requested SOPs and the list of EpiSouth Focal Points for MS updated with EWRS contact points).

SANCO/EAHC requested that WP6 activities should have been considered frozen from July 2011 until the final closure of the issue.

However, although the freezing, the routine activities of epidemic intelligence (including e-week bulletins) have been maintained, as well as the collaboration with ECDC for risk assessment.

The Mission Report prepared by the Monitor who has carried out the DEVCO ROM (Results Oriented Monitoring, 17-21 October) has clearly outlined how the above described situation was jeopardising the EpiSouth's outcome:

“The EpiSouth network involves an impressive number of stakeholders supporting the project objectives with a great deal of interest. Co-ownership, shared responsibility and addressing commonly identified needs is the way to maintain the achieved trust relations. Any obstacles to this would disturb the balanced partnership and would be detrimental for the achievements reached..... The most critical aspect for the project effectiveness is related to the issue of data flow concerning the epidemic intelligence. Different position of the DG SANCO and the EpiSouth network partners concerning the issue is a serious threat to the project.

Eventually insisting on a one way data flow without appropriate feedback could be critical for the overall project and the cooperation and trust achieved within the network so far.

Most prominent problem is related to freezing of WP6 due to different positions concerning some aspects of this component taken by the EpiSouth network and DG SANCO and DG DEVCO. This negatively influenced also the other WPs as related to WP6. Unresolved situation lasts for over four months and seriously undermines the overall project efficiency”.

Main achievements

Cross-cutting achievements

Project’s visibility through the new web-site, the participation to Conferences, the participation to the “ *Stakeholder Consultation on Health Security in the European Union*”, etc.

Synergies with Networks/Projects: ShipSan; SEEHN; ENIVD; VENICE; EurLop.

Valorisation of resources available from other Institutions/Organisations: WHO surveys on IHR core capacities; WHO/EC/ECDC questionnaires; etc.

Collaborations of the EpiSouth Network with International Organizations: ECDC Rapid Risk Assessment – A(H5N1) Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Egypt – Implications for human health in Europe”;

(<http://www.episouthnetwork.org/sites/default/files/outputs/Rapid%20risk%20assessment%20AH5N1%20Egypt.pdf#overlay-context=content/publications>)

“WHO Global Alert and Response (GAR) – West Nile Virus Infection (WNV) in Europe” (http://www.who.int/csr/don/2011_08_16/en/index.html) .

Work Packages achievements

WP4: Identification of priorities for the Mediterranean Regional Laboratory Network (MRLN); set up of the Experts Committee and its Meeting in Paris;

WP5: Training Needs Assessment and set up of the Framework for the Simulation Exercise Development;

WP6: Cross Border EI Activities; e-week bulletins; WP6 Steering Team Meeting in Montenegro;

WP7: Report on IHR core capacities in the EpiSouth Countries; Identification of priority area for EpiSouth intervention; WP7 Steering Team Meeting in Italy.

Constraints

Overall, two main aspects have delayed the implementation of the activities:

- **Political instability in the North Africa:** The situation is slowly improving, but activities have been not carried out in these countries.

However, it should be noted that, despite the impossibility of organizing events in the Mediterranean Countries such as Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Syria and Libya, most representatives were very actively participating in the Project activities. In particular the WP1 co-leader, Dr Mondher Bejaoui, from Tunisian MoH, and Dr Djohar Hannoun, WP5 co-leader from Algeria PH Institute have participated in all the relevant project’s working events.

Activities originally planned in Tunisia and Algeria are still waiting for final decisions.

Syria and Jordan, that were considered potential sites for Meetings, could not be considered suitable and this should be considered in the future plan.

The EpiSouth Focal Points of the Countries affected by the crisis were however often very busy and overloaded.

Some National Governments (i.e. Tunisia, Libya, Egypt) are in a transitional phase and many high level officials and directors are not yet officially appointed.

These aspects might be still an issue during the next implementation period, although the situation is improving in some of the mentioned Countries.

- *Argumentation with DGSANCO and DEVCO on some aspects of WP6* bringing to the freezing of WP6 activities (started in February 18, 2011 and closed in January 2012).

Mainly for the reasons reported above the project's implementation is lacking behind its schedule, with a delay of some 6 months. For this reason the project coordination has already requested to DEVCO and SANCO the possibility of a no-cost time extension which could greatly consolidate the achievements and thus enhance the final impact of the Project.

The extension was accepted by DEVCO and SANCO and the official request of no-cost extension and related amendment will be forwarded soon within next summer.

Inputs Utilisation

The entity of inputs utilisation does not reflect the entity of the activities implemented:

- Staff engagements: although some staff was hired with delay, (so the project's funds were also used with delay), many activities were carried out by permanent staff of the Institutions involved. In addition, the WP5 coordinator/ISCIII key expert had her EpiSouth contract finalized in mid March 2011 (due to long internal procedures at ISCIII), but she was working on the EpiSouth activities since the project's starting with another contract paid with ISCIII's resources.

- the "funds consuming" activities (WP4 and WP5 meetings and trainings; the 1st Project Meeting; stages at EU PH Institutes etc.) will be implemented starting from the 2nd year. The Project Budget Breakdown is not divided by year, but, in accordance with the project's schedule, inputs utilization is expected to increase in the 2nd and 3rd year.

- the WP6 freezing has delayed the planned missions to the involved countries and therefore funds utilization has been reduced.

Efficiency versus effectiveness

The EpiSouth approach and strategy, so far adopted, are aimed at guaranteeing and ensuring the effectiveness of the implementation with long term changes which can ensure future sustainability.

In the framework of EpiSouth activities efficiency may appear, at a first view, poor and hampered by obstacles. The standard indicators for efficiency might also mislead.

In fact, the project's success is linked to the concrete participation of the partners which, step by step, will facilitate the countries' sense of ownership and the taking in charge of responsibilities and tasks related to the activities. For examples it is expected that some project's events should be organized and carried out by the non-EU co-leaders in their respective countries.

Actually, some meetings and trainings have been planned to be held in the North Africa countries. The project is trying to wait for a more stable and secure situation in those countries. If this will not be ensured soon, the locations for some events will be reconsidered.

2. Specification of the project:

2.1 General Objective of the project:

To increase health security in the Mediterranean Area and South East Europe by enhancing and strengthening the preparedness to common health threats and other bio-security risks at national and regional levels in the EU Countries of the existing EpiSouth Network in the framework of the International Health Regulations implementation.

The general objective is ensured through the following strategic objectives:

1. To optimise the support to common threat detection by developing a Regional Laboratories Network (in and for the benefit of Europe, particularly for Southern Europe and the Mediterranean area) based on available resources in Mediterranean and Balkans (by mapping them, assessing their diagnostic and confirmation capacity, facilitating rapid access to laboratory facilities, interactions with public health institutions and officials ,based on national reference laboratories from the EU MS, beyond the Institute Pasteur network

2. To facilitate an inter-operational capacity of the EWS among countries in the EU and in the Mediterranean area and South East Europe. The project partners are fully aware of the efforts and resources put in place in these sectors by Regional institutions and mainly EU, ECDC and International Agencies like WHO, especially referring to IHR(2005) requirements.

Nevertheless, the current EpiSouth project has highlighted many sectors where collaboration and interaction is not only useful but extremely needed in this geographical area which encompasses EU, MS and non-MS and three WHO regions.

In particular, the proposed 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 MS and non-MS of the Mediterranean area and the South East Europe, in line also with the existing EU legal acquis for the implementation of the EWRS/IHR.

2.2 Specific objectives of the project

Number	Title	indicators	WP
1	Establishment of a Mediterranean Regional Laboratories network	Process: Number of participants attending the Meeting organised by the Pasteur Institute for Laboratories Representatives out of the total number of those	WP4

		<p>selected</p> <p>Output: Reference procedures available and endorsed by each country for the collaboration between PH Institutions and laboratories of the EpiSouth Network</p> <p>Outcome: number of Laboratories which accept to participate in the Network out of the total number of those whose standards were adequate to the project's objectives; number of laboratory investigations/ sample/information exchange carried out between the network of laboratories from EU MS and Non EU countries and include the number of laboratory generated EWRS/IHR notifications of cross border events</p>	
2	Promotion of common procedures in interoperable Generic Preparedness and Risk management among the countries involved in the Network	<p>Process: Two Workshops carried out; Number of countries attending each Workshop out of the 27 countries in the Network.</p> <p>Output: In-depth capacity needs assessment carried out, based on information collected from a sample of participating countries</p> <p>Outcome: Strategic document on Capacity building development regarding Preparedness plans & Risk management procedures available; Examples of collaboration between partners from EU and Non EU countries for the detection of threats and risk management.</p>	WP5
3	Enhance Mediterranean Early Warning Systems (EWS) allowing alerts and Epidemic intelligence information sharing among EpiSouth countries and developing interoperability with other European Early	<p>Process: Epis based cross-border secured platform developed</p> <p>Output: Reference procedures available and endorsed by</p>	WP6

	Warning platforms	<p>countries for information sharing within EpiSouth secured platform and among it and other EW systems</p> <p>Outcome: Number of alerts published and their distribution among the Partners; Number of episodes of collaboration within the network between EU and non-EU countries and between the Network and other EW platforms.</p>	
4	Production of a strategic document, with guidelines based on assessments and surveys, aimed at facilitating IHR implementation	<p>Process: Consensus on the choice of variables to assess the topics identified by the WP and on the design of the questionnaires is reached</p> <p>Output: On-line questionnaire for data collection on national legislations dealing with security and health measures Preliminary report and recommendations on results gained</p> <p>Outcome: Strategic document on national/international issues which may interact/ interfere with IHR implementation available</p>	WP7

2.3 Overview of activities for the period covered (15/10/2010-14/1/2011)

WP1

Activities/Tasks	Outputs/ Deliverables/ Milestones/ Activities	Indicators	Achievement date as per approved Work-plan	Date of achievement	Level of achievement ¹	Justification/ Problems encountered	Action to be taken to overcome the problem	Related Annexes Available
DEVCO Inception Report	D	Report	M3	M4	100%	Many aspects related to project's implementation and administration not clear to the contractor and partners	Drafting of implementation scenarios and request of clarifications to DEVCO and SANCO	YES (Ia)
DEVCO 1 st and 2 nd technical biannual reports	D	Report	M7, M13	M9, M15	100%			YES (Ib) (http://www.episouthnetwork.org/content/interim-and-final-technical-and-financial-reports)
1st Steering Committee(SC) in Luxembourg	M	Meeting, Documents Presentations, List of Participants Agenda	M3	M4	100%	Organisation by external organizer was not accepted by DEVCO	Expenses covered with Italian MoH available funds	YES
Sustainability Plan (1st draft) in coordination with WP3	M	1st Draft available for coordination team comments	M4	M6	100%			YES
Annual Project Work Plan	M	Plan	M4	M5	100%			YES
1st SC Report	D	Report	M4	M5	100%			YES (IX)
Participation to Coordination & WPST Meetings and TCs	A	Coordination Mission: WP6/Israel, Nov 2010; WP3, WP5 and WP7 /Lisbon, Escaide framework, Nov 2010;	M1-M15	M2				YES

¹ 0-100%

		WP2 and WP4/ Rome, ISS, Dec 2010; WP4 and WP6/Sarajevo, June 2011; WP6 and WP7/London June 2011; WP6/Podgoritza, July 2011; WP7/Rome July 2011; WP2/Rome Sept 2011; WP4TC, Sept 2011; WP2, WP3, WP4, WP5, WP6 and WP7/Rome, Paris, Madrid DEVCO Monitoring Oct 2011; WP2, WP4 and WP6/Paris, Jan 2012						
Sustainability Plan (Final) in coordination with WP3	M	Plan	M6	M7	100%	available to the partners in M7		YES
Participation to Conference and seminars	A	Delegation of Egyptian Ministry of Health; ESCAIDE; EC EWARS Meeting Tirana, April 2011; Palermo, May 2011; Sarajevo, June 2011; EuroMed/UfM-Bxl, June 2011	M7-M15	M7	100%			YES

WP2

Activities/Tasks	Outputs/ Deliverables/ Milestones/ Activities	Indicators	Achievement date as per approved Work-plan	Date of achievement	Level of achievement ²	Justification/ Problems encountered	Action to be taken to overcome the problem	Related Annexes Available
Dissemination Plan	M	Final dissemination plan available after presentation and discussion at the 1 st SC Meeting	M4	M4	100%	None	NA	YES
Evaluation survey on the web-site contents/tools and quarterly bulletin and needs for a multilingual version	O	Final document available	M4	M4	100%	None	NA	YES
Web site (both restricted NWA and public area) opening, updating and maintenance	M	Web site available in three languages (English, French and Arabic)	M6-M15	M7-M15	100%	Initially planned at M6, the web site was opened one month later because of the delay in finalizing its structure and contents	Frequent contacts with CINECA and WP leaders to accelerate the process	YES
Quarterly Electronic Bulletin	D	Release of the first three issue	M6, M9, M12, M15	M8, M11, M14	75%	The first issue of the bulletin has been released two months later because of the delay in the official opening of the web site. As a consequence, the second and third issues have also been postponed by two months and the fourth issue, initially planned in January 2011, will be released in March 2012	Contacts to accelerate the process for the opening of the project's web site which contents should be presented in the quarterly bulletin	YES (http://www.episouthnetwork.org/content/episouth-electronic-bulletin)
Presentations at	M	1 poster and 11 oral	M4-M15	M1-	100%	None	NA	YES

² 0-100%

conferences/workshops and planning and stimulating the production of articles for possible publication and technical report		presentations made at 12 different conference/workshops/meetings (other 7 presentations focusing on specific project-related activities made by the other WPs teams); publication plan for articles presented and approved at the 1 st SC Meeting (LXB); One article submitted and accepted for publication in the European Journal of Public Health		M15				
Document summarising proposed rules for authorship, acknowledgements and logos	O	Draft document presented and distributed at the 1 st SC Meeting	M4	M4	100%	None	NA	Yes
Participation to WHO and EU meetings for competent bodies and contact points when requested (in collaboration with WP1)	A	Presentations made at 4 different meetings: SEEHN-Tirana, Nov 2010; EWRS - LXB, Dec 2010; WHO- Tirana, Apr 2011; EC Euromed- BXL, June 2011	M4-M15	M1-M15	100%	None	NA	Yes
Outline and leaflet release and updating	M	Leaflet and outline available	M4-M15	M4-M15	100%	None	NA	Yes
Link to the project's web site made available by partners and collaborating institutions	O	Number of external web sites providing links to the project's web site	M6	M8-M15	20%	Initially planned in M6, it has been postponed by two months because of the delay in the official opening of the web site and no actions taken by some partners	Contacts to accelerate the process for the opening of the project's web site and solicitation of partners to provide the link	No
Press releases for the main project-related events	O	3 press releases (PR) announcing the start of the project, 2 PR announcing	M1, M4	M1, M4, M8,	100%	None	NA	Yes

		the first SC and kick-off meeting, 1 PR announcing the opening of the project's web site, and 1 PR informing about the WP7 Steering Team Meeting		M10				
--	--	--	--	-----	--	--	--	--

WP3

Activities/Tasks	Outputs/ Deliverables/ Milestones/ Activities	Indicators	Achievement date as per approved Work-plan	Date of achievement	Level of achievement ³	Justification/ Problems encountered	Action to be taken to overcome the problem	Related Annexes Available
Evaluation plan	M	Plan	M4	M4	100%	None	NA	YES
Sustainability plan (in support to WP1)	M	Plan	M4-6	M6	100%	None	NA	Yes, draft available for partners comments
WPs activities evaluation questionnaires	M	Quest	M8 M12		0%	Because of 6 month project delay, (internal troubles in Mediterranean countries and freezing of WP6) monitoring trough questionnaire has been postponed.	Activities were monitored during the biannual reports preparation and in occasion of the DEVCO Monitoring Mission in October 2011. A monitoring sheet and global assessment of the status of the project will be done in order to prepare the no-cost extension documentation.	

³ 0-100%

WP4.

Activities	Outputs/ Deliverables/ Milestones/ Activities	Indicators	Achievement date as per approved Work-plan	Date of achievement	Level of achievement	Justification/ Problems encountered	Action to be taken to overcome the problem	Related Annexes Available
Configuration of Steering Team	A	document	M6	M10	100%	Political events in the Region		YES
Presenting the mission and activities of WP4 to FPs	A	document	M5	M10	100%	Fine-tuning of the mission		YES
Identification of priority areas	A	document	M7	M12	100%	Difficulties on feedback and prioritization with other WPs		YES
Participation to the EQADeBe Project meeting	A			M6	100%			
Meeting of expert committee	M	report	M9	M15	100%	Difficulties to find non-EU experts Agenda of the experts		YES
Identification of laboratories interested in contributing to the EpiSouth initiative	A	MRLN list	M11	M15	80%	Political events in the Region Difficulties to contact some countries	Reminder to countries which did not already provide a laboratory	YES
Mapping of existing biological expertise	M	document	M12	M14	80%	Overlap of networks in the region, gradual building up of the mapping due to the process of building the network. Primary data were collected from internet and complementary information is collected by the MRLN members according to its construction. Difficulties to find information for non-	To complete with: - Personal contacts - Information received with the return of questionnaires (part 1 & 2)	YES

						EU countries		
Meeting with the heads of Laboratories interested in the approach and corresponding to the minimum requirements	M		M13	M17	50%	Delayed meeting of the Expert Committee	Meeting of Heads of Laboratory will take place in early March 2012 (M 17)	

WP5.

Activities/Tasks	Outputs/Deliverables/Milestones/Activities	Indicators	Achievement date as per approved Work-plan	Date of achievement	Level of achievement ⁴	Justification/Problems encountered	Action to be taken to overcome the problem	Related Annexes Available
Organization of attendance to the SHIPSAN TRAINET for Non-EU countries	A	Program Participants list	M3	M3	100%	Some troubles with crisis in Arabic countries	training documentation will be sent to the those who cannot attend	YES
Directory of training courses	M		M3-15		5%		This M should be reconsidered in the incoming plan for the no-cost extension	
Simulation exercise preparation	A	Draft documentation	M3-28	Process started	20%			YES
Participation to the ShipSan final Conference	A	Program Participants' list	np	M12				YES
Final Questionnaire & on-line version	A	Q available on line	M5	M8	100%	Process of revision with ST with low participation of some members		YES
Data collection and analysis	A		M6-M7		50%	On line questionnaire compilation has been extended to 15 March 2012 (M17) to have exhaustive data		
Report of the assessment (1st draft)	A	Draft Report	M7			Expected for M20		

⁴ 0-100%

WP6.

Activities/Tasks	Outputs/ Deliverables/ Milestones/ Activities	Indicators	Achievement date as per approved Work-plan	Date of achievement	Level of achievement ⁵	Justification/ Problems encountered	Action to be taken to overcome the problem	Related Annexes Available
Epidemic Intelligence activities	A		M1-M15		100%			
EpiSouth Weekly Epidemic Intelligence (eWEB)	D	bulletins	M1-M15	Each week the e-web bulletin has been released	100%			YES (http://www.episouthnetwork.org/content/episouth-weekly-epi-bulletin-e-web)
Management / animation of the secure platform	M	Alerts posted	M1-M15		100%			
Mission to EpiSouth Countries	A	1 st : Israel and Palestine Mission Plan (Nov 2010); 2 nd : planned in the Balkans but cancelled	np	M1	50%	WP6 – FREEZING From July 2011 to January 2012		YES
Presentations at conferences/workshops and planning	A	Arbozonet Annual Meeting – Rabat, Nov 2010; IMED – Vienna, Feb 2011; Internet-based intelligence for public health emergencies and disease outbreak – Haifa, March 2011; EurAsia congress on infectious diseases - Sarajevo, June 2011	M4-M15	M1, M4	100%			YES
Collaboration with other WP activities	A	WP1, WP2, CINECA: quest., organisation of TC and meetings	M1-M15					YES

⁵ 0-100%

Review of functional specification for Epis and collaboration with EU/ECDC for the EpiSouth/EpiS secured platform Plan of Action (PoA), face-to-face meeting; EW platform evaluation.	M	PoA; Quest. disseminated and available on line	M1-M12	M12	100%			YES (eg.TC with ECDC, requirement catalogue for EPIS)
Testing phase for EW Platform in Epis	M		M11-M16		10%	Due to the WP6 freezing, testing phase started in Feb 2012 (M16)		
WP6 steering team meeting	A	Montenegro meeting	M7-M8	M9	100%			YES
1 week Epidemic Intelligence stage at InVS (Paris)	M	Stage documentation	M10		0%	WP6 – FREEZING From July 2011 to January 2012		

WP7.

Activities/Tasks	Outputs/ Deliverables/ Milestones/ Activities	Indicators	Achievement date as per approved Work-plan	Date of achievement	Level of achievement ⁶	Justification/ Problems encountered	Action to be taken to overcome the problem	Related Annexes Available
First survey design	A	Questionnaire prepared	M6-7	M6	100%			YES
Online questionnaire on countries' needs and constraints in enhancing their surveillance systems and in the elaboration of	M		M 8-10	-	0%	The survey was drafted. However after an analysis of the requirements with coleaders it became	It was agreed to forego the administration of the survey. Data was retrieved by WHO co-leaders for the countries of the EpiSouth Region, analysis	

⁶ 0-100%

the general preparedness plans.						evident that all the data needed was available from an existing survey performed by WHO in 2010. The survey was therefore a duplication of effort and an un-needed burden for focal points	performed.	
Validation and discussion of preliminary results at the first ST and Sub-regional Meeting	A	Report prepared	M9	M9	100%			YES
Completion of Data Collection	A		M10	M9	100%			
Analysis of data and elaboration of preliminary results	A	Report prepared	M9-12	M9	100%			
In depth analysis of selected core capacity/ies: II survey design	A	Questionnaire	M 11-12		50%			
Preliminary report of first investigation	M	Final draft of report prepared	M 15	M15	100%			YES

3. Technical implementation of the project

3.1 Activities related to Horizontal Work Packages:

WP1: Management of the project

Activities undertaken

- partnership
- management structure
- internal communication
- communication strategy
- Problems encountered
- How were problems resolved

During these 15 months of activities the coordination focussed principally on the following aspects:

i) *setting administrative and implementation procedures with the involved partners*

Specific Agreements between the ISS and the other members of the Consortium (DEVCO service contract) have been drafted in order to guide and facilitate the activities implementation considering responsibilities, resources and time frame.

The process was quite complex and time consuming, but has had the merit of creating the framework for clarifying many administrative, managerial and technical aspects with all the involved partners (see also *Annex I*. Inception Report and DEVCO Biannual Reports for further details).

ii) *coordination meetings*

With the aim of preparing the WP's Action Plans and discussing implementation strategies, several meetings were carried out with the WP co-leaders, namely:

- **11-13 November 2010**: in the framework of Escaide Conference the WP1, WP3, WP5 and WP7 co-leaders met to discuss the relevant agreements and action plans;

- **16-27 November 2010**: participation to the MECIDS Executive Board Meeting in Jerusalem for presenting EpiSouth Plus and discussing agreement and action plan with the WP6 co-leaders: InVS and MECIDS ;

- **14 December 2010**: meeting at ISS (Rome) with WP2 and WP4 co-leaders plus CINECA (*Annex II*);

- **1-5 June 2011**: in the framework of "The 4th Eurasia Congress of Infectious Diseases (EACID 2011), Sarajevo, B&H, 1-5 June 2011" the coordinator had met with the co-leaders of WP4 and WP6 to discuss aspects of the activities implementation.

In addition, a meeting was organized with the representatives of Bosnia & Herzegovina Institutions which are part of EpiSouth Network at the Ministry of Civil Affairs in Sarajevo;

- **7-9 June 2011**: in the framework of the Global Health Security Initiative- Early Alerting and Reporting Project (GHSAG) Meeting held in London, the EpiSouth coordinator and WP7 co-leader had discussed about the Early Warning Platforms and information exchanging with the other members of GHSAG (including the InVS team/WP6 co-leadership);

- **5-6 July 2011**: in the framework of the WP6 Steering Team Meeting held in Montenegro, several aspects were discussed with the other co-leaders present and EpiSouth FPs. In particular a specific meeting was held at the Institute of Public Health in Podgorica with the Director of the Institute and the staff involved in the EpiSouth activities;

- **20-21 July 2011**: in the framework of the WP7 Steering Team Meeting held at ISS, the progress of the project's activities were discussed in particular with the WP4, WP5 and WP7 co-leaders.

- **14-15 September 2011**: in the framework of the WP2 co-leader teams Meeting held at ISS, the progress of the project's activities were discussed with focus on the multilingual website development;

- **12-13 January 2012**: in the framework of the WP4 Experts Meeting held at IP, the progress of the project's activities were discussed in particular with the WP2, WP4 and WP6 co-leaders.

Finally, the experience gained also with the 1st phase of EpiSouth, made one researcher (Dr Valeria Alfonsi) to participate in Meeting and technical session on Vaccination Strategies (February and May 2011).

iii) coordination teleconferences

Several teleconferences were organized with the WP co-leaders and other relevant participants to discuss technical and financial matters and to monitor the WPs activities progresses.

In particular:

- 14 June: teleconference with WP4 co-leaders and IP staff;
- 27 June: teleconference with WP5 co-leader and ISCIII staff;
- 12 July: teleconference with WP4 co-leaders and IP staff;
- 20 September: teleconference with WP4 co-leaders and WP4 ST.

iv) setting Project's Organisation and Governance

The document "EpiSouth Plus Project Organization" has been drafted and finalized on the basis of the comments raised during the 1st SC Meeting in LXB: several Project's "Organs" have been identified and established in order to ensure the management, the governance and the full participation of all the Countries of the Network (*Annex III*).

The 1st Year Project Work Plan was set with all the WPs and presented during the 1st SC Meeting (*Annex IV*).

During this reporting period particular efforts have been done in order to:

- set up the **Project Advisory Board (AB)**. The AB is presently composed by 17 international experts (from EU and non EU Institutions) and representatives of the Institutions acting as collaborating partners of the EpiSouth Project (i.e. HSC, SANCO, EAHC, DEVCO, ECDC, WHO) but not involved in its management and implementation, with the role of advising the Project Coordination and the Steering Committee especially on technical critical issues (**[EpiSouth Network Advisory Board | EpisouthNetwork.org](#)**).

Draft of guidelines and strategic documents produced by the Project will be forwarded to the AB Members for their comments and recommendations before finalisation and dissemination.

The consultation for request of specific advise will be done by the coordination team through e-mail or teleconferences. In addition, a dedicated area for the AB members has been open in the Network Working Area (NWA) of EpiSouth web site to allow documents uploading/downloading (documents area) and information exchanging and discussion (forum).

The AB Members will be invited to the Project Meetings and might be invited in other occasions (Steering Committee, Steering Team Meetings, etc.) according to the needs.

- consolidation of WP Steering Team(WPST). The WPST have been created to enhance both the participation of the Countries to the activities (as countries participate on the basis of their interests and needs) and the efficacy (as the reduced amount of participant countries (9-10) speeds up the decision process and facilitates the preparation of tools and documents).

Presently 24 Countries, out of the 27 involved in the Network, are taking part in at least one of the WPST .

For different reasons, Libya, FYROM and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not involved at the moment in any WPST. Contacts are going on to facilitate the process.

However, it is needed to point out that all the EpiSouth Countries can participate in the activities planned by the Project (meetings, trainings, stages etc.), being them part of WPST or not. The WPST are a good means to enhance sense of ownership, efficacy and future sustainability.

ST members meet during ST Meetings and share documents and information trough the dedicated NWA.

- up dating and consolidation of ***country focal points*** in accordance with the set criteria
 Considering the past experience and the new challenges posed by EpiSouth Plus, all the Partner Countries were requested to consider the following criteria for the selection and appointment of their FPs:

- ✓ FP should be staff belonging to the National Public Health Institute and/or Ministry of Health and/or National Reference Laboratory
- ✓ Decision making position
- ✓ Access to national early warning and surveillance systems data (EWRS Focal Points, for EU countries)/IHR Focal points (for EU and non-EU countries)
- ✓ In contact with the National Reference Laboratory if not part of it

v) ***EU and International Meetings***

- the project leader has participated in the “Twenty fourth meeting of the South-eastern Europe Health Network” - Tirana, Albania, 10-11 November 2010 (*Annex V*)
- the project coordinator has participated in the “Meeting of the EWRS component of the Community Network for the Epidemiological Surveillance and Control of Communicable Diseases”, held in Luxembourg on the 1st and 2nd of December 2010 (*Annex VI*)
- the project leader has participated in the Albania MoH-WHO-UNICEF jointly organized meeting Meeting on “Shared solutions to common threats” – Tirana, 28-29 April 2011 (*Annex VII*)
- the project leader and the WP1 co-leader from Tunisia have participated to the “Union For The Mediterranean- Health Forum” - Health Senior Official meeting in Bruxelles, 30 June 2011 (*Annex VIII*)

vi) ***1st SC/Kick off Meeting***

The 1st Project Steering Committee has been organized on the 3rd of February 2011 in Luxembourg with 35 participants (*Annex IX*)

vii) Sustainability Plan (in coordination with WP3)

The plan has been drafted and proposed to the WP co-leaders for discussion (*Annex X*)

It has to be reported that the present crisis in the Mediterranean region has partially affected the project implementation:

- the usual availability of the EpiSouth Partners from North Africa was reduced during this period (for example the co-leader of WP1 (Mondher Behaoui from Tunisia, has not participated in the Project Kick off Meeting in LXB for the unstable situation in his Country). The co-leader of WP5 (Djohar Hannoun) was hardly reachable.
- the activities originally planned in those Countries (Tunisia, Algeria) are pending. The development of events will define whether modifications of locations will be necessary.

viii) Argumentation with DG SANCO and DEVCO on WP6 criteria for implementation

Starting from February 2011, the EC DG SANCO started to ask to the Project Coordination to guarantee that the project activities in general, and those of WP6 in particular, were implemented within the EC legal framework.

The Coordination and WP6 leadership efforts went towards the objective of showing and proving to the EC that all the activities were being implemented in accordance with the EC legal aquis as stated in the Project's document.

Unfortunately the EC deemed insufficient the documentation provided by the EpiSouth Coordination and WP6 until January 2012, and the WP6 activities were kept frozen since July 2011. However, as already reported, the WP6 routine activities of epidemic intelligence have been maintained, including collaboration with ECDC for risk assessment and production of weekly bulletins.

This issue has indeed created many collateral repercussions on the other WPs activities and on the entire project's plan and related schedule.

Among others, the 1st Project Meeting was planned to be held in Paris in February 2012. This would have been the 1st occasion where all the EpiSouth Focal Points could have met vis a vis for discussing the several issues on which it has been worked on during this first year of activity. This event will be subject to 6 months delay. Many activities are connected to this 1st Meeting: the WPs Steering Team Meetings; the discussion of research, governance and sustainability issues with the FPs; the presentation of the project's achievements to the AB and collaborating Institutions, the discussion of the ECDC/Epis platform etc.

ix) DEVCO ROM Mission

In the framework of the European Commission's Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) a mission assessment of EpiSouth Plus has been conducted between 17/10 and 21/10/2011.

Two sessions have been conducted at ISS in Rome (17 and 21 October) and the EpiSouth coordination team plus the WP7 co-leader have taken part in them.

Other two sessions have been carried out at InVS (Paris) with WP4 and WP6 teams and at ISCIII (Madrid) with WP3 and WP5 teams on 18 and 20 October respectively.

The project coordinator has participated in all the sessions in Rome, Paris and Rome.

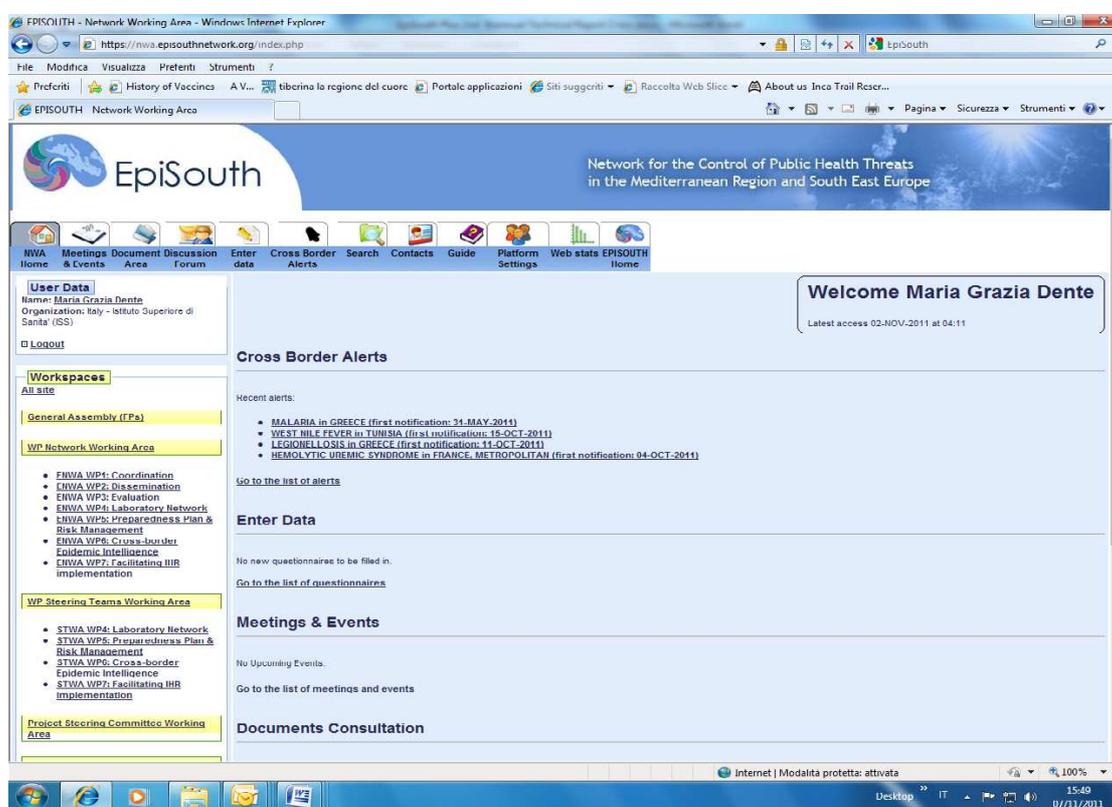
Detailed information is available in the *Annex XI*.

opening of both the public area and members' area of the new web-site foreseen for April 2011 has shifted to May 2011.

As a consequence, the first issue of the Quarterly Electronic Bulletin, which should launch the new contents presented in the project's web site, has been postponed to June 2011, after the official opening of the project's web site. Once the web site was officially opened, it has been continuously updated and the electronic bulletin released quarterly. Moreover, since December 2011, a multilingual version of the web site (English, French and Arabic) has also been made available.

Since the opening of the web site, a particular effort has been devoted to develop ways aimed at facilitating the participation of the Focal Points to the project's activities also through the members' area of the Project web site.

For example each, participant is constantly kept informed, through a customised interface, about recent documents and alerts uploaded, activities to be accomplished, and incoming events.



In the first fifteen months of the project's implementation, the whole EpiSouth-Plus Project was presented at several conferences/workshops/meetings held in different context and identified as relevant for dissemination purposes. In particular, one poster and eleven oral presentations were made at 12 different conferences, meetings etc.

- Poster presented to the 14th European Health Forum - Workshop on Health Security, Gastein, Austria 5 October 2011 (*Annex XIV*)
- Presentation to the Union for the Mediterranean-Health Forum, Brussels, Belgium, 30 June 2011 (*Annex VIII*)
- Presentation to the 4th Eurasia Congress of Infectious Diseases, Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, 1-5 June 2011 (*Annex XV*)
- Presentation to the Forum Mediterraneo in Sanità 2011, Palermo, Italy 24-26 May 2011 (*Annex XVI*)

- Presentation to the Subregional Meeting on Shared Solutions to Common Threats - Vaccination and Vulnerable Populations in South East Europe, Tirana, Albania 28-29 April 2011 (*Annex VII*)
- Presentation to the International Meeting on Emerging Diseases and Surveillance - IMED 2011, Vienna, Austria 4-7 February 2011 (*Annex XVII*)
- Presentation to EWRS Meeting, Luxembourg 1-2 December 2010 (*Annex VI*)
- Presentation to Mecids Executive Boarding Meeting, Jerusalem, Israel 26-27 November 2010 (*Annex XVIII*)
- Presentation to the annual meeting of Arbo-zoonet, Rabat, Morroco 22-24 November 2010 (*Annex XIX*)
- Presentation to XXIV Meeting of the South-eastern Europe Health Network, Tirana, Albania 10-11 November 2010 (*Annex V*)
- Presentation to Delegation of Egyptian Ministry of Health , Rome, Italy 19 October 2010 (*Annex XX*)

Moreover, other seven presentations focusing on specific activities implemented by the project have been made by the other WPs teams.

During the first steering committee meeting held in Luxembourg on February 2011, it has been presented, discussed and agreed a publication plan which foresees the submission of three articles within the first year of activities. At today, a scientific article based on data collected within the EpiSouth Network has been accepted for publication in the *European Journal of Public Health* and another one has been submitted but refused for publication in *Eurosurveillance*.

A draft version of the document summarising rules for visibility, authorship acknowledgements and logos has been presented and discussed among partners during the first steering committee meeting. Based on the comments received at that time and other comments received in the following weeks, the document has been finalised and the final version annexed to the dissemination strategy and plan and made available in the members' area of the web site together with graphic tools such as layout for slides presentations and official banner and logos.

In the first fifteen months of activities, the EpiSouth Network was requested to participate and was presented to four meetings for competent bodies and contact points. In particular, the EpiSouth network was presented at one meeting of the EWRS component of the community network for the epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases, at the Union for the Mediterranean health forum, and at two meetings of the south-eastern Europe health network (for details see *paragraph v*) under WP1.

A leaflet describing the project's organization and activities was prepared and made available to partners for dissemination purposes in both the members' area and the public area of the web site. After the release, the leaflet has been continuously updated and an outline with a more extended description of the project has been also prepared and made available in both the public area and the members' area of the web-site.

Due to the delay in the opening of the project's web-site, the request to partners to activate links to it in the official web sites of their institutions was delayed two months. Currently, six partner Institutes have activated such link and a written solicitation has been sent to speed-up the process. However, it should be considered that some partner Institutes do not have an official web-site and some of them have a web-site with a structure that doesn't allow the logical placing of links to external web sites, nor a multilingual version. As a consequence, we expect that the link to the EpiSouth web site will be made available by no more than fifteen partner Institutes.

The link to the EpiSouth Network website has been also made available in other web sites (e.g., EpiCentro, EuroSurveillance, EAHC), thus increasing the project's dissemination.

Finally, 7 [press releases](#) related to the project's events were disseminated. In particular, 3 were concerning the start of the project (October 2010), 2 announced the first kick-off meeting (February 2011), one announced the opening of the new web-site (June 2011), and one was prepared to inform about the WP7 Steering Committee Meeting (August 2011).

Activities planned for the next period

- Both the restricted members' area and the public area of the web-site will be continuously updated.
- The fourth issue of the quarterly electronic bulletin will be released in March 2012 and then quarterly until the end of the project.
- Abstracts describing the EpiSouth activities will be submitted and possibly presented at conferences/meetings/workshops considered as relevant for the visibility of the Network
- When requested, the network will participate to WHO, EU and other meetings for competent bodies and contact points.
- The leaflet and outline describing the EpiSouth-Plus project will be updated each time substantial changes in the project implementation will occur.
- Further efforts will be made to solicit partner institutions to make available the link to the project's web site in their institutional web site
- Preparation of the dissemination documents to be distributed during the final conference (e.g., copies of the strategic documents, project's reports, presentations, bulletins, fact sheets, etc.)
- Preparation of press releases in concomitance with the first project meeting and the second meeting/final conference.

WP3: Evaluation of the project

Evaluation plan available no yes

Activities undertaken

- data collection for process evaluation
- analysis of process evaluation data
- suggestions for improvement
- data collection for effect evaluation (baseline)
- analysis of effect evaluation data

Together with the assessment of correct timing and adequacy of planned deliverables and in coherence with the Plan of Evaluation (*annex XXI*), defined in February 2011, the WP3 is trying to highlight both successful results and criticisms in the achievements of the four specific objectives of the project. Unfortunately the project increased delay, because of delayed engagement of some key experts and internal troubles in some Mediterranean countries. In addition, another element which contributed to increase delay has been due to freezing of WP6, due to different positions concerning some aspects of this component, taken by the EpiSouth network and DG SANCO and DG DEVCO. This situation rebounded also on the other WPs, as related to WP6, affecting the overall project efficiency. For these reasons has been decided to postpone the production of monitoring

questionnaires, as planned in the Project Work Plan, waiting for the resolutions of those issues described above. Nevertheless, the WP3 has monitored the situation and progress of activities, both through informal contacts with WPs co-leaders and through formal meetings: on July 20th during the WP7 Steering Team meeting and on September 20th during a teleconference organised by WP4, on October 19th-20th during the monitoring mission in Madrid and Rome.

The following is a synthetic overview of WPs progress:

- WP4 has required more time than expected to reach the agreement and to organise activities among the stakeholders; they have now mapped national laboratory capacities, they have identified priorities, they have set up an Expert Committee and they are finalizing the training plan;
- WP5 has assessed training needs and they are organising the training workshop, they have also set up the Framework for the Simulation Exercise Development;
- WP6 continues to daily follow up on epidemic threats, deliver weekly Bulletins and regular thematic notes well appreciated by the stakeholders; the questionnaire on needs and expectations, concerning cross-border Epidemic Intelligence was finalised and results shared with the ECDC;
- WP7 renounced to its questionnaire in favour of the WHO one, thus avoided overlapping, produced a report on IHR core capacities in the EpiSouth Countries; identified priority area for EpiSouth intervention; organised WP7 Steering Team Meeting in Italy.

WP3 is also trying to identify those elements of strength and weakness which may ensure or challenge the sustainability of the Episouth network. For this purpose WP3 actively participated in drafting the sustainability plan, produced in April 2011. The objective is to identify a tentative list of Vital Functions (VF) for the Project, i.e. functions which should be ensured also after the project closure, to keep alive project's significance and impact on the basis of project's aims and relevance for the participant countries, participants' perceptions etc. Accordingly, in September a tentative list of vital functions has been defined in collaboration with the Project Coordination Team. The tentative VF list will be discussed the 2nd SC Meeting. VFs identified will be assessed through a SWOT analysis that will be performed during the 1st Project Meeting in Paris, in a dedicated session where an active participation of Episouth partners will be promoted. Note that the organisation of the 1st Project Meeting is under the responsibility of WP6, which is accumulating delays due to freezing. As a result, the first Project Meeting will have to be postponed, compared to what expected in the Project Work Plan. Contribution of all country partners in choosing VFs will be crucial in order to agree on an effective sustainability plan. VFs may be of two types: easy to define, i.e. infrastructures or resources, hard to define or to measure, as in case of abstract concepts, like co-ownership or shared responsibility. The latter will be probably the most important key elements in maintaining the network. EpiSouth is a participatory platform co-owned by all the partner countries and all of them expect to benefit from the data and information exchanged through it. That is why is extremely important to precisely define these key factors and to correctly identify adequate indicators to measure them.

Regarding the Milestones due by the WP3 during the first half period of project implementation the following aspects should be mentioned:

i) Work packages (WPs) evaluation questionnaires

Although during the project planning phase quarterly WPs evaluation questionnaires were planned, it was realised that the WPs leaders had to fill in a monitoring sheet, as per the bi-annual reporting schedule to DEVCO, which includes all the information needed for evaluating the WPs' progresses and delays (Date of achievement; Level of achievement; Justification/Problems encountered; Action to be taken to overcome the problem), ,

Therefore, the analysis of the information provided with these sheets every six months was considered sufficient for the monitoring purposes that at the beginning were thought to be addressed by the evaluation questionnaires.

The revision and discussion with the WPs leaders of the provided sheets were done during the coordination meetings held during this reporting period (see § ii- coordination meetings under WP1).

In addition a monitoring sheet compilation was required to the WPs leader and discussed in occasion of the DEVCO Monitoring carried out in October 2011 (one year after the starting of the Project).

The sustainability plan and the indicators revision processes presently in progress are additional tools which are providing information to the project monitoring.

If this strategy, already discussed also during the AB Meeting in BXL, will be accepted by the EU co-financing DG SANCO and DEVCO, it will be reported in the amendment to be submitted for the no-cost extension and the WP questionnaires will be definitively substituted by the bi-annual sheets.

ii) Networking evaluation questionnaires

These questionnaires were due for the M15, because the planning was to have them filled in by the EpiSouth FPs who were expected to participate in the 1st Project Meeting (planned for the M16), as done in the previous phase of EpiSouth Project. The data collected should have been integrated in the Mid term evaluation Report.

Due to the WP6 freezing the 1st Project meeting has been postponed to October 2012 (M24) and therefore the Networking evaluation questionnaires will be prepared for M23.

iii) Mid term evaluation report

It has to be noted that the mid-term evaluation report was due for the M18, so it could have not claimed with this SANCO interim report that covers the period October 2010 – January 2012 (M15).

In particular, it has been planned to have a mid term evaluation draft report to be discussed in a session during the 1st Project Meeting. The 1st PM has been postponed to October 2012. Consequently also the Mid term evaluation was postponed also considering the 6 months delay of the project implementation.

In addition, as discussed during the AB Meeting, the ASLTO1 (WP3 leader) has had unexpected problems in having the contract with the non-key expert signed. The ASLTO1 permanent staff (ie Dott. Giuseppe Salamina) will continue to carry out the monitoring, but he is not in the position to carry out the midterm and final evaluations.

It has been proposed to commit the task to an external evaluator to be selected among staff of Projects/Networks which are implementing activities in the same EpiSouth's domains.

ToR will be prepared and at least three possible implementers will be contacted.

During the AB Meeting the proposal was well accepted, so the Coordination will proceed.

Activities planned for the next period

Monitoring sheet (to be filled in with the DEVCO 3rd biannual report)

Midterm evaluation methodology and tools

Monitoring sheet (to be filled in with the DEVCO 4th biannual report)

Workshop on project outputs evaluation (during 1st Project Meeting)

Mid-Term Evaluation Report (after Workshop on project outputs evaluation)

Presentation of the Mid-Term Evaluation Report to the Review Meeting with EC Experts Committees

3.2 Activities related to project objectives (core work packages)

Objective 1: Establishment of a Mediterranean Regional Laboratories network (WP4)

Methodology applied as planned
Involvement of partners and target groups
Methodology and activities

Non-key expert

The non-key expert (Sabah Boufkhed) has been hired and active for the project from beginning of July. Her inclusion in the WP4 team was delayed due to administrative reasons.

WP4 Steering team

WP4 Steering Team (ST) has been identified and consolidated. The WP4 ST consists of representatives from Croatia, Cyprus, Italy INMI, Italy Padua-GH, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia (*Annex XXII*). One additional country which has shown interest in participating to the WP4ST could as yet not been included (Libya). Libya was not reachable due to political instability. Contacts have been renewed and a final position on participation will be asked.

Exchanges between WP co-leaders

Regular exchanges by e-mails and phone calls with the Turkish co-leader (Handan Kalaycioglu, Refik Saydam National Public Health Agency) are established. Each question, direction to follow and decision is discussed at first and validated between the co-leaders.

Activities

The presentation of the mission of WP4 and the corresponding activities were presented by an informative letter to all the ST members (03 August 2011 – *Annex XXIII*).

A questionnaire was joined to determine jointly the priority areas which will be addressed (*Annex XXIV*). The proposed issues were selected according to their importance in the region, emergence or re-emergence (West-Nile, Dengue, MDR tuberculosis, new influenza strains), cross-importance with other work packages (Biosafety, zoonoses, vector-borne diseases) and previously identified as important in EpiSouth (*Annex XXV*).

A first WP4ST teleconference (TC) was organised on the 20th of September 2011 to discuss the results of the Questionnaire. Lebanon and Cyprus who could not participate to the TC were called later to inform them on the discussions and to collect their point of view (*Annexes XXVI and XXVII*).

All agreed on the following points:

the identified priority areas for the WP4 are West Nile Virus, Biosafety and Dengue (*Annex XXVIII*) which are also crosscutting issues with the other WPs (zoonoses, vector-borne diseases [WP6], of IHR concern [WP7]). Influenza was identified as a priority according to the results, but it was agreed, however, that since a lot of influenza-related training and meetings were organised during the past years, due to the A/H1N1pdm 2009 pandemic, additional training was not a priority.

As such, it was decided that only networking activities would be organised concerning influenza. Multidrug-resistant Tuberculosis issues will be further discussed with regard to specific activities.

The Experts committee and the identification of laboratories

Experts on the priority issues were contacted and asked to participate to the WP4 Experts committee. An informative letter was sent to the experts, to explain the issues of EpiSouth Plus, and more specifically the WP4 activities. A first questionnaire, aiming at the identification of the minimum requirements (laboratory capacities) for selection of the laboratories which will be involved per country, has been prepared by the WP4 team and shared with the expert team for validation.

Once validated, this questionnaire was sent to the EpiSouth national focal points (FPs) who forwarded it to the concerned Laboratory(ies) (human and animal fields) of their countries. The aimed laboratories should be national references for Dengue and West Nile or a Virology unit which has the best possible expertise on diagnosis and identification with these pathogens or related viruses if no specific reference laboratory exists.

The meeting with the Expert Committee took place at the Institut Pasteur (Paris, France) on the 13 January 2012. During this meeting, from the 29 Laboratories proposed by 20 countries, the Laboratories to be part of the MRLN core group have been identified. The other laboratories (9) are involved as associated laboratories (Veterinary + other Human labs).

One more laboratory from another EpiSouth country was added to the core group after the Expert meeting due to delayed response. (For details see the Meeting Report *Annex XXIX*)

Mapping of the existing biological expertise

First, an inventory of the networks existing in the Mediterranean and the Balkans Region has been performed.

Second, all national reference laboratories or related laboratories (Virology), on the priority issues of each country of the area, were listed. All the National influenza centres (WHO NIC) and the Institut Pasteur International Network members of the area were also included in the list. We found at least one laboratory per country that could be included in the Laboratory network, except for Kosovo (*Annex XXX*). Once the second questionnaire, to assess the laboratory capacities in each country, will be sent and feedback received we could consolidate and improve these data.

Coordination with other projects and activities

In addition in the framework of participation to meetings of parallel initiatives, the final Meeting of the EU Project EQADeBa, was attended in Brussels on the 11th and 12th of April 2011 (*Annex XXXI*).

Participation to the first WP7 Steering team (ST) meeting in Rome (21st of July 2011)

The issues of the WP7 were discussed and were crosscutting issues with other WPs as well as for WP4.

Regular meetings with WP6 (InVS, visit and phone calls) on coordination activities.

There is also regular exchange by emails and phone with the coordination unit (WP1).

The WP1, WP2 and WP6 participated to the Expert Committee meeting in order to have a good communication and coordination for common activities.

WP 4 and WP6 activities will be linked in subject and the networks will be complementary. The use of the EpiSouth website was discussed with WP2 for the members of the Laboratory Network.

Outcomes and deliverables achieved

Configuration of the ST
Questionnaire to identify the priority issues (Part1) and the results
Minutes of the TC
Meeting of the Expert Committee
Report of the Expert Committee meeting
Identification of the laboratories of the MRLN
List of the MRLN core group and associated laboratories

Problems encountered

Organisation of planned activities took more time than expected, especially towards the delays to get the responses back / of the exchanges with the partners. This was also partly due to political instability in the Region.

Additionally, WP6 constraints (SANCO) have influenced our progress.

Political and diplomatic tensions between France and Turkey, which hampered the participation of the Turkish co-leader and Turkish experts to the expert meeting.

To organise training at the IP there is an important administrative part and there are some legal constraints concerning the contents of the courses that have to be taken into consideration.

How were problems resolved

According to the identified problems, the agenda was rescheduled (See Annex ‘Revised Agenda.pdf’) and the participation of the non-key expert will help with the planning and execution of the activities.

Activities planned for the next period

- Update of the mapping of existing expertise (laboratories and networks)
- Meeting with the Heads of laboratories (08 & 09 March 2012 in Ankara, Turkey)
- Identification of the laboratories needs for diagnoses of priority diseases in the Region
- One-week training module at IP Paris on 02-06 July 2012 for 26 laboratory staff (17 non-EU participants)

Objective 2: *Promotion of common procedures in interoperable Generic Preparedness and Risk management among the countries involved in the Network (WP5)*

Methodology applied as planned

Involvement of partners and target groups

Coordination with other projects or activities

Outcomes and deliverables achieved

Problems encountered

How were problems resolved

Specific objectives for the WP5

Promoting common procedures in interoperability Generic Preparedness and Risk management among the countries involved in the Network.

- Identifying strengthen and weaknesses in capacities for preparedness and generic preparedness plans in EPISOUTH region
- Organising short term capacity building sessions to comply with identified needs and other WP objectives
- Testing implemented capacities to face a potential emergency event in the region through a simulation exercise

Involvement of partners and target groups

- Agreement of collaboration with Institut National de Santé Publique of Algeria is already revised but pending of official signature. The process is in a “stand by” status.
- Activities shared with co-leader: attendance to the WP7 meeting in Rome in July 2011, involvement of all the WP (4,6,7,3) in Simulation Exercise definition
- WP5 Steering Team partially involved in the preparation of the Questionnaire for Capacity building needs survey.

Coordination with other projects or activities

- SHIPSAN: participation of non-EU countries to the Training held in January in Athens
- Attendance of a representative of Training WP of EPISOUTH in the SHIPSAN Final Conference.

Outcomes and deliverables achieved

- Questionnaire uploaded in the Website
- 70% of countries responded
- Scenario of the Simulation Exercise pre-defined
- Discussion guides for Generic Preparedness Planes development prepared

Problems encountered

- Collaboration Agreement with the WP5 Co-leader Institution is frozen .
- Steering Team partially involved in the preparation of the Questionnaire for Capacity building needs survey. Arabic countries had low participation due to effects of geo-political situation in the region.
- The majority of not responded Questionnaires are from countries with socio-political disturbs or almost civil war.

How were problems resolved

- Communication: e-mails & faxes sent, for finding solutions for signing the agreement
- E-mails for motivating the participation, forum in the web site for solving doubts
- Individual interviews have been established that will be implemented during the next period
- Part time spent by non Official staff: extra people have been involved in the WP5 team based in Madrid.

One Junior Epidemiologist focused on the Capacities and Training Needs Survey, and two Junior Epidemiologists focused on the preparation of the Simulation Exercise.

This ISCIH WP5 Team has been part of the WP5 co-lead team for developing the questionnaire and phone interviews for the survey and the general frame and scenario for the simulation exercise to be carried out.

In depth-core capacity needs assessment

Preparation of the questionnaire to identify strength and weaknesses in preparedness and response generic plans in the region at central national level has been one the main activity performed during this period (*Annex XXXII*) . The final version was uploaded in the EpiSouth website the 6th July after some schedule changes coordinated by ISS for avoiding overlap of questionnaires to be responded by National Focal Points at the same time. This will have a little effect in WP5 schedule of activities.

Short interviews to be done by phone or skype will complete the information needed for covering the main objectives which are:

- Developing a comprehensive map of resources, experiences and capacities at institutional level in situations of occurrence of a possible Public Health threat that might cause a transnational PH emergency within the EpiSouth countries
- Identifying existing gaps and common training needs of all project partners in order to improve transnational cooperation in situations of PH emergencies
- Providing input for the upcoming simulation exercise

Collected information's provided capacities need priorities to be fulfilled in the workshops and training sessions.

As mentioned also above, data collection for this assessment was particularly demanding and the 1st draft results were shared and commented for the 1st time during the 1st Workshop held at ISCIH in February 2012.

The final report has been attached to this revised report as annex XXXIX

Simulation exercise preparation

In order to include necessary questions in the survey the first steps for the Simulation Exercise (SE) preparation have been started. Some criteria for selecting the main risk to be spread during the exercise and operational aspects and procedures have been included in the questionnaire.

A Madrid located SE Team was set up during the first six months and has continued working during this second six month period. Two specific Junior Epidemiologists have been working in the simulation exercise design during the period.

Participation of EPISOUTH WP5 at the SHIPSAN TRAINET Final Conference

SHIPSAN invited EPISOUTH representatives to attend their Final Conference held in Athens the 4th October 2011. The short meetings hold with responsible for training allowed the exchanging of information and inputs for improving collaboration and enlarging it to other WPs.

Other activities undertaken:

- Establishing links with the EPIET and Field Epidemiology Training Programmes.
- Dissemination of EPISOUTH PLUS Project and WP5 activities at EPI JOURNAL Sessions held at National Centre of Epidemiology.

Activities planned for the next period

- 1 workshop/ training sessions

- 2 training addressed to Non EU countries
- 1 Steering Team Meeting for SE and Guide development on GPP
- Final report of capacities needs for Preparedness and Response
- Continuing the preparation of Simulation Exercise

Objective 3: *Enhance Mediterranean Early Warning Systems (EWS) allowing alerts and Epidemic intelligence information sharing among EpiSouth countries and developing interoperability with other European Early Warning platforms (WP6)*

Involvement of partners and target groups
Coordination with other projects or activities
Outcomes and deliverables achieved
Problems encountered
How were problems resolved

Some activities performed by the WP6 team were not developed in this interim report for SANCO as they are with their attached Milestones under DEVCO budget only. Thus, all related details and scientific report are available in DEVCO bi-annual reports (example: MECIDS coleadership, mission into non-EU Episouth countries, etc.). However, even if it was not under SANCO budget, a short section of this report describes the WP6 steering team meeting performed mid-July 2011

The EpiSouth Alert platform's assessment and EPIS-EpiSouth new platform development

- The EpiSouth secure platform for alert and data exchanges was created during the 1st phase of the EpiSouth project and is operational since November 2009.
- As of 14th January 2012, a total of 113 alerts were posted in this platform.
- According to the EU-EpiSouth PLUS agreement, one of the EpiSouth-plus' objective is the development of synergies that will allow interoperability with other European and other relevant Early warning and surveillance systems in collaboration with ECDC and WHO.
- In order to ease this process with European Union Early Warning System, a new EpiSouth platform is under development in an EPIS environment by the ECDC. Before being operational, the use of this new platform will have to be endorsed by the participating countries, as planned in the project.
- A review of the current EpiSouth –Alert platform has been launched by the WP6 team. This survey was done among all Episouth secure platform users in order to perform an evaluation of the existing system and improve this tool thanks to countries comments during the 2nd phase of the project (*Annex XXXIII*).
- This survey had 2 objectives:
 - o Firstly, to consolidate the tool developed during the phase 1 and improve its characteristics.
 - o Secondly, to include proposed modifications and improvements in the EpiSouth-EPIS platform under development at the ECDC. This new EpiSouth-EPIS platform should ease the interoperability between the different EW systems.

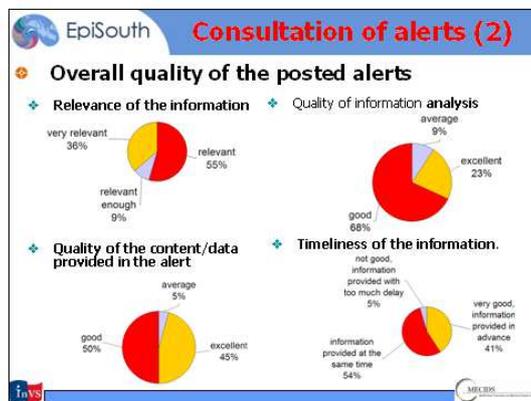
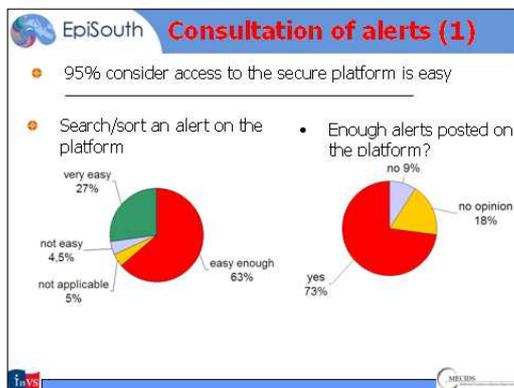
- The evaluation-questionnaire has been shared with ECDC in order to explore current and new functionalities to be included in the new EPIS-EpiSouth platform. The questionnaire has been shared with all participating countries and the EpiSouth platform users through the EpiSouth website with an active collaboration of WP2 and Cineca (see attached screen shot).
- The questionnaire was put online in the secure EpiSouth platform up to the 31st May 2011. The results from this survey were available in June 2011 and have been integrated in the specifications of the future EpiSouth-EPIS-based platform.
- Regarding the technical development of the EPIS-EpiSouth platform with ECDC
 - o Two constructive “face to face” meetings between ECDC and WP6 teams have allowed streamlining the process and the Plan of Action (PoA) has been finalised. (*Annex XXXIV*).
 - o Several teleconferences were held regularly with the ECDC developer officers.

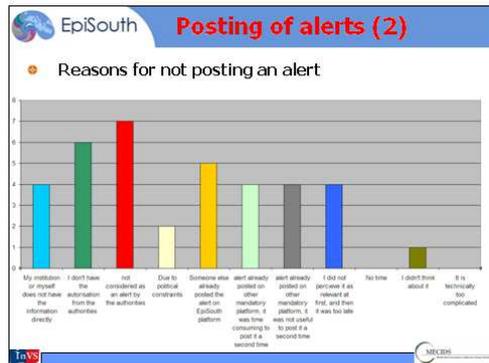
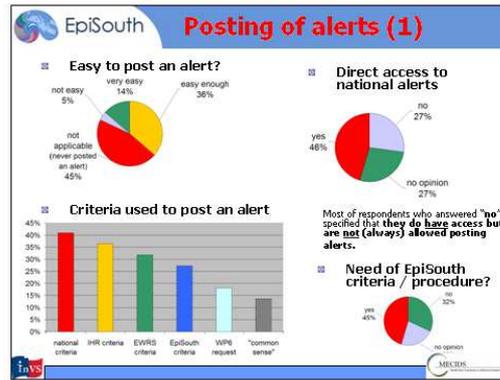
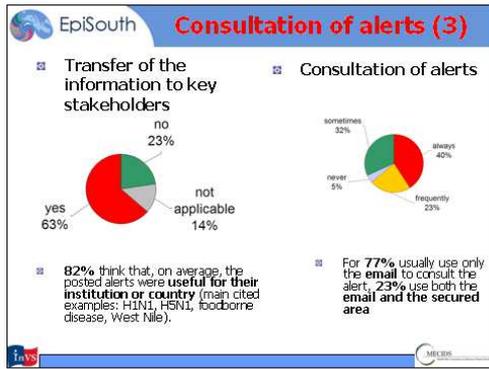
Here below are some information about this survey:

- Methodology:
- The questionnaire was online from 21st April to 31st May 2011.
- 22 persons over 54 (40%) answered the questionnaire
- 7 of the 22 respondents (32%) were from Non –EU countries
- Results:
- cf. slides below.

- Propositions made by countries to ease the participation of focal points in posting alerts:
- Get commitment and blanket authorisation from higher levels (MOH, director of NPI) and communicable disease departments
- Having at least 1 focal point at a decision making position,
- Commitment from focal points in posting alerts,
- Increase number of focal points,
- Official and written EpiSouth procedure (shared at a high level),
- Proceeding with an update of alerts posted (every 3 months),
- Continue to solicit countries when information is perceived as relevant for EpiSouth
- Simplify the alerts platform; ease the posting procedure, reduce information on each

page.





The WP6 steering team meeting in Montenegro: 5-6 July 2011

- The WP6 steering team meeting was kindly hosted in Montenegro on 05 & 06 July 2011 thanks to the collaboration of the Montenegro Institute of Public Health and our EpiSouth PLUS focal points, Dragan Lausevic and Zoran Vratnica.
- This meeting was the opportunity to have a face-to-face meeting with the WP6 ST members as planned in the WP6 working plan and the AIDCO/DEVCO agreement.
- The aims of this meeting were the following:
 - o Overview of the Epidemic Intelligence activities 2010-2011 and the EpiSouth PLUS project;
 - o In-depth discussion and analysis of existing early warning systems and their interconnections with EpiSouth
 - o Optimisation of information sharing: practical issues and challenges
 - o Definitions of SOP (standard operating procedures) for the EpiSouth data sharing;
- Participating countries for WP6 steering team meeting: 9 countries, 18 participants Israel, Kosovo, Montenegro, Morocco, Romania, Tunisia, Turkey, France and Italy (as observer).
Partners: MECIDS, WHO- Geneva and ECDC
Missing: Algeria, Malta, Jordan and Palestine (both had difficulties to obtain Schengen Visa).

Thanks to the Italian Ministry of Health support, Romania and Malta, the 2 EU representatives in the WP6 ST group, were able to join the meeting. In fact, these 2 EU countries had no dedicated funds to participate to WP6 ST meetings under SANCO grant.

- Here below the contents and the agenda of the WP6 steering team meeting (*Annexes XXXV and XXXVI*):

DAY I.

- o Introduction & opening ceremony
- o Presentation of Montenegro public health activities
- o Overview of WP6 activities in 2010
- o Results of EpiSouth alert platform 's assessment
- o Legal framework & principles of information exchange

DAY II.

- o Presentation of the new EpiSouth-EPIS platform
- o Principles of information exchanges & articulation with other EWS
- o SOP: Standard Operating Procedures
- o Conclusion

eWEB bulletin: a new sending process and registration form

- Through years and months, people requesting to be registered in order to receive the eWEB bulletin is increasing. The management of the large number of subscriptions and the large mailing list became difficult for the WP6 team. Through active collaboration with the WP2 and CINECA, WP6 asked CINECA to develop easier ways for the eWEB dissemination process done each week:

- 1) For the eWEB upload in the public website
- 2) For the eWEB dissemination to all recipients based on the large mailing list.

- The 2 procedures/sending tools are operational since several months. The new procedures are simple and ease the work done every week to disseminate eWEB bulletin.

- These 2 new procedures came in complement to the subscription tool developed during the 1st semester of the EpiSouth PLUS project phase (<http://www.episouth.org/newsletter.php>)

- Here below, screen print of the 2 new tools for eWEB dissemination:

Figure 1. The new procedure to upload the eWEB bulletin in the public website.

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Create Bulletin - Weekly" with a navigation bar at the top containing "Home" and "Add content". The form includes a "Title" text input field, a "Date of bulletin" section with dropdown menus for "Month" (set to "Aug"), "Day" (set to "5"), and "Year" (set to "2011"), and a "File of bulletin" section with a "Parcourir..." button and an "Upload" button. Below the file section, it states "Files must be less than 32 MB" and "Allowed file types: txt doc pdf rtf xls zip ppt pps". There are two text areas: "Revision information" (with a "New revision" label) and "Revision log message" (with a prompt: "Provide an explanation of the changes you are making. This will help other authors understand your motivations."). A "Save" button is located at the bottom left.

Figure 2. The new procedure the eWEB bulletin sending to all recipients.

The screenshot shows the "OpenNewsletter 2.5" web interface. It has a top navigation bar with "Home", "Subscribers", "Compose", "Requests", and "Members", and a "Logout" link. The main area is titled "Compose Newsletter" and contains a "Subject:" text input field, a "From:" dropdown menu (set to "EPI SOUTH_alerte <EPI SOUTH_alerte@mvs.sante.fr>"), and a "Type:" dropdown menu (set to "text/html"). Below this is a rich text editor with a toolbar and a large text area. At the bottom, there is an "Attachment (optional):" section with a "Parcourir..." button, and "Preview" and "Send" buttons. A footer note reads "For any problem, please contact c.dellaCasa@ineca.it".

MILESTONES AND DELIVERABLES: 1st interim SANCO report

- Please refer to the WP6 table: Overview of activities for the first 15 months period (15 October 2010 – 14 January 2012).

DESCRIPTION OF INDICATORS OF ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

EpiSouth Epidemiological Weekly Bulletin (eWEB)

- The EpiSouth electronic weekly epidemiological bulletin (e-Web) has been issued since 19th March 2008. Since March 2009, e-Web is accessible on open access on EpiSouth Website.
- The e-Web provides a weekly summary of new health events occurring in both non-EpiSouth and EpiSouth countries and in relation with a health threat (providing that information is already public or directly provided by the affected EpiSouth country). Events are presented in a public health perspective.
- The e-Web aims neither to present an exhaustive list of all “international health alerts” nor to provide weekly updates on previously reported health crises. E Webs are posted every Thursday on the EpiSouth website public area.
- Every week, the eWEB bulletin is archived in a database hosted on the secured EpiSouth website.
- Since March 2009, eWEB bulletins are available from: <http://www.episouthnetwork.org/content/episouth-weekly-epi-bulletin-e-web?page=1>; and bulletins are also sent through email in a PDF format.
- For the 1st EpiSouth PLUS interim SANCO report (15th October 2010 to 14th January 2012): 65 eWEB bulletins (from n°135 to n°199) have been issued.

Scientific seminars and congresses

During this 15 months period, the team participated to:

- Arbozonet Annual Meeting – Rabat, Nov 2010;
- IMED – Vienna, Feb 2011; Internet-based intelligence for public health emergencies and disease outbreak – Haifa, March 2011;
- EurAsia congress on infectious diseases -Sarajevo, June 2011, but not with the support of SANCO budget funds.

The period of the WP6 freezing (from July 2011 to January 2012) has reduced the possibilities of attending additional conferences.

The WP6 team will try to do its best during the next 15 month period.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED and How problems were resolved

On 25th May 2011, The European Commission (EAHC, DEVCO) requested the WP6 and the project coordination to define how EpiSouth PLUS intends to communicate the events and the information matching the current EU criteria for reporting. Without which the EAHC was unable to continue to support the WP6 early warning and cross border epidemic intelligence. All activities related to WP6 were frozen after the 4th July 2011 until the SOPs were approved by the European Commission. The freeze period went from July 2011 to January 2012.

The SOP version which got EU approval on 19th January 2012 is provided with the *Annex XXXVII*.

It is to be mentioned that the freezing of WP6 situation delayed the implementation of the WP6 activities and thus had an impact on the deliverables’ calendar, especially:

- o The next EpiSouth annual meeting was expected to be organised in Paris during the 1st quarter 2012. The organisation of such large meeting requires anticipation and down payment is necessary to secure reservations. Although we are aware of the possible impacts on other planned EpiSouth activities, the Paris meeting will have to be postponed at least to the second semester 2012.

- o The lack of possibility to attend scientific congresses, to set-up scientific events hampered the promotion of SANCO support in the Episouth project. The WP6 team intends to maximise its congress participation during the next 15 months period.
- o The miss possibility to propose an internship on epidemic intelligence at the Institut de veille Sanitaire during a week to a non-EU participating countries.
- o Following the European Commission notification of the end of the WP6 freezing dated 19 January 2012, the WP6 team is now striving to provide all deliverables during the next 15 months period.

Activities planned for the next period

Epidemic Intelligence activities
 EpiSouth Weekly Epidemic Intelligence (eWEB)
 Management / animation of the secure platform
 2nd WP6 ST meetings (place to be defined)
 Missions in non-EU countries (To be defined)
 1 week Epidemic Intelligence stage at InVS (Paris) 1st - (To be defined)
 Presentations at conferences/workshops and planning
 Collaboration with UE for the EpiSouth/EpiS secured platform interoperability with other EW system
 1st EpiSouth Meeting
 Launching of EpiSouth/EpiS Platform (after 1st EpiSouth Meeting)

Objective 4: *Production of a strategic document, with guidelines based on assessments and surveys, aimed at facilitating IHR implementation (WP7)*

Involvement of partners and target groups
Coordination with other projects or activities
Outcomes and deliverables achieved
Problems encountered
How were problems resolved

Methodology applied as planned

The methodology, as described in the SANCO contract, implied the design of two surveys, of which one to identify priority capacities to acquire in the EpiSouth Region and one to carry out an in depth analysis of a selected priority.

Due to the explanation mentioned later in this report, the first survey was designed but not carried out. Previously not-analysed data for the EpiSouth region collected by WHO as part of a global monitoring exercise was made available to the WP7 co-leaders and a regional analysis and assessment were carried out. This was the factual basis of a subsequent expert meeting (the first WP7 ST meeting). In this forum, those results were discussed and validated by the WP7 Steering Team and invited experts.

The data analysis and the additional information provided by the Countries of the WP7ST have shed light on the present priorities and are in line with the WP7 activities' aims as described in the Grant Agreement:

“The activities planned in the framework of this WP will facilitate the implementation of IHR-2005 at national level in the EpiSouth Countries in accordance with the priorities identified with WHO-LYO and aimed at supporting:

- i) The description of the status of national progress in the acquisition of core capacities for surveillance and response and for points of entry as required by IHR, and the identification of gaps through the surveys planned by WP7;
- ii) the acquisition of missing core capacities for surveillance and response and at points of entry to be addressed by WP4, WP5 and WP6 activities”.

Involvement of partners and target groups

Involvement of partners and target experts (for example IHR NFPs, WHO IHR Contact Points) was fostered first through the consolidation of the WP7 Steering Team and then through the participation of WP7 ST Members, target experts and other EpiSouth WP leaders to a sub-regional meeting that was held in Rome in July 2011.

This enabled the validation of preliminary results of the assessment of regional priorities for capacity implementation in the framework of IHR, coordination with the other WPs of the EpiSouth Project and interaction with IHR focal and contact points at national and WHO regional level.

Coordination with other projects or activities

During the reporting period, contacts were made with SEEHN network which is part of the WP7 ST. The Shisans project was invited to be part of the WP ST and the assessments they produced were analysed as part of a review of documents and literature that was carried out in preparation for the in depth survey design.

Outcomes and deliverables achieved

During the period 15th October 2011- 15th January 2012 the following outcomes were achieved: WP7 co-leaders finalized the WP action plan and consolidated the Steering Team (ST) membership. Following this, WP7 co-leaders and the WP7 Steering Team worked to identify EpiSouth priority IHR related capacities for in depth analysis. The outcome of this work was summarized in the report “Level of Implementation of IHR 2005 in the EpiSouth Region” that was shared with Steering Team members.

Discussion and fine tuning of the priorities to address took place in Rome on the 20- 21st of July during the first WP7 ST meeting that involved WP7 ST Members and Focal Points of the EpiSouth sub-region where the meeting was held. At the end of this meeting a main findings report was produced in agreement of the meeting participants and a preliminary WP7 report on priority capacity needs in the Mediterranean was finalized (*Annex XXXVIII*).

Following this, an analysis of available documents and literature concerning the identified area of focus of WP7 was made in order to design an in depth analysis as planned. This activity is ongoing.

Problems encountered

The 2011 Mediterranean crisis hindered the rapidity of communications among Countries and made the participation of some FPs to the WP7 ST face to face meeting impossible. In the field of activities of WP7 this translated in a slower consolidation of the ST and in the need to avoid overburdening countries.

Although this was not observed in the period of this report an additional aspect to consider is that the current severe European Economic Crisis could lead to more strict national prioritization of activities in public health institutions and ministries and penalize participation in the Project.

How were problems resolved

WHO made aggregated data collected for the 2010 Assessment on IHR implementation from 18 Countries within the EpiSouth Network available. Based on this information the priority area to analyse in the coming months was defined and validated with the WP7 ST during the first WP7 ST Meeting.

Activities planned for the next period

During the next phase of activities, the WP7 team will publish its first WP report that provides the results of the first analysis of data on IHR implementation in the EpiSouth Region and identifies the priority area where to focus for its in depth assessment.

As discussed in the EpiSouth AB Meeting in BXL in May 2012, although in the original Project Plan an assessment on national procedural and legislative aspects relevant to IHR implementation was planned, the analysis of WHO data and the countries' specifications indicated that "coordination of surveillance and response between points of entry and national surveillance systems" is the priority area to address in the Mediterranean. The second phase of WP7 activities will therefore focus on developing guidelines on this topic that will be discussed and validated during the 1st EpiSouth project meeting.

A specific assessment of surveillance at Points of Entry might be performed to enhance the impact of those guidelines. However, the most appropriate methodology to follow to meet the aforementioned objectives will be defined in the WHO/EpiSouth Meeting which will be held in Lyon on 16-18 July 2012.

Considering that the above adopted strategy was favourably accepted by the AB Members, it will be reported in the amendment to be submitted for the no-cost extension to have formal acceptance by the EU co-financing DG SANCO and DEVCO

Reports from the other Partners

National centre of Infectious and parasitic Diseases (NCIPD) – Bulgaria

During the period 15 October 2010-14 January 2012 the activities in the NCIPD were related to the start of the EpiSouth Plus project and mainly to the objectives of EpiSouth Plus WP7 (Facilitating International Health Regulations - IHR implementation).

WP7 ST identified that coordination of surveillance and response between points of entry and national surveillance systems is a priority among Mediterranean countries for IHR implementation.

Along with specific WP7 activities, certain activities of the other WPs, related to the strengthening of surveillance and response to health threats have been performed: WP4 (Mediterranean regional laboratory network), WP5 (Generic preparedness plan and risk management procedures) and WP6 (Early warning system and cross-border epidemic intelligence).

LIST OF THE PERSONS PARTICIPATED IN THE PROJECT

DURING 15 October 2010-14 January 2012:

1. Professor Mira Kojouharova MD, PhD – Deputy Director, National Centre of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases
2. Assoc. Prof. Anna Kurchatova, PhD – Department Epidemiology and CD Surveillance, Head of Section Epidemiological Surveillance and Early Warning
3. Dr. Radosveta Filipova – Ministry of Health
4. Dr. Nadezhda Vladimirova – Department Epidemiology and CD Surveillance, Head of Section Epidemiology of Communicable Diseases

Hellenic Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (KEELPNO) – Greece

The Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention, MoH and Social Solidarity, Athens Greece, have actively participated in all the WPs of the EpiSouth Plus activities.

Regarding the visibility of the EpiSouth Plus, a presentation of the mandate and the WPs and activities of the EpiSouth Plus has been done at Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Questionnaire about the website assessment was completed in May 2011.

Regarding WP4:

We completed the questionnaire about WNV and arboviruses reference laboratories, We forwarded the Final questionnaire to the Hellenic Competent laboratories, which have subsequently been included in the activities carried out by WP4.

Regarding WP5: We participate in the Steering Team, we have followed the preparation of the 27-29 February 2012 Workshop in Madrid, and we have committed ourselves to the preparation of and the active participation to the simulation exercise.

Regarding the WP6: We have completed the WP6 Questionnaire about EpiSouth Secure Alert Platform, to which we have contributed on numerous occasions:

On 20/7/2011 provided the WNV epidemiologic data from Greece in 2011.

On 5/8/2011 provided update on the WNV epidemiologic data from Greece in 2011.

On 6/9/2011 provided the WNV clinical and laboratory and epidemiological data about an Albanian Citizen.

22/09/2011 we provided all epidemiologic data for malaria in Greece in 2011.

11/10/2011 we provided all epidemiologic data for Legionellosis in British tourists in Corfu, Greece.

24/10/2011 update of the above.

3/11/2011 we provided an update on all epidemiologic data for malaria in Greece in 2011.

10/01/2012 WNV final epidemiologic data in 2010 (updated) , and 2011.

Regarding the WP7: Regina Vorou participated in the Steering Team of the WP7, contributing in the preparation of the ST meeting in Rome, 20-21 July 2011 with the following aims:

-To consolidate the newly formed ST.

-To finalize the process of identification of core capacity/ies that the WP7 could help to acquire and strengthen,

-List the expected outcomes of WP7,

-Presentation for Greece,

-Main findings July 2011 and contribution to the final version.

Problems encountered were: 1. the introduction of a colleague who is representative in the EWRS for Greece, as at that time it had not been nominated for EWRS yet, and we had to wait for this nomination before appointing her as EpiSouthPlus focal points from Greece.

2. There is no administrative/technical assistant, and all this has been undertaken by Dr Rengina Vorou.

Medical and Public Health Services (MPHS MoH) – Cyprus

During the first 15 months of EpiSouth Plus we have been involved in various activities that include:

- Completion of Questionnaires sent to us by the different work packages

-Took part in teleconference

- Preparation of country presentation

- Participation in WP7 ST meeting (Rome)

-Observation of the latest uploads on the website

-Information given in EpiSouth weekly bulletin

-Correspondence and communication

Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care – Malta

Activities undertaken in relation to the objectives.

- In April 2011 we participated in a WP6 Teleconference to plan the way ahead.

- In April 2011 a questionnaire for WP6, on Secure Episouth Alert platform was filled in.
- In July 2011 a questionnaire from WP5 relating to Preparedness and Response Capacities Assessment was also filled in.
- In July 2011, a doctor from the department attended the WP7 ST meeting on IHR in Rome.
- Malta FPs helped selection of priority pathogens for Laboratory activities in November 2011.

Consultations with other colleagues from different departments was sometimes necessary in order to fill in the questionnaires as comprehensively as possible.

Unfortunately due to pressures of work and lack of staff we were unable to attend the WP6 steering committee meeting in Montenegro in July 2011.

Public Health Institute (IPH/ISPB) – Romania

WP 5: Generic Preparedness Plan and Risk management procedures
Objectives

- Activities done by IPHB

The questionnaire "Public Health Preparedness and Response Core-Capacity Assessment" has been completed on-line in September, 2011 by Dr. Adriana Pistol.

WP6: Early warning system and cross-border epidemic intelligence

- Activities done by IPHB

The questionnaire about EpiSouth Platform for cross-border alerts has been completed on-line in late of May, 2011 by Dr. Aurora Stanescu.

By the end of July, 2011 the alerts regarding the West Nile fever cases and the Dengue fever cases notified in Romania have been posted on the EpiSouth Platform (Dr. Florin Popovici).

On July, 4-5th, 2011 Dr. Aurora Stanescu attended the Cross-Border Epidemic Intelligence WP6 steering team meeting held in Budva, Montenegro; the main issue debated at that meeting was the Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) for information flow between EpiSouth and EWRS.

Public Health Institute (IVZ-RS) – Slovenia

In this report we describe work carried out by Slovenian participants in the first 15 months of the Episouth plus in 2011 and state in particular activities undertaken in relation to the objectives of the project.

Exchanging information allowed rapid assessment and possibility to respond in line with IHR, especially regarding harmonization of cross border activities. Weekly Epidemic Intelligence

bulletin was very useful environment for sharing generated alerts in the EpiSouth community. We made also number of accesses to the web page of EpiSouth and also password protected member's area.

There were also many other activities and milestones in the project in which Slovenian members were not directly involved, but were important for process.

In 2011, Slovenia actively participated in fulfilling some EpiSouth questionnaires:

- WP2: an evaluation questionnaire with the intention to set up the new website and quarterly electronic bulletin for EpiSouth Plus;
- WP6: a questionnaire about EpiSouth Platform for cross-border alerts:
the questionnaire had two main objectives: to improve the quality of the alert secure platform and to assess the current Alert platform in order to develop a new platform with additional functionalities including interoperability between the different EW systems;
- WP5: a questionnaire related to country Preparedness and Response Capacities Assessment on institutional capacities regarding preparedness and response to public health threats of international concern;
- WP4: a questionnaire aimed at establishing a regional laboratories network among Mediterranean and South-East Europe countries, to strengthen and support the already existing surveillance activities provided by the National Public Health Institutions, involved in EpiSouth, on West Nile, Dengue and related Biosafety issues.

Due to excellent coordination of the project and all activities done, there were no problems noticed by Slovenian participants.

The importance of the EpiSouth project lies in its potential to strengthen cross border capacity and resources in the area it covers.

Azienda Ospedaliera di Padova (PADUA GH) – Italy

Azienda Ospedaliera, Padua (PADUA GH) is involved as associated partner in the project “EpiSouth +: a Network for the control of Public Health threats and other bio-security risks in the Mediterranean region and Balkans” (Grant Agreement n. 2009 11 05) by supporting the coordinator, Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS), in the implementation of the WP1 coordination as well as by taking part in the core WPs activities with particular reference to WP4 and WP5.

The main activities performed during the report period 15/10/2010 – 14/01/2012 are below listed. It has to be highlighted that the crisis in the Mediterranean Basin has affected the project in general and delays occurred in the implementation of the planned activities during the first months of the project life.

(M1-M6) Preparatory phase: administrative procedures for requested documents (project agreements and financial forms) and acquiring human resources were performed as indicated in the signed agreements.

(M2-M3) The Grant Agreement n. 2009 11 05 – EPISOUTH PLUS – was received and signed.

(M4) The Service Contract n. 2010/238-194 “EpiSouth, a Network for the control of health and security threats and other bio-security risks in the Mediterranean region and South-East Europe” was signed with ISS.

(M4-M6) The administrative documents for the enrollment of staff in public bodies, in accordance with the Italian law, were prepared. Although the re-organisation of the institution administrative structures implied some delay, a call for applications was made and published in the institution website (15th April 2011) to select a candidate to act both as technical assistant (DG SANCO agreement) and non key expert (DG DEVCO contract).

(M7-M8) One candidate applied. She was selected with approval of the EC – DG DEVCO (30th June 2011) and started her activity on 15th July 2011.

(M7-M8) A more substantial engagement in WP4 activities was expressed to concretely contribute to the specific objective 1 Establishment of a Mediterranean Reference Laboratories Network, having Padua Hospital a consolidated expertise as a Biosafety Level BSL 3 – P3 LAB. For this reason, a senior scientist of the Hospital Microbiology and Virology Department was identified to substitute the senior PH expert included in the DG SANCO Grant Agreement (E1. Staff – Costs pertaining to Public Officials, page 64).

A formal request for substitution was finalised and communicated to the coordinator for EC approval (17th May 2011).

(M8) The senior scientist was formally included as a Member of the WP4 Steering Team.

(M9-M10) Meetings with the Padua team and contacts with the coordinator were arranged for facilitating the involvement of the new Focal Point.

The cooperation with WP4 started up by the compilation of the WP4 questionnaire on Training and Networking to define priority areas (pathogens and corresponding diseases and subjects) for common action in the EpiSouth Region. The questionnaire was a preliminary step for a telephone conference.

(M11) The telephone conference organized by the WP4 leaders to discuss on Training and Networking issues as well as on the organization of meeting with experts and heads of laboratories was attended.

(M12) Contribution was given to the National Institute of Health (ISS) in the compilation of the WP5 national questionnaire on Preparedness and Response Capacities.

(M13-14) Contribution was given in the compilation of the WP4 list of laboratories (human and animal fields) that are a reference for Dengue and West Nile or Laboratories of Virology dealing with the mentioned pathogens.

(M14-M15) A draft of a simplified version of the Directory of Health Institutions that is included in the project website aiming at updating information and data regarding Institutions partners was prepared and sent to the coordinator.

E1. STAFF

Considering the delays that occurred in general for the implementation of the planned activities due to the crisis in the Mediterranean Basin and the preparatory phase as well as the staff substitution

and human resources acquisition, no costs were charged for the below mentioned items in the period 15 October 2010 – 15 April 2011. Costs were charged for the next periods once the activities were implemented.

a. Cost pertaining to public officials

Senior PH expert: Mr. Giovanni Putoto. Substituted by Mrs. Monia Pacenti; MD - senior scientist (communication to the coordinator for EC approval dated 17th May 2011, prot. N. 28976).

Senior Scientist: Mrs. Monia Pacenti. Focal Point and member of the WP4 Steering Team; she is specifically involved in WP4 and WP5 activities. In particular, she contributed to the compilation of the WP4 questionnaire on Training and Networking to define priority areas (pathogens and corresponding diseases and subjects) for common action in the EpiSouth region. She took part in the WP4 telephone conference scheduled on 20th September 2011. She worked in contact with the coordinator to concretely contribute to WP4 and WP5 activities. She will take part in the WP5 planned training activities related to the “Workshop on Public Health Preparedness & Response” scheduled from 27th to 29th February 2012 at Instituto de Salud Carlos III in Madrid.

Due to the staff replacement, no costs relating to Mr. Giovanni Putoto, MD are indicated in the financial statement concerning this professional figure.

Administrator: Mrs. Cinzia Montagna.

Tasks: She is in charge of the execution of administrative issues concerning the project; she coordinates the staff that is involved in the project; she deals with all the administrative issues in collaboration with the concerned Departments of Padua General Hospital. She works in strict cooperation with WP1 and supports the scientific work.

The costs reported for this professional figure are in line with that indicated in the GA Annex II Estimated budget of the action, page 64.

b. Cost not pertaining to public officials

Technical assistant: Mrs Cristina Borella (15 July 2011-15 April 2013) with an average estimated number of working days equal to 38 in accordance with the GA Annex II Estimated budget of the action, page 65. Contract to be renewed in case of project extension with available allocated left funds).

Tasks: She supports the Azienda Ospedaliera - Padua staff in the implementation of the planned activities relating to WP1, specifically the organization of meetings and conferences in cooperation with the coordinator, and the drafting of technical and administrative requested documents. She

supports the senior scientist in the contacts with the coordinator and in the logistic, organizational and administrative procedures. She supports the administrator in administrative issues management.

It has to be highlighted that Mrs Borella's co-operation in the project activities concretely started on 15th July 2011 – as per Delibera of the Director General of Padua University Hospital n. 675 dated 19th July 2011 and e-mail communication to the co-ordinator dated 8th August 2011. For this reason, only the costs incurred from 15th July 2011 were considered.

One contract was made for this professional figure acting both as logistic and conference organizer as well as technical assistant for an estimated number of working days equal to 230 (192 days as per Service Contract n. 2010/238-194 and 38 days as per Agreement n. 2009 11 05 – EpiSouth Plus) for a total amount of 46.000,00 Euros (38.400,00 funded by DG DEVCO - Service Contract n. 2010/238-194 and 7.600,00 Euros funded by DG SANCO - Agreement n. 2009 11 05 – EpiSouth Plus).

Istituto Nazionale per le Malattie Infettive Spallanzani (INMI) – Italy

INMI- Spallanzani

The activities performed in these first 15 months of the project are listed below and are all to be included in WP4 - A Mediterranean regional laboratories network.

- Summer 2010: Communication, through the Italian MoH and IHR focal point, of AHFV infection in travelers returning from Egypt
- September 2011 Evaluation of WP4 action plan and compilation of “Table of pathogens” questionnaire to select pathogens and activities to be included in the training program
- September 2011 participation to the First steering team teleconference call
- December 6th 2011 compilation of the WP4 Questionnaire on laboratory capacities
- October 2011 Ongoing collaboration with Albania NIH (Dr. S. Bino) on diagnosis of WNV and hantavirus infection

Cineca Consorzio Interuniversitario (CINECA) - Italy

A dedicated web-site (<http://www.episouthnetwork.org>) has been created with a private section (called Network Working Area, accessible only by project participants through a personal ID and password).

The public web site has been developed on Drupal, a Content Management System, in order to simplify its management and to easily create a multi-language version of the portal; editorial staff accounts were made available for WP leaders in order to facilitate the dissemination of contents.

Some specific tools were created: two mailing list to manage the dissemination of the two bulletins (the Quarterly Episouth Bulletin and the Weekly Epi Bulletin);

The main contents of the website were and will be translated in English, French and Arabic.

In the Network Working Area, project participants can share and revise documents, post and discuss topics in forums, consult a calendar of relevant events (both internal and external to the project), fill in questionnaire, share epidemic alerts and find contacts.

All the activities are tracked and specific indicators (e.g. number of uploaded and downloaded documents, number of posted alerts and follow-ups, number of posted topics and messages in forums) are available to the project coordinator.

Focal Points were asked to fill in three questionnaire:

- Episouth web site assessment: to collect assessments on the quality of the information displayed on the first Episouth web-site to be used to improve the new version of the web-site.
- Episouth Platform for cross-border alerts assessment: to collect opinions and comments on the alerts secured platform for the development of the new Episouth- EPIS platform.
- Public Health Preparedness and Response Core-Capacity Assessment: this survey focused on the available institutional capacities and needs related to detection, surveillance and control of Public Health (PH) events of international concern (PHEIC) according the IHR 2005 definitions.

Each questionnaire responsible had the possibility to view and download all the answered questionnaires.

Moreover, a complete review of the alerts secured system has been done to provide information for the new Episouth-EPIS platform.

Activities planned for the next period are:

- Upgrading and maintenance of the web site
- Improving functionalities and maintenance of the private members area
- New questionnaires and assessments according to the needs of the project
- Developing new tools/directories for the dissemination of infos

National Institute of Public Health (HZJZ) – CROATIA

Persons involved in the project:

Senior PH expert:

Prof.dr.sc.Ira Gjenero-Margan, MD - EpiSouth Focal Point

PH expert seniors:

Prim.dr.Borislav Aleraj, MD

Prim.dr.Bernard Kaić, MD

Iva Pem Novosel, MD

PH expert juniors:

Sanja Kurečić Filipović, MD

Administrative staff:

Jasmina Pavlić, prof.

Croatia has been participating mainly in WP4 - Mediterranean Regional Laboratories Network which is a network of selected laboratories in the Mediterranean to support the priority diagnostic needs by relying on the existing facilities and diagnostic capacities available in the EpiSouth Area and by interaction with public health institutions and officials based on national reference laboratories from EU MS and the Institute Pasteur network.

After the announcement of official initiation of EpiSouth Plus project the following activities have been performed in Croatia:

- coordination of the grant agreement with Croatian National Institute finance department and collecting the data for filling in the Financial Identification Form;
- several meetings of local project staff for the evaluation of Croatian participation in WP4, evaluation of the WP4 action plan
- continuous follow up of e-mail correspondence with EpiSouth platform
- filling in WP5 questionnaire
- filling in WP4 questionnaire
- participation at WP4 Steering Team TC on September 20th 2011
- evaluation of the minutes of the TC held on September 20th 2011
- completion of other requested documents (pathogens of interest for WP4, WNN)
- coordination meeting with the laboratory team of the Croatian National Institute of Public Health, NRL for arboviruses and rickettsia
- questionnaire on the laboratory capacities completion

4. Note about Partners Staff

It has to be noted that some Partners have changed their staff involved in EpiSouth from those originally identified and mentioned in the Annex II of the Grant Agreement.

However, as already communicated to the EAHC Project Officer, although these changes do not imply any costs variation, the modifications will be integrated in a future amendment to be submitted to the EC DGSANCO/EAHC for approval.

5. Annexes

See the Annexes document that is integral part of this Report.

Silvia Declich
EpiSouth Plus Project leader

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Silvia Declich". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.