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EU Health Programme Selected projects

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Health and
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Foreword

This publication puts together 31 projects which were funded under the 2nd Health Programme of the European Commission and are presented to the public in a scientific poster exhibition at the European Health Forum Gastein 2014 and the 7th Annual European Public Health Conference 2014.

The 2nd Health Programme came into force on 1 January 2008 and is implemented through various actions namely, projects, Joint Actions, operating grants, conferences, direct grants to International Organizations and service contracts. The total budget of the programme rises to € 321.5 million. The Programme aims at increasing solidarity and prosperity in the European Union by protecting and promoting health. The Programme is intended to complement the national actions and policies of the 28 EU countries by adding a European layer. This means that they involve actors from different countries and that the project outcomes are beneficial for several countries and can be applied to other countries as well.

The projects presented here cover a wide range of health themes, from health promotion to health security. They cover topics such as rare diseases, HIV/AIDS, good health in older age, antimicrobial resistance and organ donation to name a few. Although progress has been made with the previous and the existing Health Programme, the work is not concluded yet - an ageing society needs to concentrate on improving the health and safety of its citizens consistently. This is why the European Commission has proposed a new Health Programme which started in 2014 that continues the path we have taken with the first two Health Programmes and will help to face future health challenges all over Europe

European Commission
Director-General for Health and Consumers
Consumers, Health and Food Executive Agency

TABLE OF CONTENTS

7 Health Promotion

- 8 **Action-For-Health** - *Reducing health inequalities - preparation for action plans and structural funds project*
- 9 **BISTAIRS** - *Brief InterventionS in the Treatment of Alcohol use disorders In Relevant Settings*
- 10 **CANCON** - *Joint action European Guide on Quality Improvement in Comprehensive Cancer Control*
- 11 **CHRODIS** - *Joint action Addressing chronic diseases and promoting healthy ageing across the life cycle*
- 12 **EJA** - *EUCERD Joint Action: working for rare diseases*
- 13 **Equity Action** - *Joint Action on Health Inequalities*
- 14 **EUHANET** - *European Haemophilia Network*
- 15 **EUHWforce** - *Joint action on European Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting*
- 16 **Euroheart II** - *European Heart Health Strategy II*
- 17 **HIV COBATEST** - *HIV community-based testing practices in Europe*
- 18 **JAMIE** - *Joint Action on Monitoring Injuries in Europe*
- 19 **MHP Hands** - *Mental Health Promotion Handbooks*
- 20 **NEW Implementation** - *Nightlife Empowerment and Well-being Implementation project*
- 21 **PASQ** - *Joint action on Patient Safety and Quality of Life*
- 22 **RARECARENet** - *Information network on rare cancers*
- 23 **SIALON II** - *Capacity Building In Combining Targeted Prevention with Meaningful HIV Surveillance among MSM*
- 24 **YSAV** - *Understanding and addressing youth sexual coercion and violence as a threat to young people's sexual health in Europe*

25 Health Information

- 26 **ACT** - *Advancing Care Coordination & TeleHealth Deployment Programme*
- 27 **NEW BORN SCREENING** - *Evaluation of population newborn screening practices for rare disorders in Member States of the European Union*
- 28 **PHGEN II** - *European Best Practice Guidelines for QA, Provision and Use of Genome-based Information and Technologies*
- 29 **WHO-EISAH** - *Cooperation between the EC and WHO Regional Office for Europe on further development of joint data gathering and common knowledge base relating to the alcohol situation and alcohol policies in the EU MS*

30 Health Security

- 31 **ARPEC** - *Antibiotic Resistance and Prescribing in European Children*
- 32 **EpiSouth+** - *Network for the Control of Public Health Threats and other bio-security risks in the Mediterranean Region and Balkans*
- 33 **EULID** - *European Living Donation and Public Health*
- 34 **FLURESP** - *Cost-effectiveness assessment of European influenza human pandemic alert and response strategies*
- 35 **QUANDHIP** - *Joint action on Quality Assurance Exercises and Networking on the Detection of Highly Infectious Pathogens*
- 36 **SHIPSAN ACT** - *Joint action on the impact on maritime transport of health threats due to biological, chemical & radiological agents, including communicable diseases*
- 37 **Quality Action** - *Joint action improving HIV Prevention in Europe*
- 38 **ODEQUS** - *European Quality system indicators and methodology on organ donation*
- 39 **PHASE** - *Public Health Adaptation Strategies to Extreme Weather Event*
- 40 **SHARE** - *Single Hub and Access point for paediatric Rheumatology in Europe*



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



The EpiSouth Plus Project: strengthening the control of public health threats through a Mediterranean and South-East European network

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Summary

With 27 participating countries, the EpiSouth Network was the biggest inter-country collaborative effort in the Mediterranean Region. Following the successful implementation of the EpiSouth Project (2006-2010), which focussed on communicable diseases, surveillance and training, the network implemented the EpiSouth Plus Project (2010-2014) with a focus on strengthening preparedness to common health threats and bio-security risks. Thanks to the EpiSouth Plus Project, a Mediterranean Regional Laboratories Network was established, a capacity building process on preparedness to common health threats was set up, the creation of a "culture of epidemic intelligence" was supported and facilitation of IHR implementation with a special focus on coordination of surveillance between Points of Entry was promoted.

Background and Aim

Countries around the Mediterranean Sea share epidemiological characteristics and public health problems.

In order to share knowledge and develop joint activities, in 2006 a Mediterranean collaborating framework, called the EpiSouth Network, was established.

The EpiSouth Network progressively expanded from including 9 EU MS to 27 countries of which 10 EU MS and 17 Non-EU MS from South Europe, the Balkans, North Africa and the Middle-East. It was therefore the biggest inter-country collaborative effort in the Mediterranean Region.

In order to increase health security in the Mediterranean Area and Balkans, it is necessary to enhance preparedness, detection and response capacity at national/regional levels to face threats to public health. The framework of the International Health Regulations (IHR) is particularly useful in this effect because it is not only legally binding for all EpiSouth partners but it also declines a set of capacities to be met, detailing a mechanism for information exchange and response collaboration under the umbrella of WHO.

Between 2010 and 2014, the network implemented the EpiSouth Plus Project with the aim to increase the health security in the Mediterranean area and South East Europe by enhancing and strengthening preparedness to common health threats and bio-security risks at national and regional levels and in the framework of the WHO-IHR.

EpiSouth Plus activities

In addition to WP1-Coordination; WP2-Dissemination; WP3-Evaluation, EpiSouth Plus activities were articulated in four WPs: WP4-Establishing a Mediterranean Regional Laboratories Network; WP5 - Promoting common procedures in Generic Preparedness and Risk Management Plans; WP6-Enhancing Mediterranean Early Warning Systems (EWS) and cross-border Epidemic Intelligence, and WP7- Facilitating IHR implementation.

Management

The Project was led by the Italian National Institute of Health (ISS) and counselled by an Advisory Board composed by EC, ECDC, WHO and other international experts. Each country participating in the EpiSouth Network was represented by two national EpiSouth Focal Points (FPs). Each FP was a public health officer working in the country's MoH or IPH officially selected among those involved in preparedness and risk management of Communicable Diseases and other Public Health threats. Most FP were also WHO International Health Regulations (IHR) and/or EU Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) Focal Points. Participation to the Network activities was on a voluntary basis. Staff from participating countries were not paid for their contribution, however all costs related to their involvement in the Network activities were covered by the projects. Each EpiSouth Plus WP, with the exception of WP3 evaluation, was led by two co-leaders (one from an EU and one from a non-EU Country/International Organization). In order to facilitate countries' participation and WPs activities implementation, Steering Teams (WPSTs) were established for each WP to identify the countries' needs, develop the tools and the conducive project environment in accordance with the specific objective and requirements of the related WP. The project activities and achievements were disseminated through a multilingual website and quarterly bulletins. EpiSouth Plus underwent both an internal and external evaluation.

Results

A Mediterranean Regional Laboratories Network was established to facilitate common threat detection and build regional capacity on the diagnosis of Dengue, West Nile Viruses and on Biosecurity. This network was consolidated through trainings, site visits and an External Quality Assessment (EQA). A capacity building process on preparedness to common health threats was set up with training modules and workshops culminating in the implementation of the Nautilus Simulation Exercise and the preparation of the EPREP Tool (Emergency Preparedness Planning) aimed at supporting EpiSouth Countries in setting up their Preparedness Plans. The focus of EpiSouth Plus epidemic intelligence (EI) activities has been on sharing information, the publication of bulletins and thematic notes and residential stages on EI/Event Based Surveillance. In order to facilitate information sharing, the EpiSouth Network set up and facilitated a dedicated secure platform. Since late 2012, to ensure its sustainability after the end of EpiSouth Plus and interoperability, this secure platform is hosted and managed by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). In the framework of facilitating IHR implementation, EpiSouth Plus countries highlighted the need to enhance the coordination of surveillance between Points of Entry, (i.e. ports, airports and ground crossings), and the National Health Systems in the Mediterranean Region. EpiSouth Plus contributed to the development of knowledge in this area, by conducting in four countries of the Network the EpiSouth Plus National Situation Analysis on coordination of surveillance between PoE and NHS (ENSA). This study included site visits in each participating country involving both the Ministries of Health and PoEs.

The EpiSouth Plus capacity building events/activities have involved more than 200 people and include two project meetings, two workshops/trainings on preparedness, two trainings on applied epidemiology, one simulation exercise, one lab training on Dengue, one lab training on WNV, EQA for Dengue and WNV, lab experts site visits, three residential stages on Early Warning and Epidemic Intelligence and four site visits carried out in the framework of the WP7 ENSA. The main final Outcomes/Deliverables have been three Strategic Documents: the EPREP Tool; Recommendations for the Institutions and consolidation of relevant lab networks and their capacity building process; and the Report on Coordination of Epidemiological Surveillance between PoE and the National Health System in the EpiSouth Region, co-authored by WHO.

Conclusions

EpiSouth-Plus was unique for its focus on the Mediterranean region as a whole, including non-EU countries and all three WHO Regional Offices that cover the Mediterranean. In addition to facilitating epidemiological communication and practical training, this regional approach strengthened solidarity and cohesion within the European Community and between EU and non-EU countries. It also enabled information sharing on cross-border public health threats and contributed to facilitating the implementation of IHR. Ultimately, EpiSouth-Plus contributed to the stability of the region as well as to improve public health protection.



The EpiSouth Network website

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

Starting date -duration	October 2010 - 39 months
Leader Organization	The Project is led by the Italian National Institute of Health (ISS) and counselled by an Advisory Board composed by EC, ECDC, WHO and other international experts.
Contact/WebSite	EpiSouth Dissemination Team: episouth@iss.it www.episouthnetwork.org

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