



## Press release

### Applied Infectious Disease Epidemiology Conference, Stockholm, Stockholm, October 26-28, 2009

**Stockholm, June 26, 2009:** “Epidemiology is always important and topical, though sometimes unsung,” says Professor Johan Giesecke, Chief Scientist at ECDC, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, “but the third applied Infectious Disease Epidemiology Conference in Stockholm in October this year will be an opportunity to put Epidemiology and infectious disease prevention and control into the spotlight; delegates will have the opportunity to discuss and share information on current and emerging infectious diseases, including influenza A (H1N1)v. The call for abstracts closes on July 3<sup>rd</sup> so there is no time to lose.”

“Let me stress,” he adds, “that influenza is not the only topic. We welcome abstracts relating to all infectious diseases in areas of applied public health research, outbreak investigations and public health surveillance. We also welcome abstracts in other areas of applied epidemiology or public health practice in which results are linked to public health action. We have an easy-to-use online system for abstract submission and conference registration to be found at <http://www.escaide.eu>. And it is not too soon to register. Remember, Sweden has the Presidency of the EU in the second half of this year, so we advise you to book your flights and hotel early.”

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control – ECDC - will host the third annual European Scientific Conference on Applied Infectious Disease Epidemiology – ESCAIDE - in Stockholm, home to the ECDC, from October 26-28. The event is being organized in partnership with the European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training (EPIET) and the EPIET Alumni network (EAN). It is a unique opportunity for frontline professionals from national disease control institutes to engage with each other and the wider scientific community.

The Conference aims at:

- strengthening and expanding the network of all those involved in applied infectious disease epidemiology;
- sharing scientific knowledge and experience in this field in Europe and internationally; and
- providing a dedicated platform for fellows of the EPIET/FETP (field epidemiology training program) to present their work.

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ESCAIDE 2009 is expecting participation of up to 500 health experts from more than 60 countries. The application for ESCAIDE to be accredited by the European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME) as in 2008 is under way. This should enable participants to be granted up to a maximum of 18 CME credits for participating in the conference while the registration costs will remain low.

More information can be found at <http://www.escaide.eu>.

### ECDC

*Set up in 2005 and headquartered in Stockholm, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is a EU agency which aims to strengthen Europe's defences against infectious diseases. ECDC's mission is to identify, assess and communicate current and emerging threats to human health posed by infectious diseases.*

*In order to achieve its mission, ECDC works in partnership with national health protection bodies across Europe to strengthen and develop continent-wide disease surveillance and early warning systems. By working with experts throughout Europe, ECDC pools Europe's health knowledge, so as to develop authoritative scientific opinions about the risks posed by current and emerging infectious diseases.*

### EPIET

*EPIET is the European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training, which provides training and practical experience in intervention epidemiology at the national centres for surveillance and control of communicable diseases in the European Union (EU). Presentation of EPIET diplomas will be the closing event of the Conference.*

## Free vaccination access for mobile Roma children and current spread of measles in Europe: EpiSouth project results

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### INTRODUCTION

Population mobility and migration are common features of modern times in Europe. Intensive movement contributes to the spread of communicable diseases including vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD).

EpiSouth project aims to create a framework of collaboration on epidemiological issues in order to improve communicable diseases surveillance, communication and training across the countries of Mediterranean and the Balkans.

- 26 countries— EU and non- EU are involved into the Network
- 4 regions -South Europe, Balkans, Middle East and North Africa, different geographically and politically ( EU and non-EU) are united in the project
- EU /DG SANCO, EU/ ECDC, and WHO-EURO, WHO-EMRO, WHO-Lyon are also involved in the project

The main specific Objective of EpiSouth WP7 Vaccine-preventable diseases and migrant populations, is assessing the access to immunization and exchanging information on cases/outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases of migrant populations.

#### Epidemiological situation

- Outbreaks of VPD such measles continue to spread in the European region and the risk of re-emergence of already eliminated diseases remains very high
- Large groups of high-risk unvaccinated children and young adults as well as non-immune to VPD young people exist across the European region
- Little is known about access to health care & vaccinations among migrating people and mobile populations

#### Roma population

A significant proportion of the world's Romanies live in Central and Eastern Europe, often in squatter communities with very high unemployment, while only some are fully integrated in the society.



Distribution of the Romani people in Europe (2007 Council of Europe "average estimates", totalling 9.8 million)<sup>[1]</sup>  
\* The size of the wheel symbols reflects absolute population size  
\* The gradient reflects the percent in the country's population:  
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani\\_people\\_by\\_country#Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani_people_by_country#Romania))

### METHODS

- An ad hoc structured questionnaire "Assessment of countries migration status profile and vaccination access of mobile population" was defined and used to collect information among the EpiSouth countries in 2007.
- Internet search on measles outbreaks in mobile population and in particular in Roma people across Europe since 2006 was performed.

### RESULTS

#### EpiSouth countries : Vaccination access of mobile Roma children

- All countries involved in the study reported free vaccines for all eligible children including Roma children; source of budget- Ministry of health & NIP
- Equal access to immunisation service for people of native origin and for migrants in all participating countries is ensured by law
- Country specific regulation supporting Immunisations of nomadic population :only one country—Croatia reports specific national action plan document called "Decade of Roma inclusion 2005-2015"
- Specific program/approach for traditionally nomadic population in Europe (Roma people) facilitating the access and acceptance of immunisations

**Albania:** Trained mediators, community health workers, specific Roma vaccination program;

**Croatia:** National action plan for Roma population "Decade of Roma inclusion 2005- 2015";

**Greece:** 45 medico social centers, situated inside the ROMA camps in Greece, facilitate the access to immunization. They are supported by HCDPC's Medical Mobile Units.;

**Italy:** see above for other immigrants;

**Kosovo:** Health and social strategy for Roma community;

**Romania:** network of health mediators and community nurses

- Country immunisation service for Roma people

#### Routine health care system

#### Outreach system

#### Catch –up campaigns, mobile team

- Observations or information that Roma population do not take advantage of the right/ opportunity to be protected by immunizations  
**Albania:** Roma children all over the country but especially in some specific areas; **Bulgaria:** two studies( data not published); **France:** Anecdotal reports from NGOs without official data; **Italy:** several barriers (lack of awareness, fear for their illegal status, language; **Romania:** many refusals; **Slovenia:** 2004 special study: vaccine coverage of Roma children is significantly lower than the national VC
- Measles persists in Europe despite the long history of measles vaccinations and routine childhood immunization programmes.
- Between 2006 and 2007, several countries reported high numbers of measles cases and outbreaks. The largest outbreaks took place in Switzerland, Germany, Spain and Romania, and mostly affected the general population.
- Other outbreaks have been described in particular groups, such as the Roma and Sinti communities in Italy, Roma and immigrant families in Greece.
- Increased measles transmission continued to be recorded in 2008, particularly in Roma communities in Italy, Spain, Romania, Serbia, Bosnia& Herzegovina, Bulgaria (2009)

### CONCLUSIONS

- Immunisation service in almost all EpiSouth countries is free of charge for children of mobile populations incl. Roma
- The recent outbreaks of measles, which occurred in Roma settlements in European region, confirmed that Roma children are most vulnerable and unimmunised, due to lack of real access to health care service and immunizations, as well as due to their mobility and poor socioeconomic status
- Roma traditions and specific behavior are another reason for the low immunization coverage in Roma communities
- Measles outbreaks can serve as an indicator of immunization coverage of Roma children/ population
- Public health services in each country in Europe should follow up the Roma children, having in mind the mobility of their population and the facts most of them have never been registered
- Public health services need undivided support from governments and society to apply different methods Roma children and ensure free of charge immunization service for every Roma child
- The experience of European immunization week— one good opportunity to improve immunization coverage and epidemiological situation where is needed