



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

PROJECT OUTLINE  
June 2010

**INTRODUCTION**

Infectious diseases as well as potential health threats do not have geographical boundaries. Apart from few infectious diseases for which a valid and efficacious vaccine is available, surveillance is the only available instrument that public health personnel can use to contain the spread of infectious diseases. However, in order to translate data into appropriate action, dissemination of information is crucial. Furthermore, an early detection of cases and a cross-border, harmonic and prompt response is needed to effectively contain the spread of diseases.



The countries of the Mediterranean area have common sea borders in the remarkable ecosystem of the Mediterranean Sea and, as a result, they also share common public health problems.

During a preliminary meetings held in 2004 in Athens (organized by the Hellenic CDCP) and Venice (organized by Italian ISS and Veneto Region), experts from Bulgaria, Greece, France and Italy discussed the possibility to create a co-operative effort in the Mediterranean and Balkan countries, similar to that developed by EpiNorth Project in Northern Europe and then decided, in occasion of the Year of the Mediterranean (2005), to propose to the countries belonging to such an area a project called EpiSouth.

## GENERAL OBJECTIVE

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

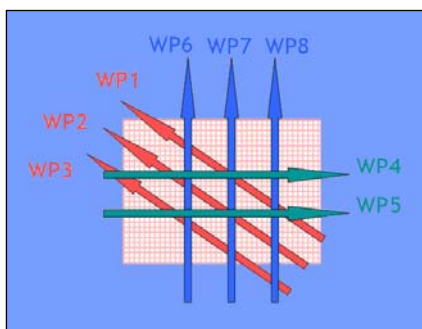
## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND AREAS OF ACTIVITY

Several areas of activity were identified and are being developed through specific Work Packages (WP) as follow.

- 1 - **Co-ordination of the project (WP1)**, with the main specific objective (SO) of guaranteeing a high quality performance of the project.
- 2 - **Dissemination of the project (WP2)**, with the main SO of disseminating the information produced by EpiSouth within the participating countries and to those who need to know through an ad hoc created website and an electronic bulletin.
- 3 - **Evaluation of the project (WP3)**, with the main SO of evaluating the project and its achievements in terms of milestones, deliverables, and indicators.
- 4 - **Network of public health institutions (WP4)**, with the main SO of facilitating the networking process and activities among participants in order to strengthen solidarity and cohesion.
- 5 - **Training in field/applied epidemiology (WP5)**, with the main SO of strengthening the early response capacity of participating countries to health threats and infectious disease spread.
- 6 - **Cross-border epidemic intelligence (WP6)**, with the main SO of establishing a common platform on epidemic intelligence where participating countries may find broad internationally as well as regionally focused information.
- 7 - **Vaccine-preventable diseases and migrant populations (WP7)**, with the main SO of assessing the access to immunisation and exchanging information on cases/outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases of migrant populations.
- 8 - **Epidemiology and preparedness to cross-border emerging zoonoses (WP8)**, with the main SO of providing a platform for the communication of human (HPH) and veterinary public health (VPH) officials, describing risk assessment methods and providing a mechanism for exchanging information between HPH and VPH.

## METHODS

The EpiSouth project is articulated in 8 Work Packages (WP) led by Public Health Institutes.



The main partner (ISS Italy) has developed a framework where all the managerial aspects are being included (WP1) and the information produced by the project are being disseminated (WP2).

Three vertical WPs, "Cross-border epidemic intelligence-WP6" (InVS, France), "Vaccines and migrants-WP7" (NCIPD,

Bulgaria) and "Cross-border emerging zoonoses-WP8" (HCDCP, Greece) constitute the technical basis.

The two horizontal Work Packages, "Networking-WP4" (Padua, Italy) and "Training-WP5" (ISCIII, Spain) provide the skills, networking and capacity building in order to match the vertical Work Packages. The project is evaluated through a dedicated Work Package (WP3).

## **PROJECT NETWORK ORGANISATION**

Once the project had been approved by EU-DGSANCO, the effort done by the EpiSouth Project Steering Committee was to verify the strategic possibility to involve in the Project all the interested countries of Mediterranean area.

In this framework, the 1<sup>st</sup> Project Meeting was organised in Rome in March 2007. In addition to the 9 Countries which were involved in the project from the beginning, 13 countries from the Balkans, North Africa and Middle East participated to the meeting together with representatives of EU DGSANCO, EU ECDC, WHO, and Italian MOH. Once the EpiSouth project objectives and methodology were discussed, the new organization and partnership were elaborated.

The Project Steering Committee is composed by the 6 WP leaders plus ECDC, EC-SANCO C3, WHO EURO, WHO EMRO, WHO LYO and Italian MOH representatives as observers, in order to facilitate synergy and avoid overlapping.

The participation of the Countries and the International Organisations to the project foresees three different levels of active involvement:

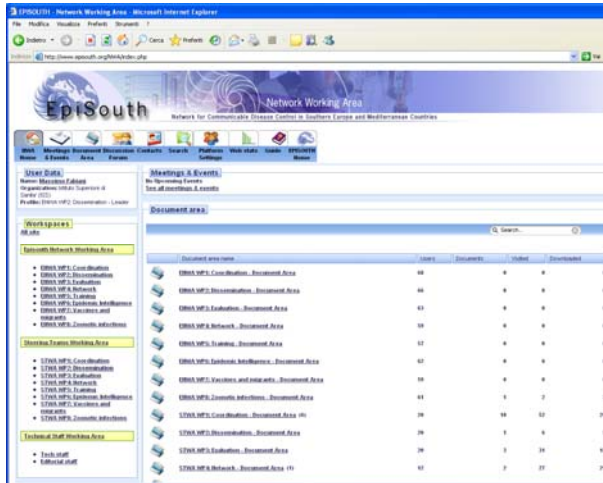
- a) Focal Points (FPs) of the Episouth Network (WP4). Each Country/International Organisation identifies and appoints one or two relevant persons who act as Focal Point (FP) of the Episouth Network and convey all the communication/information to the relevant officers in their respective Countries/Organisations.
- b) Collaboration in the Work Packages Steering Teams (WPSTs). In order to facilitate and enhance the work, each Country/International Organisation actively collaborates in one or two WP Steering Teams, which is in charge for identifying the countries' needs, developing the tools and the conducive project environment in accordance with the specific objective and requirements of the related WP.
- c) Participation to Work Packages' activities. Each participating country participate to the activities of one up to all the WPs in accordance with their needs and interests.

As per June 2010, the EpiSouth Network counts 27 Countries which have identified and appointed a total of 66 Country Focal Points (30 from EU-Countries and 36 from non-EU Countries) plus 7 representatives from Collaborating Institutions.

## MAIN RESULTS

### EpiSouth Web site and Bulletin

The EpiSouth website ([www.episouth.org](http://www.episouth.org)) can be considered both an output of the project and the mean by which most of the results are disseminated to the international audience. The web-site also publishes relevant guidelines, documents, and policies on topics of interest for the project and makes available useful links with national and international organisations.



The web-site is structured in two areas.

- A public portal devoted to the dissemination of the information collected and the results generated by the EpiSouth network to all interested people who visit the site.
- An access-restricted Network Working Area as a permanent communication tool to support the communication among project participants.

Moreover, the EpiSouth electronic Bulletin summarises the information presented in the

website quarterly and is being sent by e-mail to selected national institutions, as well as to European and International institutions and to people who register for this service.

Finally, the Network was presented and promoted in several international events.

### EpiSouth Networking and Directory of Public health Institutes

An effective collaboration among the Mediterranean countries enables to have a wider and clearer picture of the peculiar context in this region, EpiSouth being one of the few existing projects with a pure Mediterranean focus. It also identifies possible areas of significant gaps in public health where new funds need to be directed.

Communication among partners is the best way to react and respond to possible health threats, and the dissemination of the information to those who need to know will enable a prompt action. In this regard, the network of epidemiologists, created in the context of EpiSouth, represents a vital source of information for the European Union as well as for the participating countries to further strengthen their capacity to early and effectively respond to possible health threats and to more efficiently contain the further spread of infectious diseases.

A directory of all the Institutions involved in EpiSouth is available in the web-site.

### Training

Three Training Modules of one week each have been organised and delivered to around 100 people belonging to the Institutions of EpiSouth Network.

Moreover, the analysis of results of the training needs assessment, the teaching material from the modules, and a directory of training courses and fellowships of interest to EpiSouth countries are available in the Web Site.

Finally, a strategic document on training has been produced.

### **EpiSouth Weekly Epidemiological Bulletin (e-WEB) and Cross-border Epidemic Intelligence**

The EpiSouth Weekly Epidemiological Bulletin (e-WEB) reports new health events occurring outside and inside EpiSouth Area that may have implications on EpiSouth populations. In fact, the international public health intelligence comes as a complement to regular monitoring of national surveillance and aims to identify health threats that can potentially affect these populations. Epidemic intelligence, based on already collected and circulating information, consists in the sorting out, verification, analysis and eventually dissemination of information.

Access-restricted section on the website is used to allow rapid circulation of information, to offer a space for discussion and to share alerts originating from EpiSouth partners and restricted only to partners. In fact, all participating countries should be able to communicate their alert of potential common interest to the other participating countries.

Moreover, a strategic document on Epidemic Intelligence and Cross-Border has been produced.

### **Vaccine-preventable diseases and migrant populations**

A country based assessment survey for vaccine preventable diseases and migrants among participating countries has been carried out and the results on country specific migrant groups, organization and performance of their immunizations and problems faced by the national public health system in this context are presented in a specific report.

Moreover, a strategic document on vaccine preventable diseases and migrant populations has been produced with guidelines for exchanging information on VPD among migrants and recommendations for improving the access to immunizations of migrant groups.

### **Epidemiology and preparedness to cross-border emerging zoonoses**

A directory with accurate contacts of human (HPH) and veterinary public health (VPH) officials for specific diseases has been made available for strengthening the communication and collaboration between the Mediterranean countries regarding exchanging information on emerging zoonotic infections with possibility of cross border transmission.

Moreover, a strategic plan featuring indices for the description of epidemiology and monitoring in the area of a selected list of zoonoses (Brucellosis, Leishmaniasis, Campylobacteriosis, Rabies, West Nile Virus) and a strategic document on risk assessment methods for cross-border transmission of zoonoses and mechanism to exchange information between HPH and VPH officers on possible outbreaks has been produced.

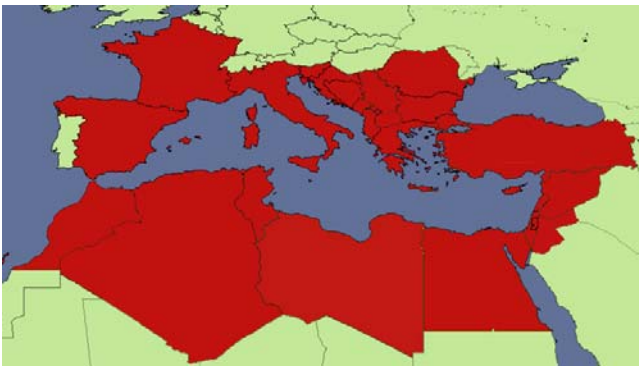
## FUNDING

The EpiSouth project receives funds from the European Commission (DG SANCO) and the EU participating Institutions for the overall project infrastructure and EU countries participation. In addition, the financial support of Italian Ministry of Health (EpiMed Project) and the EC EuropeAid and DG Enlargement through the TAIEX facility has made possible the participation of non-EU Countries.

## PROJECT DURATION

The project started officially the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006 and is expected to last until 30 June 2010.

## PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES



As per June 2010, 27 countries are part of the EpiSouth Network plus 6 Collaborating Institutions

### South Europe (9)

- Bulgaria
- Cyprus
- France
- Greece
- Italy
- Malta
- Romania
- Slovenia
- Spain

### Balkans (7)

- Albania
- Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Croatia
- FYROM
- Kosovo
- Serbia
- Montenegro

### North Africa (5)

- Algeria
- Egypt
- Libya
- Morocco
- Tunisia

### Middle East (6)

- Israel
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Turkey
- Syria
- Palestine

### Collaborating Institutions

- EC DG Sanco
- ECDC
- Italian MOH
- WHO-EURO
- WHO-EMRO
- WHO-LYO

## **PARTICIPATING PARTNERS**

ALBANIA, Tirana (Institute of Public Health);  
ALGERIA, Alger (National Institute of Public Health);  
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA (Ministry of Civil Affairs, Sarajevo; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska; Public Health Institute, Mostar, Federation of B&H);  
BULGARIA, Sofia (National Center of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases-NCIPD);  
CROATIA, Zagreb (Croatian National Institute of Public Health);  
CYPRUS, Nicosia (Ministry of Health);  
EGYPT, Cairo (Ministry Of Health and Population);  
FYROM-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Skopje (Institute for Health Protection; Clinic of Infectious Diseases);  
FRANCE, Saint Maurice Cedex (Institute for Public Health Surveillance-InVS);  
GREECE, Athens (Hellenic Center for Diseases Control and Prevention-HCDCP);  
ISRAEL (Center for Disease Control, Tel Hashomer; Ministry of Health, Jerusalem);  
ITALY (National Institute of Health-ISS, Rome; Teaching Hospital, Padua);  
JORDAN, Amman (Ministry of Health);  
KOSOVO UNSCR 1244, Prishtina (National Institute of Public Health);  
LEBANON, Beirut (Ministry of Public Health);  
LIBYA, Tripoli (National Center for Infectious Disease Prevention and Control);  
MALTA, Msida (Ministry of Health, Elderly and Community Care);  
MONTENEGRO, Podgorica (Institute of Public Health);  
MOROCCO, Rabat (Ministry of Health);  
PALESTINE, Ramallah (Ministry of Health);  
ROMANIA, Bucharest (Institute of Public Health);  
SERBIA, Belgrade (Institute of Public Health);  
SLOVENIA, Ljubljana (Institute for Public Health);  
SPAIN, Madrid (Carlos III Health Institute-ISCIIII);  
SYRIA, Damascus (Ministry of Health);  
TUNISIA, Tunis (Ministry of Health);  
TURKEY, Ankara (Ministry of Health; Refik Saydam National Hygiene Center).

ECDC-European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Stockholm, Sweden;  
EUROPEAN COMMISSION-DG SANCO Public Health Directorate, Luxembourg;  
MOH-Ministry of Health, Rome, Italy;  
WHO-EMRO Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo, Egypt;  
WHO-EURO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark;  
WHO-LYO Department of Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response, International Health Regulations Coordination, Lyon, France.

## PROJECT RELATED EVENTS (2006-2010)

<i>1<sup>st</sup> Steering Committee Meeting</i>	Venice, Italy	11-13 December 2006
<i>1<sup>st</sup> Plenary Meeting</i>	Rome, Italy	28-30 March 2007
<i>1<sup>st</sup> Training module</i>	Madrid, Spain	10-14 September 2007
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Steering Committee Meeting</i>	Athens, Greece	10 & 12 December 2007
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Meeting</i>	Athens, Greece	10-12 December 2007
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Training module</i>	Madrid, Spain	2-6 June 2008
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Steering Committee Meeting</i>	Brussels, Belgium	30-31 October 2008
<i>4<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee Meeting</i>	Sofia, Bulgaria	30 March 2009
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Meeting</i>	Sofia, Bulgaria	30-31 March 2009
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Training module</i>	Madrid, Spain	15-19 June 2009
<i>5<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee Meeting</i>	Venice, Italy	<i>12-13 November 2009</i>
<i>4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting</i>	Rome, Italy	<i>20 April 2010</i>
<i>EpiSouth Conference on Communicable Diseases and Public Health in Mediterranean and Balkans</i>	<i>Rome, Italy</i>	<i>21-23 April 2010</i>

## PROJECT OFFICE

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