



## EpiSouth Report 3/2008

### EpiSouth Project

#### **Monitoring Tool of Network Development: results from the questionnaire distributed during the First and the Second Project Meetings**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 EpiSouth General Objective**

The general objective of the 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.

### **1.2 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.

### **1.3 Methods**

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 tools that help fulfilling the objectives of the vertical Work Packages. The project is evaluated through a dedicated Work Package (WP3).

### **1.4 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 1st 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, and WHO. Once the EpiSouth project objectives and methodology were discussed, the new organization and partnership were elaborated.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Project Meeting took place in Athens in last December 2007 and, in addition to the Countries present to the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting, other four were invited as potential partners of EpiSouth Network.

The Project Steering Committee is now composed by the 6 WP leaders Countries plus ECDC, EC-SANCO C3, WHO EURO, WHO EMRO and WHO LYO-HQ 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 who 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 December 2007, the Network counts 21 Countries, (plus Tunisia that is in progress with its official commitment to EpiSouth) which have identified and appointed a total of 52 Country Focal Points (27 from EU-Countries and 25 from non-EU Countries) plus 5 representatives from International Organisations as part of the Network.

## **2. The questionnaire for monitoring the Network's development**

The questionnaire used during the First EpiSouth Meeting held in Rome last March 07, was again distributed among the participants at the Second Meeting in Athens. The questionnaire intended to assess how EpiSouth members perceive the progress toward the Network's building. Its repeated use during the project's implementation allows to monitor its advancement and identify both obstacles and opportunities. The results should be used to enhance the Network's development and will be available through the EpiSouth website.

The questionnaire was compiled by 43 out of 75 (57%) participants of the Athens meeting in comparison with the Rome meeting, where 24 out of 65 (37%) filled in the questionnaire. However, not every question was answered by all. The analysis does not stratify among different professional background or geographical areas, because some respondents did not specify those aspects. The following text draws attention to each question first; the conclusion attempts a general interpretation of the replays and recommendations suggest steps useful to strengthen the Network's development.

### **2.1 Results**

The following portion of the document shows the frequency and percentage for each possible answer to the 15 questions posed through the questionnaire. The numbers in bold and those in brackets indicate the frequency and percentage, respectively [e.g. 19 (46%) answered "I'm clear" to the first question]. Each question is followed by a short comment on the observed results. In interpreting the results, ranks 4 and 5 have been considered as a "positive" outcome while answers 1 and 2 have been considered as a "negative" one.

### Q1. Network's purpose

1: <i>I'm uncertain</i>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
2:	<b>0 (0%)</b>
3:	<b>6 (15%)</b>
4:	<b>16 (39%)</b>
5: <i>I'm clear</i>	<b>19 (46%)</b>

85% of respondents have a clear understanding of the Network's purpose. No one has significant doubts about this aspect.

### Q2. Network's goals

1: <i>Set from above</i>	<b>1 (3%)</b>
2:	<b>0 (0%)</b>
3:	<b>6 (15%)</b>
4:	<b>22 (55%)</b>
5: <i>Emerged through interaction</i>	<b>11 (28%)</b>

The great majority of respondents (83%) think that EpiSouth's goals were set in a participatory fashion. This represents an important improvement compared to the first meeting (68%). A 15% feels that such goals are the result of a mix of interaction and up-bottom approaches. Only one participant is convinced that goals were imposed on participants.

### Q3. Network's membership

1: <i>I'm out</i>	<b>4 (10%)</b>
2:	<b>1 (3%)</b>
3:	<b>6 (15%)</b>
4:	<b>9 (23%)</b>
5: <i>I'm in</i>	<b>19 (49%)</b>

72% of respondents deem they are already full members of the Network, less than in Rome (83%). Only 13% sense they are not in or at the margin, equivalent to what was recorded during the first meeting. We do not know who they are and if they declare so because they were invited to the meeting without being EpiSouth members

### Q4. Communication

1: <i>Very cautious</i>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
2:	<b>1 (2%)</b>
3:	<b>9 (22%)</b>
4:	<b>14 (34%)</b>
5: <i>Very open</i>	<b>17 (41%)</b>

75% of respondents feel that communication is straight and honest compared with 56% in Rome; just one member (2%) perceives it as rather restrained.

### **Q5. Mechanisms for getting feedback**

1: <i>Poor</i>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
2:	<b>3 (7%)</b>
3:	<b>4 (10%)</b>
4:	<b>17 (41%)</b>
5: <i>Excellent</i>	<b>17 (41%)</b>

82% think that feedback instruments operate appropriately.

### **Q6. Useful feedback**

1: <i>Very little</i>	<b>1 (3%)</b>
2:	<b>2 (5%)</b>
3:	<b>3 (8%)</b>
4:	<b>18 (47%)</b>
5: <i>Considerable</i>	<b>14 (37%)</b>

84% are convinced that feedback is helpful. Both figures concerning feedback (questions 5 and 6), are better than those recorded in Rome.

### **Q7. Use of Network member's skills**

1: <i>Poor use</i>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
2:	<b>1 (3%)</b>
3:	<b>12 (30%)</b>
4:	<b>14 (35%)</b>
5: <i>Good use</i>	<b>13 (33%)</b>

68% are convinced that the Network makes use of their competence.

### **Q8. Support**

1: <i>Little help for individuals</i>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
2:	<b>2 (5%)</b>
3:	<b>5 (13%)</b>
4:	<b>18 (45%)</b>
5: <i>Strong support for individuals</i>	<b>15 (38%)</b>

83% think that EpiSouth is creating a supportive culture. This is much better compared to the previous 55% in Rome

### **Q9. Working on relationships with others**

1: <i>Little effort</i>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
2:	<b>1 (2%)</b>
3:	<b>7 (17%)</b>
4:	<b>16 (39%)</b>
5: <i>High level of effort</i>	<b>17 (41%)</b>

80% sense that members are considerate toward others compared with 70% in Rome.

### Q10. Cohesion

1:Low	0 (0%)
2:	3 (8%)
3:	6 (15%)
4:	18 (45%)
5: Optimal	13 (33%)

78% feel that cohesion within the network is already solid, compared to slightly more than half in Rome. Only 3 (8%) participants see some obstacles in this regard.

### Q11. Conflict

1:Difficult issues are avoided	2 (5%)
2:	0 (0%)
3:	12 (30%)
4:	12 (30%)
5: Problems are discussed openly and constructively	14 (35%)

65% (68% in Rome) believe that differences of opinion are confronted explicitly and successfully. Only 2 participants judge that controversies are swept under the carpet.

### Q12. Influence on decisions

1:By few members	1 (2%)
2:	3 (7%)
3:	15 (37%)
4:	10 (24%)
5: By all members	12 (29%)

Similarly to what participants reported in Rome, half think that all members have significant control over decisions. Only 9%, compared to 18%, feel that power is controlled by a small group.

### Q13. Distribution of leadership

1: Limited	2 (5%)
2:	3 (7%)
3:	11 (27%)
4:	10 (24%)
5: Shared	15 (37%)

61% believe that leadership is spread among members. 12% think the opposite is true.

### Q14. Capacity for creativity and growth

1:Low	0 (0%)
2:	1 (3%)
3:	7 (18%)



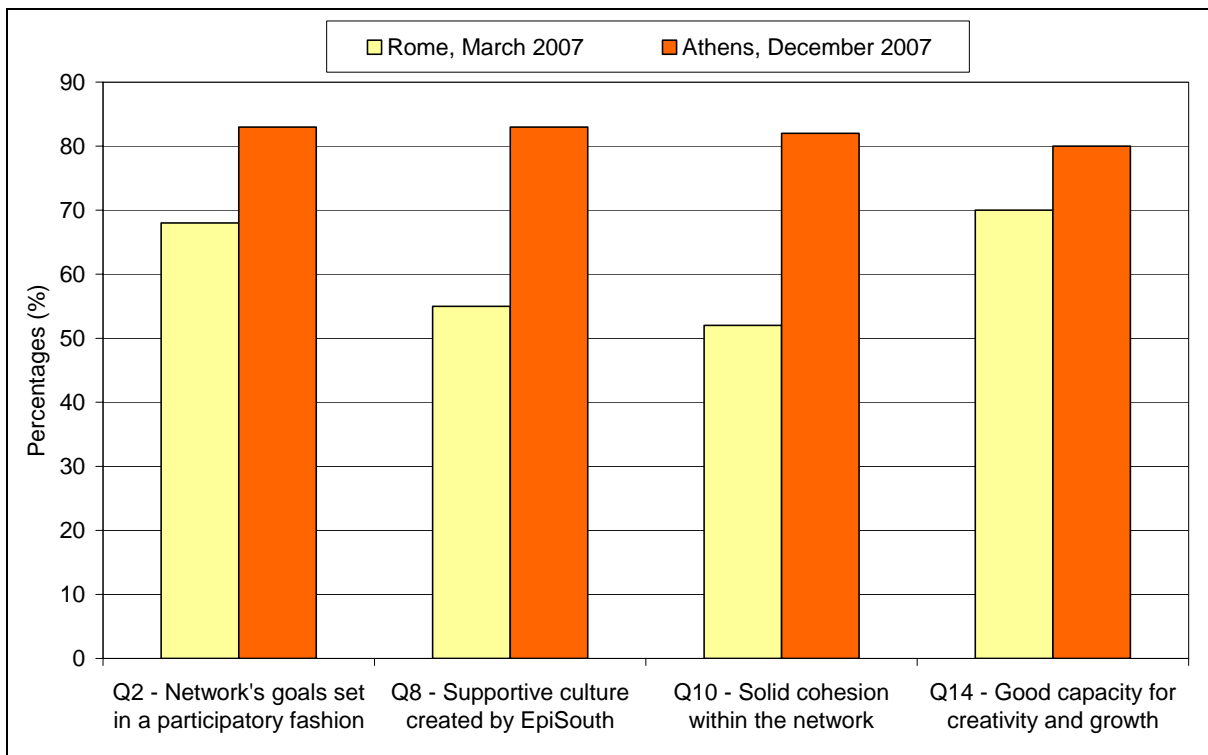
4: 22 (55%)  
 5: High 10 (25%)

80% (70% in Rome) look at the Network as a great occasion for creativity and evolution. Just one person sees no space for advance

**Q15. Risk taking**

1: Not encouraged 5 (12%)  
 2: 3 (7%)  
 3: 11 (27%)  
 4: 16 (39%)  
 5: Encouraged and supported 6 (15%)

Over half (54%) believe that risk taking is promoted, but 19% feel the opposite applies.



**Figure:** Comparison of responses to some of the questions posed through the questionnaire in Rome and Athens meetings

## **2.2 Conclusion**

From the answers to this questionnaire we can infer that, nine months after the project's first meeting, the Network is in good shape and its potential strong. In fact, the answers of EpiSouth's members to this questionnaire are, on the whole, positive and more than that represent an improvement to the opinions expressed in Rome. Only a minority of participants gave negative or pessimistic responses. More specifically, four out of five participants, even more for some characteristic, have a good or excellent understanding of the Network's purpose, think that goals were not pushed by a restricted group, feedback is valuable and offered through effective instruments, help for individuals is robust, cohesion and work on relationship are effective and the potential for innovative growth is clear. Around 70% feel that their membership is established, communication is direct, members' skills are well used and conflicts are dealt with openly. About half of participants thought that influence on decisions is widespread and risk taking is promoted. Six out of ten believe leadership is distributed, whereas only one out of ten think influence and leadership are restricted.

Again, similarly to the conclusion we reached on the basis of the previous meeting's answers, the opinions expressed by the Athens meeting respondents show that common ground is being built on which EpiSouth Network's development can be further advanced. In order to fully grasp the opportunities offered by such a positive beginning, EpiSouth's leader, WP managers and country Focal Points should strengthen solid dimensions and work on sorting out weaknesses. The following recommendations strive to identify steps useful in doing so.

## **2.3 Recommendations**

At this stage in the evolution of EpiSouth, it is essential to translate the enthusiasm and high expectations into focused energy capable to keep the project going and overcome the obstacles intrinsic in any implementation phase. In particular, it is crucial to focus the project on content. This means to ensure that vertical packages carry out their tasks with the thorough support of horizontal packages and the coordinated cooperation of each involved group and individual. Progress in completing the activities included in the annual work plans should be monitored and constructive decisions taken accordingly, before delays become failures.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that all participants become full members of the Network, individuals who do not feel included yet and the reasons behind their feeling of separation should be identified and responded to. Wide consultations before major decisions are made can contribute to spread out influence on decisions and leadership. Pending concerns and disagreements should also be dealt with openly in occasion of vertical packages and overall meetings. Meetings time management should improve so that more space for discussion on substantive topics becomes available. Risk taking within each WP should be encouraged within the project's mandate and agreed strategies.

## **3. Acknowledgements**

We would like to acknowledge all the participants who have filled in the questionnaires making possible this monitoring process of the Network development.

# EpiSouth

## WP3 Evaluation

### Monitoring Tool of EpiSouth Network Development

Athens, 10-12 December 2007

*This short questionnaire intends to assess how EpiSouth members feel about the Network's building progress. This survey will be distributed to the participants in a few occasions during the project's implementation in order to periodically monitor key dimensions of its advancement. The results will be used to improve the Network development and will be available to participants through the EpiSouth website.*

*Please declare if you are an EpiSouth member or an external participant.*

*EpiSouth member ....*

*External participant ....*

*If you wish so, feel free to identify yourself with your name or just with the area where you come from.*

*Please answer the following questions, circling the score which reflects your view:*

*For example, to question 1.*

- answer 1 if you are totally uncertain about the Network's purpose,*
- answer 5 if you are totally clear about the Network's purpose,*
- the other scores reflect in-between opinions.*

#### **1. Network's purpose**

I'm uncertain    1 2 3 4 5    I'm clear

#### **2. Network's goals**

Set from above    1 2 3 4 5    Emerged through interaction

#### **3. Network's membership**

I'm out    1 2 3 4 5    I'm in

#### **4. Communication**

Very cautious    1 2 3 4 5    Very open

#### **5. Mechanisms for getting feedback**

Poor    1 2 3 4 5    Excellent

#### **6. Useful feedback**

Very little    1 2 3 4 5    Considerable

#### **7. Use of Network member's skills**

Poor use    1 2 3 4 5        Good use

**8. Support**

Little help for individuals    1 2 3 4 5        Strong support for individuals

**9. Working on relationships with others**

Little effort            1 2 3 4 5        High level of effort

**10. Cohesions**

Low    1 2 3 4 5        Optimal

**11. Conflict**

Difficult issues are avoided    1 2 3 4 5        Problems are discussed openly and constructively

**12. Influence on decisions**

By few members    1 2 3 4 5        By all members

**13. Distribution of leadership**

Limited    1 2 3 4 5        Shared

**14. Capacity for creativity and growth**

Low    1 2 3 4 5        High

**15. Risk taking**

Not encouraged            1 2 3 4 5        Encouraged and supported

Please add any comment you consider relevant to how the Network is evolving and what can be done to enhance its progress. Also suggest any modification to this questionnaire you consider useful (e.g. adding questions, different spelling out).

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Thank you for your time.