



EpiSouth Report 11/2010

EpiSouth Project
Executive Summary
of the
Fourth Project Meeting Report
(Rome, 20th - 21st April 2010)

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JUNE 2010



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Suggested Citation: Montagna C, Putoto G, Borella C, *et al. EpiSouth Project. Executive Summary of the Fourth Project Meeting Report (Rome, 20th - 21st April 2010).* EpiSouth Report 11/2010
Available at https://www.episouth.org/project_outputs.html

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This project receives funding from the European Commission (DG SANCO). Neither the European Commission, nor any person acting on its behalf is liable for any use made of the information published here.

The financial support of EC EuropeAid and DG Enlargement through the TAIEX facility and of the Italian Ministry of Health through the EpiMed Project is also acknowledged.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFRO	WHO Regional Office for Africa
CB	Cross Border
CISID	Centralised Information System for Infectious Diseases
EC	European Commission
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
EI	Epidemic Intelligence
EMRO	WHO Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean
EC DG AIDCO	EuropeAid Cooperation Office
EC DG SANCO	European Commission Directorate General Health and Consumer Protection
ENTER-NET	Enteric Pathogen Network
EPHA	European Public Health Alliance
EpiNorth	A Cooperation Project for Communicable Disease Control in Northern Europe and Russia
EU	European Union
EURO	WHO Regional Office for Europe
EWRS	Early Warning and Response System
EWS	Early Warning System
FP	Focal Point
HCDCP/KEELPNO	Hellenic Center for Diseases Control and Prevention, Greece
HPH	Human Public Health
IHR	International Health Regulations
INFOSAN	WHO International Food Safety Authorities Network
InVS	Institut de Veille Sanitaire, France
ISCIII	Istituto de Salud Carlos III, Spain
ISS	Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Italy
Lab	Laboratory
LYO-HQ	WHO Lyon Office – Head Quarters
MECIDS	Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance
MoH	Ministry of Health
MR	Minimum Requirement
MZCC	Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Centre
NCIPD	National Centre of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases, Bulgaria
NIPH	National Institute of Public Health
OIE	World Organisation for Animal Health
PADUA GH	Padua General Hospital – Azienda Ospedaliera di Padova, Italy
RAPEX	Rapid Alert System for non-food consumers Products
RASDOON	Regional, Alert, Surveillance and Detection of Outbreak Network
RASFF	Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed
RSS	Really Simple Syndication
SC	Steering Committee
SEE	South East Europe
SO	Specific Objective
ST	Steering Team
TAIEX	EU “Technical Assistance and Information Exchange” Instrument
ToR	Terms of Reference
VPD	Vaccine preventable diseases
VPH	Veterinary Public Health
WHO	World Health Organization
WP	Work Package
WPST	Work Package Steering Team

Contents

Acknowledgements	p. 6
1. Project Description	p. 7
1.1 EpiSouth General Objective	
1.2 Specific Objectives and Areas of Activity	
1.3 Methods	
1.4 Project Network Organisation	
2. Executive Summary	p. 9
2.1. Introduction	
2.2 Objectives of the 4th Project Meeting	
2.3 Main Outcomes	
2.3.1 Achievements of the project	
2.3.2 EpiSouth Plus Project	
2.3.3 EpiSouth Plus: fundings, leaderships and governance	
2.4 Conclusions	

Annexes:

- I - Meeting Agenda
- II - List of Participants

*The EpiSouth project has built on a clear need in public health and is today looking towards the future as a single motivated network of epidemiologists and public health specialists. The first assignments have been met, now we look ahead to future challenges.
(From the welcome speech of the Head of the Italian National Centre for Epidemiology, Surveillance and Health Promotion, Istituto Superiore di Sanità)*

Acknowledgements

We wish to take this opportunity to thank all WP Leaders and Focal Points involved in the EpiSouth Network for their precious contribution and support to project activities and implementation.

Special thanks are addressed to the EC DGSANCO and the Italian Ministry of Health that, with their co-funding together with the contributions from the national Ministries of Health and Institutes of Public Health, have made possible the establishment and development of the EpiSouth Network. The financial support of EC EuropeAid and DG Enlargement through the TAIEX facility is also acknowledged.

A special mention to Germain Thinus (EC DGSANCO) for having pushed forward since 2004 the Commission vision of the countries in the Mediterranean region participating in a common network and for having believed in this possibility, providing his ideas and support for all the duration of the Project as project officer.

We are grateful to all ECDC and WHO personnel who contributed and followed the project: Guénaël Rodier and Pierre Nabeth (WHO-HQ Lyon); Patrick A. Druri (WHO-HQ); Nedret Emiroglu, David Mercer and Roberta Andraghetti (EURO); Zoheir Hallaj, Jaouad Mahjour, John Jabbour, Sk. Md. Mamunur Rahman Malik (EMRO); Guido Sabatinelli (WHO-UNRWA); Denis Coulombier, Massimo Ciotti, Jan C. Semenza and Evelyn Depoortere (ECDC).

Thank also to Stein Andresen (EpiNorth Network), Antoine Delphine (InVS), Yannis Tselentis (University of Crete), Frank Boelaert (EFSA), Yves Charpak (Pasteur Institute, France), Karim Ben Jebara (OIE), Dionisio José Herrera Guibert (TEPHINET), Maria Angeles Rodriguez Arenas (ISCIH), Christophe Paquet (AFD, France), Michela Martini (IOM), Giovanni Baglio (ISS), Adriano Mantovani, (WHO/FAO Collaborating Centre for Veterinary Public Health, Italy), Christos Hadjichristodoulou (SHPSAN Network), Djamel Yala (Pasteur Institute, Algeria), Alessandro Candeloro and Pierluigi Soddu (EuroMed PPRD South Programme), Darem Tabbaa (University Al Baath, Syria), Paolo Calistri (Zooprohylactic Institute of Teramo, Italy), Aristarhos Seimenis (WHO Mediterranean Zoonoses Control Centre, Greece), Fulvia Motta (Caritas Rome, Italy), Sandro De Luca (CISP, Kenya), Kathleen Victoir (Pasteur Institute, France), Agoritsa Baka (MOH, Greece), Ahmed Driss (CEMI, Tunisia), El Meddeb Hamrouni (MOH, Tunisia), Itamar Grotto (MOH, Israel), Boban Mugosa (IPH, Montenegro), Asad Ramlawi (MOH, Palestine), Fabrizio Oleari, Loredana Vellucci and Pietro Malara (MOH, Italy) which have contributed with their expertise to the development of technical aspects of the project.



1. Project description

1.1 EpiSouth General Objective

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

1.2 Specific Objectives and Areas of Activity

Several areas of activity and specific objectives were identified and were developed through eight Work Packages (WPs) as follows:

- WP1 - Co-ordination of the project (lead by the Italian National Institute of Health, Italy) with the main objective of guaranteeing a high quality performance of the project.
- WP2 - Dissemination of the project (lead by the Italian National Institute of Health, Italy) with the main objective of disseminating the information produced by EpiSouth within the participating countries and to those who need to know through an ad hoc created website (www.episouth.org) and an electronic bulletin.
- WP3 - Evaluation of the project (lead by the Padua Teaching Hospital, Italy) with the main objective of evaluating the project and its achievements in terms of milestones, deliverables, and indicators.
- WP4 - Network of public health institutions (lead by the Padua Teaching Hospital, Italy) with the main objective of facilitating the networking process and activities among participants in order to strengthen solidarity and cohesion.
- WP5 - Training in field/applied epidemiology (lead by Instituto de Salud Carlos III, Spain) with the main objective of strengthening the early response capacity of participating countries to health threats and infectious disease spread.
- WP6 - Cross-border epidemic intelligence (lead by the Institut de Veille Sanitaire, France) with the main objective of establishing a common platform on epidemic intelligence where participating countries may find broad internationally as well as regionally focused information.
- WP7 - Vaccine-preventable diseases and migrant populations (lead by the National Center of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases, Bulgaria) with the main objective of assessing the access to immunisation and exchanging information on cases/outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases of migrant populations.
- WP8 - Epidemiology and preparedness to cross-border emerging zoonoses (lead by the Hellenic Center for Diseases Control & Prevention, Greece) with the main objective of providing a platform for the communication of human public health (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, WP6, WP7 and WP8 constitute the technical pillars on which the project activities have been developed through the Network of participating countries; the two horizontal WPs, WP4 and WP5 provide the skills needed to critically develop the vertical WPs. The evaluation of the project is carried out by the dedicated WP3 and it is transversal to all other WPs.

1.4 Project Network Organisation

The EpiSouth Steering Committee provides guidance on key issues and is composed by the six WP leaders plus European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), European Commission-Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection, Unit SANCO C3-Health Threats (EC-SANCO C3), World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO-EURO), WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (WHO-EMRO) and WHO Headquarter (WHO-HQ) representatives as observers.

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

- Focal Points (FPs)
Each Country has identified and appointed two relevant persons who convey all the communication/information to the relevant officers in their respective Countries/Organisations. Each FP directly interacts with the project coordinator as well as with all the other FPs of the EpiSouth Network.
- 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 WPST, 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.
- Participation to Work Packages activities
Each participating country takes part in the activities of one up to all the WPs in accordance with their needs and interests. The participation to the activities of WPs not initially chosen can however be requested by the country at any time.

As per June 2010, the Network counts 27 Countries, which have identified and appointed a total of 71 Country Focal Points (35 from EU-Countries and 36 from non-EU Countries) plus 7 representatives from International Organisations.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Introduction

The 4th EpiSouth Meeting took place in Rome on 20th and 21st April 2010. The meeting was hosted by the Italian National Institute of Health (ISS) and organised by the EpiSouth Project Coordination (WP1) in cooperation with Padua GH (WP4-Networking), and representatives of the EpiSouth Network Countries.

Twenty-one among twenty-six countries involved in the Network were present, including EU and non-EU partner countries. Among them, 8 were from Southern Europe (Bulgaria, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Romania, Slovenia and Spain), 6 from Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia), 3 from North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco) and 4 from the Middle East (Israel, Jordan, Palestine and Syria). Libya was also represented as observer.

Five countries that were expected to attend (Cyprus, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and Kosovo) were unable to be present due to the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud closing several airports. Also the participation of collaborating institution such as WHO, ECDC and EC have been jeopardized by the natural disaster and substituted by videoconferences.

After the third meeting in Sofia (30th March - 1st April 2009), the final meeting in Rome represented an important occasion in which project partners could present the achievements and discuss in detail the further concrete cooperation in the new phase of the “*EpiSouth Plus*” project.

It is also worth reporting that after the end of the 4th Project Meeting the *EpiSouth Conference on Communicable Diseases and Public Health in the Mediterranean and Balkans* was held on 21-23 April at ISS.

Besides presenting the results that were achieved by the EpiSouth project in three years time, the Conference main aim was also to discuss and provide recommendations for *the Control of Public Health Threats and other risks in the Mediterranean Region and Balkans* in the light of the future activities of the EpiSouth Network.

The Conference was organised by the EpiSouth Project Coordination Team with the support of experts in the field, who enhanced and enriched the discussions during the Six Round Tables of the Conference.

2.2 Objectives of the 4th Project Meeting

The 4th EpiSouth meeting was meant to discuss, starting from the EpiSouth project outcomes, the future prospects in relation to the activities proposed in the new project “EpiSouth Plus” to be financed by DGSANCO and DGAIDCO.

Besides the deliverables that were presented by the WP leaders, the meeting was meant to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the Network as starting point for future collaboration in order to benefit from lessons learned and overcome past limitations.

The objectives of the meeting were as follows:

- To share status of the project activities and discuss deliverables achieved
- To discuss on how to strengthen the Network and the thematic areas
- To discuss governance, leadership and structure of the new project.

2.3 Main Outcomes

2.3.1 Achievements of the project

These are the main outcomes of the project.

WP1 Coordination - The enlargement of the Network was progressing passing from 9 to 26 EU and non EU countries (9 from Southern Europe, 7 from Balkans, 4 from North Africa, 6 from Middle East), plus seven representatives of international organisations.

All the project deliverables that were set for were achieved.

Methods that were adopted enhanced co-ownership of participants and the participation of *international institutions* facilitated the exchange of views with an international standing of the project.

The Network offers *variety and richness* in terms of skilled *human resources, competences and legislation*.

In consideration of numbers of countries and activities it is necessary to better define and consolidate the Network organization in terms of roles and responsibilities.

WP2 Dissemination - The public website was highly visited by people from countries within and outside the EpiSouth region. The members' area of the website was fully functional supporting all project activities and networking development.

There were 38,584 website visitors for a total of 59,241 accesses in the period April 2007 - March 2010. Nine issues of the electronic bulletin were released from September 2007 to January 2010 with a total of 931 recipients and 379 documents uploaded in the Members Area with a total of 6,345 downloads and an average of 16.7 downloads per document.

The Cross-Border Alert Platform was opened in November 2009 with 18 new alerts and 22 follow-up posted by six different EpiSouth countries.

Abstracts were submitted to 18 scientific conferences and workshops (10 posters, 18 oral presentations). Three articles were published.

WP4 Networking - The on-line Institutions Directory is a sort of identity card of Network participating institutions. From 2008 to 2009 16 questionnaires relating to 16 institutions of 14/26 countries were published (54%). Up to April 2010, 22 questionnaires relating to 22 institutions of 20/26 countries published (77%).

The results showed that all institutions are directly or indirectly related to the Ministry of Health with varying degree of autonomy. Some institutions work independently from laboratories. There is an increasing number of activities and functions and problems are commons as well as solutions.

WP5 Training - The Training Courses Directory prototype is ready to be tested. It will focus on relevant training courses and associated fellowships. There will be a Directory of fellowships. Training alerts and RSS will be fed.

EpiSouth partners will contribute to the updating and data coming directly from training institutions will be validated by EpiSouth Directory of Courses and Fellowships managers.

WP6 Cross Border Epidemic Intelligence - The EpiSouth Early Warning System platform is operational since November 2009, dealing with information on health events of international importance and regional cross-border issues. It is a secure web-based system, interactive, user-friendly allowing members to share in real time health alerts among them or with partners. From November 2009 to April 16th 2010, 37 messages were posted by 6 countries, covering 10 locations, 1 environmental and 36 infectious events at different levels of cross-border risk. Among them 26 were A(H1N1) -related.

The first 100 EI e-web bulletins covered 390 events. The 19% of the latter were related to the EpiSouth countries.

WP7 VPD and Migrants - From September 2008 to January 2009 information through questionnaires were collected for the purpose of assessing countries migration status profile and vaccination access of mobile population. The response rate was 84.6% (22/26 countries among them 9 EU and 13 non-EU countries). The findings can be summarized as follows.

The migration process in EpiSouth region is very intensive and mobile population figures are different in each country.

There are well structured public health services with available developed and well established National Immunisation Programmes. Moreover, vaccines and immunisations are free of charge for children.

There are generally no specific regulations supporting immunisations of migrant populations. The immunisation coverage of migrants is not monitored separately therefore there is no specific information about vaccinations of legal and illegal migrants. Difficulties persist regarding the immunisations of Roma people and illegal immigrants.

There is a lack of specifically trained public health/social workers staff and, in general, of experience in dealing with migrants.

Available information is scanty on this issue and very often projects or programmes or organisations dealing with migrants are not focusing on Communicable Diseases.

WP8 Zoonoses – The survey that was conducted in 22 EpiSouth countries selected Brucellosis, Leishmaniasis, Rabies, Campylobacteriosis and West Nile Virus as priority zoonoses in the Mediterranean region requiring intersectoral collaboration between human (HPH) and veterinary public health (VPH).

The survey findings highlighted the Laboratory aspect as a challenge particularly due to significant gaps in certain countries.

By the end of July 2009 a HPH and VPH Contacts Directory was created and is now available.

Surveys - Ten reports were produced from 2007 to 2010 relating to project meetings and surveys. Surveys assessed needs, priorities and requests. All the different reports were included in an official publication. The 10th report is related to the EpiSouth Strategic Documents.

Strategic Documents - Four documents were prepared in a single document dealing respectively with Training, Epidemic Intelligence, VPD and migrants and Emerging Zoonoses. They include relevant data and information that were collected by the project surveys and assessments.

2.3.2 EpiSouth Plus project

Introduction - EpiSouth Plus represents a step forward to the Network evolution after the process and common understanding generated by EpiSouth project. EpiSouth Plus intends to further develop the activities of EpiSouth Network, both by consolidating some activities in place and by addressing new sectors identified as priorities by the partners.

Funding opportunities were investigated and two proposals were submitted to EC DGSANCO and DGAIDCO relating to one project entitled *The Network for the Control of Public Health Threats and other risks in the Mediterranean Region and Balkans - EpiSouth Plus*.

The project, which meets EC priorities, will contribute to share information and make the different systems interoperable in the framework of IHR.

Timeframe -The project is expected to start in July 2010 and end in December 2012.

Aim – The project aims at increasing the health security in the Mediterranean Area and Balkans by enhancing and strengthening the preparedness to common health threats and other risks at national and regional levels in the Countries of the existing EpiSouth Network in the framework of the International Health Regulations implementation.

Specifically it aims to:

1. Establish a Mediterranean Regional Laboratories Network (WP4)
2. Promote common procedures in interoperable Generic Preparedness and Risk management for the Countries involved in the Network (WP5)
3. Make Early warning system (EWS) and alert platform able to share info between EpiSouth countries and interoperable with other Early Warning platforms (WP6):
4. Develop guidelines and Strategic Documents based on assessments and surveys aimed at facilitating IHR implementation (WP7).

Partners - Associated partners and collaborating partners are present in both proposals. The participating institutions are those taking part in the Network (26 countries plus international agencies) but other countries are invited to join the Network. Libya expressed the willingness to take part in it.

The involved partner institutions are:

Istituto Superiore di Sanità – ISS, Rome (Italy), Azienda Sanitaria Locale di Torino - ASLTO1, Turin (Italy), Institut Pasteur – IP, Paris (France), Instituto de Salud Carlos III - ISC III, Madrid (Spain), Institut de Veille Sanitaire – InVS, Saint Maurice Cedex (France), National Centre of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases – NCIPD, Sofia (Bulgaria), Hellenic Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention – HCDCP, Athens (Greece), Ministry of Health – MoH, Nicosia (Cyprus), Ministry of Health – MoH, Msida (Malta), Institute of Public Health – IPHB, Bucharest (Romania), National Institute of Public Health – NIPH, Ljubljana (Slovenia), Azienda Ospedaliera di Padova - Padua (Italy), Istituto Nazionale per le Malattie Infettive – INMI, Rome (Italy), CINECA, Bologna (Italy), Institute of Public Health – IPH, Zagreb (Croatia).

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2.3.3 EpiSouth Plus: fundings, leaderships and governance

Funding

It was reasserted that EpiSouth project is funded by 2 Directorate Generals and that by Mid-May the proposal will be submitted for finalisation. The project is expected to start in July 2010 and end in December 2012. The first Steering Committee and Executive Board is scheduled in September 2010 in Luxembourg.

Expected main project activities were illustrated together with a provisional roadmap.

Co-leadership

EpiSouth Plus is a real opportunity to test, develop and evaluate this strategy, already initiated in the EpiSouth Project.

The strategy consists in ensuring that each project WP is led by two Institutions, one based in a EU country and the other in a non-EU country.

The EU Institutions will be those already involved in the 1st phase of EpiSouth whose WP are still foreseen in EpiSouth Plus or new Institutions, identified on the basis of their experience and capacities in the new WPs of EpiSouth Plus.

The non-EU Institutions will be identified always on the basis of their experience and capacities in the WPs of EpiSouth Plus as well as on the basis of their active and fruitful participation in the 1st phase of EpiSouth.

To ensure a fully efficient co-leadership, mechanisms will have to be clearly defined and formalised, regularly assessed and readjusted accordingly. A global framework should be initiated by the coordination and adapted to the specific WP.

During the meeting the project Coordination Team and the WP leaders reported the status of the process aimed at identifying the most appropriate co-leaders and assessing institutions' availability. Representatives of available institutions confirmed their willingness and several issues related to co-leadership were discussed.

Consensus was reached regarding the need of keeping a maximum of two leaders for each WP and of balancing EU and non-EU partners.

Governance

Balanced, functional governance and effective decision making require the following: responsibilities and resources have to be adequately attributed; role and responsibilities are to be formalised and endorsed; countries from different sub-regions and institutions (NIPH, MoHs) are to be adequately and correctly represented while partners and stakeholders adequately associated and involved.

Focal Points (FP) – FPs should ideally be from both NPHI and MoH and have a decision making position and access to national Early Warning and Surveillance Systems data. Continuity is needed and frequent changes are to be avoided.

Steering Committee – Having a similar role to the existing one, the SC will be separated from the Advisory Board. Formalisation of ToR is necessary.

Advisory Board – It is supposed to advise the EpiSouth SC and not to be involved in the implementation. Suggested members are: international agencies, other donors, non-EU countries representatives, external international experts, representative from sister Networks and others.

Steering Teams – In the second phase, renewal and further development is necessary, including regular active participation in activities implementation and decision processes. Countries and members should commit for the 3 years period.

Formalisation and Grant agreements

EU countries have to give a letter of mandate to sign the DGSANCO's Grant Agreement in which they are mentioned as happened in the previous project. Relating to the DGAIDCO's proposal, the formalisation will be in accordance with the type of contract which will be signed (Grant or Service Contract).

2.4 Conclusions

The fourth meeting in Rome was an occasion for presenting achievements of the three and half years of the project, by highlighting lessons learned and project outputs. It was also the opportunity to jointly discuss further developments linked to the EpiSouth Plus initiative, representing the second phase of the Network.

From the last meeting in Sofia progresses were made and lessons learned were valuable for the formulation of the new project.

Main project outcomes evidenced relevance of the activities that were performed (VPD and migrant assessments, training), usefulness of produced tools (alerts sharing secure platform, Institutions directory, HPH and VPH contacts directory, bulletins), increased trust among Network participants and tangible opportunities for cooperation in the EpiSouth region.

The limits of funding discussed during the Sofia meeting promoted the new phase and the successful applications to DGSANCO and DGAIDCO of the EpiSouth Plus project allowed to concretely reflect on the future.

The existing activities will be continued, developed and improved by taking into consideration identified priority areas (laboratory Network, interoperable generic preparedness and risk management, interoperable EWS and data sharing, IHR implementation), needs and gaps. They are meant to complement and integrate the existing systems and Networks, by promoting and strengthening cooperation with international organisations and, especially those already involved in the EpiSouth project (WHO, ECDC). Collaboration with other Networks will also be highly promoted and considered as a real added value.

Network re-organisation is particularly needed due to the increased number of countries and activities. Different levels of involvement (Steering Committee, Focal Points, Advisory Board, Steering Teams) have to be better defined and formalised in terms of roles and responsibilities. Steering Team function was unanimously appreciated but representativeness, geographic coverage and thematic suitability will be verified in the second phase to meet countries interests and needs as well as to encourage improvements and fruitful collaboration.

Decision making process and governance were widely debated and proposals were made. Priority was given to non-EU countries participation and co-leadership of work packages represents a step forward to responsibilities sharing and mutual help among partners.

The already active involvement of non-European countries will increase in Network activities and management and their participation will be financed by DGAIDCO.

Actual involvement of the political and decision making level was frequently arisen in the debate as crucial issue for Focal Points roles, data sharing and Network support.

Formalisation of commitments modalities for the project new phase were illustrated and discussed. Partnerships and co-leaderships would be confirmed and formalised. Grant agreements will be signed and the *EpiSouth Plus* project is expected to start in July 2010.



EpiSouth 4th Project Meeting

Rome, 20 April 2010

EpiSouth



**Rossi Conference Room
Istituto Superiore di Sanità
Via Giano della Bella 34– Rome, Italy**

TUESDAY 20 APRIL 2010

9.00-9.30: Registration

9.30-9.40: Welcome address (Stefania Salmaso, ISS-CNESPS Director)

9.40-9.50: Meeting's agenda and objectives (Silvia Declich)

9.50-11.30: Session 1 "EpiSouth Outcomes"
Chairpersons: Silvia Declich and Maria Grazia Dente

9.50-10.00: EpiSouth: main successful methodological approaches and lesson learned (WP1)

10.00-10.45: Last year achievements

- EpiSouth Portal and Networking Members Area (WP2)
- Institutions Directory (WP4)
- Alerts Sharing Secured Platform (WP6)
- HPH and VPH Contacts Directory for 5 priority zoonoses (WP8)



10.45-11.00: Coffee Break

11.00-11.30: Last year achievements (2nd part)

- Training Courses Directory (WP5)
- Assessment on VPD and Migrants (WP7)
- The EpiSouth Surveys and the Strategic Documents (Silvia Declich/Giovanni Putoto)

11.30-12.00: Discussion

(With contributions from all the partners countries and institutions)

12.00-13.30: Session 2 "EpiSouth Plus Activities"
Chairpersons: Silvia Declich and Philippe Barboza

12.00-13.00

- EpiSouth Plus: from Sofia to Rome Meeting (WP1)
- Laboratory Network (WP4)
- Preparedness and Risk management procedures (WP5)
- Early Warning Systems and Data Sharing (WP6)
- Data collection and assessments for IHR implementation (WP7)

13.00-13.30: Discussion

(With contributions from all the partners countries and institutions)

13.30- 14.30: Lunch

**14.30-17.15: Session 3 “EpiSouth Plus: Funding, Leaderships and Governance”
Chairpersons: Germain Thinus and Cinthia Menel Lemos**

14.30-14.45: EC DGSANCO and DGAIDCO for ONE Project: funding and tentative schedule
(Project Leader)

14.45-15.00: WPs Co-leaderships: countries availability and consensus of the EpiSouth partners (WP1)

15.00-15.30: Discussion

(With contributions from all the partners countries and institutions)

15.30-15.45: Decision making process and governance: Advisory Group; Steering Committee; WPs Teams; Focal Points; criteria for representativeness; etc. (WP6)

15.45-16.00: formalisation of commitments (Project Leader)

16.00-16.30: Discussion

(With contributions from all the partners countries and institutions)



16.30-16.45: Tea Break

16.45-17.15: Consensus among the partners and closing remarks.

Working Dinner has been organised after the Meeting

EpiSouth 4th Project Meeting

20 April 2010



Rossi Conference Room
Istituto Superiore di Sanità
Via Giano della Bella 34 – Rome, Italy

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