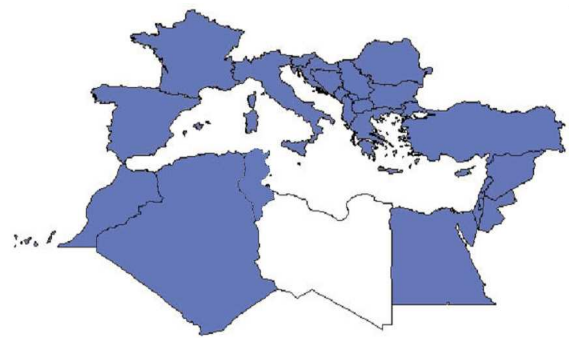


Common training needs in diseases surveillance among EpiSouth countries in the Mediterranean and Balkan regions

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BACKGROUND



EpiSouth Region 2008

EpiSouth is a project co-funded by European Commission (DG SANCO) and supported by the Italian Ministry of Health (EpiMed Project) aiming to improve communicable diseases surveillance, communication and training across the Mediterranean and Balkan regions.

"Training in field/applied epidemiology" is one of eight areas of activity with the objective of strengthening early response capacity to health threats of participating countries through organising short-term trainings/workshops.

Objective: To identify common institutional training needs in surveillance and early warning among EpiSouth countries in order to ensure consensus and necessary support for surveillance activities in the region.

METHODS

We carried out a **survey** among 22 countries involved in the EpiSouth project, between June-July 2007.

Participants: decision-makers or senior epidemiologists from Ministries of Health or national public health institutions in the participant EpiSouth countries.

Questionnaire: self-administered, semi-structured

- comprised five sections: Introduction, Professional identification data, Organization and structure, Skills and competencies, Proposals for improvement.
- "Skills and competencies" section included a core part listing 20 training topics on surveillance, outbreak investigation, risk assessment and tools used in surveillance activities.

The core part allowed for **prioritisation** of training topics using a score based on following variables:

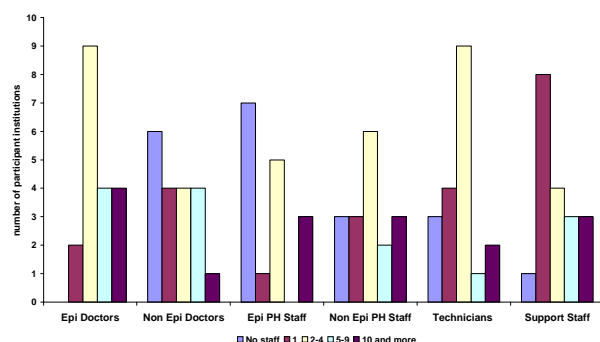
- Perceived need of training in that topic (ranked 1-4, 4 being the most needed)
- Rank of perceived importance of the topic (ranked 1-3, 3 being the most important)
- Existent skills at the central level to perform related task (ranked 1 for "yes" and 2 for "no")
- Undertaking of the related activity in the unit (ranked 1 for "yes" and 2 for "no").

The score was computed summing up ranks of variables. The mean score for each topic was used in prioritising.

RESULTS

- Response rate:** 86% (21 ques from 19 countries)
- Target audience:** The number of professionals working in public health surveillance at the central level varied widely among institutions. Figure 1 shows the corresponding results.

Figure 1: Distribution of participant institutions by number and type of professional staff



- Access to training:** In 17/18 countries, a course in disease surveillance and/or epidemiology is offered besides the basic curriculum in medical schools. In seven countries, **advanced courses** are offered. A 2-3 years **field Epidemiology training programme** exists in five countries. In three countries, a course in field Epidemiology is offered with a duration of 1-4 weeks.

- In most countries, the percentage of surveillance personnel who received **training in the last two years** is less than 25%.

- The majority (81%) of institutions **deliver training** in surveillance and 52% of them **developed training** programmes for their staff.

Training Areas

- Based on prioritisation score, the **first 5 topics** were: quantitative risk assessment (mean score=8.73), modelling of environmental risks (8.52) and infectious diseases (7.94), epidemic intelligence (8.31) and advanced data analysis (7.84).
- By training area, *Risk assessment* ranked first (mean score=8.25), followed by *Surveillance* (7.49), *Outbreak Investigation* (7.41) and *Tools for surveillance* (7.40).

CONCLUSIONS

- The training package of the EpiSouth project is meant filling some gaps in training related topics of interest for the development of the network. Together with other activities, the project carries out three training modules whose topics were identified by this assessment.
- These identified topics constitute the latest step in the epidemiological training process and require a good understanding of other topics included in the assessment. Nevertheless, establishing an accurate profile and a adequate selection of candidates will be key issues for the success of the next two training modules.

RECOMENDATIONS

- Facilitating/promoting the preparation of feasible training plans at national level.
- Coordination activities with organizations at regional level such as WHO and ECDC.

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