

Regional workshop on One Health approach against antimicrobial resistance in EU pre-accession countries

26-27 September 2018, Belgrade, Serbia

Scope and purpose

Background

EU enlargement countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Turkey) are the focus of ECDC technical assistance for non-EU/EEA countries since 2008. During those ten years of ECDC cooperation with financial support from the European Commission's Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), experts from Western Balkan countries and Turkey have been regularly participating, together with EU/EEA Member State experts, in ECDC technical discussions on various topics related to communicable disease prevention and control, including public health microbiology systems.

Moreover, upon request from the Commission in 2011, ECDC has assessed country capacities in the area of communicable disease prevention and control in Montenegro (2013), Serbia (2013), Turkey (2015), North Macedonia (2016), and Albania (2017). The countries' compliance and implementation of EU legislation, and availability of human resources for this were assessed to draw recommendations on reforms needed to meet essential public health system requirements as part of the accession process. In this regard, antimicrobial resistance (further – AMR) and healthcare associated infections (further – HAI) was one of the assessed areas within the review of horizontal national disease programmes.

ECDC meeting on *Strengthening regional antimicrobial resistance and healthcare-associated infections surveillance and networking in the EU enlargement countries in 2012* (Dubrovnik, Croatia) highlighted different levels of capacity to implement the *EU acquis* on AMR and ECDC requirements for participating in ECDC surveillance activities on AMR, antimicrobial consumption and HAI. Majority of the EU candidate and potential candidate countries (notably Western Balkan countries) at that time had yet to develop and implement their national legislative frameworks, action plans and surveillance networks. Short-term perspectives to effectively participate in ECDC surveillance networks on AMR, antimicrobial consumption and HAI were identified only for Croatia and Turkey in 2012, while Western Balkan countries were facing urgent challenges and barriers to develop their capacities and resources for effective national measures to ensure progress on the implementation of key AMR control policies.

Similar countries' system weaknesses and gaps were identified and described in the Technical Assessment Reports after *the EC/ECDC assessments of communicable diseases surveillance and control systems in five EU enlargement countries* (Montenegro and Serbia in 2013, Turkey in 2015, North Macedonia in 2016, and Albania in 2017). The assessments, in particular those of Western Balkan countries, suggest the following common needs in the region:

- to develop and reinforce high-level national strategies for antimicrobial resistance and healthcare associated infections;

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

- to define and further strengthen functional systems for surveillance of AMR, antimicrobial consumption, and HAI based on EU standards and based on operational functioning of national reference laboratories for AMR, including capacities to detect cases by microbiology laboratories; and
- to establish and operationalise national inter-sectorial coordination mechanism to address AMR in the framework of One Health approach.

As a follow up on the above-mentioned regional discussions and country assessments, within the EU strategic framework in this area, representatives from countries and ECDC are initiating the facilitated discussions to reflect on progress made in prevention and control of AMR since 2012, learn from best practices of the EU Member States, and identify key programmatic areas to address common challenges that could boost advancement of one health response to antimicrobial resistance in Western Balkan countries.

EU strategic context

The new EU strategy for **A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans** confirms the European future of the region as a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values. Applying EU rules and standards not only by law, but also in practice remain key priorities in the enlargement process. Supporting socio-economic development, including investment in health to support social inclusion, is one of the six flagship initiatives set out in the Strategy for EU's unprecedented support to the transformation process in the Western Balkans. A credible enlargement perspective, as part of a larger strategy to strengthen the Union by 2025, requires sustained efforts and irreversible reforms by the Western Balkans. The dynamics of moving forward on their respective EU paths for all Western Balkans is based on their own merits and at their own speed depending on the concrete results achieved.

The **new EU action plan on AMR** is underpinned by a One Health approach that addresses resistance in both human and animals, and includes guidelines to promote prudent use of antimicrobials in human health. The plan foresees key actions to make the EU a best-practice region and this requires better evidence, better coordination and surveillance, as well as better control measures. In this regard, it is imperative that countries establish, implement and monitor their national One-Health Action Plans on AMR in line with the commitment they made at the 2015 World Health Assembly.

The EU's 'One Health' approach has already been accepted as best practice at international level, and many of the EU's domestic AMR policies, such as the ban on using antimicrobials as growth promoters in feed for food-producing animals, already contribute towards international goals.

In order to deliver long-lasting results and create the necessary impetus, it is important that the EU legislation related to AMR (e.g. rules on AMR monitoring in food-producing animals, on use of veterinary medicinal products and medicated feed) as well as related EU operational standards (e.g. harmonised outcome indicators to assist EU Member States in assessing their progress in reducing the use of antimicrobials and antimicrobial resistance in both humans and food-producing animals) are adequately implemented in the Member States. Much remains to be done across the board to adopt those AMR-related *acquis*, standards and measures in EU candidate and potential candidate countries on their way towards EU accession.

Scope and objectives

Objectives

In light of the above, the **overall aim of the ECDC regional workshop on One Health approach against AMR in EU enlargement countries is to boost the advancement of one health response to antimicrobial resistance** in Western Balkan countries and Turkey.

More specifically, the objectives of the Regional workshop on One Health approach against AMR are to:

- ✓ reflect the work done by countries in prevention and control of AMR since 2012, including programming the post-assessment national action plans;
- ✓ update on the new EU One Health action plan on AMR and related EU *acquis*;

- ✓ share best practices of EU MS and exchange regional experiences on one health response to AMR covering human health, animal health and environment;
- ✓ identify key priority areas that need to be addressed at regional level to advance one health response to AMR.

It is expected that the discussions during this Regional workshop will define key building blocks and high-level commitment from the countries for a *Multi-country One Health project against AMR in Western Balkans* with tangible, budgeted, and time-bound interventions to be financed by the EU.

Participants

In the framework of ongoing ECDC technical EU pre-accession assistance (ECDC-IPA5/2017/386-267), ECDC will invite four representatives from each EU enlargement country, including:

- National ECDC Correspondent or equivalent, representing national policy and governance of implementation of AMR strategy (ensuring One Health approach) in the country;
- Observer to the ECDC National Microbiology Focal Points or equivalent, having leadership in national microbiology laboratory system supporting monitoring of AMR (national reference laboratory for AMR);
- Observer to the ECDC National Surveillance Focal Points or equivalent, having leadership of the national communicable disease surveillance system, including surveillance of antimicrobial resistance and healthcare associated infection
- Senior expert at national level responsible for management of national strategy against AMR in animal health and food production

EU/EEA MS experts will be invited to share their experience in One Health responses to AMR as per EU AMR acquis.

Representatives from European Commission services and specialised agencies:

- DG SANTE – human health
- DG SANTE – food/feed side
- DG SANTE – Food and Veterinary Office
- EFSA

WHO/Europe