

ECDC Consultation meeting with EU enlargement countries on annual monitoring of their laboratory capabilities using ENLabCap tool

1-2 February 2018, Podgorica, Montenegro

Background

EU enlargement countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Turkey) are the focus of ECDC technical assistance since 2008. In the framework of the European Commission's Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), experts from Western Balkan countries and Turkey have been regularly participating in ECDC technical discussions together with EU/EEA Member State experts on various topics related to communicable disease prevention and control, including public health microbiology systems.

On 20-21 June 2017, ECDC organised **Multi-Country Workshop for EU Enlargement Countries on Microbiology Laboratory Systems Supporting Public Health** that gathered in Ohrid nineteen representatives from Western Balkan countries and Turkey, nine experts from the EU Member States, one official from the European Commission, Directorate-General Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE), one representative from WHO Regional Office for Europe, and three officials from ECDC International Relations and Microbiology Coordination Sections.

National leaders in public health microbiology and epidemiology and National ECDC Correspondents reflected on the work done by countries in reviewing and re-organising their national laboratory networks. They discussed the gaps at the national level including the reference laboratory functions, and shared their views on available expertise, to identify those laboratories that could potentially serve as reference laboratories for other countries in the region.

Among other issues, Western Balkan countries and Turkey acknowledged that the EULabCap monitoring tool as customised by ECDC for the use of EU enlargement countries (ENLabCap) could help them to promote necessary changes in national public health microbiology systems and initiate their implementation, as well as to advocate for sustainable financing mechanisms to ensure the delivery of reforms. It was also emphasised that, where applicable, ENLabCap country profiles should include benchmarking of countries' capabilities in comparison with EU/EEA level and to help policymakers identify possible areas for action and support. In this regard, upon signature of ECDC-IPA5 project and availability of resources, ECDC could organise a regional ENLabCap consultation meeting to kick-start this process.

Scope and purpose of the meeting

The **overall aim** of this regional ENLabCap consultation workshop is to discuss the adjustments proposed to the current [EULabCap tool](#) and agree on those needed to adapt it for the EU enlargement countries. Through the ENLabCap ECDC aims to strengthen the capability and capacity of the EU enlargement countries' public health microbiology systems to provide timely and reliable information that underpins infectious threat detection, risk assessment, and surveillance for

* 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

effective prevention and control of infectious diseases. Assessing public health microbiology vulnerabilities would aim to identify priorities for and monitoring the impact of capacity building activities and system reforms at national, regional (Western Balkan and Turkey), and EU level on essential public health laboratory functions.

Objectives

Specific objectives of the ENLabCap consultation meeting are:

- To agree on the adjustments to the [EULabCap tool](#), resulting in a customized tool (ENLabCap) for use in EU enlargement countries;
- To define the annual data collection, indicator scoring, and validation process;
- To agree on the format of the individualised country profile reports;
- To learn from good practices from the EU/EEA Member States and exchange experiences about in-country use of EULabCap or similar for addressing identified public health microbiology capacity gaps and challenges
- To discuss publication of data collected through the pre-Ohrid workshop questionnaire (peer-reviewed article).

As a preparation for the discussion during the consultation meeting, participants will be asked to review the draft ENLabCap tool (possibly together with relevant colleagues) in order to check the „relevance“ of the indicators and the „feasibility for data collection“ in their countries.

Participants

In the framework of ongoing ECDC technical EU pre-accession assistance (ECDC-IPA5 project), ECDC will invite two representatives from each EU enlargement country:

- Observer to the ECDC National Microbiology Focal Points (NMFP) forum
- Alternate Observer NMFP

Three EU MS experts (from Austria, Slovenia and Croatia) will be invited to share their experience related to the use of EULabCap tool and reports for promoting national reforms towards strengthening the capability and capacity of the microbiology laboratory systems supporting public health.

ECDC experts contributing to the meeting:

- International Relation Section, DIR
- Microbiology Coordination Section, OCS

Expected outcomes

This regional consultation meeting will result in an agreed tool for monitoring public health microbiology capabilities and capacities in EU enlargement countries (ENLabCap set of national system indicators) also enabling benchmarking of indicators, where appropriate, against EU levels (as per EULabCap annual reports). It is expected that the agreed tool, the annual ENLabCap survey, and individualised country reports will equip public health microbiology experts in Western Balkan countries and Turkey with a sound basis to assess public health microbiology vulnerabilities and monitor key public health microbiology capabilities and capacity for surveillance and epidemic preparedness in comparison with EU levels and practises. This assessment aims to help policymakers in these countries identify possible areas for action and evaluate the impact of capacity strengthening activities and health system reforms.

Agenda



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DAY 1		Thursday, 1 February 2018
08:30 – 09:00 Registration		
09:00 – 09:30	Opening and welcome, objectives of the meeting Hosting country and ECDC	
09:30 – 11:00	EULabCap tool and EU Member State's benefits of annual monitoring of key public health microbiology capabilities and capacities (feasibility, challenges, lessons learned) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECDC, Katrin Leitmeyer • Austria, Franz Allerberger • Croatia, Blazenka Hunjak • Slovenia, Verica Mioč 	
11:00 – 11:30 Coffee/tea break		
11:30 – 12:30	Experiences to review public health laboratory network capacities and capabilities in EU pre-accession countries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serbia, Ivana Cirkovic (EULabCap 2016) • The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Milena Petrovska (EULabCap 2016) • Turkey, Selçuk Kılıç (Labcap exercise and lessons learned) 	
12:30 – 13:30 Lunch		
13:30 - 15:00	Proposed revision of draft ENLabCap tool and working group discussion on indicators and challenges for data collection at country level WG1 – Dimension 1. Primary diagnostic testing services (Franz Allerberger and Agne Bajoriniene) WG2 – Dimension 2. National reference laboratory services (Verica Mioč and Joana Revez) WG3 – Dimension 3. Surveillance / epidemic response support (Blazenka Hunjak and Katrin Leitmeyer)	
15:00 – 15:30 Coffee/tea break		
15:30 – 17:00	Debriefing from WGs and finalising the ENLabCap tool ECDC together with EU MS experts to consolidate inputs from WG1, WG2 and WG3	
19:00 ECDC invited dinner (outside the meeting venue)		

DAY 2		Friday, 2 February 2018	
09:00 – 10:30	Plenary discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - annual process for data collection and validation - format of the individual country reports - ECDC support to countries with ENLabCap outputs 	
10:30 – 11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>		
11:00 – 12:30	Discussion on feasibility to publish results of pre-Ohrid workshop survey on microbiology laboratory systems supporting public health and ECDC ENLabCap methodology in a peer-reviewed article ECDC		
12:30– 13:30	<i>Lunch and departure</i>		