

## ECDC TUBERCULOSIS PROGRAMME

### Main activities and coordination of laboratory network and projects

October 2009

## ECDC's commitment to fight tuberculosis in the European Union

The tuberculosis situation in the European Union (EU) has dramatically improved over the past decades; however, tuberculosis (TB) continues to be a health threat to European citizens. This is due to the diverse epidemiological situation of tuberculosis burden in EU Member States with high rates of tuberculosis in vulnerable populations. Moreover, multi-drug resistance is a standing threat to tuberculosis control. The ECDC tuberculosis programme addresses these needs through work under the four key principles of the 'Framework action Plan to fight TB in the EU\*':

1. TB programme strengthening.
2. Quality care for all.
3. Development of new tools.
4. Development of strong partnerships and collaborations.

Timely and accurate laboratory diagnosis of TB is a central component to any TB control programme. There is a need for strengthening diagnostic capacity and quality and networking across the EU.

## Establishing a European Reference Laboratory Network for Tuberculosis (ERLN-TB)

A situational analysis of EU-wide TB reference laboratory services<sup>†</sup> was performed to gain insight on diagnostic activities, quality systems, safety and other general capacity issues in order to identify areas where EU networking would bring added value. The results indicated that the establishment of an EU-wide network of reference

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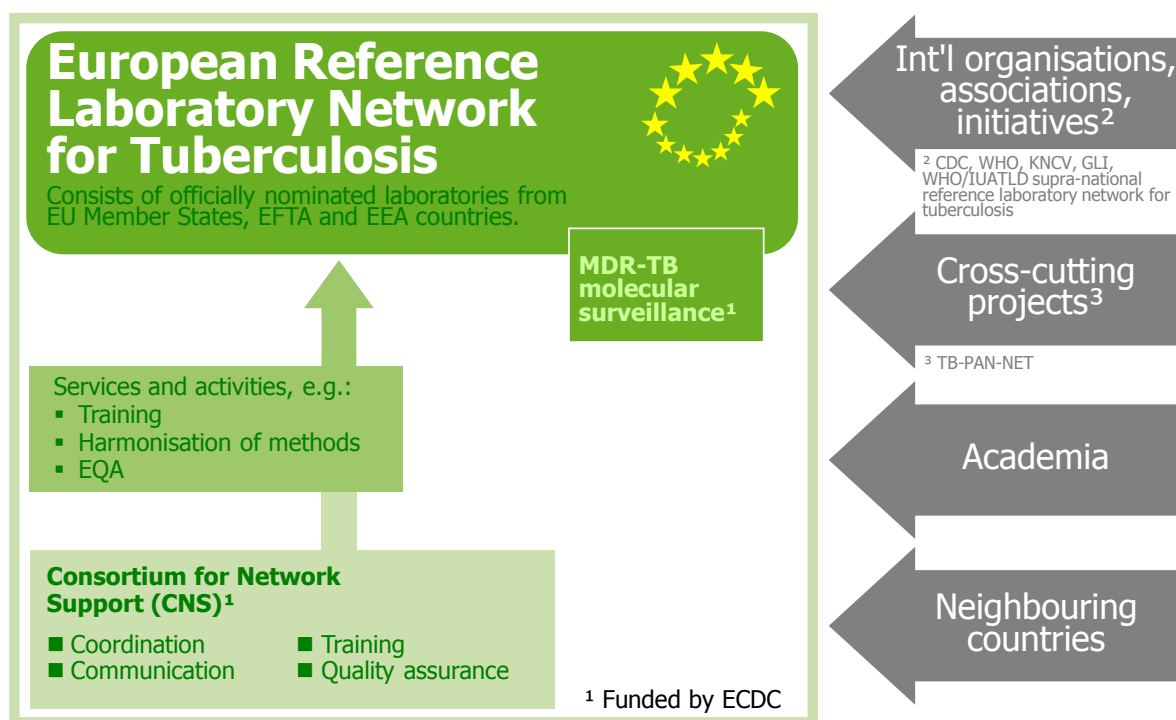
\* ECDC. TB action plan to fight tuberculosis in the European Union. Stockholm (Sweden): ECDC; 2008. Available from: [www.ecdc.europa.eu](http://www.ecdc.europa.eu)

<sup>†</sup> Drobniewski FA, Nikolayevskyy V, Hoffner S, Pogoryelova O, Manissero D, Ozin AJ. The added value of a European Union tuberculosis reference laboratory network – analysis of the national reference laboratory activities. Euro Surveill. 2008 Mar 18;13(12). pii: 8076

laboratories would support the need to strengthen diagnostic methods (especially drug susceptibility testing) services.

Based on this analysis and the strategic areas of work outlined in the Framework Action Plan, ECDC established a plan to create and be responsible for the overall coordination of a European Reference Laboratory Network for TB (ERLN-TB). The Member States were asked to nominate laboratories that fulfil reference functions to take part in the network activities, and an open competition grant was awarded to experts to support the network with services and activities. The ERLN-TB network will be officially launched in January 2010. The services and activities planned for the next four years will include: methods harmonisation, quality assurance, training, and related liaison activities to build synergy with other global initiatives.

**Figure: ECDC's tuberculosis programme**



The above figure outlines the organisational structures of the EU Reference Laboratory Network for TB (ERLN-TB) and the grant beneficiaries — referred to as the 'Consortium for Network Support' (CNS) — and the interactions with key organisations, programmes and global initiatives (grey arrows).

The Member States nominated one laboratory with reference functions per country for the ERLN-TB as well as listed laboratories that may want to participate in activities at their own cost. The MDR-TB project refers to work coordinated by ECDC for molecular surveillance of MDR-TB in Europe. There will be close liaison work and cooperation between this project and the work of the ERLN-TB.

To keep updated on the progress and upcoming activities of the EU reference laboratory network for TB please contact: [tuberculosis@ecdc.europa.eu](mailto:tuberculosis@ecdc.europa.eu)

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