

ECDC Accession Support to the Western Balkans and Türkiye

Preparatory measures for the participation of the Western Balkans and Türkiye in ECDC activities, with a special focus on One Health responses against antimicrobial resistance and severe acute respiratory infection surveillance: 2020–2024

Work plan 2024

Project background and description

Collaboration with countries that have applied to join the EU has been one of ECDC's strategic priorities since the early years of its establishment, and is endorsed in the Amended [ECDC Strategy 2021–2027](#). It is the [sixth ECDC project](#) with external financial assistance by DG NEAR under the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) aimed to prepare the national authorities of the Western Balkans and Türkiye for their future participation in ECDC activities. The beneficiaries of this ECDC-IPA6 project benefit from a European perspective that was granted to them by the European Parliament and the Council, i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Türkiye (IPA beneficiaries).

Project scope

The project's scope is to contribute to increased health security in the EU through international collaboration and alignment regarding infectious disease policies and practice. Within the action area on Global Health, ECDC supports Western Balkans and Türkiye to strengthen their infectious disease prevention and control systems and public health workforce.

Project aim

The aim of the project is to support national counterparts in IPA beneficiaries in their preparation for full participation in ECDC's technical activities and to enhance IPA beneficiaries' capacities to advance One Health responses against antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and enhanced severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) surveillance.

Work plan 2024

Work Stream 1. 'Preparatory measures for participation of IPA beneficiaries' authorities in ECDC activities and systems' aims to further support national counterparts in the IPA beneficiaries in their preparation for full participation in ECDC's work'



¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Following discussions in the Annual Meeting of National ECDC Correspondents in December 2023, countries will continue reporting data to ECDC on agreed diseases and sharing technical information on potential cross-border threats via EpiPulse.

Data submitted by Western Balkans countries and Türkiye on mutually agreed diseases will be regularly reviewed and discussed with national surveillance contact points in order to increase the level of EU-level data quality in terms of the comparability, timeliness, and reliability of communicable diseases surveillance data. In addition, ECDC will continue the series of technical country visits to discuss the surveillance of communicable diseases; country visit reports will be delivered that include analysis of strengths and challenges as well as recommendations for further improvement. The planned ECDC country visits to discuss the surveillance of communicable diseases are:

- **Albania: 27–28 February 2024**
- **Serbia: 8–10 April 2024**
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina: Q3 (TBC)**
- **Bilateral virtual discussion with Türkiye on surveillance activities, Q2 (TBC)**

ECDC will invite relevant experts from IPA beneficiaries to ECDC's disease network meetings, technical discussions, and training workshops.

The tentative list of 2024 events as part of Work Stream 1 include the following:

EpiPulse online training for Montenegro, 17 January 2024

Location: Virtual

Participants: designated experts

Webinar 'Introduction to the 2023 ECDC-EMCDDA guidance on preventing and controlling infectious diseases among people who inject drugs', 13 March 2024

Location: Virtual

Participants: designated experts

HAI-Net Network meeting jointly with Belgian Presidency, 6 May 2024

Location: In person, Brussels, Belgium

Participants: designated experts

Joint ECDC/WHO Europe TB Network meeting, 13–15 May 2024

Location: In person, The Hague, The Netherlands

Participants: designated experts

Summer School, 22–24 May 2024

Location: In person, Stockholm, Sweden

Participants: designated experts

SoHONet meeting for Human Organs, 18–19 June 2024

Location: In person, Stockholm, Sweden

Participants: designated experts

ECDC and WHO Europe Joint Annual Respiratory Viruses Surveillance Meeting, June 2024 (TBC)

Location: In person, TBC

Participants: Observer NFPs for VRD

EpiPulse online training editions for Western Balkans, Q2–Q3 (TBC)

Location: Virtual

Participants: experts having access to EpiPulse Events domains

Training on data analysis, visualization and automation of outputs, and R, Q2–Q3 (TBC)

Location: Virtual

Participants: designated experts

Annual ERLTB-Net-3 meeting, 4 - 6 September 2024

Location: In person, Bratislava, Slovakia

Participants: designated experts

Annual National Focal Points meeting – Threat Detection, jointly with Preparedness, Q3

Location: In person, TBC

Participants: Observers NFPs for Threat Detection and Observers NFPs for Preparedness and Response

Annual Meeting of National ECDC Correspondents in Western Balkans and Türkiye, 2–3 October 2024

Location: In person, Stockholm, Sweden

Participants: National ECDC Correspondents

Training 'Control of multidrug-resistant organisms (MDROs) in healthcare settings', 15–17 and 22–23 October 2024

Location: Virtual

Participants: designated experts

Joint meeting of National Surveillance Focal Points and National Microbiology Focal Points, 22–24 October 2024

Location: In person, TBC

Participants: Observers NFPs for Surveillance and Observers NFPs for Microbiology

FWD-Net Annual Network Meeting, Q3

Location: Virtual

Participants: nominated FWD experts

Biorisk awareness and management (BAM) training, Q3**Location:** In person, TBC

Participants: designated experts

EVD Annual Network Meeting, Q4**Location:** In person, Stockholm, Sweden

Participants: Observers NFPs for EVD

EVD LabNet Annual Meeting, Q4**Location:** In person, Stockholm, Sweden

Participants: Observers NFPs for EVD

ELDSNet annual meeting, Q4**Location:** Virtual

Participants: nominated Legionnaires disease experts

SoHONet meeting for Blood, November 2024**Location:** In person, Stockholm, Sweden

Participants: designated experts

Winter Workshop, 10–12 December 2024**Location:** Virtual

Participants: designated experts

Euro-GASP Meeting, TBC**Location:** Virtual

Participants: nominated Euro-GASP contacts

Epidemic Intelligence training, TBC**Location:** In person, Stockholm, Sweden

Participants: designated experts

In 2024, ECDC will engage interested countries in the ‘**European Gonococcal Antimicrobial Surveillance Programme**’ (Euro-GASP). Along with the services provided to the EU/EEA countries, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia will be supported in the following work areas:

- Surveillance of *N. Gonorrhoeae* antimicrobial susceptibility, including shipping of isolates, expert advice, face-to-face country visits;
- Provision of an EQA scheme for susceptibility testing of *N. Gonorrhoeae*;
- Molecular typing of *N. Gonorrhoeae*;
- Provision of training and capacity-building activities in STI laboratory diagnostics, NG susceptibility testing, and molecular typing including WGS.

ECDC will continue to engage Western Balkans and Türkiye in the activities for the ‘**ECDC survey of carbapenem-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* (CRAb) 2024/2025**’, within EURGen-Net. In this context, ECDC will invite countries to:

- Two virtual network meetings in May and September;
- Participate in ECDC’s CRAb survey from 1 October 2024 to 30 June 2025;
- Indicate a national-level survey coordinator in March 2024.

Work Stream 2. Advancement of One Health approaches against AMR

The consortium of EpiConcept (France) and Integrated Quality Laboratory Services (France) initiated in 2023 the implementation of activities aimed to contribute to the advancement of the One Health approach against AMR in the Western Balkans through: (i) the identification of gaps in the current national AMR strategies and action plans; (ii) the development of country roadmaps; (iii) support in the development of electronic surveillance of AMR; and (iv) awareness-raising initiatives. The gap analysis and country visits will continue in 2024.

Planned ECDC/EFSA/EC country visits on One Health against AMR:

- **North Macedonia: 29 January to 2 February 2024.**
- **Montenegro: 10–14 June 2024.**
- **Serbia: dates are still to be agreed.**

After ECDC finalises the country visit report with gap analysis and conclusions, the consortium will initiate with the national counterparts the development of a roadmap to address recommendations and ensure EU standards are respected. It is anticipated that the country roadmaps to advance One Health responses on AMR will be developed in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Montenegro.

Work Stream 3. Enhancing SARI surveillance to support the implementation of fit-for-purpose surveillance systems

The plan is to finalise the technical support to national authorities provided by EpiConcept by April 2024 through continuous services to implement planned surveillance activities and the studies, as well as deliver training and capacity-building workshops. This shall enhance the capacities in the countries to implement the protocols, validate data, and contribute to ECDC's activities as per standards at the level of the EU Member States.