

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

26-27 February 2019, Belgrade, Serbia

Scope and purpose

Background

EU enlargement countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Turkey) are the focus of ECDC technical assistance for non-EU/EEA countries since 2008. During these 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 antimicrobial resistance, healthcare associated infections, and 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 vertical national disease programmes.

Similarly as ECDC, through its Pre-Accession Programme, EFSA develops and implements technical cooperation with the national food safety authorities of these countries on food and feed safety issues within EFSA's remit. EFSA is supporting the countries in food safety scientific expertise capacity building, transfer of risk assessment and communication methodologies and harmonisation of national food safety data collections, enhancing IPA countries' capacity to generate scientific advice and perform data analysis, as well as preparedness to face with food safety crisis and issues of mutual concern.

After the adoption of the European strategic action plan on antibiotic resistance (2011–2020) by all 53 Member States of the WHO European Region, the WHO Regional Office for Europe coordinated the establishment of the Central Asian and Eastern European Surveillance of Antimicrobial Resistance (CAESAR) network in 2012 to assist countries outside the EU in setting up or strengthening national AMR surveillance. All Western Balkan countries and Turkey are part of CAESAR network and report their national antimicrobial susceptibility testing data (with exception of Albania) from blood and cerebrospinal fluid for nine bacterial pathogens of public health and clinical importance. In addition to the reporting AMR data to CAESAR, many countries are taking necessary steps to set up or strengthen their national comprehensive AMR surveillance systems, enabling them

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 get a better insight into the AMR situation in their country. Most of the countries are still facing many challenges, and strong political support is needed to continue making progress.

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. At that time, short-term perspectives to effectively participate in ECDC surveillance networks on AMR, antimicrobial consumption, and HAI were identified only for Croatia and Turkey, 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 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;
- 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 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 response to antimicrobial resistance in Western Balkan countries in One Health approach.

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 remains a key priority 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. The strategy spells out the need to develop the digital society in the Western Balkans, including the support to eHealth services. 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 humans and animals, and includes guidelines to promote prudent use of antimicrobials in both humans and animals. 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.

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 and food, 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. The fourth pillar of this EU action plan (Shaping the global agenda) foresees the support from the Commission – supported by EU agencies – to EU candidate and potential candidate countries benefiting from a pre-accession strategy in alignment and implementation of EU legislation related to AMR.

Scope and objectives

Objectives

In light of the above, the **overall aim of the regional workshop 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;
- ✓ get an update on the new EU One Health action plan on AMR and related EU *acquis*;
- ✓ share best practices of EU MS and exchange MSs experiences on a 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 on a 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 three 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 the 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 infections

In the framework of ongoing EFSA technical EU pre-accession assistance, EFSA will invite one senior expert at national level responsible for management of national strategy against AMR in animal health and food production. i.e. Observers to EFSA Advisory Forum from Western Balkan countries.

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, food/feed side, health and food audits
- DG NEAR

WHO/Europe