Study on cost-benefit analysis of reference laboratories for human pathogens

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The European Commission publishes a study on cost-benefit analysis of reference laboratories for human pathogens in the EU, and presents regulatory options to strengthen the existing coordination of reference microbiology provision in the EU in order to support the European response coordination to outbreaks of pathogenic infectious agents. The study was undertaken following the adoption of Decision 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border threats to health, and complements the findings of the European System of Reference Laboratories for Human Pathogens (EURLOP) project report.

At present, there is no EU-wide system for reference laboratory networks for human pathogens that would consolidate the operating standards of microbiological reference laboratories or provide resilience when significant cross-border outbreaks occur. The situation in the EU is currently characterised by national reference laboratories working without a formally agreed EU-wide capability or mechanism for rapidly responding in a coordinated manner to new and emerging infectious threats. These laboratories are also highly diverse in terms of scope, organisation, membership, coordination/governance structure, and activities carried out.

The results of this study indicate that the benefits (monetary and non-monetary) of maintaining a formally-defined overarching system of EU reference laboratory networks are likely to outweigh the costs, both from a Member State (participating member laboratory) and from an EU perspective (coordinator and funding entity). However, the study also identified several issues that would need to be addressed in the further process of creating such a system, including the need for adequate reference laboratory infrastructure at the national level, as well as the need to provide sustainable funding, including for emergency situations.