

## Strengthening National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups in Middle-income Countries of the WHO European Region

# EURO NITAGs

### Duration

2020 – 2021

### Budget/year

approx. 242,000 EUR

### Partner countries

Albania  
Armenia  
Azerbaijan  
Belarus  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Georgia  
Kazakhstan  
Kyrgyzstan  
Montenegro  
Republic of Moldova  
Serbia  
Tajikistan  
Turkey  
Turkmenistan  
Ukraine  
Uzbekistan

### Challenges addressed by the project

National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) are multidisciplinary panels of national experts providing independent and evidence-based guidance to Ministries of Health (MoH) on immunization policies. NITAGs develop recommendations on specific vaccination topics based on gathered, reviewed and evaluated evidence as well as on local epidemiology and social context. Almost all countries of the WHO European Region have established NITAGs, but their functionality varies largely across the Region. Middle-Income Countries (MICs) in particular, face numerous challenges in the absence of financial support, resulting in inequity in immunization. In 2017, only 35 out of the 47 NITAGs established at that time in the Region met all six WHO process indicators for NITAG's functionality, and only 11 out of the 19 NITAGs of low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). The COVID-19 pandemic and the preparations for the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines pose an unprecedented challenge to the NITAGs of the Region, especially to those which had previously experienced difficulties in their roles.

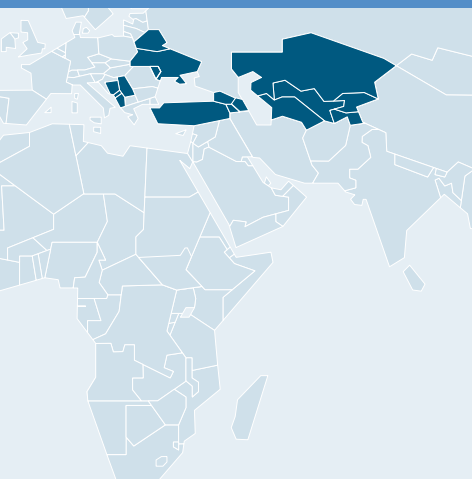
### Objectives

The project is carried out in 16 MICs of the WHO European Region.

- » In the first phase of the project NITAG/country profiles are developed based on available data and conducted evaluations of NITAGs. For each NITAG the areas for improvement as well as their challenges and strengths are identified. These results should support NITAGs in developing improvement plans to strengthen their roles
- » A second phase of the project aims to provide tailored support to NITAGs to implement the developed improvement plans
- » COVID-19 specific support: Within the project NITAGs are provided with specific support on developing recommendations on COVID-19 vaccination

### Overview of activities

The aim of the first phase of the project is to identify NITAG specific areas for improvement in order to tailor future support to their particular needs. For each NITAG areas for improvement, challenges and strengths are identified by reviewing available data (submitted by countries through WHO/UNICEF Joint Reporting Form, available from previous evaluations, surveys and reports) and by evaluating each NITAGs structure, composition, functioning and process of developing recommendation. For the evaluations a project-specific evaluation tool was developed. This tool has been piloted in Belarus and Albania and is used for both external evaluations, which are conducted in six countries (Belarus, Azerbaijan,



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From upper left to lower right: National vaccination records of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Armenia (photo: © TechNet-21.org )



From upper left to lower right: National vaccination records of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova (Photo ©TechNet-21.org )



From upper left to lower right: National vaccination records of Albania, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Serbia (photo: © TechNet-21.org )

Uzbekistan, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey) and self-evaluations which are conducted in 10 countries (Albania, Montenegro, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan and the Republic of Moldova). Based on these results, the project team will provide specific recommendations for improving NITAGs' functionality, outputs and/or integration into the policy process. These recommendations will be considered for inclusion into the NITAGs' plans for improvement, which will be presented, discussed and finalized at a regional meeting. Apart from the NITAGs included in the project other NITAGs from the WHO European Region as well as representatives of countries' MoH and project partners will be invited to participate at the meeting. The second phase of the project aims to implement the improvement plans by providing tailored support to the NITAGs. In the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team provides additional support on developing recommendations for COVID-19 vaccine introduction and deployment in a series of webinars conducted for NITAGs of the WHO European Region. Relevant resources such as (interim) recommendations on COVID-19 vaccination developed at the global, regional and country level are presented and discussed, information on COVID-19 vaccines in development is provided and experiences of NITAGs shared. Throughout these webinars the development of recommendations on COVID-19 vaccination/vaccines is followed up, needs and questions of NITAGs are directly addressed and NITAGs' experiences and lessons-learned are shared to support each other.

### Partner institution

World Health Organisation, Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe), Vaccine-preventable Diseases and Immunization Programme (VPI), Denmark

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