9.K. Workshop: “Coopera(c)tion” at points of entry – Joint COVID-19 efforts and lessons from the JA Healthy Gateways

Organised by: EU HEALTHY GATEWAYS Joint Action
Chair persons: Varvara Mouchtouri (Greece), Aura Timen (Netherlands)
Contact: doret.de.rooij@rivm.nl

Although numerous efforts in the past have been supporting and enhancing infectious disease preparedness and response at points of entry and in the transport sector, COVID-19 has provided unprecedented challenges. The sectors were forced to constantly adjust to new epidemiological situations and required measures. Cooperation and action has been required amidst a complex set of actors from within and outside public health. The EU Healthy Gateways Joint Action has been founded to improve and support technical experience and cooperation in the transport sector and at points of entry in Europe. COVID-19 did no longer allow gradual improvement through meetings, training and exercises, but only allowed improvising and learning on the job. This pandemic also coincides with the final year of this EU Healthy Gateways (2018 - 2021). The consortium and many partners has spent 2021 so far by combining its predefined and pre-pandemic tasks while supporting in the ‘emergency mode’ the European workforce in the ongoing pandemic. Ending the JA halfway a pandemic demands critical reflection made public. In this workshop, we share the diversity of challenges, and reducing these to urgent recommendations for cooperation at and among European points of entry of the near future. In four presentations, we present cooperation alongside coordinated action during COVID-19 at point-of-entry and at European level, sharing several contributions from science and practice. The first presentation will be the experience from the Netherlands with their in-action review (IAR) focused on the response at ports and airports. IAR have flourished this year although organizing one can be challenging amidst response efforts. Is an IAR for points of entry worth the drill? Second, international communication has been secured and tested during the development of a guideline for international
communication and a related European table-top exercise that took place in March last year. Have our international communication lines been up to date? European cooperation is essential during international contact tracing. In our third presentation, the development, testing and implementation of the digital passenger locator forms (PLF) for air-, maritime- and land-travel will be shown. Is a digital PLF system ready to unite all European countries into one system? The last presentation will provide lessons of organizing and coordinating, and sustaining the products and results for points of entry following from this Joint Action. This presentation will end in a brainstorming session with the panelists and the audience on what a next joint action would look like. Have European cooperation and collaborative action been feasible in transport industries, at and among points of entry? What are the urgent lessons for the near future?

Key messages:

- The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance in strengthening cooperation and coordinated action of MS to improve their preparedness and response capacities at points of entry.
- The COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes the need for the availability of a cross-European network to transfer lessons learned for an enhanced preparedness and response to future public health threats.