



# **AIRSAN – Coordinated action in the aviation sector to control public health threats**

## **Executive Summary**

**Chafea Project Grant Nr: 2012 11 02**

**Final version – 29 February 2016**



In the recent years, there has been a rapid increase in number of people travelling by air in Europe, resulting in a growing risk of cross-border public health threats. In order to ensure a coherent response to public health threats at EU level, a coordinated reaction among multiple stakeholders involved needs to be established.

The aim of the AIRSAN Project (“Coordinated action in the aviation sector to control public health threats”) was to support EU Member States to ensure a well-organised and coherent response of various organisations representing different sectors to public health threats in air transport. The AIRSAN Project was funded by the EU Health Programme between April 2013 and December 2015. The AIRSAN Project was coordinated by the Robert Koch Institute, the national public health institute of Germany. Taken together the AIRSAN Partnership, including the Scientific Advisory Board, consisted of 24 partners representing national public health authorities, national civil aviation authorities, airlines and airports across EU Member States as well as from Turkey and Israel. Other partners represented a number of international organisations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Air Transport Association (IATA) and European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

AIRSAN aimed to support the implementation and preparedness activities according to the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) and according to Decision No 1082/2013/EU. AIRSAN provided scientifically developed products and supported the collaboration between private companies, such as airports and airlines, and the public sector, such as public health and civil aviation authorities. In order to achieve these aims, the work within the AIRSAN Project had been distributed between 3 horizontal work packages (i.e. focusing on coordination, dissemination and evaluation) and 3 core work packages.

One of the core aspects of the work was the development of a project website that hosted a communication platform. This work was led by UTH EL, which has extensive relevant experience derived from the activities related to the coordination of the SHIPSAN ACT Joint Action. The **AIRSAN Website** ([www.airsan.eu](http://www.airsan.eu)) was developed in August 2013 and it has been updated regularly since then. The AIRSAN Website was designed to contain freely accessible, but also some password-protected, areas. Amongst others, the open-access area contains general information about the AIRSAN Project (objectives, partnership, work packages, links to the partner organisations), links to the major products of the project as well as dissemination material (flyer, publications, newsletters) and a registration form to the AIRSAN Network (see below more on the AIRSAN Network).

The **AIRSAN Communication Platform** constitutes a central part of the password-protected area of the AIRSAN Website; it was developed and tested to serve as a forum for informal discussion amongst registered AIRSAN Network Members (see below). The AIRSAN Communication Platform can be used to contact all or a selected group of AIRSAN Network Members in order to discuss topics related to public health threats in air transport. During the project lifetime, a number of discussions were initiated, most of them related to the outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease in West Africa.

Another important part of the password-protected area of the AIRSAN Website is a Project Corner where the AIRSAN Partners can find documents and information on the coordination and implementation of the AIRSAN Project (e.g. AIRSAN Grant Agreement, AIRSAN Amendment to the Grant Agreement, internal plans and reports, minutes and presentations of AIRSAN Meetings). This area is accessible for AIRSAN Partners only.

Another core working element was led by RKI and aimed to develop an informal network of relevant stakeholders from the public health and the aviation sector. Unlike other professional networks, AIRSAN invites colleagues from the national level as well as those representing local authorities, airports’ and airlines’ management etc. Professionals wanting to get an access to the **AIRSAN Network** need to register via the AIRSAN Website. Registered AIRSAN Network Members can access contact details of other AIRSAN Network Members. The main working space of the AIRSAN Network is the AIRSAN Communication Platform.

To address an issue of availability of relevant guidance material, the Robert Koch Institute conducted two surveys that aimed to identify existing guidance material on public health threats in air transport and to establish gaps in existing material. Identified material, such as standard operating procedures, regulations and other guidelines underwent a review process. As a result, an annotated **AIRSAN Bibliography** that contains all main documents issued by international organisations (i.e. WHO, ICAO, IATA etc.) in the area of public health and air transport was developed; it includes all reviewed guidance material and is hosted on the AIRSAN Website. The AIRSAN Bibliography includes links to approximately 70 documents, with accompanying structural and content information. An imbedded keyword search function allows selection of relevant documents.

Following the initial survey on identifying existing relevant guidance documents, another survey was conducted by the Robert Koch Institute that aimed to prioritise the topics where guidance was still missing. Following this prioritisation process, two **AIRSAN Guidance Documents** were developed in order to fill some of the identified gaps. One document

describes the **remote risk assessment and management of communicable disease events on board an aircraft**. It follows a flowchart structure, which describes different decision-making conditions. It contains questionnaires for the remote and fast assessment of travellers suspected of suffering from an infectious disease of public health concern.

The other AIRSAN Guidance Document targets **contact tracing, with a focus on the collaboration between the public health and the aviation sector**. It was written in a questions-and-answer format. It presents the different perspectives of the public health authorities and the airlines, showing the needs of both sectors as well as limitations in terms of existing abilities to provide information. This guidance document includes a discussion on a joint perspective on the collaboration in case of contact tracing. Both AIRSAN Guidance Documents were tested in table-top exercises. They are available for download on the AIRSAN Website.

RIVM led the work related to the development and pilot testing of an **AIRSAN Training Tool**, which should support countries in the implementation of the AIRSAN Guidance Documents and the International Health Regulations (2005). The developed material includes a training manual, different scenarios, training guidelines and evaluation forms. In order to pilot-test this AIRSAN Training Tool five table-top exercises have been conducted at four different international airports in EU Member States and Israel. The AIRSAN Training Tool is also available for download on the AIRSAN Website.

One horizontal work package included coordination of activities within the AIRSAN Project. Amongst others, this included the overall planning and progress monitoring of project activities, the provision of technical and financial guidance to the partners and the coordination of the cooperation between partners.

Another horizontal work package aimed to disseminate relevant information about the AIRSAN Project. The activities included amongst others the identification of the target groups and the coordination of the publication activities of the project results. The AIRSAN Website served as the most important mean of the dissemination to a wide audience.

The third horizontal work package focused on project evaluation. Two questionnaire-based surveys (after one and after two years) were carried out amongst the AIRSAN Partners. The results of the evaluation surveys were fed back to the AIRSAN Coordinator. The evaluation was independently conducted by ICAO which was subcontracted to do this work in order to achieve the maximum objectivity.

With its focus on the collaboration between public health and the aviation sector, the AIRSAN Project supports the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005). In order to ensure a coherent and efficient response to public health threats in air transport, the harmonization of existing procedures, including emergency plans, is important. This can be supported by an inter-sectoral network bringing together public health authorities, civil aviation authorities, airlines and airports as well as other key stakeholders responsible for response to public health threats in air transport, at local, national and international level.

The open-access AIRSAN Website makes the relevant information easily accessible. It will be regularly updated, even beyond the life of the project. It is planned to continue supporting the AIRSAN Communication Platform and the AIRSAN Bibliography as well. Other products, such as the AIRSAN Guidance Documents and the AIRSAN Training Tool, have been used among project partners in their routine activities and might be useful in future.