



# World Health Organization

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

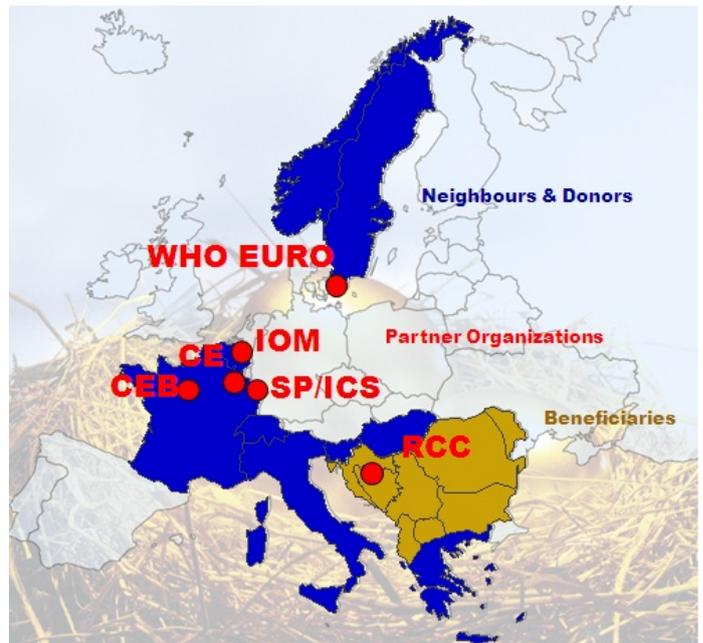
## The South-Eastern Europe Health Network for Peace and Stabilization



SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE  
HEALTH NETWORK

### *Introduction*

The South-Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN) is a forum of high-level officials from ministries of health in south-eastern Europe (SEE). It was established in 2001, originally under the auspices of the Stability Pact for SEE, with the aims of fostering regional cooperation and the stability of the SEE countries and preparing them for eventual integration into the European Union (EU). In 2008, the Stability Pact for SEE was handed over to the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The SEE countries have now completed legal procedures for establishing a new Secretariat in Skopje. At the same time, a series of new regional health development centres (RHDCs) are being established to complete the transformation of the technical projects into long-term programmes of cooperation in public health.



### *Principles of cooperation*

The following principles apply to all cooperation within the Network:

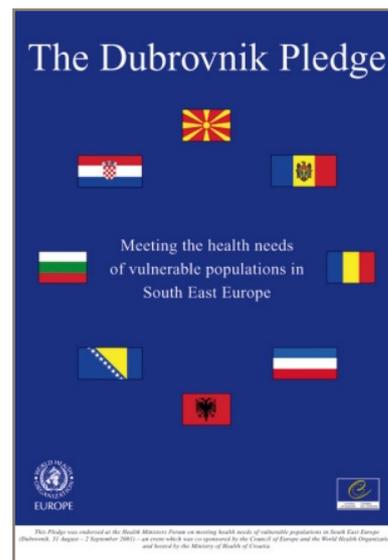
- ownership by SEE countries
- a partnership approach
- equal involvement of SEE countries
- equal distribution of activities and resources
- sustainability (commitment by SEE ministries of health to project implementation at national level, capacity-building and mobilizing of resources for further expansion)
- complementary and continuity (which implies building up ongoing plans and projects, and making investments through WHO biennial collaborative agreements)
- up to 30% of funds allocated to management
- decentralization of resources
- transparency and accountability
- project management by multi-country project steering committees; and
- regular reporting by the steering committee of each project to the Network.

## ***Pledges and commitments***

The Dubrovnik Pledge was signed on 2 September 2010 as the first-ever political document on cross-border health development in the SEE region. It committed the governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Montenegro (as named at the time of signing), Romania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to modernizing seven areas of common interest in public health. Seven regional projects, budgeted at over €8 million, were therefore designed to put into effect the political commitments of the Pledge, with support from the governments of Belgium, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland.

The Skopje Pledge was the second political document on cross-border health development in the SEE region. It was signed by the ministers of health of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro (as named at the time of signing) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 27 November 2005. Five partner countries (Belgium, Greece, Norway, Slovenia and Switzerland) and the four partner organizations (the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Development Bank, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Stability Pact Secretariat) co-signed the Skopje Pledge and witnessed it. The Skopje Pledge confirmed the agreement of the governments of the eight SEE countries to continue to cooperate beyond 2005 on the initiative “Health development action for south-eastern Europe: the South-Eastern Europe Health Network”.

In addition, the SEE health ministers have signed a number of ministerial declarations and memoranda of understanding on key public health issues.



## ***Structure***

National health coordinators are officially nominated by the minister of health of each of the nine SEE countries. An executive committee has the mandate of monitoring progress in the health projects and facilitating health reform in the SEE region. The Presidency rotates every six months among the ministries of health of the SEE countries.

## ***Technical cooperation***

The major outcome of the political commitment to health in the Dubrovnik Pledge was the development of seven technical health projects. The purpose of the projects was to modernize and strengthen the national health policies, systems and services in each project area.

The project areas were:

- mental health
- communicable diseases surveillance and response
- food safety and nutrition
- tobacco control
- blood safety and blood components
- social and health information systems
- maternal and neonatal health
- strengthening public health services

## ***Achievements***

The SEE Health Network is one of the most successful health initiatives in the SEE region in the fields of

- peace building and stabilization
- development, improvement and alignment of national health legislation with WHO and European legislation
- support to surveillance of communicable diseases and the implementation of the International Health regulations
- ratification of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and approval of tobacco control laws
- orienting health strategy towards caring for mental health and disabled children at community level
- establishment of 10 community mental health centres in the nine countries with a catchment area on over one million citizens
- approval of food safety laws and regulations in support to consumer protection
- development and updating national strategies for improving maternal and neonatal health
- capacity-building through exchange of experience and training for experts in nine technical areas at different levels
- six regional publications on the thematic areas of work
- regional and national assessments
- creation of a strong feeling of ownership, trust and confidence among the countries, together with a spirit of openness, transparency and accountability
- establishment of *strong partnerships* among the nine SEE countries on one hand, and with six donor and neighboring countries, on the other.



## ***Next Steps***

Once the new regional SEE Health Network Secretariat is fully operational, it is crucial that the WHO Regional Office for Europe is present and strongly active in supporting the process. The Regional Office must coordinate with the newly formed RCC, provide the necessary political support and participate in fundraising opportunities. The Regional Office's strategic health contribution will be vital as the SEE Health Network gradually moves away from vertical public health projects into long-term collaboration programmes focused on strengthening health systems and public health services.

## ***Further information***

For more information on SEEHN please see:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/Health-systems/public-health-services/activities/south-eastern-europe-health-network-seehn>

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