



REPORT
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE
SEE HEALTH NETWORK SECRETARIAT
FOR THE PERIOD January – December 2024

SKOPJE, JANUARY 2025

SEE HEALTH NETWORK MEMBER STATES



SEEHN Secretariat

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALB	Republic of Albania
BIH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BGR	Republic of Bulgaria
CEI	Central European Initiative
EC	European Commission
EHFG	European Health Forum Gastein
EPHA	European Public Health Alliance
EU	European Union
Ex COM	Executive Committee
ICN	International Council of Nurses
IPH	Institute of Public Health
MKD	Republic of North Macedonia
MNE	Montenegro
MOH	Ministry of Health
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NFPs	National Focal Points
NHCs	National Health Coordinators
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RHDCs	Regional Health Development Centers
MDA	Republic of Moldova
OAMGMAMR	Order of Nurses, Midwives, and Medical Assistants of Romania
ROU	Romania
RS	Republika Srpska
SCS	Sub-Regional Cooperation Strategy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SECID	Southeast European Centre for the Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SEEHN	South Eastern-Europe Health Network
SRB	Republic of Serbia
TAIEX	EC Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Tool
TCs	Teleconferences
WB	Western Balkans ¹
WHO	World Health Organization
WHO EURO	WHO Regional Office for Europe

¹ ALB, BIH, MNE, MKD, SRB common with SEEHN MSs



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Introduction

The present Report on the activities of the South Eastern-Europe Health Network (SEEHN) Secretariat. It reflects the activities carried in the period of January - December 2024 and is submitted to **the attention of the Executive Committee** according to the Annex 1: Roles and responsibilities of the SEE Health Network Secretariat of the *Memorandum of Understanding: Future of the South-eastern Europe Health Network in the framework of the South East European Co-operation Process*.

1. The SEEHN Secretariat structure

During the reporting period January - December 2024 the SEEHN Secretariat technical and administrative staff has been fulfilling its roles and responsibilities, including changes as following:

- SEEHN Secretariat Head – Overall responsibility for the management of the Secretariat and the support to the work of the Network (Contract since March 2017- November 2024-contract terminated due to sudden passing);
- Finance Officer (Contract since September 2016 as Administrative Officer and later with contract as Finance Officer since September 2018).
- Technical Officer, recruited staff of the SEEHN Secretariat, since January 2017, Acting Head since December 2024.
- Administrative Assistant, part-time recruited staff of the SEEHN Secretariat. This full time position is to be advertised in 2025, per need.
- Legal officer /office. This position to be advertised in 2025, per need.
- Communication officer (since October 2020), one part-time consultant is contracted from Romania.
- IT Specialist, part-time staff member of the Secretariat: responsible for all IT issues including the postings to the Facebook, Instagram and Website of the SEEHN (contract since March 2016).

Throughout the past year, Dr. Mira Jovanovski Dasic effectively served as the Director of the SEEHN Secretariat, consistently enhancing the organization's internal capabilities. She successfully secured commitments from Member States authorities for ongoing cooperation within the SEEHN framework, establishing it as a key initiative for addressing health challenges in the region. With deep regret, the sudden passing of Dr. Mira Jovanovski-Dasic in November 2024 necessitated the appointment of Dr. Tatiana Paduraru as Acting Head of the SEEHN Secretariat. She will serve in this capacity until the selection process for the permanent Head is completed.

2. SEEHN Executive Committee

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of 29 April 2009 of the SEE Health Network, and its Addendum of 2011, the SEEHN High Level Representatives in line with Article VI – Governance and leadership: Presidency, Executive Committee and regional meetings named the National Health Coordinators (NHCs).

During the closed session of the 47th Plenary Meeting, held on 21 June 2024, the following members of the SEEHN Executive Committee were elected:

Chair: Dr Svetlana Nicolaescu, National Health Coordinator, Deputy Secretary General, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova, re-elected for the second mandate.

Members of the SEE Health Network Member States Executive Committee:

- **Dr. Jurica Arapovic**, Member of Ex Com, SEEHN Focal Point, Assistant Minister for Health, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- **Ms Revital Maimeran**, Member of Ex Com, SEEHN NHC, Foreign Affairs Manager, Ministry of Health, State of Israel
- **Prof Dr Florentina Furtunescu**, Member of Ex Com, Head of the Unit for Monitoring, Planning and Risk Communication in Communicable Diseases, National Institute of Public Health, Romania
- **Dr Niko Hyka**, Member of Ex Com, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Republic of Albania.

All members of the Executive Committee with the Chair were appointed to serve a mandate of 2 years in the period July 2024 – June 2026.

The Executive Committee held four meetings in total during 2024 (previous and newly elected composition). Previous composition of Ex Com, held one hybrid (in person and online) meeting in Sarajevo in June 2024, prior the 47 SEEHN Plenary meeting. The current/newly elected composition held its first meeting online in September 2024. Second, in person extraordinary meeting was held in November 2024 in Sofia, back to back to the Health Diplomacy Course, following the unexpected passing of Director Dr Dasic, to discuss urgent matters of recent situation and appointment of Acting Head of Secretariat. Third online meeting was held in December 2024, to discuss Financial report 2024 and Financial Plan 2025.

3. Financial status and yearly contributions from the SEEHN Member States

The SEEHN Contributions Report in the Table below shows the status of contributions collected.

During 2024, contributions were paid by:

- Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Serbia, Romania, Republic of Bulgaria and State of Israel for 2024.
- Republic of North Macedonia for 2023.

As of 31 December 2024, contributions are pending from Republic of Albania (for 2023 and 2024) and Republic of North Macedonia (for 2024).



SEEHN CONTRIBUTIONS REPORT 2024

YEAR	Republic of Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Republic of Bulgaria	The State of Israel	Republic of Moldova	Montenegro	Republic of North Macedonia	Romania	Republic of Serbia
CONTRIBUTIONS DUE FOR 2023	20,000 €	- €	- €	- €	- €	- €	- €	- €	- €
CONTRIBUTIONS DUE FOR 2024	20,000 €	- €	- €	- €	- €	- €	20,000 €	- €	- €
TOTAL ACTUAL INCOME IN 2024	- €	20,000 €	36,000 €	36,000 €	10,000 €	10,000 €	20,148 €	36,000 €	30,000 €
TOTAL PROJECTED INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS IN 2024									258,000 €
TOTAL ACTUAL INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS IN 2024									198,148 €
During 2024, contributions were paid by:									
- Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Serbia, Romania, Republic of Bulgaria and State of Israel for 2024.									
- Republic of North Macedonia paid for 2023.									
As of 31 December 2024, contributions are pending from Republic of Albania (for 2023 and for 2024) and Republic of North Macedonia (for 2024).									

TOTAL INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS TO BE PAID	258,000 €
ACTUAL PAID in 2024, as of 31 December 2024	198,148 €

During the Third meeting of the Ex Com held online in December 2024, Annual Financial Report for 2024 and Financial Plan for 2025 were approved by Ex Com members.

4. SEEHN Communication activities

Throughout the reporting period, encompassing both in-person and online operations, the presence of a Communication Officer, whose involvement was sustained throughout 2024, has been instrumental in enhancing the visibility and representation of SEEHN. This individual played a key role in branding and tailoring the primary messages on behalf of SEEHN, during the presidencies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria.

In the same timeframe, the IT maintenance expert for the Network, who serves as a part-time staff member at SEEHN Secretariat, has consistently supported the IT requirements of the Secretariat. Additionally, this expert has been responsible for the upkeep of the SEEHN website, Facebook page, and Instagram page.

5. SEEHN Activities at Political Level

The SEEHN Secretariat in collaboration with the **SEEHN Presidency of the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)** coordinated, developed and carried out all the technical and logistical preparations for the **47th Plenary Meeting: *Strengthening Community Health Services*, held in Sarajevo. 20-21 June 2024.**

The SEEHN Secretariat carried out also the following communication strategies in order to manage the modest financial resources and secure timeliness of the implementation of the planned activities at regional level:

- *Negotiation on exchanging with the Presidency and Ex Com by correspondence/online/in-person*
- *Submitting to the NHCs for consultation and collecting approvals by correspondence*
- *Setting up Calendar of events for the Presidency/collecting data by correspondence*

As of 1st July 2024 to 30th June 2025, SEEHN Presidency is to be hold by Bulgaria.

Moreover, the SEEHN Secretariat main efforts were focused on the coordination and signing through letters the **Belgrade Pledge**. So far, the Ministers of the following SEEHN Member States had signed the strategic document: BGR, ISR, MDA, MNE, MKD, ROU and SRB. The signing letters are expected from: ALB and BIH.

5.1. SEEHN Secretariat core activities

5.1.1 47th SEEHN Plenary Meeting

The **47th SEEHN Plenary Meeting on *Strengthening Community Health Services*** was held on 20-21 June 2024, in Sarajevo, BiH.

High-level representatives from SEEHN member states, diplomatic corps and international partners gathered for robust discussions, sharing of best practices, and formulating strategies to enhance community health services across the SEEHN region.

During the dedicated sessions, representatives shared their experiences and achievements in promoting community health services while addressing the challenges and potential solutions to their particular contexts.

At the same time, experts from various fields, including primary health care, epidemiologists, mental health experts, ministry of health representatives delivered insightful presentations, underscoring the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation and active involvement of all segments of society to promote universal health coverage with people centred approach.

Participants emphasized the significance of collaboration among governments, healthcare professionals, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to address promote and implement better community health services.

Discussions centred on developing and implementing effective health communication strategies to reach out to communities and individuals to empower and promote healthy choices. Experts emphasized the need for clear, accurate, and culturally sensitive messaging tailored to different population segments and the utilization of digital platforms to increase health literacy.

SEEHN Plenary Meeting also advanced strategic governance and outlined future objectives for the South-eastern Europe Health Network. **Key highlights** included the signing of the Belgrade Pledge, strategic planning for the next four years, and the presentation of the SEEHN Presidency Report and SEEHN Road Map.

The meeting outlined the strategic priorities of SEEHN for the upcoming four-year period that would support member countries and partners to effectively align their efforts and resources.

The SEEHN Presidency Report, presented during the meeting, highlighted the accomplishments and challenges faced by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency. It displayed the progress in implementing regional initiatives, strengthening cooperation among member states, and improving health system governance. The report also emphasized the importance of collaboration with partners and stakeholders to achieve sustainable health outcomes in the SEEHN region.

During a closed session dedicated to Member States representatives, the participants elected a new Executive Committee for the next two years. The countries of the **new EXCOM** are representatives of ALB, BIH, ISR, MDA, and ROU. Additional discussions were held related to the establishment of a *new RHDC on Health Policies* to be hosted by Bulgaria.

The SEEHN Plenary Meeting concluded with a collective commitment to implement the strategies and recommendations formulated during the event. The meeting witnessed unprecedented engagement and dedication from all participants, highlighting their commitment to safeguarding public health and strengthening health systems in the SEEHN region.

The summary note on the Meeting can be downloaded following the reference link [HERE](#)

5.1.2. SEEHN Executive Training Course on Global Health Diplomacy

In memory of Dr Mira Jovanovski-Dasic, Head of SEEHN Secretariat

Commemoration Ceremony, Sofia, Republic of Bulgaria, 25 November 2024

“Together, we are stronger than we could ever be alone.” – Dr. Mira Jovanovski- Dasic.

Before the start of the workshop the SEEHN community came together both in person in Sofia, and online to honor the extraordinary life and legacy of Dr. Mira Jovanovski-Dasic, a remarkable personality in public health and health diplomacy.

The commemorative event served as a heartfelt prelude to the SEEHN Health Diplomacy Course, where participants reflected on Dr. Dasic's profound influence on public health initiatives, her advocacy for health equity, and her relentless pursuit of cross-border partnerships.

Messages of condolences and tributes poured in from esteemed health leaders from all 9 (nine) SEEHN member states, international collaborators, and colleagues who shared personal stories of her steadfast dedication, and genuine warmth and friendship.

A moment of silence was observed in her memory, underscoring the profound loss felt across the SEEHN community and beyond.

The SEEHN Health Diplomacy Course, which commenced right after the tribute, was dedicated to Dr. Dasic as a testament to her vision of promoting collaboration and enhancing health outcomes across the region.

In recognition of her extraordinary legacy, the SEEHN Secretariat collected condolence messages and letters from ministries of health, partners, collaborators, colleagues, and friends of Dr. Dasic. These tributes were compiled into a book of condolences and presented to her family as a symbol of the immense respect and gratitude she inspired.

Representatives from the SEEHN Member States, participated in the highly anticipated **Executive Training Course on Global Health Diplomacy in Times of Emergencies and Strengthening Preparedness**, held on 25-27 November, in Sofia, Bulgaria.

The event, hosted under the Bulgarian Presidency of the SEEHN in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute, and the WHO Country Office Bulgaria, brought together more than 50 participants, high-level representatives and health diplomacy experts from the region. The event was honoured by the presence of the Bulgarian Minister of Health, Dr. Galya Kondeva, who delivered an inspiring welcome address during the opening ceremony, underscoring Bulgaria's commitment to fostering health diplomacy in the region.

Co-financed by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the course provided an exceptional platform for advancing the capacities of senior health managers in the SEE region.

The primary goal of the training is to enhance preparedness and foster stronger health diplomacy practices, equipping participants to navigate the increasingly complex intersections of health policy, negotiations, and diplomacy.

Objectives of the Course were:

1. To strengthen the management-level capacities of SEEHN member states in health diplomacy with a global health perspective.
2. To build skills to bridge health policy, negotiations, and diplomacy for better health outcomes in the SEE region.
3. To provide a tailored curriculum reflecting the specific needs and challenges of the SEE region in global health emergencies.

The course concluded with a roundtable discussion on the challenges and future directions for sub-regional health diplomacy, followed by a closing ceremony and certificates presentation. The detailed report including main discussions and conclusions is developed and will be designed and printed as Publication/outcome of the Course. The report is uploaded at SEEHN web site, available from downloading [HERE](#). All materials from the course are available at Secretariat upon request. .

The SEEHN Secretariat commends Bulgaria for the extraordinary welcome and support and all Member States for their active participation and dedication to advancing regional health diplomacy. This event marks a significant milestone in SEEHN's continued commitment to enhancing collaboration and preparedness in the face of global health emergencies.

5.2 SEEHN Secretariat protocol and visibility

Throughout the reporting period, Dr. Mira Jovanovski Dasic has effectively executed her role as the Director of the SEEHN Secretariat, demonstrating adept leadership. She consistently maintained high-level diplomatic communication with the Ministries of Health in SEEHN Member States. Furthermore, Dr. Dasic engaged in ongoing correspondence with the Ambassadors representing the SEEHN Member States Presidencies, fostering crucial relationships with key stakeholders pivotal to SEE Network partnerships.

During 2024, 2 countries have had their Presidency mandates within the SEEHN. The first part of the year the Presidency Mandate was held by Bosnia and Herzegovina (1 July 2023 until end of June 2024), followed by the Presidency of Bulgaria for the following six months (July - December 2024, and to continue up to June 2025).

Dr Dasic strated the year with an interview on a crucial theme for the region – mental health. The interview was offered to the Romanian journal *Politici de Sanatate [Policies for Health]* on the **mental health** as a priority and responsibility to engage for the EU countries in sharing expertise, resources and best practices².

² <http://seehn.org/interview-with-dr-mira-jovanovski-dasic-head-of-the-south-eastern-europe-health-network-seehn-secretariat/>

Another interview offered by Dr Dasic to **Anne-Sophie Travert**, *Global Health Policy Advisor, French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs*, and **Lina Papartyte**, *Project Coordinator, EuroHealthNet*, focused on the role of the **South-eastern Europe Health Network in fostering cross-border learning to improve health across the region**³.

Dr Mira Jovanovski Dasic had the pleasure to meet with Director of the Primary Health Care Centre Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, **Dr Nevena Todorovic**. They discussed the outcome of the thematic meeting dedicated to the healthcare workforce, nursing, midwifery challenges, and next steps, on 24 May 2024. As well, the conversation led to the Symposium „Prevention is the foundation for health” and the way to replicate its impact at the regional level.

Dr Dasic efforts’ significantly contributed to advancing SEEHN’s priorities, including promoting mental health as a regional focus and strengthening cross-border collaboration. The transition of the Presidency mandate from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Bulgaria during 2024 highlighted the importance of continuity and collaboration within SEEHN’s framework. Dr. Dasic’s engagements, including impactful interviews and discussions on workforce challenges and regional health initiatives, underscored her commitment to driving progress and fostering innovation in South-Eastern Europe’s health systems.

6. SEEHN Secretariat Technical Activities in January - December 2024

The Belgrade Pledge is a major headline and strategic policy document that should define the SEE Health Network next major axes of interventions for the upcoming four years. The Secretariat strived to form a working group. However, the process is still ongoing as two MSs (ALB and BIH) are yet to commit to the document.

The priority areas to attention shall be support and strengthen healthcare personnel capacities, address mental health, to advance the mHealth solutions and digital agenda, strengthen primary healthcare, promote immunisation, and address health inequalities. Regionally, cross border exchange of information and prevention and control practices among health professionals on COVID -19 and other emergencies, is still important to be improved.

- I. In this respect, after negotiations with **Dr Rivka Hazan-Hozerf**, Head of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Leadership and Governance in Nursing -Israeli counterparts offered course on the “**Nursing Regulatory Standards | Empower Nursing Workforce**”, aimed at strengthening nursing workforce in the SEE region.

The course was carried out by the **WHO Collaboration Center for Leadership and Governance in Nursing** online. This program was specifically designed for nursing leadership on this critical

³ <http://seehn.org/the-role-of-the-south-eastern-europe-health-network-in-fostering-cross-border-learning-to-improve-health-across-the-region/>

subject. The strategic objective aimed **to enhance the quality of care** and elevate the **professional aspect of nursing at the national level** in every member state of the SEEHN.

The senior nurses from all SEEHN Member States participated. The course primarily consisted of self-study modules and included virtual meetings with instructors from the Nursing Division's guidance department. Its objective to equip participants with the necessary **skills to formulate professional regulations in nursing, from initial development to implementation, dissemination, and monitoring.**

SEEHN Secretariat expressed **deep gratitude** to the **Israeli counterparts – the WHO Collaboration Center for Leadership and Governance in Nursing**, which through this activity strengthened the capacity of the nursing in the SEE region and even carried it out to a successful completion under armed conflict situation.

- II.** SEEHN representatives attended the TAIEX Regional Workshop on 112 and e-Call, on **21 and 22 February 2024 in Skopje, MKD**. The Transport Community Permanent Secretariat (TCT Secretariat), together with the European Commission, were the organisers. This workshop fostered closer integration of emergency and communication services in the Western Balkans six and Observing Participants view to further integration with the European Union transport market and build-up of the common regional market.

In alignment with the decisions of the Regional Steering Committee, the Commission's services offered full support of advancing the implementation of the unique emergency number, 112, in the Western Balkans. The workshop aimed to facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration, particularly with firefighters and emergency responders, emphasising the importance of cooperation across different administrative levels. 112 and e-Call systems play a key role in expediting emergency response not only in transport-related incidents but also in natural disasters and criminal activities, thereby constituting a vital investment in public safety. Crosscutting issues with health sector keep this activity under a high priority.

- III.** **Most SEEHN Member States (ALB, BIH, ISR, MNE, MKD, MDA, ROU, SRB) gathered for the Regional Meeting: Secure Future of the Healthcare Workforce and the Provision of High-Quality Health Care: Nursing and Midwifery Challenges and Next Steps, organized on 22-23 May, 2024, in Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska, BIH.**

This meeting is co-organized by the Presidency of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare RS, Federal Ministry of Health and the SEEHN Secretariat.

During the SEEHN Presidency of Bosnia and Hercegovina, great efforts were made to strengthen nursing. Nursing and Midwifery stand as fundamental pillars of the healthcare systems, contributing substantially to the delivery of quality care and ensuring the seamless continuum of services. The

commitment of all ministries of health in the SEE Region high point the collective dedication to advance and recognize nursing and midwifery in the healthcare landscape.

The main **objectives** of the Regional technical meeting were to:

1. Strengthen the Workforce Resilience and Preparedness:

- Identify and discuss strategies to enhance the resilience and preparedness of the nursing and midwifery workforce in the face of current and future health crises.
- Share best practices and innovative approaches to support mental health and well-being among healthcare professionals.

2. Address Workforce Shortages and Skill Development:

- Explore effective solutions to address persistent shortages in the nursing and midwifery workforce, including recruitment, retention, and training programs.
- Develop action plans to improve skill development and continuous professional education to meet the evolving needs of healthcare systems.

3. Foster Collaborative Partnerships and Policy Implementation:

- Promote collaboration between regional stakeholders, including governments, healthcare institutions, and educational organizations, to implement policies that support nursing and midwifery.
- Discuss and formulate recommendations for policy interventions that ensure high-quality healthcare provision, focusing on equity, accessibility, and sustainability.

These objectives aim to address the critical issues facing the nursing and midwifery workforce and outline actionable steps for ensuring robust and high-quality healthcare systems in the region.

6.1 Cooperation with WHO Regional Office for Europe

The strategic framework that governs the partnership between SEEHN and WHO Regional Office for Europe is the **Roadmap for Health and Well-being in the Western Balkans (2021-2025)**⁴. The activities shall be streamlined to achieve common goals settled under the umbrella of European Programme of Work (2020–2025) - United Action for Better Health.

The involved parties continuously implement different actions to achieve the key target for universal health coverage in the Member States of SEEHN.

Technical cooperation for the implementation current strategic documents with the following objective:

⁴ <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/345937/WHO-EURO-2021-3437-43196-60510-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

- To deliver on the commitments of the SEEHN Member States to the Belgrade Pledge, building upon the legacy of the SEE Health Network developing, promoting and supporting regional cooperation and technical activities in public health in SEE for the past 23 years.
- **Communication for health promotion:** SEEHN is marking international days related to the health challenges during the reporting period: *the TB World Day (24 March); The World Health Day: “My Health, My Right” (7 April); the European Immunization Week (21-27 April); The International Nurses Day: “Our Nurses. Our Future. The Economic Power of Care” (12 May); World Mental Health Day 2024: “Mental Health at Work” (10 Oct).*
- **March-May 2024,** The SEE Health Network Secretariat in joint action with the WHO Regional Office for Europe worked on the development of a regional project, which was submitted for funding under the open Second Call of the Pandemic Fund. The implementation of the project **Empower and Protect: A Regional Leadership and Management Enhancement Program for Health Executives in SEEHN Member States (“Empower and Protect”)** would take place across 8 (eight) SEEHN countries, over a period of three years, ensuring comprehensive regional coverage while addressing the unique context of each member state. The **"Empower and Protect"** initiative aims to fundamentally strengthen health management capacities within the SEEHN region, to bolster the resilience and responsiveness of healthcare systems to current and emergent health challenges. This initiative was meticulously designed to enhance leadership, governance, and operational efficiencies across the SEEHN member states through a robust, multi-faceted training and development program.

The Project Applicant was SEEHN Secretariat, and the Implementing Entity were designed to be the Hospitals, jointly with the Quality and Patient Safety Unit at the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The overall estimated project budget for three years is approximately 40 million US dollars for all the nine SEEHN member states. *The applied project has not been selected, yet it has been advised to apply in future.*

Participation to WHO high level meetings:

- ✓ The SEE Health Network BIH Presidency mandate, addressed the **77th World Health Assembly, held in the period 26.05.-1.06.2024.** The declaration focused on the main priorities as community mental health services and nursing leadership. Additionally, were highlighted **actions focused** on data quality improvement and control, non-communicable diseases population-based registries; improvement and promotion of patients’ rights; pandemic preparedness, influenza surveillance, and immunization.
- ✓ The Bulgarian Presidency, represented SEEHN by Dr Angel Kunchev, Head of delegation, at the **74th WHO Regional Committee for Europe, held in Copenhagen, on 29 October 2024, with a statement.** The intervention firmly committed to the achievement of Universal Health Coverage in SEEHN and on three key priorities: **global and regional health diplomacy, health literacy and e-health.** Additionally, the inauguration of a new Regional Health Development Center for Nursing and Midwifery, through the National Order of Nurses and Midwives and operating under the auspices of the South Eastern Europe Health Network has

been highlighted along with a set of efforts to promote nursing leadership in the region led by Romania.

6.2 Cooperation with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

SEEHN has been engaging with RCC throughout the reporting year frame. It has been some multi-framework partnerships with WHO EURO and CEI. The continued efforts aimed at striving for better health and well-being in SEE Region.

6.3 Cooperation with the European Commission

Cooperation with European Commission (EC) continued to develop during 2024. SEEHN agreed with EC Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Tool (TAIEX) Instrument representatives, to organise the further multi-country workshop in person for better inter-countries exchanges.

The Secretariat is under continuous expectation and coordination for project proposals concept notes eligible for TAIEX assistance.

SEEHN representatives attended the *TAIEX Regional Workshop on 112 and e-Call*, with the support of the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat (TCT Secretariat), together with the European Commission. The event took place on **21 and 22 February 2024 in Skopje, MKD**. Furthermore, the SEEHN Secretariat provided feedback to overall workshop report aimed to enhance road safety in case of emergencies and transport of dangerous goods.

6.4 Other partners

In 2024, the SEEHN Secretariat maintained its commitment to fostering strong partnerships with partner organizations and member countries, albeit at a slower pace due to transitional adjustments and evolving priorities. Regular information exchange and efforts to strengthen existing collaborations remained a focus, with valuable discussions exploring new partnership opportunities among public health experts, NGOs, and government representatives. These efforts underscored SEEHN's unique role in facilitating dialogue and negotiation to align diverse interests for the collective benefit of regional public health.

Central European Initiative (CEI)

CEI Call for proposals 2024

The SEEHN Secretariat has developed and submitted application for co-financing under the open CEI Call for proposals on the subject *Healthy and active ageing in the SEEHN MSs - WBs and beyond: challenges, progress and potential policies through economic lens*.

The Secretariat has been notified of the project approval. The activity is planned to be implemented second half of 2025.

European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG)

This year the SEEHN and the EHFG supported the participation of three SEEHN representatives in the EHFG 2024. Under the main theme *“Shifting sands of health – Democracy, demographics, digitalisation”*, two participants attended from the Ministry of Health, Romania: **Mrs. Mihaela Gîză**, Head of the International Relations and European Affairs Unit and the national focal point for communication or public relations, and **Mr. Bogdan Vinersar**, Director for regulatory and medical professional training direction. The third representative was **Mr. Ardit Gabili**, Adviser to the Minister’s Cabinet, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Albania.

This participation was made possible by the SEEHN Secretariat funding and EHFG support to strengthen cross-border collaboration in health diplomacy and regional public health efforts. Mrs. Gîză and Mr. Gabili also participated in the EHFG 2024 Capacity-Building Initiative, a 1.5-day pre-conference workshop focused on *“Inclusive Dialogue in Difficult Times”*. The initiative explored the topic of „Deep Democracy”, a facilitation method that emphasises the importance of minority voices in decision-making processes and is designed to bring out underlying motives and opinions to reach more inclusive and informed decisions that reflect a broad consensus and effectively utilise a group’s diverse perspectives. This experience will undoubtedly enhance the future work of the participants, enabling SEEHN to continue to have a profound impact on regional health cooperation, resilience-building, and promoting inclusive health policies.

The participation of representatives from Romania and Albania, supported by the SEEHN, underscores the network’s commitment to fostering cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange in the shifting sands landscape of health policy and public health.

EuroHealthNet

SEEHN Secretariat and EuroHealthNet proved the power of joint actions and partnership between aimed at cross-border collaboration to improve regional public health efforts. EuroHealthNet organized the Members-only capacity-building study visit: *Understanding EU decision-making for health improvement and for a meaningful engagement of public health actors’ representatives in the EHFG 2024*, held on 2– 3 September 2024.

SEEHN supported the participation of **Dr Svetlana Nicolaescu**, SEEHN Executive Committee Chair and Deputy Secretary General, from Moldova. This experience was designed to enhance participants’ capacity to engage meaningfully with decision-makers, strengthening their ability to contribute to policy impact. Following the European Parliament Elections in June 2024, the Study Visit successfully fostered a deeper understanding of EU institutions, policies, and their influence on both national and regional initiatives.

Another objective was to strengthen Partnership’s understanding of EU policymaking to better address social and health inequalities, thus advancing a sustainable, fair, and inclusive Europe through healthier communities.

Participants engaged in interactive sessions, explored the European Parliament, and attended diverse workshops that provided valuable insights into the EU's operational landscape. Practical exercises, including a role-play simulation at the European Parliament's visitor center, allowed members to experience effective advocacy first-hand.

This capacity-building event also facilitated enriching discussions with various EuroHealthNet members, enhancing their appreciation of the EU's cultural and political heart.

European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

In July 2024, SEEHN and the EPHA have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This MoU marks the beginning of a strategic collaboration aimed at improving public health outcomes and promoting sustainable health systems in the South-Eastern European region. This partnership is rooted in a shared vision of fostering healthier communities through joint initiatives and capacity-building efforts in line with the **UN Agenda 2030** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

The agreement formalises a framework for cooperation between the two organisations, including organising joint events, promoting capacity-building activities, and contributing to the achievement of **SDG 3—Good Health and Well-being**.

The MoU emphasises collaboration in several key areas, including:

- Organising joint public health events and fostering actions aimed at achieving better health outcomes for all;
- Promoting institution- and capacity-building projects related to public health, such as healthy environments, health service delivery, and digital health;
- Joint contributions to the UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly **SDG 3**, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages.

This MoU will serve as a foundation for the two organisations to deepen their partnership over the next two years, with the potential for extension. The collaboration will also aim to facilitate knowledge sharing, support health system reforms, and promote the role of civil society in addressing public health challenges.

The first step to advance joint efforts shall focus to strengthen ***Digital Health Literacy for All***, in particular vulnerable populations in the South Eastern Europe. In this respect, a project proposal has been developed and coordinated for further donor fundraising.

UNFPA

Director of Secretariat, Dr Dasic was invited to have intervention under the high-level session within the **Regional Forum of the EECA Alliance for Cervical Cancer Prevention, held in Istanbul, 5-7 November 2024**. Dr Dasic could not attend due to health issues, and Dr Silvia Bino, Director of SEEHN RHDC on CDCS, hosted by Albania, participated at the meeting and presented on behalf of the SEEHN. The participation was organized under the bilateral cooperation with UNFPA, under the signed MoU with SEEHN. The intervention under the high-level session on 6 November 2024 gave the opportunity to raise awareness on cervical cancer and foster sub-regional cooperation closer between MKD, MNE and ALB.

7. Technical Activities of the SEEHN RHDCs

The new strategic planning declaration - the Belgrade Pledge, calls for cooperation upon joint action of the Member states with partners on the following main directions:

- **Political:** Keep health and well-being high atop the political and investment agendas of the SEEHN and its member states and partners
- **Investment:** Promote increasing investments in health and well-being in the SEE, and improve its value by combining the resources of SEEHN member states and partners
- **Technical:** Promote united action and coherence among member states and partners in implementing the vital areas for action in the SEE 2022-2026 strategy.

To date, the SEEHN has acquired one new RHDC, which makes ten formally designated RHDC for technical collaboration in various mutually agreed public health areas.

The performance of the RHDCs varies between Member States and is mostly dependant on the financing of their activities. In line with the SEEHN MoU, each Member State with a designated RHDC does have financial obligations only during the first year of the respective Centre's designation. After that, RHDC shall take the ownership with the support of the SEEHN to fundraise, implement, manage and coordinate the regional collaborative activities in the respective area.

The SEEHN Secretariat continued the work as planned to provide further support to the SEE RHDCs as it has been agreed that the technical collaboration and outcomes at regional and national levels is of utmost importance for the Network and its international visibility.

Following the adopted SOPs for RHDCs as well as conclusions from the Third Ex Com meeting held in Sarajevo on 19 June 2024, and Closed Session of the 47th SEEHN Plenary (21 June 2024), the Secretariat will start the process of revision of the RHDCs regional efforts and in communication with the respective member state will agree on the status of each RHDC. In the forthcoming period, each member state should agree whether respective RHDC will be reinforced and continue to act as RHDC or will be closed and eventually the respective topic will be offered to some other member state.

Secretariat will elaborate and submit Document including proposals/decisions for each SEEHN RHDCs during the next 48th SEEHN Plenary meeting in Sofia, June 2025, where Final Decision will be taken.

7.1. RHDC Mental Health (BIH)

RHDC in mental health is hosted by BIH and is under reorganisation process that limits its possibilities to engage more actively in the regional activities. However, due to high priority to mental health, SEEHN Secretariat launched the process to conduct an analysis of the situation in the mental health field in the Member States of SEEHN. The research results aim to provide useful information on the state of the art related to the SEEHN mental services in 2021 and draw recommendations what can be done at the regional level.

It will be a comparative survey with the analysis made in 2014. The aim of this study is to conduct a review of all efforts and developments in each country and in the region. The activity is coordinated and carried out by Prof. Dr Stojan Bajraktarov, National Focal Point for Mental Health to the SEEHN, MKD. The data collection has been started in 2021 and continued through 2021 and 2022. The first data analysis was completed in 2022. The final analysis and results were presented during 2023. At the moment, the final reviews after proof reading process is to finalize the report.

The preliminary results of the SEEHN **Comparative analysis of the situation in the mental health in the SEE region**, conducted from August 2021 to December 2022, **were shared** within the **“Regional Conference on Mental Health”**, in Sarajevo in May 2023.

During 2024, the expert team was conducting coordination and data validation with MSs. It is expected to be published in 2025.

7.2. RHDC on Human Resources in Health (Moldova)

The RHDC on HRH, Ministry of Health, the National Agency of Public Health of the Republic of Moldova and the SEEHN Secretariat organized a highly anticipated meeting on **4-5 June, 2024**, in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, on **Medical Licensing (to Practice) and Registration System of Health Practitioners. Insights on Legal Framework and Related Experiences focused on the Medical Licensing and Registration System of Health Practitioners.**

This event provided valuable insights on the Legal Framework and Related Experiences in the healthcare sector and will serve as a platform for participants to share best practices, discuss challenges, and foster collaboration in the field of health regulation.

The meeting featured expert speakers, panel discussions, and interactive sessions aimed at promoting knowledge exchange and networking opportunities among attendees. Key topics addressed included advancements in medical licensing, registration processes for health practitioners, and the importance of a robust legal framework in healthcare.

One of the most significant challenges faced by SEEHN Member States is the brain drain of healthcare professionals, driven by the migration of talent to Western Europe in search of better opportunities. This exacerbates existing issues such as workforce shortages, disparities in healthcare access, and the need for continuous professional development. While other challenges include improving healthcare infrastructure and ensuring equitable access to services, addressing brain drain is critical. It requires strategic efforts to enhance working conditions, provide competitive incentives, and invest in the professional growth of healthcare workers to retain talent within the region.

7.3. RHDC on Nursing and Midwifery (Romania)

7.3.1. SEEHN Regional Health Development Centre for Health Professionals and Midwives in Southeast Europe – Official Inauguration

The SEEHN celebrated the official inauguration of the SEEHN Regional Health Development Centre for Health Professionals and Midwives in South-eastern Europe, marking a significant advancement in promoting excellence in nursing and midwifery education and practices across the region, on October 23, Bucharest, ROU.

The new RHDC, led by the Order of Nurses, Midwives, and Medical Assistants of Romania (OAMGMAMR) in partnership with the Ministry of Health and SEEHN, is dedicated to supporting sustainable health system development and strengthening collaboration among SEEHN member states. This Centre will function as a vital hub for professional training, policy development, and sharing of best practices throughout South-eastern Europe, working in line with global health standards to raise healthcare quality and accessibility.

High-profile guests, including Nicolae Ciucă, President of the Romanian Senate, who emphasized the importance of investing in healthcare workforce development, attended the event:

Among other supporters, Professor Diana Loreta Păun, Public Health Department Coordinator for the Romanian Presidential Administration, and Professor Alexandru Rafila, Romanian Minister of Health, shared messages reaffirming their commitment to the Centre's work and to regional health initiatives. Dr. Florentina Furtunescu, Member of the SEEHN Executive Committee, moderated the event.

Throughout the event, speakers underscored the Centre's crucial role in addressing healthcare workforce challenges, with a special focus on enhancing data collection to shape informed policies and boost cross-border cooperation.

This official inauguration underscores a renewed commitment to advancing healthcare professions in South-eastern Europe, with robust support from both regional and international partners, and paves the way for sustainable healthcare progress in the years to come.

7.3.2. SEEHN Member States representatives participated at the International Council of Nurses's (ICN) 125th Anniversary Celebration in Romania

The ICN's 125th Anniversary Celebration took place in Bucharest on 21 and 22nd of October 2024.

In honour of ICN's 125-year journey, celebrating the invaluable contributions and unwavering commitment of nurses to enhancing global health, SEEHN supported the participation of its member states representatives.

During this celebration, it was delved into the profound implications of the **2024 International Nurses Day theme: "Our Nurses. Our Future. The economic power of care"**, exploring nursing's challenges, and devising strategic initiatives to garner support and momentum for investing in nurses and our shared future. A declaration advocating for support in nursing and midwifery was presented for adoption and signed by present stakeholders.

This dynamic two-day event blended celebratory activities with meaningful discussions, showcasing and engaging conversations, inspiring keynote speeches, and chances to connect with respected global personalities and representatives from leading international institutions.

Her Royal Highness Princess Muna Al-Hussein of Jordan was the guest of honor at ICN's 125th Anniversary Celebration. Princess Muna Al-Hussein is a beacon of inspiration in the world of health and health care. With a legacy spanning over six decades, she has passionately championed the roles of nurses and midwives, advocating tirelessly for their recognition and advancement on the global stage.

The event was hosted by the Order of Nurses, Midwives, and Medical Assistants of Romania, and held under the High Patronage of the President of Romania, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, the Committee for Health and Family of the Chamber of Deputies and the Public Health Committee of the Romanian Senate.

7.3.3. Sub-Regional Workshop to Strengthen Reporting of National Health Workforce Accounts (NHWA 2.0) and Health Workforce Data Quality Review for the State of the World Nursing Report 2025

The workshop took place in Bucharest on 29-30 August 2024, organized under the auspices of the SEEHN Secretariat, financed by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and hosted by the Order of Nurses and Midwives in Romania under the umbrella of the SEEHN RHDC for Nurses and Midwives.

The Sub-Regional Workshop first objective was the strengthening of reporting on **National Health Workforce Accounts**, planned for publication in April 2025. The second **objective** was to harness this unique opportunity to build a **network of dedicated focal points in the South Eastern Europe region**.

There were more than 40 participants, out of which 35 in person and 8 online, from all 9 SEEHN member states, together with the SEEHN Secretariat, representatives of the partner-state Slovenia, and of the host organization.

Among the identified commonalities across SEEHN countries, there are:

- Challenges in standardizing health worker definitions
- Recognition of the need for a select number of indicators to be routinely monitored
- Data flow issues between local authorities, the national level, and across governmental institutions
- Development of health workforce registries in some countries, with others recognizing the need to establish them
- The need for an enabling environment for digital transformation
- The importance of stakeholder involvement and coordination mechanisms in health workforce data and evidence
- The need for capacity building and training in data utilization and health workforce planning.

Conclusions and the Future of Collaborations:

The efforts of these two days will significantly contribute to improving the accuracy of health workforce data in SEEHN member states and will be reflected in the second edition of the Global State of Nursing report.

OAMGMAMR as the host of the new SEEHN Regional Development Center for Nurses and Midwives in Romania remains committed to the development of a sub-regional strategy dedicated to the nurse and midwife professions, together with its regional and international partners.

Finally, this event was another opportunity to exchange and explore further regional needs and opportunities to build cross-country and cross-regional initiatives that SEEHN together with WHO shall support in future.

8. Conclusions & ways forward

The SEEHN Secretariat has successfully navigated a transformative year, marked by transitions, challenges, and achievements. Despite a slower pace in 2024, substantial progress was made in advancing regional collaboration, strengthening partnerships, and addressing critical public health priorities.

The Secretariat's efforts were pivotal in sustaining momentum across several key areas:

- **Regional Collaboration and Governance:** The transition of SEEHN Presidencies from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Bulgaria underscored the importance of continuity in leadership and collective action. Activities such as the signing of the Belgrade Pledge, although incomplete, laid the foundation for stronger strategic governance and alignment with SEEHN's long-term goals.

- **Health System Strengthening:** Notable strides were made in workforce development, including the promotion of nursing and midwifery leadership and enhanced digital health integration. Regional events, such as workshops on health workforce data quality and cross-border collaboration, further solidified SEEHN's role in capacity building.
- **Partnership Development:** Collaborations with key stakeholders, including WHO, EuroHealthNet, EPHA, and the European Commission, displayed the value of multisectoral engagement. These partnerships facilitated knowledge exchange, capacity-building initiatives, and policy advancements tailored to the region's needs.
- **Emerging Priorities:** Mental health, digital health, and workforce resilience emerged as critical themes, with targeted actions and plans to address these pressing challenges.

Ways Forward

To build on this progress, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Finalize the Belgrade Pledge:** Renew diplomatic efforts to secure the commitment of all Member States, ensuring alignment on regional health priorities.
2. **Strengthen Regional Capacities:** Expand training programs and technical workshops to address workforce shortages, enhance leadership, and support digital health advancements.
3. **Enhance Communication Platforms:** Accelerate the development of the intranet for EU integration and foster real-time information sharing among Member States.
4. **Promote Equity and Sustainability:** Focus on reducing health disparities, particularly in rural areas, and explore innovative financing mechanisms to sustain regional initiatives.
5. **Deepen Partnerships:** Leverage collaborations with existing partners while exploring new opportunities to strengthen SEEHN's influence and resources.

SEEHN remains committed to advancing public health, fostering solidarity, and ensuring sustainable progress across the region. With a unified approach and collective action, the Network will continue to address shared challenges and drive impactful health outcomes for all Member States.