



## News from SEEHN

# The control of chronic non-communicable diseases is a success in the sustainable development of society

The SEEHN is entering its second decade, with a clear commitment of Member States to take responsibility for the further development of partnership and institution networks.

### About SEEHN

The South-eastern European Health Network (SEEHN) is a governmental sub-regional cooperation established in 2001. SEEHN consists of ten countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Israel, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia

WHO, Regional Office for Europe is one of SEEHN's founders and has supported the SEEHN from its establishment.

For more information:  
www.moh.gov.mk

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The 32<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting of the SEEHN took place in Podgorica, Montenegro from 27 to 28 November 2013. It took stock of the activities during the Montenegrin Presidency and fostered consensus of the Network for activities to take place during the upcoming Presidency of Romania. During the Montenegrin Presidency of the SEEHN, the Network actively participated in the process of developing the SEE 2020 Growth Strategy (www.rcc.int). The South East Europe (SEE) 2020 Strategy, developed under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), was adopted in Sarajevo on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2013, at the Ministerial Conference of the South East Europe Investment Committee. Creation of one million new jobs in SEE until 2020 is the most important aim of the strategy "Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective (www.rcc.int).



Delegates at the 32<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting of the SEEHN

### Key strategy actions in Dimension M 'Health'

A set of key actions have been identified to address the Dimension M Health in the inclusive growth strategy (www.rcc.int). They include:

- Introduce policy measures for improving the health gain of the populations,

with a focus on low-income and disadvantaged groups, by strengthening the delivery of universal and high-quality health-promoting services

- Strengthen the institutions and improve inter-sectoral governance of the health sector at all levels, including health information infrastructure and regional cross border information exchange
- Harmonise cross-border public health and public health services legislation, standards and procedures; develop mutual recognition and trust to enable the creation of a Free Trade Area from a public health perspective
- Strengthen human resources in the health sector, harmonise the qualifications of health professionals in the SEE region, monitor Human Resources for Health (HRH) mobility.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Meeting of the SEEHN adopted a decision to reinforce the health chapter of the SEE 2020 Strategy with the prospect to formulate specific implementation activities in future.

Chronic non-communicable diseases represent a major challenge for the countries of South Eastern Europe, not only as a health issue, but as a serious threat to the development of society. The Health in All Policies is a means to achieve general social understanding that health, a state of physical, mental and social well-being should be a whole-of-society task. In this sense, any economic development program is inadequate if it has no health and social dimension. There is a wealth of evidence that investment in health is an investment in the sustainable development of societies. Health, being dependent on multiple



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and complex determinants, lifestyle, environmental, societal, economic and political, was a responsibility not only of the health sector but of the whole society. Development Strategy 2020 in South-Eastern Europe, which defines the creation of new jobs and innovative economic development, can not avoid the health and fighting against the preventable chronic non-communicable diseases. Therefore, it is a great achievement that a Health Chapter in the document is one of the important pillars of the strategy of development until 2020.

Strategies are serious documents, but without real implementation it may remain as a set of desires and good intentions without result at the level of the citizens and the population at large. The main challenge is precisely to define realistic action plans, as well as the realization of these plans. The SEEHN is preparing itself during the Romanian Presidency not only to develop its Health



The 32<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting of the SEEHN in Podgorica, Montenegro, 27-28 November 2013.

Action Plan but to launch implementation of concerted actions at regional and national levels supported by its main partners and the RCC.

# A SEE health regional workshop on preventive actions for reducing the excessive salt intake for NCD prevention, Podgorica, Montenegro, 25-26 December 2013

A very rich and informative meeting, organized by the EC TAIEX Instrument, with active participation of experts from the EU (Croatia, Latvia, Slovenia, Romania, and Denmark), WHO Europe, and more than 50 participants from the 10 SEEHN countries, dealt with the important issue of salt intake that directly affects health and could result in hypertension and brain stroke if consumed in excessive levels (recommended daily intake of 5 g). Currently it is assessed that the average salt intake varies between 8 and 13-15 grams daily in the region.

The Workshop reviewed in depth the EU Regulation EU/169/2011, European Parliament and Council, the food information to consumers and the WHO Europe recommended “best-buys” interventions of its Action Plan for Preventing and control of Non-communicable Diseases.

SEE countries show a large variety of approaches used to tackle the problem, both from the political (administrative) and practical points of view. In all cases, the

Ministries of Health and Agriculture are the main actors along with the food industry and very often the consumer organizations.

As a result, a huge SEE initiative of concerted regional and national actions will be launched in 2014 and onwards, based on a formal signed Decision by the SEE Health Network Presidency. The actions will focus on: (I) Data collection, monitoring and research; (II) Implementing national action plans; (III) Minimum benchmarks for salt content in major food categories; (IV) Labeling; (V) Effective public awareness campaigns; (VI) Industry involvement, and (VII) Vigilant and transparent monitoring, evaluation and reformulation of the regional, national and sub-national policies and interventions.

The implementation of the initiative will be coordinated by the SEE Regional Health Development Centre in Podgorica, Montenegro.