Regional Committee for Europe
70th session
Virtual session, 14–15 September 2020
Provisional agenda item 1(d)

Report of the fifth session

This document contains the report of the fifth and final session of the Twenty-seventh Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC), held in Copenhagen, Denmark on 8 September 2020, before the opening of the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe on 14 September. This document should be read in conjunction with the consolidated report on the work of the Twenty-seventh SCRC (document EUR/RC70/4).
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Opening of the session

1. The Twenty-seventh Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) held its fifth session on Tuesday, 8 September 2020 by means of a virtual meeting.

2. The report of the Twenty-seventh SCRC’s second special session, held virtually on 29 June 2020, had been approved electronically. The consolidated report of the Twenty-seventh SCRC (document EUR/RC70/4) was available on the official website of the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC70). In the interests of time and given the virtual format of RC70, the statement of the SCRC Chairperson to the Regional Committee would be pre-recorded and posted on the official RC70 website, together with the text of the statement in the four official working languages of the WHO European Region.

3. The WHO Regional Director for Europe gave a brief update on the various activities undertaken since the previous regular session of the SCRC (15 May 2020). In the area of health emergencies, the first pillar in WHO’s Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 (GPW 13), a high-level meeting on schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic had been organized jointly with the Ministry of Health of Italy. The WHO Health Emergencies programme had conducted 46 capacity-building webinars on clinical management, infection prevention and control, and laboratories. Over 50 emergency response missions had been carried out and 130 shipments of supplies (valued at US$ 40 million) had been delivered across the Region. The Regional Director had signed a financial agreement with the Government of Turkey to establish a new WHO European Centre for Preparedness for Humanitarian and Health Emergencies. HealthBuddy, a new multilingual chatbot to engage with communities in Europe and central Asia on COVID-19, had been launched in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund.

4. On universal health coverage, the second pillar of GPW 13, the Regional Director had initiated, as previously consulted with the SCRC, the development of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development. Chaired by Professor Mario Monti, President of Bocconi University, Italy, the independent Commission had held its inaugural meeting on 26 August 2020. The WHO Regional Office for Europe was continuing to explore how to strengthen equitable access to affordable vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics and was planning for the meeting on the subject to be held in Oslo, Norway, in March 2021. In cooperation with the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region, the Regional Office had developed a framework of competencies for the public health workforce.

5. In the area of health and well-being, the third pillar of GPW 13, the Mental Health Coalition had been launched with the aim of improving mental health policies and practices across the Region, and a webinar had been conducted by the United Nations Issue-based Coalition on Gender Equality to share lessons learned and challenges in addressing gender-based violence in country-level responses to COVID-19. The Fourteenth Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Tuberculosis for the European Region had been convened in May 2020 to advise on prioritized actions to respond to tuberculosis (TB), drug-resistant TB and TB/HIV coinfection during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. A regional working group was coordinating COVID-19 vaccine development and deployment within the COVAX Facility initiative.

6. Structural alignment of the activities of the Regional Office in Copenhagen was under way, in full consultation with the staff of the Regional Office and the Staff Association, and
the new detailed organigram would be issued on 21 September 2020, concluding the in-depth functional review. The Regional Director had signed new bilateral country agreements with Czechia, Latvia, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova. The Regional Office had continued to grow its media impact through regular live press briefings and interviews with regionally important media.

7. One member of the SCRC underscored the need for all countries in the Region to have access to COVID-19 vaccines and called for close regional involvement in the COVAX Facility. In reply, the Regional Emergency Director confirmed that the Regional Office was working with scientists from the Russian Federation on the safety and efficacy of a COVID-19 vaccine developed in that country and welcomed the indication that the European Union would join the COVAX Facility. Vaccines should be considered a global health good.

Adoption of the provisional agenda and the provisional programme

8. The provisional agenda (document EUR/SC27(5)/2 – see Annex 1) and the provisional programme (document EUR/SC27(5)/3) were adopted.

Provisional agenda and provisional annotated programme of the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC70), and brief discussion on the governance and policy topics on the provisional agenda of RC70

9. The Regional Director informed the SCRC that, since its special session held at the end of June, the programme of RC70 had been further refined. The first day of RC70 would be devoted to political and strategic aspects, focusing on discussion of an address by the Director-General and the Regional Director’s report to the Regional Committee, including lessons learned from the current pandemic, and the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025 – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”, which sets out the vision and priorities for the coming five years. The second day of the session would start with a private meeting for nominations and elections to WHO bodies and committees, followed by presentations and discussion of the WHO transformation at global and regional levels and the Proposed high-level programme budget 2022–2023.

10. Interventions by special guests at RC70 would include addresses by: Her Royal Highness The Crown Princess of Denmark; Her Majesty Queen Mathilde of the Belgians; Ms Stella Kyriakides, the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety; and Professor Mario Monti, Chairperson of the newly instituted Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development.

11. In accordance with Rule 10.2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe, the SCRC proposed the following nominations for officers of RC70:
   • Dr Alexey Tsoy (Kazakhstan), President
   • Dr Søren Brostrom (Denmark), Executive President
   • Dr Iva Pejnović Franelić (Croatia), Deputy Executive President
   • Dr Nora Kronig Romero (Switzerland), Rapporteur.
Draft resolutions and decisions for RC70

12. The Team Leader, Regional Governance, recalled the provisions of rules 22 bis and 22 ter of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe and informed the SCRC that no formal proposals for new resolutions or decisions and no substantive amendments to proposed resolutions or decisions had been transmitted to the Regional Director.

13. One member of the SCRC noted that, following the fourth session of the Twenty-seventh SCRC, Member States had adopted a decision through a “written silence” procedure whereby the location of RC71 would be switched to Tel Aviv, Israel. She also asked whether the presentation of Member States’ views in advance of a Regional Committee session precluded their speaking at the session itself. In reply, the Team Leader, Regional Governance, explained that the proposed dates of RC71 coincided with a religious festival in Israel, which was why the draft resolution contained in document EUR/RC70/Conf.Doc./3 envisaged the holding of RC71 in Copenhagen, Denmark, and of RC72 in Tel Aviv. As provided for in the draft decision on special rules and procedures for a virtual 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (document EUR/RC70/Conf.Doc./4), written statements could complement a live intervention, whereas video statements would be broadcast in lieu of a live intervention.

Establishment of the Credentials Committee

14. The SCRC decided that the Credentials Committee for RC70 would consist of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Twenty-seventh SCRC and the SCRC member from Switzerland.

Report of the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe subgroups

Subgroup on country work

15. The SCRC member from Poland, speaking as chair of the subgroup on country work, reported that, since the third session (March 2020), preliminary analysis of the responses to the survey of Member States with country offices had been completed. Additional mapping of human resources across country offices had been made by the Secretariat and a small number of functions in country offices had been identified for immediate creation of posts. In consultation with certain Member States, it had been decided to reconvert some country offices to be headed by national personnel. An in-depth functional review was under way in the Regional Office, which would, inter alia, clarify contact points for technical issues both in Member States and in country offices. In May, a consultation had been conducted with WHO representatives and heads of country offices as part of the reorganization of the Regional Office. A new Director of the Division of Country Support and Communications had been appointed and would start work on 21 September 2020.

16. The chair of the subgroup suggested that a plan could be drawn up, for submission to RC71, concerning WHO’s presence in and support to countries and comprising a range of
different modalities of cooperation. She accordingly proposed that the Twenty-seventh Standing Committee should recommend an extension of the subgroup’s mandate.

17. The Chairperson of the SCRC noted that proposal, which would be forwarded to the Twenty-eighth Standing Committee for consideration.

Subgroup on governance

18. In the absence of the SCRC member from Hungary, who had served as chair of the subgroup on governance, the Team Leader, Regional Governance, reported that the subgroup had held its first teleconference on 14 January 2020, followed by a face-to-face meeting on 10 March, prior to the third session of the Twenty-seventh Standing Committee in Copenhagen, and two WebEx meetings on 6 May and 22 June. Through the outcomes of these meetings, the SCRC subgroup had provided comprehensive advice to Member States and the Regional Director with regard to:

- arriving at the best arrangements for RC70, improving the efficiency, effectiveness and attractiveness of proceedings, proposing the right content and format for the RC70 programme, and drafting special rules of procedure for its conduct in a virtual format and for the adoption of decisions through the “written silence” procedure;
- involving non-State actors more actively by meeting with, briefing and consulting them between Regional Committee sessions, as was done for instance on the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025; and
- following global discussions on governance and advising on regional measures: during the COVID-19 outbreak, the Regional Office had called for two ad hoc meetings to consult the SCRC, written consultation procedures had been used for reviewing progress reports for RC70, and written statements would be used for RC70.

19. The Chairperson of the SCRC paid tribute to the extraordinary skills of the chair of the subgroup in steering its work during turbulent times. The Regional Director expressed appreciation for the work done by all the members of the subgroup.

Update on the activities of WHO’s global governing bodies

20. The Team Leader, Regional Governance, informed the SCRC of the provisional dates of special and resumed meetings of WHO’s global governing bodies:

- special session of the Executive Board, 5–6 October 2020;
- resumed session of the Seventy-third World Health Assembly, 9–14 November 2020;
- resumed session of the 147th session of the Executive Board, 16 November 2020;
- thirty-second meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee, 21–23 October 2020.

21. The high-level meeting to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations would be held on 21 September 2020. The general debate at the seventy-fifth session
of the General Assembly would be held from 22 to 26 September and on 29 September 2020. Most meetings at the seventy-fifth session would be virtual.

22. The observer from Finland, speaking as the link between the WHO Executive Board and the Twenty-seventh SCRC, noted that a hybrid model would be adopted for forthcoming meetings of WHO’s global governing bodies, involving both physical and virtual attendance. The co-chairs of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, former Prime Minister of New Zealand Helen Clark and former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, had announced the high-level and diverse membership of the Panel the previous week. The Panel, which was due to meet for the first time on 16 September 2020, would present an interim report to the special session of the Executive Board and a final report to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly in May 2021.

23. The Regional Director informed the SCRC that Dr Bruce Aylward, Senior Advisor to the Director-General, Organizational Change, had been appointed as the link between the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response and the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development.

**Elections and nominations**

24. The SCRC met in private to consider the nomination of four members of the Executive Board and the election of four members of the SCRC, and it agreed on the shortlist of candidates for those two bodies that would be submitted to heads of delegations.

25. In view of the fact that the request for nominations for membership of the Policy and Coordination Committee (PCC) of the Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) had reached the Regional Office after the procedure had already been launched, and in order not to overburden countries in the midst of the pandemic, it was proposed, in consultation with legal counsel and the President of RC69, to consider extending the mandate of Czechia by one year.

26. The SCRC agreed to the proposal to extend Czechia’s membership of the PCC/HRP by one year. That would allow the Regional Committee to elect a new member at RC71 for a term beginning on 1 January 2022.

**Other matters, closure of the session**

27. The outgoing member from Lithuania said that he had been grateful for the opportunity to take part in the work of the Standing Committee.

28. The observer from Greece, participating in his capacity as Chairperson of the Twenty-sixth Standing Committee, said that he considered his election as Chairperson of the SCRC and his participation in the presidency of important sessions of the Regional Committee to be noteworthy milestones, both for him personally and for his country. He was pleased to have been given the opportunity, through the SCRC, to participate in work to promote the health of migrants and refugees, access to medicines and vaccines, and the development of primary health care systems. He hoped that the friendships he had developed would last for many years to come.
29. The Chairperson of the Twenty-seventh Standing Committee said that it had been an honour and a pleasure for him personally and for his country to be part of the Standing Committee and to chair it for the past year. He wished to thank all members of the SCRC and the Regional Director for their trust and support during a difficult and unpredictable year.
Annex 1. Agenda

1. Opening of the session by the Chairperson and the Regional Director

2. Adoption of the provisional agenda and the provisional programme

3. Provisional agenda and provisional annotated programme of the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC70), and brief discussion on the governance and policy topics on the provisional agenda of RC70

4. Draft resolutions and decisions for RC70

5. Establishment of the Credentials Committee

6. Report of the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe subgroups

7. Update on the activities of WHO’s global governing bodies

8. Elections and nominations
   (a) Nomination of four members of the Executive Board
   (b) Election of four members of the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee
   (c) Membership Category 2 of the Policy and Coordination Committee (PCC), Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP)

9. Other matters, closure of the session