

**MAINSTREAMING ACTIVITIES AND PRIORITIES OF WORK UNDER THE
PROTOCOL INTO THE POLICY MAKING OF THE WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION (WHO)**

Prepared by the secretariat

INTRODUCTION

Article 17 of the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes lays down that the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe and the Regional Director of the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization shall carry out the secretariat functions for the Protocol. Under Article 17, paragraph 1 (c), the Executive Secretary and the Regional Director are tasked with “the performance of such other functions as may be determined by the Meeting of the Parties on the basis of available resources”.

The current paper informs on the governance process within WHO, and submits for consideration to the participants a concept of a recommendation to be made by the Meeting of the Parties to facilitate streamlining of Protocol operations in the overall work program of WHO.

GOVERNANCE

Global governance

The World Health Assembly is the supreme decision-making body for WHO. It generally meets in Geneva in May each year, and is attended by delegations from all 192 Member States. Its main function is to determine the policies of the Organization. The Health Assembly appoints the Director-General, supervises the financial policies of the Organization, and reviews and approves the proposed programme budget. It similarly considers reports of the Executive Board, which it instructs in regard to matters upon which further action, study, investigation or report may be required.

The Executive Board is composed of 32 members technically qualified in the field of health. Members are elected for three-year terms. The main Board meeting, at which the agenda for the forthcoming Health Assembly is agreed upon and resolutions for forwarding to the Health Assembly are adopted, is held in January, with a second shorter meeting in May, immediately after the Health Assembly, for more administrative matters. The main functions of the Board are to give effect to the decisions and policies of the Health Assembly, to advise it and generally to facilitate its work.

Regional governance

Regionalization is a special feature of WHO organizational structure. Geographic areas serve as a framework for six regional organizations, as provided for in the WHO Constitution.

The regional organizations provide a more specific response to the challenges faced by countries in broadly similar circumstances. Each such organization consists of a regional committee for regional decision-making and a secretariat or regional office for carrying out decisions at the regional level.

Representatives of each [Member States](#) in the European Region make up the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. The Regional Committee is the highest decision-making body in the region. It formulates regional policies, recommends and supervises WHO/Europe's activities, and approves the budget.

The Regional Committee shall hold at least one session per year. It shall determine at each session two years in advance the time and place of subsequent sessions.

The fifty-sixth session of the Regional Committee was held at the Regional Office in Copenhagen from 11 to 14 September 2006. The fifty-seventh session of the Regional Committee will be held at the Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen from 17 to 20 September 2007, unless the Regional Director receives a firm invitation on acceptable terms from a Member State by 1 January 2006.

Notices convening the session shall be sent by the Regional Director not more than six months nor less than six weeks before the commencement of the session to the Members, to the Director-general of the World Health Organization and to the Organizations. (Rule 4)¹.

The provisional Agenda of each session of the Regional Committee shall be drawn up by the Regional Director and dispatched with the notice of convocation. Except in the case of extraordinary sessions, the provisional Agenda shall include (Rule 8):

- (a) all items the inclusion of which has been prescribed by the World Health Assembly
- (b) all items the inclusion of which has been prescribed by the Executive Board of the World Health Organization
- (c) any item proposed by the Director-General
- (d) any item proposed by a Member of the Region
- (e) any item proposed by the Standing Committee
- (f) the Report of the Standing Committee

Standing Committee

The Standing Committee of the Regional Committee (SCRC), a sub-committee of the [Regional Committee](#), consists of representatives of Member States duly elected by the Regional Committee and of the Deputy-Executive President of the Regional Committee as *ex officio* Chairperson. The SCRC acts for and represents the Regional Committee and ensures that effect is given to the decisions and policies of the Regional Committee. The SCRC advises the Regional Committee on questions referred to it by that body and counsels the Regional Director as and when appropriate between sessions of the Regional Committee. The SCRC reports to the Regional Committee on its work.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee for Europe and the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe, including amendments adopted on 10 September 2001 published by WHO Copenhagen 2001.

WAY OF WORKING

Matching services to needs

Challenges and achievements

Despite recent accomplishments in public health, differences in health within and between populations have never been more severe. For example, life expectancy shows significant differences between the eastern and western parts of the WHO European Region and between social classes in all countries. Across Europe, poorer people are suffering more and dying younger.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe aims to support countries in:

- developing their own health policies, health systems and public health programmes;
- preventing and overcoming threats to health;
- anticipating future challenges; and
- advocating public health.

Policy support

WHO special task is to serve as a health intelligence resource to help countries make policies that benefit public health. In this capacity, we support activities to ensure that relevant evidence is collated, ordered and used at all policy and operational levels. By providing decision-makers with information, analyses and case studies on which approaches work and which do not, we help make the case for investing in public health.

WHO work supports countries in developing health policies, health systems and public health programmes both to improve people's health and to reduce inequities in health within and between countries. We also work to strengthen international solidarity for health, especially to support countries in need, and to anticipate and facilitate collaboration on transboundary health threats.

To this end, the Regional Office operates both a Division of Country Support, and a Special Program on Health and the Environment. The Division on Country Support operates in-country, based on country-driven assessment of needs in priority areas identified by the Regional Committee. The Special Program on Health and the Environment serves *de facto* as the Secretariat to the Protocol on Water and Health, and provides technical support to the Division for Country Support in the design and implementation of projects related to water and health.

The work of the Division for Country Support and of the Special Program on Health and the Environment are based on the decision taken at the Regional Committee. It is therefore of the highest importance that the Regional Committee be informed of the priorities identified through the mechanism established under the Protocol on Water and Health so that these priorities can be taken into account during the definition of regional policies, the formulation of recommendations for WHO/Europe's activities, and the final budget allocation.

CONCLUSION

Noting that the Regional Director of WHO is ex officio one of the Secretaries to the Protocol on Water and Health and the Secretary to the Regional Committee of WHO, and being aware of the important role played by the Regional Committee in the definition and supervision of the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, participants to the fifth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health may wish to instruct the Secretariat to draft an appropriate resolution for consideration by the Meeting of the Parties inviting the Regional Director to report the outcome of meetings of the Parties to the Regional Committee, and to explore possibilities to provide appropriate support to the implementation of the work plan adopted by the Meeting of the Parties within the available resources.