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Hosting a Regional Committee session outside Copenhagen

Hosting a Regional Committee (RC) session is a commitment that requires a considerable amount of time and expense. To ensure that Member States are fully aware of the level of commitment required before applying to host a session of the RC and to ensure transparency of the process of organizing a session of the RC outside Copenhagen, the Regional Office presents this information document outlining the tasks, time frame and provisional expenditures for which the host country must plan.

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Introduction

1. The Regional Committee for Europe (RC) is the main decision-making body of the WHO European Region at the regional level. In accordance with Rule 4 of its Rules of Procedure, the Regional Committee holds at least one session a year. By tradition, the Regional Committee meets in the third week of September. Every second year, the RC session usually takes place at the Region's main office, located in Copenhagen, Denmark. The session in alternate years takes place in a host country, except for the years when the Regional Director is to be nominated: those RC sessions take place in Copenhagen.

2. Hosting an RC session is an honour for a Member State and, customarily, many countries offer to organize it. However, hosting a session of the RC involves considerable expenditure and intensive event planning. Member States should be fully aware of the implications before applying to host a session. In order to ensure transparency of the process of organizing a session of the RC outside Copenhagen, the Regional Office has prepared this information document to provide an overview of the tasks, time frame and provisional expenditures.

Initial steps and time frame

3. The first step is for a Member State interested in hosting a future RC session to contact the Regional Office, expressing interest and initiating consultation with the Secretariat on the terms and conditions.

4. Following that, the Member State is invited to make an announcement at the upcoming session of the RC, indicating the year in which it is interested. If the Regional Committee accepts the proposal, it will be adopted in the resolution entitled "Date and place of regular sessions of the Regional Committee".

5. Preparation for a regular RC session takes approximately 18–24 months. Following the adoption of the resolution on the date and place, the host country starts in-depth discussions with the Regional Governance (RGO) unit on the details of the host agreement. The RGO Technical Officer has the overall coordinating role and responsibility for organizing an RC session and acts as the focal point for all communication and consultation with the host country.

6. An important element at the beginning of the process of organizing an RC session is the selection of the venue. The host country proposes the host city and three potential venues. A core team – composed of Secretariat staff from Regional Governance, Information and Communications Technology, and Administrative Services and Conferences, a security adviser and an audiovisual technician – visits and assesses the venue options together with representatives of the host country. This joint assessment is presented to the Regional Director and the Minister of Health of the host country, with a proposal of the most suitable venue. Following approval by the Regional Director and the Minister of Health, the host country books the venue. The Regional Office then sets out the technical requirements for the selected venue and attaches its specifications to the host agreement as an annex.

7. The approximate time frame is as follows. In the year prior to the scheduled RC session:

- (a) the venue selection takes place in the spring, following the first site visit;
- (b) the host agreement is finalized by the end of the year, at the latest; and
- (c) a second site visit takes place when the host country needs to consult prior to launching procurements.

8. During the year of the RC session:

- (a) details are submitted for the *Guide for participants*, including cover photograph, selection of social events, information on visa arrangements, accompanying persons' programme, and so on, by the end of March at the latest;
- (b) funds are transferred by the end of May;
- (c) a third site visit takes place in June to discuss the meeting room set-up and the programme;
- (d) a fourth site visit takes place in mid-August to discuss the programme, all organizational details, protocol, security, and so on;
- (e) the Regional Director and core team arrive the week prior to the RC session;
- (f) pre-meetings with Member States are held during the weekend prior to the RC session; and
- (g) the RC session takes place during the third week of September, as set out in the date and place resolution.

Task-sharing between the Regional Office and the host country

9. The RC session is not a technical conference but a high-level diplomatic and political event, the Regional Committee being the highest decision-making body of the 53 Member States of the WHO European Region, with rules of procedure and traditions. Although hosted by a Member State in the European Region, the event is nevertheless a WHO session, governed by WHO rules and procedures.

10. In recent years, the number of participants attending an RC session has ranged between 400 and 450 persons, which, together with WHO staff and accompanying persons, required a pre-booking of 600–650 hotel rooms, preferably in the vicinity of the meeting venue. Experience shows that the majority of Member State representatives select accommodation in four- or five-star hotels, while approximately 10% choose a three-star hotel.

11. It is important to bear in mind that the session is understood in the broadest sense, that is, not only the four days of the RC session itself but also the pre-meetings during the previous weekend, which are an integral part of it.

12. The host country, in close cooperation with the Regional Office core team mentioned above, is responsible for logistical arrangements, namely:
- (a) booking of the venue;
 - (b) selection and pre-booking of hotels (participants pay for their own accommodation but the host country negotiates a preferential rate);
 - (c) procurement of equipment and services and contracting of local service providers;
 - (d) provision of transportation from/to the airport and between the hotel and the session/reception venues on a daily basis, including transport for VIP guests in accordance with the protocol of the host country;
 - (e) advice and provision of support to the Regional Office core team for the organization of the Regional Director's reception (for example, selection and booking of the venue), on the basis of its local experience and knowledge; and
 - (f) provision of security and protocol measures, as required, in consultation with the Regional Office.
13. The Regional Office is responsible for the following elements:
- (a) preparation of the RC agenda, programme and content, including translation, in close cooperation with the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee;
 - (b) advice and close cooperation with the host country on the logistical and administrative preparation, on the basis of its decades-long experience of RC sessions;
 - (c) dispatch of invitations, including to VIP guests and keynote speakers, and administration and execution of registration;
 - (d) recruitment of interpreters supporting the RC session;
 - (e) event branding; and
 - (f) provision of flags and certain special equipment, such as camera for webstreaming.

Cost-sharing between the Regional Office and the host country

14. The expenditures borne by the host country with regard to the organization of an RC session can be categorized into three groups: cash, in-kind contribution and voluntary elements. The Regional Office bears the staff salary and overtime costs.

15. The host country provides funds for:
- (a) WHO staff travel to the venue (economy flight ticket, per diem covering accommodation and meals, visa cost and incidentals) in accordance with WHO travel regulations;
 - (b) three or four pre-session site visits by the core team, as organization requires; and
 - (c) transportation of certain special equipment (for example, camera for webstreaming) from Copenhagen to the RC session venue.

16. An indicative level of the funds required is approximately US\$ 500 000. The amount should be adjusted as soon as the host country and city are known, since per diem allowances and flight ticket prices vary enormously. Moreover, for some destinations staff might have additional entitlements (for example, a business-class ticket entitlement if the total travel time exceeds nine hours or an additional day of per diem allowance for early arrival).

17. The host country, in close consultation with the Regional Office, provides an in-kind contribution without charge that comprises:

- (a) the venue with equipped meeting rooms and offices, as detailed in Annex 2 of the host agreement. From a security point of view and to facilitate the transportation of VIP guests, the preferred venue is a five-star hotel that belongs to an international chain. The following is a summary of office and meeting room needs:
- a plenary meeting room with a capacity of 450 persons, of whom 55 ministers and/or heads of delegations are seated around a U-shaped table and the remaining participants on a mixture of chairs with and without tables;
 - one room for 50 persons for representatives of the European Union (a U-shaped table for 30 persons, with additional chairs behind);
 - one room for 30 persons as a press room, used for press conferences and interviews;
 - one room for 70–100 persons for technical briefings set up in a theatre- or classroom-style arrangement;
 - one room for 100 participants seated around 10 round tables for ministerial lunches (lunch for 90–100 persons);
 - offices of different sizes for WHO staff, three of which are exclusively for the WHO Director-General, the Regional Director and a VIP guest; (optimally, there is a requirement for 15 offices, although the exact number depends on the specificities of the venue);
 - one room that is appropriate for coffee and lunch breaks for delegates and staff (450–500 persons);
 - an area for conference functions, such as the registration desk, document distribution, exhibitions, an information desk, and so on; and
 - an area where delegates have access to computers with printing facilities;
- (b) services as described in the host agreement and its annexes, including transportation of delegates and of VIP guests and RC officers, provision of equipment (printers, photocopying machines, computers, screens, furniture, and so on), free Wi-Fi Internet access, wired Internet connection, catering, provision of local casual labour and security staff, and so on; and
- (c) organization and provision of security and protocol services, including facilitation of visa arrangements for delegates and staff.

18. The host country undertakes contracts with the session venue and with the local service providers pursuant to the decrees, financial rules, public procurement requirements, and so on, as provided for in the regulations and laws of the host country.

19. Traditionally, the Minister of Health of the host country holds a reception on Monday, the first day of the RC session, and the Regional Director hosts a reception on the second day.

20. As optional elements, the host country may also provide the following:

- (a) a welcome reception, hosted by the staff of the Ministry of Health, on Sunday, prior to the opening of the RC session;
- (b) a cultural event on Wednesday;
- (c) a cultural visit or excursion on Friday, on the day following the RC session (half day or full day); and
- (d) a programme for accompanying persons.

Host agreement

21. The host agreement is a standard text, which is slightly adjusted to the local conditions, particularly to the specificities of the selected venue.

22. The agreement has three important annexes:

- (a) Annex 1 on the financial contribution, specifying the amount and its use;
- (b) Annex 2 on meeting room and office set-up, including furniture, audiovisual and information technology requirements; and
- (c) Annex 3 on support staff.

23. The host agreement is usually signed at the end of the year preceding the RC session.

Follow-up and closing the financial contribution of the host country

24. By the end of the year of the RC session, the Secretariat sends a preliminary financial report, certified by its Finance Manager, on the use of the funds to the host country. During the spring of the following year, a final financial report, certified by the WHO Chief of Finance, is sent to the host country together with any outstanding balance. The funds are used in accordance with the Financial Regulations and Rules and the financial and administrative rules and practices of WHO.