



EU HEALTH PROGRAMME

Call for Proposals 2010

Survey of participants' satisfaction

Comparison with the surveys from 2008 and 2009



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Executive Summary

The Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) is committed to providing the best possible service to beneficiaries, contractors and other stakeholders. This is why, from the start of the second EU Health Programme 2008-2013, it has carried out satisfaction surveys among the applicants of the annual Calls for Proposals. After each Call a survey is posted on the EAHC internet site and all applicants are invited to participate – regardless whether selected for co-funding or not. The response rate was highly satisfactory in all years.

The results show that the applicants are very satisfied (over 90%) with the services EAHC provides such as the Help Desk and the "guide for applicants" document. While in 2008 and 2009 applicants were divided about the easiness of the application form (which had been modified), in 2010 a majority (57%) found it "easy to fill". Problems are reported by applicants in some of the technical and financial aspects of the forms. While the number of applicants who use the support mechanisms offered at national level (telephone support, national information days) is not very high, those who make use of these services are highly satisfied.

Based on the feedback and also on specific comments received, EAHC has been improving the application tools. It also offered a specific training workshop for potential applicants on how to write project applications in February 2010.

1. Introduction

The Second Programme of Community Action in the Field of Health 2008-2013¹ came into force on 1 January 2008. This Programme is intended to complement, support and add value to the policies of the Member States and contributes to increased solidarity and prosperity in the European Union by protecting and promoting human health and safety and by improving public health. The range of financing mechanisms was enlarged to include co-financing of projects, the operating costs of European non-governmental organisations or a specialised networks (operating grant), conferences and joint financing of common activities carried out by the Community and one or more Member States or by the Community and the competent authorities of other countries participating in the Programme together (so called "joint action").

The Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) has been mandated by the European Commission to implement large parts of the Programme, based on annual work plans². This includes the implementation for Calls for Proposals for the various financing instruments as well as Calls for tender. Over the past years EAHC has built a range of support for potential applicants. This includes foremost a network on National Focal Points (NFP), made up of people in the national administration (e.g. Ministry of Health) who have been specifically trained by EAHC to serve as the first contact point at national level concerning the Calls for Proposals and their related procedures. After the opening of Calls for proposals EAHC organized InfoDays in Luxemburg in 2008 and 2009 and also national information days in more than half of the Member States and participating countries in collaboration

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ%3AL%3A2007%3A301%3ASOM%3AEN%3AHTML>

² See, for example, the 2010 annual work plan under: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:340:0001:0046:EN:PDF>

with the NFP. In 2010 a specific workshop for prospective applicants was organized in Luxembourg with the aim of providing training in the preparation of a project application. All workshop materials, including videos from the sessions were made available via the EAHC web-site. In addition, when the Calls are launched, EAHC offers a help-desk via telephone and e-mail.

With the aim of serving potential applicants and beneficiaries better, EAHC performs a satisfaction survey among all who sent in an application for the Calls for Proposals in a given year. The first time was 2008 and it has been repeated annually since. The questionnaire has been somewhat adapted every year, but principally asks about the satisfaction with the services provided by EAHC and the NFP for the applicants, the usefulness and easiness of use of the tool and documents provided, the problems encountered, all separated by type of financial instrument. It also provides space to describe specific problems and provide comments.

The report presents the main results from these surveys in a comparative way. The key findings are illustrated by graphs to attract the attention of the reader.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the satisfaction surveys among the participants of the Calls for Proposal 2008-2010 was to assess the user-friendliness of the call related documents and the helpfulness of the support services provided.

3. Methods

The questionnaire was developed by the EAHC Health Unit in 2008 and has been adjusted and improved as part of the annual Calls for Proposals procedure.

The questionnaire is posted on the EAHC website and can only be completed online. An invitation e-mail is sent to all applicants (regardless whether successful or not) after the evaluation giving the direct link to the survey. Access to the survey is only possible with this specific link. Once the questionnaire is completed, the answers are automatically sent to EAHC. A deadline to submit the survey is set at 2 weeks after receiving the e-mail. A reminder is sent after one week.

While the survey was carried out in 2009 and 2010 very shortly after the deadline to send the applications, it was carried-out only after the award decision in 2008, which should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Hence, the fact that the results of the Calls were known in 2008 when the survey was sent to the participants, could have positive or negative impact on the results as well as the response rate.

4. Results

The results of the 2010 satisfaction survey are described and presented in comparison to the results from 2008 and 2009. These are complimented with some quotes from the comments the applicants made.

4.1. Response rate

The response rate to the survey is very satisfactory. While the total number of replies in 2010 is somewhat lower than in 2009 (see graph below), it gives a good overview of the opinions. This includes applicants for all funding mechanisms. However, it has to be taken into account that the reasons for not responding are unknown.

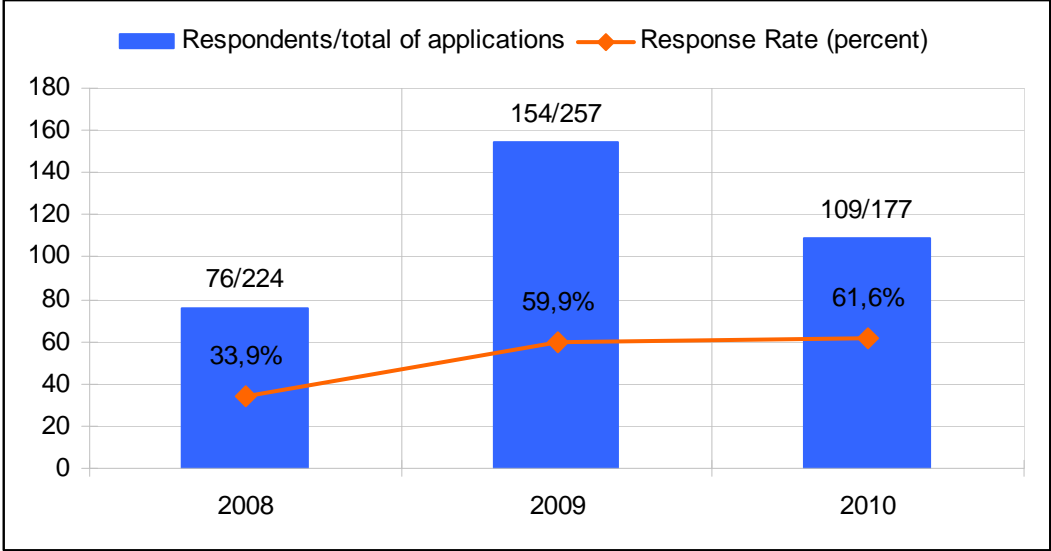


Figure 1 – Response rate in percent and total numbers of respondents

4.2. The Completing of the application form

The respondents have a split opinion if the application form is "easy" or "difficult". As the form was changed in 2009, there seems to be a positive trend that the revised form is somewhat easier, as depicted in the figure below.

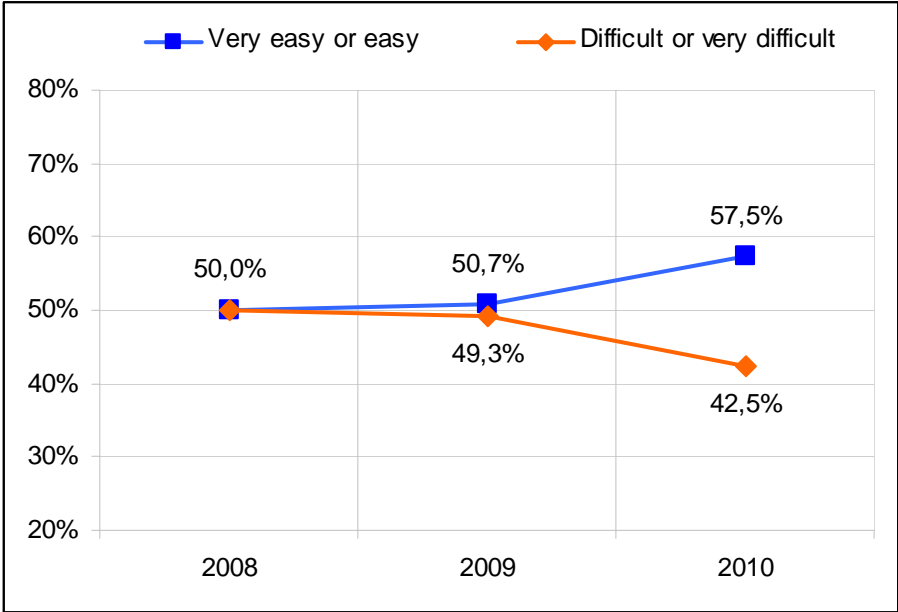


Figure 2 – Perception of applicants to complete the application form

"The most difficult part of the form is to be consistent. The form is the reflection of a very logical framework for the development and description of project. But sometimes it is very hard to construct such a framework for the questions that lead the project."

4.3. Specific problems reported by applicants

The questionnaire allows for applicants to report specific problems encountered in filling in the application form. Those include technical, administrative and financial problems. As the applicants forms vary between the financial instruments, except project and joint action, these data are presented by financial instrument.

4.3.1. Joint Actions and Projects

The results from 2010 show that the vast majority of joint action applicants (80%) do not report any problems with the application form, which could be due to the fact that they mostly already have experience in applying and managing projects under the Health Programme. Large Joint Actions (35+ partners) found the form somewhat difficult to manage due to the high number of partners.

Among the respondents applying for a project 30% report to have not experienced specific problems while the majority (70%) indicated to have experienced some kind of problem (see figure below).

"Overall there is an improvement compared to previous application form. It still needs lots of time and efforts for a small organisation to gather all the information and to describe the project in the requested format. Milestones remain difficult to define. On the financial side, we had issues for the budget with how to consider public officials salaries. We had issues also on how to manage subcontractors but we got the right answers from the help desk."

Swedish applicant, applying for the first time under the Health Programme 2008 - 2013

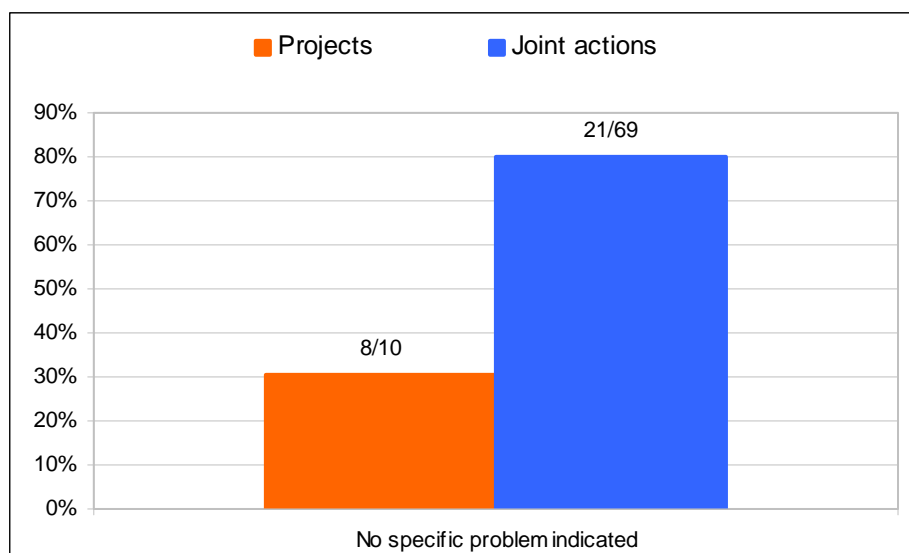


Figure 3 – No specific problems experienced by respondents applying for a Project or Joint Action in 2010

"In our opinion, the definitions or descriptions of indicators (process, outcome) that were provided were not clear enough. We think that some applicants could have difficulties with differentiating between process and outcome indicators in certain types of undertakings, especially, if they do not deal with such terminology in their every-day work."

Polish applicant, who has already applied under the Public Health Programme 2003-2007

The following graph shows the grouped results of specific problems applicants reported from 2008 to 2010. Less than half report a problem with technical aspects³ in 2010 and this is less than in the years before. On the other hand, the percentage of those reporting a problem with financial aspects⁴ increased. Problems with administrative aspects⁵ are experienced by about 1/5 of the survey respondents.

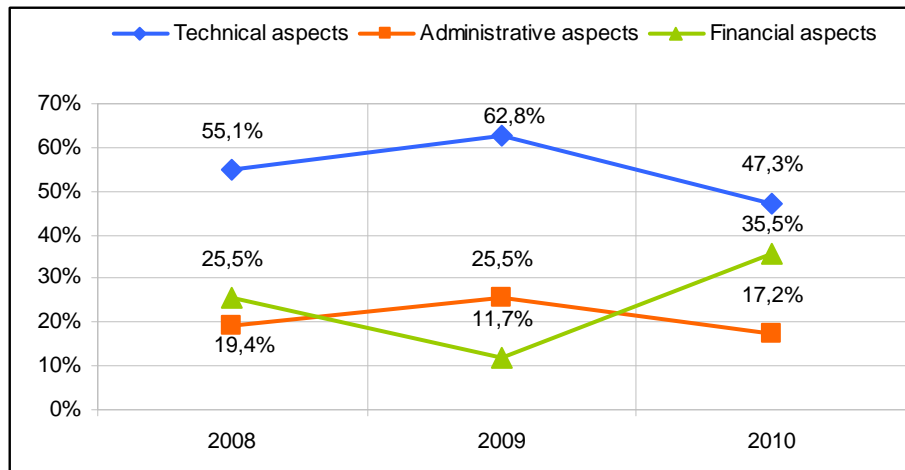


Figure 4 – Specific problems experienced when applying for Project/Joint Actions application

"Difficult to plan the financial expenses for all partners - despite good guidelines. Sometimes it is difficult to figure out how much information had to be filled in the form."
 German applicant, applying for the first time under the Health Programme 2008 - 2013

4.3.3. Conferences

The number of applicants who experienced problems with the application form for a conference grant in 2010 is considerably lower than in the previous year. While the budget was mentioned as problematic before, it had been reworked for the 2010 Call and this was much appreciated by the beneficiaries.

"The form had 3 sections for pre / conference / post and this was completed as required?! When calling the EAHC helpline they were very supportive / informative."
 UK applicant for a conference grant, applying for the first time under the Health Programme 2008-2013

³ Executive summary, Policy and context relevance, Specification of the project, Management of the project and the Description of the work packages

⁴ Financial viability information, Financial management data

⁵ Participation in EU funded projects, Overview of the project, Supporting documents, Partners information

4.3.4. Operating Grants

Among those who applied for an operating grant under the 2010 Call about 25% report to have problems with the financial part (budget and accounts from previous years). This figure was approximately the same in the previous years. While no particular problems are reported with the technical part of the application form, a smaller number of applicants (some 15%) are unclear about the supporting documents.

"Being the first time I had problems with the specific language and I needed the help from an expert person"
Italian applicant for a project and operating grant, applying for the first time under the Health Programme 2008-2013

4.2. Guide for Applicants

The vast majority of the respondents indicated using the applicants' guide EAHC prepares every year in four different versions i.e. one per financial instrument and consider it very useful or useful – over 90% in all years (compare figure below).

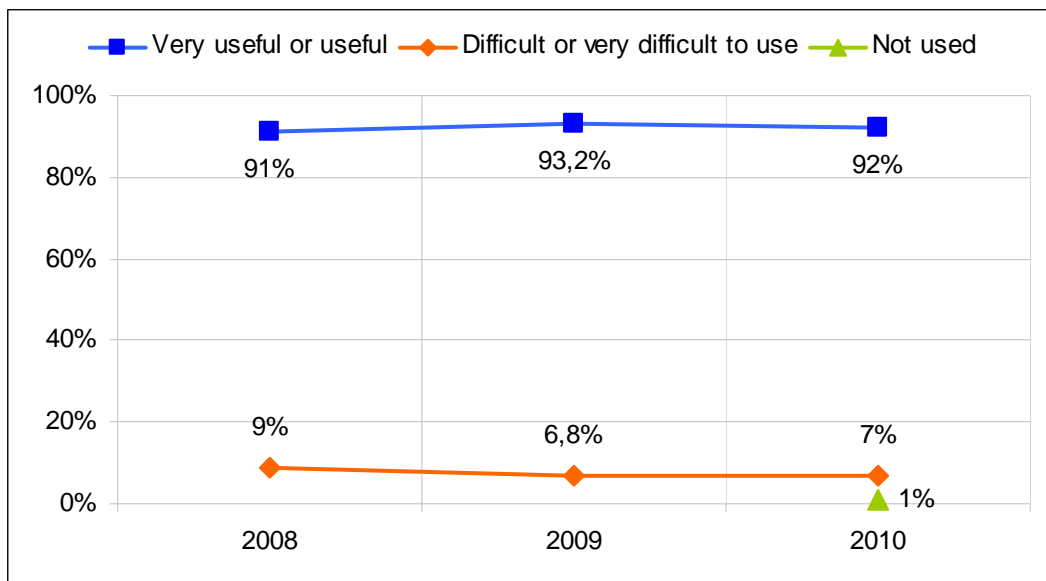


Figure 5 – Usefulness of the Guide for Applicants in percent

"No comment regarding the applicants guide, I think it was very clear and straight forward what was expected from the applicant and even how the application would be evaluated."
Belgian applicant, applying for the first time under the Health Programme 2008-2013

4.3. Support for the applicants at national level

4.3.1. The National Focal Points

The network of National Focal Points (NFP) is made up of representatives of the European countries' Ministries of Health. They were specifically trained by EAHC to serve as the first contact point at national level concerning all Calls for Proposals under the Health Programme. While nearly all survey respondents reported in 2008 to have consulted the NFP⁶, the figure is much lower now (see graph below). Among those who did consult the NFPs in 2010 80% rate the support of the NFP as good or very good, a similar figure to previous years (76% in 2008 and 89% in 2009). Most questions posed to the NFP concern financial or administrative matters.

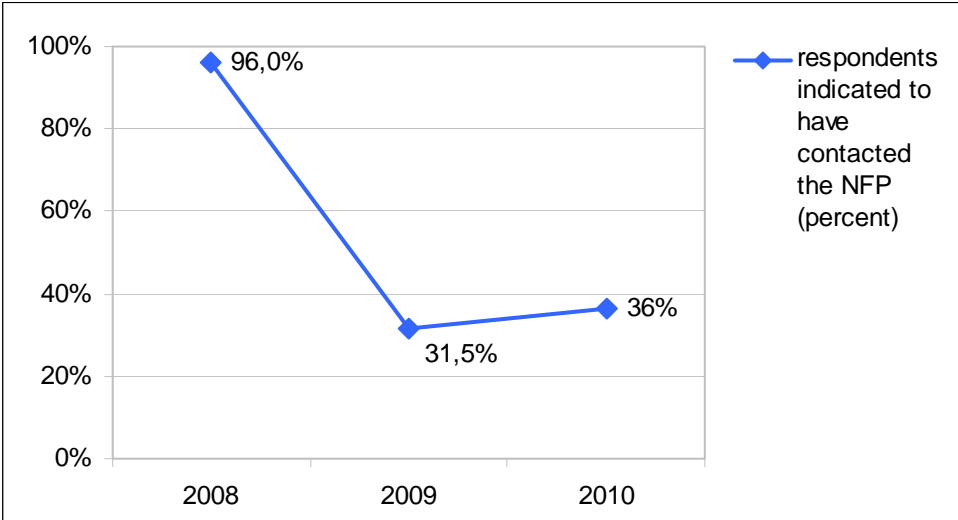


Figure 6 – Respondents who received support by NFP in percent and total numbers of respondents until 2010

4.3.2. The “National Information Day”

A “National Information Day” is organised by several NFPs to offer hands-on and up-to-date information about the annual Call for Proposal at national level. It is usually held in the capital city, but in some countries also in several cities. The information provided concerns the application procedure and requirements, but also includes personal reports and experiences from managers of projects currently co-funded by the EU. In 2008 12 NID were organized in 11 Member States (as 2 NID in Spain), in 2009 16 NID were organized in 13 Member States (several NID in Italy and Spain) and in 2010 11 NID were organized in 10 Member States (2 in Spain).

As illustrated in the below graph only 20, 4 % of the 2010 respondents to the survey participated in a National Information Day. However, those participants found the participation helpful or very helpful (70%) for their proposal preparation.

⁶ It should be noted that the survey in 2008 was sent out when the results had been communicated. Hence it could be that the respondents to the survey are rather those who did get the funding and hence those who consulted the NFP are disproportionately high.

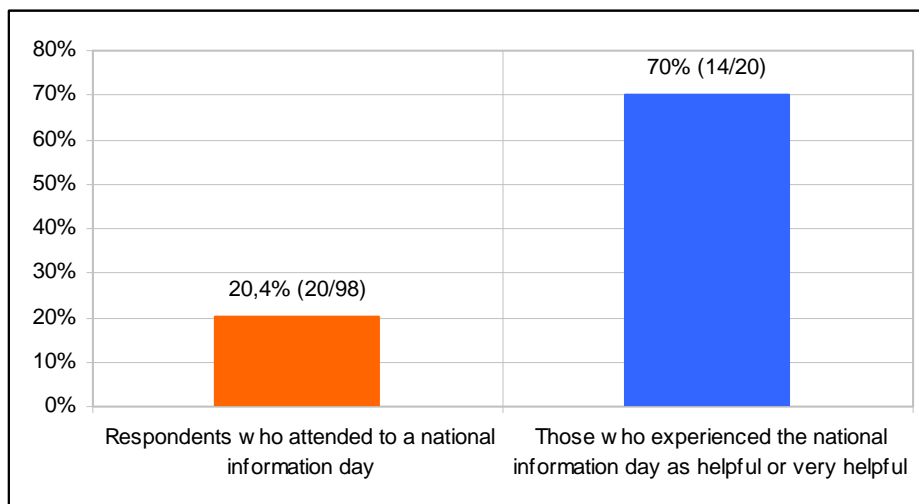


Figure 7 – Participation and helpfulness of the “National Information Day” in percent (respondents/total numbers of respondents) in 2010

4.4. Support from the EAHC helpdesk

About half of the survey participants (52, 5%) contacted the EAHC help desk in 2010. This figure is lower than in the years before (92% in 2008 and 70% in 2009). The majority of those rated the received support as good or very good (90, 4%) – this is about the same as in previous year (92% in 2008 and 95% in 2009). The graph below shows the development of the topics of the queries (administrative or financial matters) over the years.

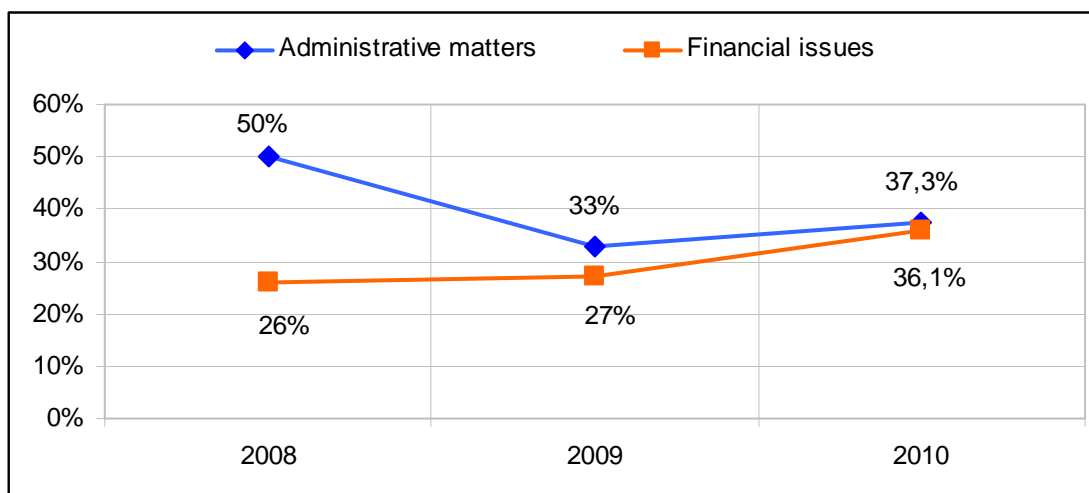


Figure 8 – Categories of requests to the EAHC help desk in percent until 2010

"The support by the helpdesk was very good and all issues could be solved by that."
Austrian applicant, applying for the first time under the Health Programme 2008-2013

4.5. Use of the EAHC website's “Partnership Tool”

Based on suggestions from applicants as well as the NFP, EAHC created a “Partnership Tool” where potential applicants can post their project idea asking others to join and those looking to participate in a project can present their expertise. This tool was introduced for the Calls in 2009. The results show that the proportion of respondents’ who used the partnership tool increased. However, even though more participants were using the tool the percentage of those who found a partner decreased.

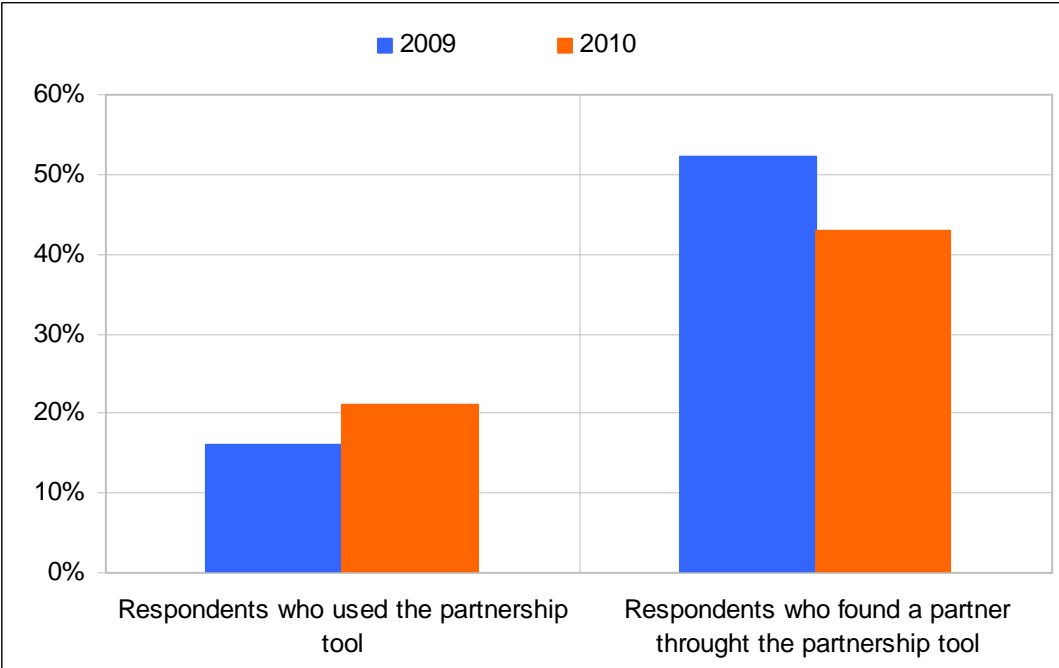


Figure 9 – Use of the “Partnership Tool” in percent in total number of respondents

*"This really was a very good and useful thing!"
Finnish applicant, applying for the first time under the Health Programme 2008-2013*

4.6. The 2010 training workshop

While the 2010 Call for Proposals for projects was open EAHC organized, for the first time, a specific workshop to train potential applicants who planned to submit a project proposal. The main purpose of the workshop was to improve the quality of submitted project proposals too. 48 public health professional from 16 countries (including 5 new Member States) participated in the workshop. The evaluation of this workshop showed that a majority was highly satisfied with the workshop (69%). The detailed analysis of this workshop is presented in the report "Evaluation of the 2010 Calls for Proposals" (forthcoming).

4.6.1 Workshop material on the EAHC website

All Power Point presentations given at the workshop and videos of these presentations were published on the EAHC web-site shortly afterwards in order to make this material as widely available as possible.

In the present survey among the 2010 Calls for Proposals applicants only a minority indicated that they watched the videos (16, 7%) and/or Power Point presentations (28, 7%). However, those who watched them, found them very helpful (see graph below).

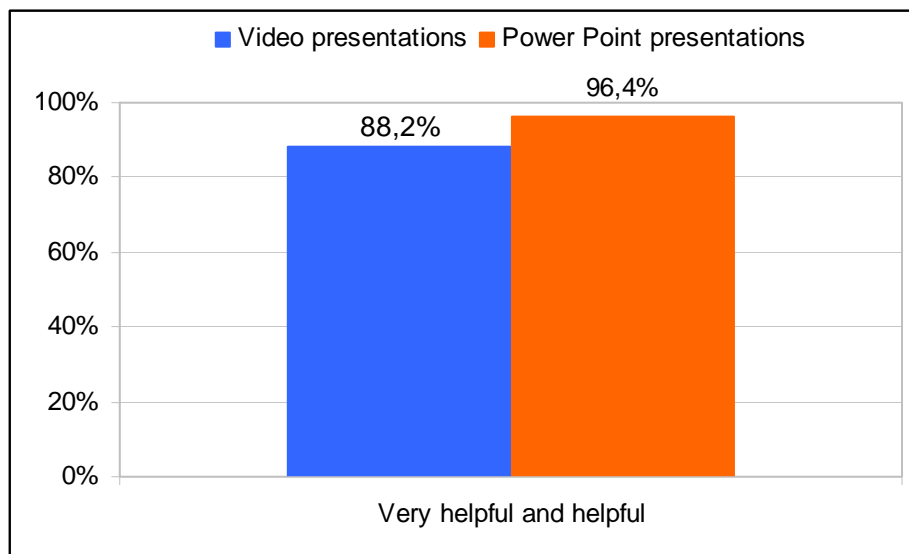


Figure 10 – Helpfulness of the watched video and PPT presentations

"The change from the info day to the workshop was an excellent idea."
Finnish applicant and workshop participant, re-submitting a proposal

5. Conclusions

Overall it can be concluded that the fact that a satisfaction survey is carried out among the applicants after each call is positively acknowledged by them, as the response rate is rather high and gives important feedback to EAHC in its aim to support the applicants.

While the feedback regarding the application forms seems to be tilting towards the positive side, several useful comments from the applicants can be taken up (e.g. concerning more space to describe the work packages in the form for projects and joint actions) in order to improve the forms.

What is reassuring is the fact that satisfaction with the EAHC Helpdesk services remains high over the years, supporting EAHC in its goal to have only well-trained staff answering the calls and e-mails. The same is true for the applicants' guides, which EAHC will continue to provide in up-dated and improved versions.

Concerning the support provided by the NFP, it seems that, while the attendance numbers at national information days are usually high, not many decide to send in an application afterwards. This fact is to be discussed with the NFP. Nevertheless, according to the results, applicants having participated in

national information days found them helpful, hence they do have a place in the services provided around the Calls for Proposals.

It is an encouraging fact that relatively more applicants made use of the partnership tool in 2010 than in 2009. Some suggestions on how to improve this tool (e.g. a different presentation on web-site) were received from the users and EAHC will work on improving it for further Calls.

In 2008 and 2009 EAHC had organized large (more than 300 participants) information days about the Calls for Proposals in Luxemburg, which received positive but also negative feedback. The format was changed to a smaller workshop (48 participants) in 2010, focusing only on project proposals. While the workshop was much appreciated by the participants, the materials stemming from it could not be as widely disseminated as EAHC would have wished. They were freely available on the EAHC web-site, but only a small number of applicants actually made use of them. Some mentioned that they were not aware of these materials, even though they were prominently posted on the web. Thought should be given to finding a solution as to how EAHC training material can be publicized more widely.

