



EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

15 March 2005

DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH - A EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION

1 -The Problem

European Union citizens are moving too little and consuming too much: too much energy, too many calories, too much fat and sugar, and salt. The main consequence is a sustained, acute EU-wide increase in overweight and obesity. The increase is particularly severe for children and adolescents. This trend is increasing ill health and shortening lives. The human cost is unacceptable. The budgetary and economic cost is also severe.

The causes of this social disease are manifold. There are no simple solutions. A Network of Experts on Nutrition and Physical Activity is in place to advise the Commission on preparing a broadly based strategy to support national and local efforts to confront the challenge. Also, a series of projects related to nutrition, obesity and physical activity are financed under the Public Health Action programme. There is general convergence of recommendations at the level of Member States and of WHO as to the role and broad proportions of nutrients in a balanced diet. EFSA has a mandate to provide further assistance concerning communication on such nutritional issues. But already there seems to be in use very similar benchmarks on diet.

2 - A Platform for Action

The problem is already sufficiently severe and sufficiently understood for certain actors to be prepared to give a lead in taking actions that can help to contain or reverse current trends. These actors have come together to endorse this Platform.

The Platform operates under the leadership of the European Commission whose role is above all to make sure that a cooperative and action-oriented approach is respected, and to ensure that the activities of the Platform are in harmony with the work of the European Network on Nutrition and Physical Activity, and with discussions in the Council and the European Parliament.

The purpose of this Platform is to provide a common forum for all interested actors at European level where:

- (a) they can explain their plans to contribute concretely to the pursuit of healthy nutrition, physical activity and the fight against obesity, and where those plans can be discussed;
- (b) outcomes and experience from actors' performance can be reported and reviewed, so that over time better evidence is assembled of what works, and Best Practice more clearly defined.

The Platform does not yet incorporate all possible actors, but is open to cooperate with all who can make a commitment to contribute. The Platform's work plans will be open for improvement as new evidence and new political guidance emerges. The results of work inspired by participation in the Platform will contribute new data to the detailed analysis already underway.

The Platform recognises that many similar initiatives have already been launched by individual schools, companies, NGOs and communities, and that similar networks are also under construction or in operation in some regions or Member States. The Platform is also conscious of the ongoing work of the Network of Experts and of the regulatory and legislative programme in the pipeline on various aspects of food labelling and commercial communication. The spirit of the Platform is not to substitute for any of this. The Platform will seek close coordination with other initiatives, and will seek to enable successful endeavours in this field to be more promptly shared with potential partners and emulators across the European Union as a whole. The present Platform hopes, as a result, to become an example that others will choose to follow, and to provide input into the ongoing European Union policy debate.

3 - Fields of Action for Diet and Physical Activity

The fields for action identified so far by the current actors in the Platform reflect the various experiences of participants. They are:

- Consumer information, including labelling
- Education
- Physical activity promotion
- Marketing and advertising
- Composition of foods, availability of healthy food options, portion sizes

These fields are overlapping and inter-related, and the above list can further evolve.

4 - Commitments to action

The Platform members have agreed to share with each other their action plans, setting out what they intend to achieve and by what means. In order to make explicit these plans for devoting resources to action, the participants of the Platform agree to the following process:

- Most if not all participants of the Platform are already devoting some effort to tackling the obesity issue. Participants will begin by reporting, as a baseline, activities carried out in 2004 and already decided for 2005.
- Actions to be taken will be defined by each actor (or member organisation) in consultation with those of their usual stakeholders who have an interest in the obesity debate. Not all actors may choose to operate in all the fields of action identified. Actors will identify which fields for action cover each element of their commitments.

- The EU-level commitment made within the context of the Platform process may need to be implemented in agreement with local stakeholders and in varying ways at national and local level.
- For 2006, the aim is that each actor commit to devoting an increasing level of resources and effort, beyond their baselines, for current or new actions designed to reverse the obesity trend. The action plans will make clear who the owners of this commitment are. Where an actor is committing on behalf of a grouping or federation, the extent of the commitment shall be defined as precisely as possible.
- The aim is that 2006 commitments should be adhered to by a substantial proportion of members, and that benchmarks or possible indicators of action and of outcome be defined.

5 – Monitoring of actions

- Actors will monitor their own performance in a transparent, participative and accountable way, so that there is a degree of stakeholder involvement in reviewing progress and outcomes that creates trust in the data. This will require new methods of monitoring. This issue is recognised as an important contribution to the work of the Platform and would be shared and explained here.
- There is a general desire amongst participants to develop not only participative self-monitoring, but also some more ambitious best practice on monitoring, including aspects such as evaluation. The Commission as well as the actors are committed to working towards defining such a method throughout 2005.
- The Platform will review reported data at regular intervals, drawing lessons for future steps in each player's action plan.

6 – Duration of commitments

- All participants of the Platform agree that the Platform process is a challenging and innovative endeavour. In 2006, the Platform's members will review progress and take further decisions on its sustained operation, reform or dissolution, depending on what by that time has been achieved, both around the Platform and in other ways, to reverse the current trends. It is understood that current participants of the Platform may review their participation at that time, and that new actors may apply to join at any time.

7 - Other initiatives

The Platform will serve to deepen common understanding of the challenge of obesity, to integrate responses to this challenge into a wide range of EU policies, and to contribute to the future development of the fields of action. To this end:

- The Platform will also serve as a forum for issues not yet formally covered by the fields of action. In this spirit, it will begin, during 2005/2006, an examination of how best to "obesity-proof" other policies, in areas such as agriculture, environment, education and research. The Commissioner for Health will cooperate with colleagues and their services to provide the underpinnings of this debate.
- The Platform will deepen its members' understanding of current levels of knowledge and evidence on key issues, notably in a first phase through working groups on "life style, including physical activity" and on "informing consumer behaviour: education; information, commercial communication". At the end of 2005 the Platform will review the scope for establishing other working groups if resources permit. Suggestions include dedicated working groups on food labelling and on marketing and advertising.

8 - Call for Support

The Platform calls on the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of Ministers to seek the endorsement for this initiative. We invite the Council both to commit Member State Health and Education authorities, and to encourage health professionals, at local and regional as well as at national level, to devote resources to replicating the best practice that is already on offer, and to cooperate strongly with Platform members in 2005 in order to create the necessary momentum. We invite all relevant EP Committees to support our efforts. The Platform is open to all who can contribute through a concrete action plan. We will in particular reach out to health, education and media professionals to seek their effective involvement in our work.

9 – Founding Participants

At this stage, the Platform has the following participation:

- Coordinator: Mr Markos Kyprianou on behalf of the European Commission
- Mr Mars Di Bartolomeo, Minister for Health and Social Security of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
- Mr Karl-Heinz Florenz, Chairman of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament
- European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
- Confederation of the Food and Drink Industries of the EU (CIAA)
- EuroCommerce
- EuroCoop
- European Consumers Organisation (BEUC)
- European Modern Restaurants Association
- European Vending Association (EVA)
- World Federation of Advertisers (WFA)
- International Obesity Task Force (IOTF)
- European Heart Network (EHN)
- Standing Committee of European Doctors
- The World Health Organisation (WHO), represented by Headquarters and the Regional Office for Europe, contributes to the Platform in relevant technical areas

10 - Additional participants

The following organisations have begun to participate in the preparation of this initiative during recent weeks. They support the work of the Platform while continuing to define the scope for them to join the Platform and make concrete contributions.

- European Economic and Social Committee
- European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
- Agricultural organisations and cooperatives (COPA-COGECA)
- European Society of Paediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition (ESPGAN)
- European Federation of the Association of Dieticians (EFAD)
- Association of Commercial Television (ACT)
- European Group of Television Advertising (EGTA)
- European Food Information Council (EUFIC)
- European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)
- European Federation of Contract Catering Organisations (FERCO)
- International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)