

EUROPEAN ALCOHOL AND HEALTH FORUM

TASK FORCE ON YOUTH-SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF ALCOHOL

Report **to the plenary meeting of the European Alcohol and Health Forum** *(presented at the 4th Forum plenary meeting on 11 March 2009)*

I. Membership

The Task Force on youth-specific aspects of alcohol (*"The Task Force"*) included representatives of the following organisations (*sometimes represented by members of affiliate organisations*):

- Alcohol Policy Youth Network
- Association of European Cancer Leagues
- Comité Européen des Entreprises Vins
- EUROCARE
- European Forum for Responsible Drinking
- European Mutual Help Network for Individuals and Families with Alcohol Related Problems
- European Public Health Alliance
- European Transport Safety Council
- European Young Person's Network for Drug and Alcohol Health Promotion
- European Youth Forum
- Institut de Recherches Scientifiques sur les boissons alcoolisées
- Standing Committee of European Doctors
- The European Spirits Organisation
- The Brewers of Europe

Moreover, observers from Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic) as well as of the World Health Organization and of the International Organisation of Vine and Wine participated in the meetings.

II. Mandate, Rules of Procedure

The mandate of the Task Force derives from the Forum Charter, which specifies in its Annex 4 that the Task Force's main tasks are:

- to examine trends and drivers in drinking habits of young people and of the alcohol-related harm they suffer;
- to examine approaches that have a potential to reduce the alcohol-related harm suffered by young people, and in particular strategies aimed at curbing under-age drinking and drink-driving by young people, actions aimed at promoting responsible selling and serving, and interventions aimed at educating and empowering young people;
- to make any appropriate recommendations to the Forum.

The document "Mandate, Rules of Procedure and Work Plan" which the Task Force adopted at its 1st meeting of 22 November 2007 ¹ further developed this initial mandate, and suggested that the Task Force focuses on identifying actions which have a potential for:

- curbing under-age drinking;
- curbing drink-driving by young people;
- educating and empowering young people on alcohol issues;
- promoting responsible selling and serving of alcohol for young people;
- protecting young people from the consequences of alcohol abuse by others.

The Task Force was chaired by the Commission services (Mr Michael Hübel), which also assumed the secretariat of the group.

III. Activities

The Task Force held four meetings:

- The meeting of 22 November 2007 ² served to adopt the Rules of Procedure, to identify the priority working areas (*see above*) and to agree on a work plan for the Task Force.
- The workshop of 20-21 February 2008 ³ helped to further focus the work of the Task Force by presenting and discussing examples of good practice in the priority areas of the Task Force.
- The meeting of 18 September 2008 ⁴ completed the February workshop with presentations on 'Trends and drivers in drinking habits of young people', on involving young people in activities aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm, and on protecting young people from alcohol-related harm caused by others.

¹

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/docs/alcohol_taskfmandate_en.pdf

² summary report:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/docs/alcohol_taskf20071122_en.pdf

³ conclusions:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/docs/ev_20080220_conclusions_en.pdf

⁴ summary report:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/docs/ev_20080918_mi_en.pdf

Moreover, there was a first exchange of views on the Clearing House project (*see below*).

- Finally, the meeting of 20 January 2009⁵ served to finalise the Clearing House project (*see below*) and to summarise the work of the Task Force so far.

IV. Main issues discussed

- **Trends in under-age drinking** are causing serious concern. Action is needed by economic operators, the health community, and Member States.
- **Building social norms:** underage drinking, and any support for, or endorsement of, harmful drinking should become socially unacceptable
- **Sustainability of actions:** effective pilot projects should be rolled out into the mainstream (*see also Clearing House project below*).
- **Evidence based:** Actions aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm among young people should be evaluated and build on available evidence of effectiveness; at the same time, and in particular given the particular characteristics of the target population, there is also a need to allow for experiments. In parallel, the existing evidence base needs to be further developed (*see also Clearing House project below*).
- **Need for comprehensive, strategic approaches:** these should link to the overall strategy in the national/regional/local environment, and need to be in line with broader public policy. At the same time, these approaches need to be linked to the relevant partners (eg for measures aimed at reducing drink driving: police, media, pub/club owners, retailers...).
- **Youth involvement:** need for broader and more creative implementation of this concept (*see below*); the Alcohol Policy Youth Network could help to frame strategies on this issue.
- **No global solution by individual actions:** a combination of actions of different actors, and at all levels, is needed to achieve significant and sustainable reductions in alcohol-related harm.

V. Conclusions and recommendations to the plenary meeting of the European Alcohol and Health Forum

Youth involvement:

Much of the discussions in the Task Force focussed on the importance of involving young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of all activities which specifically target young people. The Task Force strongly recommends that youth involvement at all stages of interventions should be promoted, and that more creative ways of bringing about this involvement, including in the commitments made by Forum members, should be considered. Beyond the framework of the Forum, formal consultation exercises of young people, such as the one carried out by the Irish Government, are considered as good practice, which other Member States may wish to examine for the further development of alcohol policy targeting young people.

⁵ summary report:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/docs/alcohol_taskf20090120_en.pdf

Protecting young people from the consequences of alcohol abuse by others:

The Task Force underlines that harm suffered by children because of irresponsible alcohol use in their environment is an extremely important issue. Action to address this will need to be pursued particularly at Member State level.

Concept Paper for a ‘Clearing House’:

The Task Force clearly identified the need for an inventory of existing activities and projects aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm among young people, including basic information on key characteristics of the intervention, on monitoring and evaluation, and on the results achieved.

In response to this need, and as a means of fostering sustained actions, the Task Force suggests the creation of a “Clearing House” as an information point on activities and projects related to alcohol and health. The scheme, in which information regarding the effectiveness and evaluation of projects would be available in an easily accessible format, would be open to contributions from all interested organisations and agencies working on alcohol and young people. The information collected would be available on a public website, linked to the EU Health Portal.

A first implementation level of the Clearing House would be the establishment of a European on-line database in which information on projects and good practice is collected. As the system becomes operational, and depending on needs and requirements, this could be expanded to include the promotion of good practice and support for proponents of projects in specific who look for information or partners.

Further implementation levels could include:

- information on measurement and evaluation methodologies to assess effectiveness and impact on alcohol-related harm in the short, medium and long term;
- defining factors for effective programmes;
- enabling project leaders to open up for broader help and participation;
- evaluation mechanisms;
- sustainable measured and evaluated prevention programmes developed by stakeholders at local/regional, national and EU level.

Such a scheme should set clear and objective criteria for the admission of projects into the data base, and leave sufficient scope for smaller and experimental projects. Synergies should be sought with similar initiatives covering similar topic areas (such as IREFREA⁶).

The basic responsibility for establishing and running the scheme would lie with DG SANCO, which is expected to provide start-up funding for the creation of the database and basic operations for an initial phase. The Commission services should be supported by an advisory body, composed of a small number of representatives drawn from the Alcohol Forum, the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action and possibly the Science Group. This advisory group would i. a. define admission criteria for the data base and work on the templates to be used to collect structured information.

⁶ IREFREA is a professional European network founded in 1988 interested in the promotion and research of prevention of drug and other child and adolescent problems.

Such a scheme would be an additional tool for implementing the EU alcohol strategy, and should be taken forward in cooperation between Member States and stakeholders.

Further details on the Clearing House scheme are contained in Annex I ("Draft Paper to establish a Clearing House on activities and projects on alcohol and youth health "); **this is a draft of a decision that the Commission services recommend formally to adopt by the Forum, with the support of Task Force membership.**

Future of the Task Force on youth-specific aspects of alcohol:

Task Force members tend to agree that the Task Force is reaching a natural conclusion, with the development of the Clearing House as its most concrete outcome. The Clearing House scheme could be taken forward independently of the Task Force, with support of individual members. The need for a continuation of this Task Force should be examined by the plenary meeting of the European Alcohol and Health Forum.

At the various meetings of the Task Force many interesting presentations were given on various topics; these presentations are available on the Commission's public health website. The good practice reflected in these presentations should be taken into account when the Forum will discuss in more detail commitments in the priority areas relating to alcohol and young people ('Develop a strategy aimed at curbing under-age drinking' and 'Promote effective behavioural change among children and adolescents').

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*Draft Paper
to establish a Clearing House
on activities and projects on alcohol and youth health*

Background

In examining good practice projects related to alcohol and young people, the Task Force on Youth Specific Aspects of Alcohol has identified five key areas of intervention:

- 1) curbing under-age drinking;
- 2) curbing drink-driving by young people;
- 3) educating and empowering young people on alcohol issues;
- 4) promoting responsible selling and serving of alcohol to young people;
- 5) protecting young people from the consequences of alcohol abuse by others.

Actions on these key areas across EU Member States are very diverse; some are local in nature and are organised by individual organisations, while others are larger in scale and can involve many partners across society. While interventions are always dependent on the social and cultural environment, lessons learnt and approaches can offer useful inspiration to similar projects in other settings.

In discussions with project leaders, it became clear that there is a need for an inventory of activities and projects which includes basic information on key characteristics of the intervention, including on monitoring and evaluation, and on results achieved. This should cover incipient or ongoing actions and projects which have recently been completed.

The proposal

In response to this need, and as a way of sustaining actions, the Commission, with the support of the European Alcohol and Health Forum, have together decided to create a “Clearing House” as an information point for activities and projects related to alcohol and health. This would be a further tangible element in implementing the EU alcohol strategy, taken forward in cooperation with Member States and stakeholders.

The Clearing House will be open to contributions from all interested organisations and agencies working on alcohol and young people, and information collected would be available on a public website, linked to the EU Health Portal. This would enable the exchange of views and the sharing of good practice in an open and transparent way.

The Clearing House will also ensure that information regarding the effectiveness and evaluation of projects is available in an accessible format.

Objectives of the Clearing House

The objective of the Clearing House is to collect and disseminate knowledge in the EU on appropriate and effective approaches aimed at young people in the field of alcohol. As a first step, it is intended to create a database in which project information is collected and made easily available. As the system becomes operational and depending on needs and requirements, this could be expanded to include the dissemination of good practice and to support proponents of projects in specific searches for information or partners.

Objectives	Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer an overview of activities and projects across Europe by creating an online EU database linked to the EU Health Portal: the database can be accessed by all (public domain). This would cover information on good practice, indicators, evaluation methodologies, based on contributions by EAHF members and others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DG SANCO to set up a database of activities and projects and issue an open invitation to EAHF members, Member State representatives and others to suggest programmes and projects to be included.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote good practice and develop monitoring/evaluation of effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify basic criteria of project quality which serve as requirements for including project information in the database. - Highlight well-evaluated and effective programmes and projects on the website and via (yearly) events of the Clearing House. - Support the dissemination of methodologies for monitoring and evaluation, and of evidence of effectiveness. - An independent professional team should be in place to run and maintain the database.

<p>- Offer support to all stakeholders to reduce alcohol-related harm by developing toolkits for prevention programmes and templates for the description and evaluation thereof: This would involve making available recommendations on good practice that could be recommended for roll-out across Europe as well as templates for description and evaluation of programmes/activities (identifying elements that could be covered, e.g. objectives, target group, intervention settings, messages, communication tools, and evaluation details)</p>	<p>- The Clearing House to offer support in the development of such toolkits and templates based on existing programmes identified through the database.</p>
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Elements of the Clearing House:

These could include, in a step by step approach:

- A European on-line database of projects, good practice, indicators, evaluation methodologies, scientific research data to reduce alcohol related harm among young people which fulfil certain basic requirements;
- Information on measurement & evaluation methodologies to assess effectiveness and impact on alcohol-related harm in the short, medium and long term;
- Defining factors for effective programmes;
- Enable those conceiving and leading projects to open up for broader support and participation;
- evaluation mechanisms;
- Sustainable measured and evaluated prevention programmes developed by stakeholders at local/regional, national and EU level.

Working methods and organisational aspects

- To maintain the objective of a central and neutral place, the Clearing House will be linked to the implementation of the EU alcohol strategy
- To be efficient, the Clearing House will be built around simple structures: The basic responsibility will lie with DG SANCO, which will in turn be advised by an advisory body composed of a small number of representatives drawn from the Forum, the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action and the Science Group.
- The working methods of the Clearing House will evolve over time. At its first meeting, the advisory body would provide input on preliminary working methods and basic requirements for projects/programmes to be included in the data base, which can be further developed in the light of practical experience.
- DG SANCO will report back regularly to the Forum plenary meetings.
- It is envisaged that once the data base is operational, (linked to the Open Forum of the A&H Forum), the Clearing House will organise an event on Alcohol and Youth good practice reflecting its work and findings.

- The agenda, documents tabled and results of the meetings will be available to the public and posted on the Commission's websites.

Resources

Resources for the delivery of the full version of the Clearing House will need to be identified, keeping in mind that it could developed over time. The European Commission is willing to provide start-up funding for the creation of the database and basic operations for an initial phase running to end-2011. But in parallel there are different options which need to be explored further:

- Seek EU or national support to pilot projects to implement the template programmes at national level;
- Seek funds from Member States to support the work of the “Clearing House”.