



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

PLENARY MEETING
3 April 2009, 10.00 – 17.00
CENTRE DE CONFERENCES ALBERT BORSCHETTE (CCAB)

MINUTES

1. INTRODUCTION AND AGENDA

The Chair welcomed the participants to this first plenary session of 2009, particularly the representatives of Member States that are in attendance. Their presence implements the proposals in late 2008 on modalities for cooperation between the Platform and the High Level Group. The Agenda was adopted.

2. COMMITMENTS / PLATFORM ANNUAL REPORT 2009

Platform members were informed about the timeline for the reporting and introduction of new commitments to cover the period up to 2010. From the end of April 2009, commitments can be updated and new ones can be entered into the database. The deadline to input the 2010 commitments is the end of October 2009. The full timeline will be uploaded onto CIRCA.

In 2008, the Chair challenged Platform members to aim for 80% of the monitoring reports to score 3/5 or above. According to the Rand Europe report, there was a slight improvement from 53 % to 55%, meaning that this target was not achieved. Platform members are invited to explore whether an additional effort in the next few months is possible by those members that have a score of less than 3 in order to improve the monitoring of their 2008 commitments. The deadline for reviewing the existing monitoring reports is the end of June 2009.

The Chair noted there is a credibility problem if monitoring is not of sufficiently high quality. The purpose of the monitoring process is to ensure that the new Commissioner can go to the new Parliament and assure them that the Platform is delivering measurable progress.

2.1. Annual report 2009

The Draft Annual Report was circulated in advance of the meeting for comments or amendments. Deadline for comments is 15 April 2009.

3. CASE STUDY ON IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION ON DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH, presented by Magda Rosenmöller, IESE Business School

The case study was commissioned by DG SANCO as part of the broader evaluation of the implementation of the EU Strategy, and provides an external view of the Platform as a tool. The companies interviewed highlighted the role of the Platform as a catalyst for getting management buy-in for activities and an opportunity to develop relationships with stakeholders. So far the case study concentrated on the business viewpoint, although input from the non profit sector and NGOs is also welcome. The question of the impact of the Platform on their operational environment and priorities is equally valid. Some participants

noted that the governance and goals of the different sectors in the Platform need other ways of assessing impact, for example looking at how grass roots organisations have been affected. IESE noted that the interviews highlighted that the overall objectives of the Platform might be shared by the members, but there is no consensus on key issues such as traffic light or GDA systems. This demonstrates the value of the Platform as a space for debate. For business school case studies, controversy and challenges can be useful as a learning exercise.

4. EU STRATEGY 2010 PROGRESS REPORT

The Commission will report on implementation of the EU Strategy, which comprises ongoing monitoring, a progress report in 2010 (a policy assessment on implementation of the activities to reduce obesity) and a final report by 2013. One element in this reporting will be an evaluation on progress achieved by the Platform. A tender will be launched for an external evaluator and a steering committee is being formed to which a few active Platform members would be invited (volunteers welcome). This steering committee would meet twice (June and September) and would help to set the questions for the Terms of Reference for the evaluator and provide guidance. France and Slovenia will be the Member States represented on the committee. The Platform will also be invited to provide comments on the recommendations of the evaluation before it is submitted to the new Commissioner, Parliament and Council.

The WHO EURO already plays an important role in the monitoring by compiling a central information resource which follows how relevant policies are being put in place in the Member States, each of which has appointed a national focal points. Other Commission departments are involved in the efforts to monitor the strategy including EUROSTAT, INFSO, AGRI, EAC etc.

In terms of timing, the monitoring system with the WHO was defined in 2008, in early 2009 work began on a framework including a set of indicators with RAND Europe which will be endorsed by the High Level Group in July 2009. The Member States will also provide a first round of data collection to the WHO.

5. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

5.1. Physical activity members manifesto was presented by Mogens Kirkeby ISCA

The European Physical Activity Forum has been created by members of the Platform that work on physical activity, European Confederation Sport and Health – CESS, European Cyclists Federation – ECF, European Federation of Play Industry – FEPI, European Health and Fitness Association – EHFA, European Non-Governmental Sport Organisations – ENGSO, International Sport and Culture Association -ISCA. Their goal is to engage as many stakeholders as possible from a variety of sectors to encourage greater physical activity in Europe. Other Platform members are welcome to join the Forum and to contribute to a range of activities including EU projects, conferences, online libraries etc. There are three themes for cooperation:

- Promotion
- Mobilization
- Knowledge-sharing

The Chair noted that in this context, the European Commission has started planning its participation in the World Exhibition in Shanghai. There is potential for synergies with some organisations that have not previously appreciated that the Platform relates to their core work.

5.2. Fit@work video presentation by Hermann Rutgers EHFA

At the request of DG SANCO, EHFA has developed four short videos (5 minutes each) showing exercises that could be done in the office environment to stretch and strengthen the back, neck and shoulders, legs and upper body. These are practical and useful tools that were produced quickly at low cost. In addition a small promotional video showed senior SANCO managers testing out these exercises. All of the videos

are available on the SANCO intranet together with the health and wellbeing advice. Use of the videos is being tracked and the medical service of the Commission has benchmarked the system and is interested in the results.

5.3. DG EAC gave an update on the [EU Physical Activity Guidelines](#)

The EU Physical Activity Guidelines were adopted by the Sports Ministers in November 2008 under the French Presidency. Voluntary support from Platform members is particularly welcome because it is a non binding document. These commonly agreed standards are a useful communication tool that stakeholders can refer to when they undertake work to increase physical activity. The Chair noted that School Fruit project and the Physical Activity Guidelines are two examples of the positive impact of the Platform across other areas of the European Commission's work programme.

6. REFORMULATION – INCLUDING COMPOSITION OF FOODS, AVAILABILITY OF HEALTHIER FOOD OPTIONS, PORTION SIZES

6.1. Initiatives from the restaurant sector to improve nutrition, Goody's fast service restaurants, presented by *Theo Kallitsis, chair of EMRA*

This presentation highlighted a number of initiatives to reformulate fast food offerings to improve the nutritional content. This included consumer education, promotion of salads, changing the frying oil and not adding salt to French fries. Olive oil is more expensive than palm oil, for example, adding 5 cents more to the cost of a portion of fries. The company has not passed on the full price rise to consumers. For six months, they monitored the feedback from customers and the profit and loss of these stores. Results show that consumers are prepared to pay for changes that they feel are justified and directly benefits them.

6.2. Reformulation of recipes and new cooking methods in catering companies presented by *Marie-Christine Lefebvre FERCO*

The company calculated that the cost of reformulation, costs of re-training and education of customers, can have an 8% impact on a price of a meal. Previously many meals were subsidised (workplace and schools) and this trend is changing. Clients increasingly want to keep the price for the customers the same, and reduce their own subsidy to the cost of the meal. The result is a lower cost, lower quality product. Across Europe, there are large price differences for similar services: the municipality of Rome will spend between 5-8 € on a special diet meal. In contrast, in the UK it is less than 1 €. The same infrastructure and accompanying services can clearly not be provided for these different prices. Food waste in the education sector is 30-50% of what is on the plate. This is destroyed and cannot be re-used which represents a significant environmental problem.

In the catering sector, the pressures on budget constrain the ability to improve quality. There may be some opportunities to build a coalition of stakeholders such as trade unions and education ministries to explore the public health challenges around the reported client resistance to portion control and the associated food waste.

6.3. Healthier option – vending machines with fruit and vegetables (experiment in Dijon, France) was presented by *Ms Myriam Decoeur-Michel NAVSA*

These pilot activities are designed to introduce local food and healthier options into a vending machine and to offer fresh fruit and vegetables. Although some challenges have been identified – e.g temperature, packaging and range of products, there has been a positive response from the consumers. There are a number of technical issues that need to be resolved, for examples hygiene issues mean that fruit should be wrapped in some kind of packaging and school students increasingly prefer sliced products which would mean dipping the fruit – thus making it processed and no longer fresh. Fruit and vegetables also take up a lot of space in a machine so servicing it has to be more regular and intensive.

In the discussion following the intervention it was mentioned from one of the members that getting fresh produce into vending machines requires a cultural shift as well as a different engineering approach, with machines more adapted to fruit and vegetables rather than vice-versa.

6.4. The *Commission* presented the latest developments to the EU salt reduction initiative

- DG SANCO has been working closely with Member States to prepare tables with the lowest achievable salt levels in the major food categories. For 27 out of the 29 countries this information has been provided and governments will have 6 weeks to review the data before it is published.
- Almost all countries have taken some action on salt reduction initiatives and submitted this data to SANCO. This information will be reviewed by mid May and Member States have been asked if this data can also be published.
- SANCO is working on communication material for the general public about salt reduction initiatives and has met with industry representatives to discuss salt reduction, nutrition strategy and nutrient profiles.
- SANCO is in contact with the World Hypertension League to talk about the World Hypertension day, 17 May, which this year has a theme of the ‘silent killer’.
- SANCO has made contact with all of the projects funded under FP6/7 and specifically [TRUEFOOD](#) project to examine traditional food items and improve the nutritional content for meat and cheese.
- SANCO will commission a study through a competitive tender to explore the potential for reformulation. This should deliver results in 2010.
- SANCO is following the ‘salt war’ in the journals of Nephrology which have featured supportive and negative views of salt and health. An editorial note explains that peer review process was carried out despite the commercial funding of the studies which find no impact of salt on health.

This update on the salt reduction initiatives shows there has been progress in getting all Member States to take a proactive position on reformulation, starting with salt. Platform members are encouraged to build on this opportunity to discuss with national authorities about product reformulation.

6.5. The [Food Pro-Fit project](#) was presented by Dr Toni Colom, Regional Ministry of Health of the Balearic Islands

This EU funded projects has developed a new online database tool for small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) that want to reformulate their processed foods and meals. The tool contains a database of recipes that can be customised allowing them to control and reduce the amount of fats, salt and sugar in their product ranges. The nutrient content of the ingredients is taken from the Eurodiet profiles. There is an algorithm to select items for reformulation – scientists can play with 4 ingredients which are selected and are balanced out with a visualisation of the changes to the recipe. The database has typical recipes for an item, but it is possible to change the nutritional objectives as a means of calibrating the tool. Before meeting the nutritional criteria, the safety aspects of recipe changes are checked. For example, if the salt or fat is reduced, the Hazard Analysis And Critical Control Points (HACCP) model needs to be changed. In most cases it is a taste issue rather than a safety problem. When the database is released, it will probably also be of relevance for regulators because they need to be aware of the technical challenges for SMEs of reformulation and the potential solutions.

6.6. The [FOOD](#) project - Fighting Obesity through Offer and Demand was presented by *Nolwenn Bertrand*

This EU funded project explores ways of helping people to eat healthily at lunchtime during the working day. It aims to sensitise employees to health issues in order to help them to improve their nutrition and to improve the nutritional quality of the offer by working with restaurants owners, cooks and food servers.

6.7. Discussion on Reformulation

“Health by stealth” is one way of improving the nutritional content of food products, e.g; reformulating without publicising the changes. Food retailers have registered that since the reformulation efforts began, complaints about the taste of products have more than tripled. So if products are labelled as reformulated,

there is a risk that consumers may be less attracted to the product. Therefore the changes need to be accompanied with some public awareness and education about the health benefits. For example, the UK government has calculated that the public health impact of every 0.5 gram reduction in average salt consumption is 3,000 fewer premature deaths.

A certain degree of industry-wide coordination is needed so that products are not avoided as salt is reduced. The experience of countries that have successfully implemented reformulation campaigns is that this has not been a competitive feature if it has been accompanied by education. Better measurement and understanding of the public health impacts of nutrition initiatives are needed, particularly those of reformulation. Platform members will be increasingly expected to demonstrate the relevance of their commitment activities for national nutrition policies.

The Chair concluded the meeting with a reminder that the next Platform Plenary meeting on 9 July will have a specific link to the Commissioner's launch of a youth health campaign and focus on lifestyles. The topic of food labelling has been moved to a Platform meeting later in the year (11 September 2009).