



FLASH REPORT
EUROPEAN ALCOHOL AND HEALTH FORUM
PLENARY MEETING OF 25 APRIL 2013

The 12th Plenary meeting of the European Alcohol and Health Forum (EAHF) took place on 25 April 2013 in Brussels, with two main focus areas:

- CEOs global initiatives to reduce alcohol related harm;
- Lowering alcoholic strength of drinks.

The European Alcohol and Health Forum has a new Chair, *John F. Ryan*, Acting Director for public health, Directorate General for Health and Consumers.

Opening by the Chair

John Ryan acknowledged the importance of the European Alcohol and Health Forum as one of the tools for the implementation of the EU Alcohol Strategy. This is confirmed by the preliminary results of the independent evaluation, the report of which should be available before the summer break. The report will identify further areas to enhance the effectiveness of the actions taken by the Forum members.

Highlights by Commission Services

Two studies and projects on enforcement of age limits and on informing consumers on health aspects, financed by the Health programme in 2012, were introduced by DG SANCO.

The chair concluded that, the results being expected before the autumn, the update on progress will be presented in the next Forum's meeting.

DG CONNECT presented the Implementation report of the Audio-visual

Media Service Directive and its future planning, which focuses on the actions related to the protection of minors, including alcohol advertisement. A productive discussion on marketing followed this presentation. The need to have an accepted methodology among Forum Members to follow up the one developed for the RAND report was widely recognized. It was agreed to set up a small workgroup to discuss this issue possibly in September. Members who wish to take part in this discussion should express their interest to SANCO. This reflection will also involve DG CONNECT.

Global Action initiatives to Reduce Harmful Drinking

The International Centre for Alcohol Policies - ICAP - gave an overview of the global commitments to reduce harmful drinking. Afterwards, Heineken, Comité Européen des Entreprises Vin and Pernod Ricard specified how they contribute to this global initiative. EUROCARE informed the Forum on the fears by several NGOs about the increasing involvement of industry stakeholders into WHO Global discussions. Overall, the global alcohol producer initiative was regarded as valuable and the possibility to further involve other sectors (e.g. retailers and the hospitality sector) was deemed positive.

The chair considered that the global CEOs commitment creates an opportunity to boost actions on important issues such as underage drinking, consumer information

and warning messages also in the EU context.

Lowering alcohol content in drinks

The afternoon session began with two presentations under the UK Responsibility Deal pledge on "Alcohol Unit Reduction". The Royal College of Physicians underlined the reasons why this pledge was important for Public Health. Molsen Coors presented the perspective of the UK industry under the pledge and the reasons why reducing alcohol content does not necessarily lower profits. This was followed by a round table with the Royal College of Physicians, Molsen Coors, AB InBev, Heineken, Diageo, Pernod Ricard, Eurocommerce and the Standing Committee of European Doctors.

Several panellists questioned the feasibility of a similar commitment outside the UK, where this action is part of a wider initiative to foster a culture of responsible drinking (e.g. low risk drinking guidelines, standard units, labelling, taxation facilities in some cases for low alcohol content beverages).

The Chair stressed the importance of EAHF following the development of these UK commitments.

With regard to standard drinks (or units) and low risk drinking guidelines, the Chair informed that a Joint Action on alcohol has been submitted under the EU Health Programme where these issues are included and proposed to have a presentation on this Joint Action in the next Forum Meeting.

Selected commitments

The European Transport Safety Council presented SMART (Sober Mobility Across Road Transport), their new project on drink-driving, supported by the Brewers of Europe as a new Forum commitment.

HORECA Vlaanderen, one of the new members joining the forum in November 2012, presented their commitment aimed at increasing awareness and to provide training in the hospitality sector.

European Alcohol and Health Forum: ways forward

DG SANCO presented a more user friendly version of the commitments reporting. Following the preliminary recommendations in the external evaluation, it will be also compulsory for new commitments to introduce references to outcomes and impact indicators. The change will also be accompanied by a revision of the Members submission guide. It was agreed that SANCO will explore the possibility to use the new version on a trial basis before taking the final decision.

Commitments

The Chair insisted on the importance of maintaining active commitments and of effectively reporting. There are still Members without an active commitment. The Chair stressed that it is important for members to table new commitments to maintain the credibility of the forum approach.

Next meeting

The date for the next plenary meeting of the Alcohol and Health Forum was fixed for **21 November 2013**. Next yearly reports on the implementation of commitments to action under the Forum were set to be delivered at latest on **31 March 2014**.