

MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

23 November 2016
10.00 – 17.00

CHAIR: SANTE Director C

FINAL MINUTES

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE COMMISSION

The meeting was opened by the **Chair** who welcomed the participants and introduced the agenda, centred on '**Monitor and evaluate**' and '**Increase research**' (areas 7 and 8 of the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity).

The **Chair** informed the participants of a new Steering Committee that will be operational in 2017 that will address prevention, promotion and chronic diseases. Its purpose is to advise the Commission and to provide a forum for consultation on the planning for health promotion and disease prevention actions in the EU, and support the Member States in meeting the WHO/UN 2025 global voluntary targets on non-communicable diseases. The first meeting will take place on 30 November in Brussels, chaired by the Deputy Director-General. The members of the High Level Group will be kept informed on further developments.

The **Chair** also gave the floor to the new Head of Unit for C4 'Health determinants and inequalities', who will start as of 1 January 2017, to present himself.

The draft agenda was adopted. The High Level Group approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

The **Chair** mentioned that colleagues were present today from DG EAC, DG AGRI, DG RTD and DG MOVE.

2. PRIORITIES OF THE CURRENT AND UPCOMING PRESIDENCIES

The representative of **Slovakia** presented the work of the current Presidency so far on food reformulation. Based on the trio questionnaire, to which 24 Member States plus Norway and Switzerland provided input, the document 'Best practices of the Member States in food reformulation' was developed and presented at the High Level Conference (20-21 September) and the Informal Meeting of the Ministers of Health (3-4 October) in Bratislava.

The document concludes that the Member States use a wide range of (combined) actions (such as legislation, voluntary agreements, logos) to reach their reformulation goals for the main nutrients. It further concludes that that the biggest progress is in the area of salt, but also saturated fats, including trans fats; positive developments are taking place on added sugars.

The representative of **Malta** presented their priority on halting the rise in childhood obesity. They have two main focus areas.

First, the mid-term evaluation of the EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity will identify in the Member States good practices and areas of concern, and will outline how the Commission and Member States can step up actions. It is also the wish of the Maltese Presidency to use the outcomes of the mid-term evaluation to develop council conclusions on childhood obesity.

Secondly, voluntary public procurement guidelines for foods for schools which can be adapted for use by Member States. Healthy school meals are extremely important for future healthy food choices. Representatives of the Commission and of 15 Member States will meet early December to start developing this work.

Finally it was mentioned that a technical workshop will be held on 22-23 February 2017.

The Chair welcomed the intention of Malta to keep childhood obesity high on the agenda and noted that Council Conclusions will help to raise the political attention on the topic. He also welcomed the planned work on public procurement guidelines.

Belgium mentioned that they have developed similar voluntary guidelines for schools.

The **Commission** gave a brief update on the development of the public procurement guidelines so far, mentioning that billions of euros are spent by public authorities on food. So action in this area can be used to improve public health and provide practical support to the most the innovative companies and decision units, especially at local level.

The **Chair** advised Malta to involve the colleagues that deal with internal market. **Malta** replied that the proposals will be aligned with the current legislation.

3. WHAT IS NEW

The **Joint Research Centre** provided an overview of scientific news and developments in the fields of nutrition and physical activity.

A brief discussion followed on the link between dietary patterns rich in meat and obesity and chronic diseases. The **Chair** mentioned that the European Code Against Cancer (<http://cancer-code-europe.iarc.fr/index.php/en/>) provides relevant advice on processed meat and limit red meat.

The **Commission** mentioned that it has been working together with the Joint Research Center to develop a reference publication for policymakers. The aim of this document is to summarise the status of research on a selected number of topics. The document will be easy to read and a 'living' document (update on a regular basis). The Commission will provide more information to the members of the High Level Group at a later stage.

4. UPDATE BY DG EDUCATION AND CULTURE

DG EAC presented an update of the recent (policy) developments on health-enhancing physical activity. An overview was given on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on health-enhancing physical activity and studies to strengthen the evidence base for policymaking (study on the contribution of sport to the regional development through the Structural Funds, and a study on EU Physical Activity Guidelines). The Erasmus+ programme co-finances projects and events, and the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity is a priority. A Sport Infoday (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/events/sport-infoday-31-january-2017_en) to inform potential applicants about funding opportunities will take place on 31 January 2017. DG EAC gave an update on their pilot project on promoting health-enhancing physical activity policy measures and actions for refugees, and on Massive Open Online Course (<https://www.fun-mooc.fr/courses/CoR/114001/session01/about>) on EU budget and funding for regions and cities. Finally, an update of the second EU Week of Sports was given.

The **Chair** mentioned that the information on funding will be shared with the participants after the meeting.

France underlined the importance of a better coordination between the promotion of physical activity and sport. He also raised concern about the support of sport events, such as the European Week of Sport, by food companies.

DG EAC mentioned that the partners are sport or physical activity related stakeholders; companies are not directly involved. However, it is difficult to control this at local level. France asked if this aspect could be included in the evaluation of the initiative. DG EAC mentioned that this can be discussed when preparing the questionnaire for next year's evaluation.

DG RTD inquired about the link with active mobility and urban planning. **DG EAC** replied that the promotion of physical activity across all sectors has been called by the Council and that this is reflected in the indicators of the monitoring process of the Council Recommendation on health-enhancing physical activity.

The **Chair** mentioned the Luxembourg programme celebrating 10 years of helping people eat healthy and be more active. This initiative involves the 4 Ministries of Health, Sports, National Education, and Family, and thereby ensures a coordinated action to help people live healthy lifestyles. The Chair invited Luxembourg to present the programme and its results at a future High Level Group meeting.

5. 'MONITOR AND EVALUATE' AND 'INCREASE RESEARCH'

5.1 MONITORING OF MID-TERM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU ACTION PLAN ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY

The Commission launched a call for tender to prepare a report on the mid-term implementation of the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity. The consortium led by **Nivel, the Netherlands Institute for Health Services Research**, is working to establish an overview of the state of implementation of the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity as well as on relevant related actions on nutrition and physical activity. This will facilitate to focus activities from 2017 to 2020 in those areas, where gaps or lacks in the implementation may be identified.

Nivel explained the tasks and the methodology and asked the support of the members of the High Level Group in their data collection and their availability for a one hour telephone interview. The **Commission** underlined the importance of the input and cooperation from all Member States as the report is one of the major inputs to the Technical Meeting of the Maltese Presidency on 22-23 February.

The Chair reminded the Member States of the importance of monitoring initiatives in the all areas of the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity.

5.2 DEDIPAC PROJECT (DETERMINANTS OF DIET & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY)

Dedipac (Determinants of Diet & Physical Activity) is the first action of the Joint Programming Initiative: 'A Healthy Diet for a Healthy Life'. It is finished and the results were presented by the coordinator, the **VU University Medical Center of Amsterdam**.

The project focused on the determinants, at both the individual and group levels, regarding dietary, physical activity and sedentary behaviours. To this end an assessment and harmonisation of measurement methods are undertaken, together with an evaluation and benchmarking of public health and policy interventions. Besides establishing a strong

network, literature reviews have been conducted, frameworks of determinants have been developed, and a toolbox has been designed for developing, monitoring and evaluating policies across Europe.

The coordinator presented the following conclusions:

- Lack of standardised/harmonised measurement methods
- Lack of studies on determinants of dietary, physical activity and sedentary behaviours
- Lack of infrastructure to evaluate and benchmark policies and interventions

For the future Dedipac would recommend maintaining the network and collaborations, and to develop a cross-European cohort study to investigate the causes of the causes.

France underlined the importance of harmonisation of the methods to determine behaviours. The **Dedipac** coordinator replied that the main focus has been on qualitative methods.

The **Chair** mentioned that the toolbox could be presented to the New Committee on Promotion, Prevention and Chronic Diseases. He added that the outcomes can be used in the Commission's work on chronic diseases.

DG RTD inquired about the importance of social determinants. The Dedipac coordinator mentioned that this was handled separately due to its importance.

5.3 RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS BY PLATFORM MEMBERS AND BY I.FAMILY PROJECT

Four **EU Platform members** were invited to share their top 3 of suggestions for research. The **World Obesity Federation (WOF)** and the **European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN)** were present at the meeting; the presentations by the **European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)** and the **European Network for Prevention and Health Promotion in Family Medicine and General Practice (EUROPREV)** were made available online.

The aim of this exercise was to facilitate the identification of research topics for the future.

The **Commission** explained that the focus of today's meeting was also to have regular analysis of research needs and shared with DG RTD. **DG RTD** informed the participants that the work programme for the next three years of Horizon 2020 is currently being prepared and asked for input and ideas.

5.3.1 RESEARCH PRIORITIES TO TACKLE CHILDHOOD OBESITY

WOF mentioned that research should be relevant to policy, include costs of implementation (many school-based trials do not report cost or cost-effectiveness), indicate time needed to see effect, and indicate health equity impact.

In their opinion future research should focus on 1. actions to prevent that non-communicable diseases face opposition from commercial interests; 2. actions to strengthen the position of national health ministries, and prioritise the issue of prevention of non-communicable diseases; and 3. strategies for changing the language, narrative, discourse (how to change media and political philosophy).

The ongoing health-enhancing physical activity pilot project was mentioned, which contributes to maintaining an EU and Member State focus on health inequalities and help to mainstream measures to address them. The project will have a particular focus on alcohol,

nutrition and physical activity, related to the socio-economic gradient and disadvantaged areas. More information on:

https://ec.europa.eu/health/social_determinants/projects/ep_funded_projects_en#fragment1

WOF mentioned that their library of images related to obesity is accessible for all.

Following the point on presentation, the **Commission** added that it is currently doing a study with the OECD on economics of prevention and that WP4 of the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity is researching the lifetime impact and cost of childhood obesity, providing therefore national health ministries with an evidence-based economic rationale for action on childhood obesity.

5.3.2 EARLY NUTRITION: THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION

ESPGHAN presented Early Nutrition, a research project funded by the 7th Framework Programme, that investigates the effect of early nutrition and lifestyle on metabolic programming. The project started in 2012 and will finish in 2017 and look into the long-term effects of early nutrition on later health. **ESPGHAN** highlighted that the first two years of a child are key to prevent future problems. More information on: <http://www.project-earlynutrition.eu/eneu/>

In their opinion, future research should look into the 1,000 days initiative, that underlines that good nutrition in the 1,000 days between a woman's pregnancy and her child's second birthday set the foundation for all the days that follow. More information: <http://thousanddays.org/>

Another suggestion was to focus on the link between obesity and brain development, and on the effects of nutrition and physical activity on it.

The **Commission** invited **ESPGHAN** to present the outcomes of the Early Nutrition project at a later stage.

5.3.3 I.FAMILY PROJECT

The I.Family project, funded by the 7th Framework Programme and building on the Idefics project, investigates the determinants of food choice, lifestyle and health in European children, adolescents and their parents. The **Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology (BIPS)** presented the key results in the areas of dietary behaviour, physical activity and the built environment, sleep, media consumption. The final conference will take place on 9 February 2017 in Brussels.

More information on: <http://www.ifamilystudy.eu/>

BIPS also presented their three suggestions for future priorities in research on childhood obesity: the need for life-course approach (longitudinal studies), including funding for further follow-up of existing children cohorts, addressing the environmental determinants of health behaviours, and assessing the effectiveness of policy interventions.

The **Commission** underlined the importance of including vulnerable groups and the time to intervene at young age. In effectively addressing the environmental determinants and for

developing the concept of movability, the involvement of both DG EAC and DG MOVE is essential.

Belgium inquired about the length of sleep. **BIPS** replied that their research showed that just a small reduction of the sleep duration can have an effect on overweight and obesity, and that the effect is stronger on those children that are already obese.

6. UPDATE BY THE WHO

The **WHO** noted the well-established role of price as a driver of food choice and the fact that this can help governments to correct the tendency of the market to encourage the consumption of products with a documented negative impact on health. There is a growing interest in taxes and subsidies in Member States to improve diets and prevent non-communicable diseases. The WHO presented the objectives of using price policies and provided a summary of evidence and evidence to inform policy. Among its key observations, the WHO noted the significant scope to advance the implementation of price policies in the coming years, the importance of focusing on influencing purchasing and consumption behaviour, and the crucial role of monitoring and evaluating.

On the issue of digital marketing, the WHO mentioned that children are increasingly exposed to persuasive, individually-tailored marketing techniques. Children users are tracked online using behavioural analysis techniques such as “zombie cookies”, device fingerprinting, geolocation and the most tailored advertisement is delivered. This data collected is highly valuable and sold by social platforms to advertisers: *“Taken together, the creative tactics and analytics equate to a brand appointing a personal marketer to each child, locating and identifying those who are most susceptible to their messages, encouraging them to send marketing messages to their friends, and following them throughout the day, at moments of happiness, frustration, hunger and intent, delivering advertising with the maximum impact, and directing them to the nearest place to buy foods to ‘fix’ their current emotional state.”*

On the mechanisms that influence children's diets, the WHO said that individuals must not only understand the persuasive intent of marketing but also require conscious awareness of it, and the ability as well as the motivation to resist. The latter factors are often not present among teenagers, undermining the notion of an age-based cognitive defence against advertising being present even beyond the age of 12.

Finally, the WHO briefly presented its new report 'Tackling food marketing to children in a digital world: trans-disciplinary perspectives', in which it suggests clear steps for effective policy-making.

Find the report here: http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/322226/Tackling-food-marketing-children-digital-world-trans-disciplinary-perspectives-en.pdf?ua=1

The **Commission** added that now is the time to keep a close eye on the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which is now being discussed by the European Parliament and the Council.

Belgium highlighted that there is much marketing effort ongoing on social media and called for more action in this field by the members of the EU Platform. The **WHO** replied that marketeers are ahead of us and that the current rules need to be expanded. This could be an area for further research – topic of today's meeting – but it will be difficult and expensive. The WHO expressed their fear that the WHO recommendations that call for a reduction in the total

exposure of children to marketing of food high in fat, salt and sugar and a reduction in the persuasive power across all marketing channels, will not be reached if the trends continue.

Italy asked if the WHO has considered the impact of taxes on consumption on other food products. The **WHO** replied that the introduction of the Mexican tax on sugar-sweetened beverages has led to an increase in water consumption and the consumption of more balanced foods. Companies with a diversified portfolio could use this to their advantage and make profits. This could also be topic of further research.

Romania shared that they study the introduction of a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. The **WHO** replied that taxes generate changes in behaviour and this is enough evidence for action to be taken. Ideally a comprehensive approach is needed, and a food tax is part of the mix.

Hungary mentioned that they just finished evaluation of their food tax. It shows that most of the consumers who substituted unhealthy foods, replaced this by healthier options. Therefore the tax had a positive influence on the changing the behaviour of the consumer.

France suggests that when a specific pricing mechanism is introduced, the reason should be to have an impact on the consumer behaviour – and not to reduce the reducing the levels of obesity – and that this is part of a comprehensive policy approach.

7. UPDATE ON THE WORKING GROUP ON FOOD REFORMULATION AND WAY AHEAD

The **Commission** provided a summary of the previous day's working group with reformulation experts. The recommendation of the working group to the High Level Group is the following:

- the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity monitoring methodology can and should support reformulation/product improvement. It is based on an inexpensive, fit-for-purpose approach of collecting product level nutritional information based on the labels (that can/should be used for all seven points covered by the food law);
- the methodology for the monitoring of reformulation initiatives should be based on the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity. The nomenclature/definition and sub-categories of the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity should preferably be used. Data should be complemented with market share. Additional detail on the methodology will be available in the coming months (based on the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity and on the experiences of Switzerland and the UK; guidance will include additional information on definitions, subcategories, estimation/calculation of added sugars and practical tool/instructions, whether or not to include products with artificial sweeteners is up to Member States);
- providing a monitoring baseline is crucial to the success of all reformulation initiatives; Member States are therefore encouraged to use the monitoring methodology of the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity for setting up these baselines;
- it was agreed to share the inventory on benchmarks with the stakeholders and to link stakeholder contact per product group;
- on benchmarks, the Member States working group made up of UK, IE, NL, FR will continue to work on three food categories (but are open to more) taking into account the High Level Group members' feedback based on the established baselines for the 28 Member States;

- The monitoring/benchmarking process as well as the baseline exercise with the Member States will be regularly reported to the High Level Group and Platform.

The **Commission** asked for approval from the High Level Group members for this approach and all gave their approval. In addition, the following Member States provided some additional information.

Slovenia shared that they has a 2015 database and that in their experience it is a pragmatic way and useful tool. If we work globally maybe the work is better.

Luxembourg agrees with the approach and **Malta** added that this approach will provide a good baseline and a clear picture of the differences in the various products and in various Member States.

The **Commission** will present this to the members of the EU Platform at tomorrow's meeting.

Another topic that was discussed yesterday was the possibilities of the Commission supporting the Member States in the near future.

The 2016 budget allows for a project that supports the efforts on reformulation and monitoring or expands the methodology used in the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity, perhaps supporting the less well-served countries such as Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus, which are less/not covered by commercially available databases. The 2017 budget will allow for an even bigger initiative.

A joint project with DG CNECT will start in 2017 to assess the exposure of children to marketing of foods high in fat, salt and sugar.

The Netherlands highlighted their wish to pay more attention to marketing (also of alcohol) to children and cross border issues such as commercials by internationally operating companies. They would be keen to know the approaches of other Member States.

Cyprus mentioned that they would welcome the support on their reformulation work.

France underlined that also bigger countries should be involved due to their impact. On the suggestion for a new Joint Action he added that this would need to include the results of JANPA and he suggested including the topic of front of pack labelling.

8. NATIONAL POLICY UPDATE

Belgium presented the national reformulation strategy (salt, energy). Together with manufacturers and retailers, a 'Convention for a Balanced Diet' has been developed, including a monitoring of the energy reduction strategy, and this was presented in detail. Finally, the 'Boogie Woogie' campaign, an initiative of the Flemish Institute for Health Promotion and Disney Benelux, was presented. Find the link here: <https://woogieboogie.be/>

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The **Commission** thanked the Member States for their work and input in the reformulation/public procurement questionnaires, guidance to DG AGRI on the implementation of the school milk scheme, and for their updates on their national reformulation situation.

The Commission briefly updated the Member States on current status of the revised Platform work methodology.

10. CONCLUSION

The Chair

- noted that the work on the implementation of the Added Sugars Annex is moving forward and welcomed that a methodology for monitoring national reformulation initiatives was endorsed, based on the methodology developed and piloted by the Joint Action on Nutrition and Physical Activity;
- noted the ongoing work on developing guidelines for public procurement of food;
- welcomed the discussion on the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the importance that the public health points can be included;
- reminded the Member States to take concrete action on areas 7 (monitor and evaluate) and 8 (increase research) of the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity.

The next meeting will be on **Wednesday 8 March in Brussels** and will focus on '**Restrict marketing and advertising to children**' (area 4 of the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity).