



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HEALTH AND CONSUMERS DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Public Health
Health determinants

CONCLUSIONS

of the work of the Governance Working Group

of the European Alcohol and Health Forum

1. CONTEXT

At the last Forum meeting on 9 April 2014, it has been decided to create an ad-hoc working group to consider and discuss the governance of the Forum and the reporting of the commitments by the members. This document is based on the discussions of the Working Group (WG) on 10 July 2014 in Luxembourg and 6 October 2014 in Brussels (list of WG members). Both meetings were chaired by Philippe Roux, DG SANCO (Head of Unit, Health Determinants Unit).

The current document reviews the WG's opinions and recommendations to the plenary on the issues discussed.

2. MAIN ISSUES DISCUSSED

At the time of the second meeting, 25 out of the 64 Forum members had no active commitment. Among the active commitments, 17 out of 39 will expire by the end of 2014. Also, last year only 58 monitoring reports were received instead of 87 reports expected (including final and intermediate reports). According to the Charter, having both active commitments and proper monitoring are essential requirements for Forum membership; therefore all members should be encouraged to better comply with these obligations.

The process of preparing the Forum plenary meetings and the Forum's work at large would gain from a renewed approach, particularly by reducing the time of presentations and allowing space for discussions and proposals to be considered by participants.

3. SETTING THE SCENE

The work of the European Alcohol and Health Forum finds its roots in the EU Strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm (2006) and is defined in its founding Charter. In addition, the 2014 Action Plan on Youth Drinking and Heavy Episodic Drinking endorsed by Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action (CNAPA) is also a useful source document when considering new Forum commitments for the two coming years (2014-2016). The Action

Plan lists areas where CNAPA wishes to see industry playing a helpful role in prevention of alcohol related harm and contributing to the Action Plan¹.

A decision on the future of the EU alcohol policy will be taken after the new College takes office, when the work plan of the Commission for the coming years will be considered. In case of a positive decision for a new strategy, preparations will start with an impact assessment including a wide stakeholder consultation. CNAPA members are currently working on a scoping paper summarizing their priorities for a new EU alcohol strategy which will contribute to the reflection process. It should also be considered whether alcohol policy should form a part of a more general reinforced approach to strengthening of health systems and reductions of the burden caused by chronic diseases.

The general principle of involvement of stakeholders in the work to reduce alcohol related harm is likely to be maintained (multi-stakeholder approach); therefore the Forum needs to perform and set up strong, tangible commitments in this interim period

In this context, the enforcement of the Charter's principles and their proper implementation into concrete operational objectives is crucial.

4. OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Assiduity in committing

Having an active commitment shall be kept as a compulsory requirement for Forum membership ("entry" and "staying" ticket). Thus, ideally, a new commitment shall be submitted still before the expiry of the (last²) active commitment. However, a short transitional period for new submissions might be justified.

Conclusions:

- Forum members need to submit a new EU commitment within 4 months after the expiry of their (last) active commitment at the latest.
- The Commission will send reminders to commitment owners (two months in advance of the expiry).

4.2 Assiduity in reporting

Submission of monitoring reports is a compulsory requirement for keeping Forum membership according to the principles of the Charter. Timely submission of reports is necessary allowing the proper yearly assessment of Forum commitments.

¹ - the reduction of alcohol content (in accordance with specific EU or national legislation)
- supporting independent monitoring to strengthen the protection of young people from exposure to alcohol advertising, including from new media,
- providing consumer information, including voluntary labelling, at national and local level
- through initiatives on staff training to prevent serving to intoxicated drinkers and to people below the legal age of purchase
- through consumer information where information messages and campaigns are defined and supported by public authorities or independent bodies
- through supporting multi-stakeholders programmes to ensure better enforcement of age limits

² In case of more active commitments for the Forum member concerned

Conclusions:

- A monitoring report needs to be submitted every year for all active commitments (including when multiannual).
- To facilitate the follow-up of reports, information on monitoring shall include a schedule for submission of the intermediate and final monitoring report(s) when submitting a new commitment.
- As of 2016, a new deadline for submission of commitment monitoring reports shall be 31 January, with only exceptional circumstances allowing Forum members to continue with the 31 March deadline. As a transitional measure, for the reports on 2014 activities, monitoring reports can be provided by 31 March 2015.

4.3 Suspension of Forum members not fulfilling committing and monitoring requirements

Forum members not fulfilling these two requirements shall bear consequences.

Conclusions:

- Forum members not respecting the deadlines under 4.1 and 4.2 shall be suspended until the fulfilment of the requirements. The consequence of suspension is that the concerned organisation will be excluded from the Forum member list and not be invited to participate in Forum activities.
- Submission of a missing commitment or monitoring report will allow for restoring the membership of the concerned organisation without formal re-application. Presentation of the new commitment at the following plenary meeting will be required.
- The Commission will inform Forum members of their suspension after one written reminder.
- The Commission should investigate how to take account of the efforts of those organisations involved in commitments without owning one.

4.4 Quality and content of commitments

The Forum is an action-oriented body. Therefore, ensuring high quality commitments and their constant improvement is essential.

A new additional framework for accepting/rejecting commitments for the database is not possible due to lack of additional resources.

Forum members' commitments should take into account, and avoid where possible, conflicts of interest. Conflict of interest may be perceived or established. Transparency, openness and partnership in commitments may help address this. For example, the governance group discussed that programmes designed to assist teachers and parents to address underage drinking in school settings should be unbranded. When economic operators contribute to financially supporting the development of such material, it should be done via third party entities.

Joint commitments between MS authorities, NGOs and economic operators are encouraged in the form of pilot projects to test the multi-stakeholder cooperation in certain areas. There is a need for more guidance and capacity building for Forum members on planning, evaluating and monitoring

commitments. Reviewing the existing commitments where there has been a joint involvement of MS authorities, NGOs and economic operators could be helpful.

For monitoring reports, e.g. the external contractor evaluating the Forum work could give its view on how to improve the availability and quality of these reports. Furthermore, new ways for the yearly evaluation of the Forum commitments could be considered in the future.

Conclusions:

- Commitments shall be kept in line with the priorities of the Strategy and the Charter. Commitment owners shall ensure full compliance with the Charter's principles and rules. As a source of inspiration, also the Action Plan endorsed by CNAPA should be used, in particular in the areas of underage and binge drinking. Forum members shall recommit to evaluate, monitor and publicly report on these on an annual basis.
- The Commission does the basic checking before accepting and making commitments publicly available in the database. This does not mean endorsement but a technical validation.
- On a voluntary basis, Forum members can and should initiate discussions on, challenge and scrutinise other Members' commitments - constructively and in good faith - based on the Charter's principles.
- Identified issues with commitments shall be notified to the Commission and can be directly notified to the commitment owners and other Forum members. The aim of this arrangement is to improve the concerned commitments.
- Forum members would consider if a chat box in the commitment database providing a place for discussion of commitments could be helpful in improving the quality of commitments
- To mitigate the assumptions of perceived or established conflict of interest in commitments, an improvement could be to foster a constructive dialogue between commitment holders. One option to mitigate the risks to be discussed is to collect and apply a list of elements for risks of having a conflict of interest in commitments e.g. in a form of Guiding Principles, taking inspiration from already existing documents.
- Forum members should help develop initiatives in areas where they can add value, building on their core strengths and expertise. The commitments of Forum members should not neglect their core businesses.
- Forum members shall consider the possibility of joint commitments between MS authorities, NGOs and economic operators especially but not exclusively on (consumer information, drink driving, underage drinking and binge drinking).
- Forum members should look at the opportunity to develop unbranded commitments (where the source of funding is only visible in the Forum process) in partnership between economic operators, NGOs, enforcement authorities, Member State authorities etc. This kind of cooperation could be one of the ways out to avoid some NGO's concerns over branded messages, solve the difficulties of low resource organisations in setting up commitments and build a better cooperation between NGOs and economic operators within the Forum (the model is working in the field of Nutrition & Physical Activity).

- The Commission shall ensure more guidance and capacity building for Forum members on planning, evaluating, monitoring and reporting on commitments, taking account of the conclusions of the external evaluation report³ on improving outcome and impact indicators for commitments.

4.5 Planning of Forum work

The strong action orientation of the Forum focusing on commitments shall be kept. Members should be able to prepare themselves in advance to the meetings.

Conclusions:

- An annual or biannual work plan for the Forum shall be prepared, based on the 2006 Strategy, the Forum Charter and (as a source of inspiration) the Action Plan endorsed by CNAPA. The work plan shall summarise the indicative content of each meeting.

4.6 Meeting organisation

The sharing of experience should be a core task of the plenary sessions. Forum meetings need an improved, predictable and consistent structure allowing most importantly for more constructive discussion on commitments.

Conclusions:

- Thematic discussion sessions on commitments in each Forum meeting (see also 4.4), additional meeting(s) or longer (1,5- or 2-day) meetings shall be considered.

- Other DGs covering relevant policy areas and other relevant European Institutions (e.g. EMCDDA⁴ or the JRC) could be more involved in the work of the Forum, e.g. by regular targeted invitations based on the work program/meeting agenda.

- New commitments shall also be presented in Forum meetings as the progress and final reports of all commitments.

4.7 Communication

In order to ensure easier and more constructive dialogue between stakeholders, some rules could be considered for presentations and communication about new commitments.

Conclusions:

- Presentations on commitments (max. 10 slides in 10 min) should be received by the Commission two weeks before the meeting date.

- Forum Members should refrain from issuing Press releases and other similar PR activities on commitment documentation, particularly non-public, that has been shared in advance of an upcoming Forum meeting.

³ Assessment of the added value of the EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm (December 2012)

⁴ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

4.8 Link to public health authorities orientations

There is a need to approximate the work between public health authorities and other stakeholders including economic operators and NGOs active in the fields related to alcohol.

Conclusions:

- Forum members shall further examine the possibility of approximation of their initiatives with the Public Authorities priorities. The alcohol strategy and the Action Plan could serve as a starting point for this work. Common issues could be found such as underage and binge drinking. Back-to-back CNAPA and Forum meetings, joint discussions on concrete actions/commitments shall be considered.

4.9 Research and science related to Forum work

Under the current conditions and in the current form, the Science Group is not considered as an adapted tool to help the work of the Forum.

Conclusions:

- The Commission shall consider involving DG Joint Research Centre (JRC) as an independent and funded source of experts for scientific questions raised by the EAHF members (it is already a well-working model in the field of Nutrition & Physical Activity).

- SANCO shall approach EMCDDA to clarify if and how they could help EAHF to improve its work in particular in the field of surveys and data collection. A presentation of EMCDDA shall be considered at one of the future plenary meetings.

- A definite conclusion on the future of the Science Group shall be drawn after the above mentioned alternatives are clarified and some experience is gained with them.

4.10 Future of the Working Group

The above-discussed points especially regarding the quality and content of commitments and monitoring reports warrant the continuation of the WG.

Conclusions:

- The mandate of the WG shall be prolonged mainly due to the potential tasks related to the quality and content of commitments and monitoring reports. Appropriate representation of all the stakeholders and regular meetings shall be ensured.

- The role, objectives and frequency of meetings shall be clearly defined.

- The WG shall take a role - among others - in scrutinising and challenging commitments and preparing recommendations to the Forum plenary for joint commitments between public health authorities, economic operators and NGOs.

Luxembourg, 31 October 2014

MEMBERS OF THE FORUM GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP

Alcohol Policy Youth Network
Association of European Cancer Leagues
Brewers of Europe
Comité Européen des Entreprises Vins
Eurocare
European Association of Communication Agencies
European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)
Institute of Alcohol Studies
Représentation des institutions françaises de sécurité sociale auprès de l'UE
SHAAP - Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems
SpiritsEUROPE
SpiritsEUROPE Diageo
SpiritsEUROPE Pernod Ricard
SpiritsEUROPE Scotch Whisky Association

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