



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HEALTH AND CONSUMERS DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Public Health
Health Determinants

EUROPEAN ALCOHOL AND HEALTH FORUM

13th Plenary Meeting

BRUSSELS, 21 NOVEMBER 2013

Summary Report

1. Opening by the Chair, John F. Ryan, Acting Director for Public Health, Directorate General for Health and Consumers

- John F. Ryan welcomed the participants and informed them that the Commission is now working with Member States within the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action (CNAPA) on a proposal for an Action Plan on alcohol. The action plan, which would cover the period 2014-2017, would supplement existing activities implemented under the umbrella of the EU strategy in reducing alcohol related harm.
- The Chair stressed that much has been achieved in implementing the EU alcohol strategy so far, referring to the independent evaluation of the EU alcohol strategy. He highlighted that according to the evaluators the strategy and its priority themes have been relevant across the EU and have had results in terms of supporting Member States' alcohol harm reduction policies. Yet, there is a need for further action as trends remain preoccupying.
- The Chair encouraged the Forum to consider how it can best support the Action Plan, particularly by fine-tuning existing commitments or submitting new ones.
- A need to push for further involvement from sectors under-represented in the Forum, for example alcohol retailers and social insurers was also emphasized by the Chair.

- The role of Forum Members in tackling the impact of harmful and hazardous alcohol consumption was underlined: outcome and impact indicators are now essential for the credibility of the Forum and its actions.
- The Chair also referred to the four Members (below) that left the Forum and mentioned that they have been invited to meet the Commission and the Forum to elaborate their reasons for leaving.
 - Active – Sobriety, Friendship and Peace
 - IOGT-NTO (Swedish temperance movement)
 - European Youth Forum
 - the Swedish Youth Temperance Association (UNF)
- At the same time, the Forum received two applications for membership since the last meeting:
 - UMIH – Union des Metiers et des Industries de L’ Hotellerie
 - ELPA – European Liver Patients Association
- The Associazione Italiana Imprese di Intrattenimento da Ballo e di Spettacolo, Silb-FIPE also expressed their interest to join the Forum and they were present as observers at the meeting.
- An additional point to the agenda was suggested by World Federation of Advertising concerning the SANCO support to the consultation process relating to the Responsible Marketing Pact.

2. Highlights by Commission Services

2.1. Action Plan

- SANCO presented a draft preliminary timeline for the preparation of the action plan, which was still in negotiation with CNAPA. The Commission proposed to develop a 6-year action plan focusing on youth and binge drinking. CNAPA members proposed in addition to include a focus on heavy drinking and preferred to keep the length at three years as a maximum.
- The Forum's role in the new action plan was clarified: EAHF members were called to consider how they can commit to achieve the operational objectives of the action plan. Fine tuning of existing commitments or submission of new commitments in support to the action plan would be welcomed. Besides this fine tuning, the action plan would have limited impact on the on-going commitments.
- The importance of the possible ownership of the action plan by the Member States' National Authorities was highlighted. Forum Members will be invited to send their proposed actions for and comments on the action plan after closing the first consultation with CNAPA.
- For Forum Members, the action plan would be a great opportunity to make Forum activities more visible.

- The Chair stressed that the action plan should be focusing on results to be achieved. That could contribute to paving the way for future EU alcohol policy developments after the end date of the Action Plan.
- Several Members expressed their support for the new action plan, in spite of their concerns in relation to specific questions such as the definition of “heavy drinking”, “young people” or regret for not renewing the strategy itself.
- On this last point, the Chair pointed out that the reflection process with CNAPA members on a possible new alcohol strategy was still active. However, work on a new alcohol strategy until the end of the current Commissioner’s mandate is not realistic. He stressed that the way to ensure continuity of the present activities in the Forum and CNAPA was to complement the existing strategy with an action plan. Similar approach was followed also in the policy fields of HIV/AIDS and Nutrition/Physical activity.
- Concerning the definition of youth or heavy drinking, the Chair stressed that these aspects are being discussed among Member States. Forum Members’ comments would be welcomed but CNAPA will be in the driving seat of the process.

2.2. Joint Action

- The Executive Agency for Health and Consumers (EAHC) presented an overview of the Joint Action.
- The Joint Action is funded by the EU Health Programme. It is foreseen to start on 1st January 2014 and will last 36 months.
- The Joint Action aims to strengthen Member States' capacity to reduce harmful alcohol consumption and related harm, thereby improve EU citizens' health and reduce costs to health systems and the society.
- With a budget of 3.2M€, half of which is from the EU Health Programme, actions will include: exchange of good practises on protecting children and young people; identification of comparable data on alcohol related harm and development of common tools such as a methodology for alcohol surveys; the production of guidelines for low-risk alcohol consumption and instruments for information dissemination.
- The tools developed under the Joint Action will help better plan public health policies that in the longer term will contribute to reducing alcohol related harm.
- The kick-off meeting of the Joint Action will be held on 31 January 2014 in Lisbon. Forum members are invited to join the event.

2.3. Assessing the quality of the monitoring activities

- COWI consortium gave a general presentation on the preliminary results of the assessment of the quality of the monitoring of the commitments.
- The recommendations presented highlighted the need for moving from a process-based approach to an evaluation-oriented approach. Among others, the report recommended: defining what is meant by evaluation of the commitment, distinguishing ‘Information on monitoring’ from ‘Information on evaluation’

in the commitment monitoring form, making compulsory the ‘outcome, results and impact indicators’ section and providing guidance already at the planning stage and in the submission process.

- The Commission will include these aspects in the next Forum meeting agenda, when the report has been published, so that the information is carefully processed by Forum members.

2.4. Discussion and approval of the new version of the database

- SANCO gave a short presentation on the comments received concerning the new version of the database, following also the suggestions to improve the monitoring of commitments given in the COWI report.
- The new version of the database was approved to enter into force after the final adjustments has been made which is foreseen in the 1st quarter of 2014.
- The majority of the proposals referred to functional aspects, which generally were taken on board. The proposed in-depth changes implying modification of the Forum charter were postponed for a later stage. Several comments referred also to aspects that will be addressed in the revision of the commitments submission guide.
- In the discussion, some Members expressed their wish to keep the “Associated Partners” field that has been suppressed in the new version of the database; this point will be taken into consideration by SANCO.

2.5. Pilot Community of Practice for Better Self- and Co- Regulation

- CNECT gave a presentation on a draft document on self-regulation, under Action 5 of the COM (2011) 681 final “A renewed EU strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility”, which was in public consultation by the time of meeting.
- Information was given to the Members on the possibility to participate in the consultation and in the next meeting on the topic on 10 December 2013. Interested parties would have also the possibility to join the online platform (Community of Practices) which can host debates on self-regulation practices.

3. The Science Group

- The Chair of the Science Group of the Forum gave a presentation on the importance of the Group and the possible renewal of its mandate.
- The Chair of the meeting proposed to Members to consider the issue until the next EAHF meeting. The three main questions for consideration were identified as follows:
 - Whether or not the Science Group should do research on its own or look at existing research and provide an overview,
 - Whether and how the Science Group could be linked to CNAPA

- How the Science Group can contribute to steer research in the future, particularly in the framework of Horizon 2020.
- Forum Members were invited to send their comments on these questions to the Commission by the end of February 2014.
- The Chair committed SANCO to raise this topic with the Member States on the next suitable occasion.

4. Issue in focus: Research on Alcohol Related Harm

4.1. The burden of alcohol related health harm

- Professor Jürgen Rehm summarised the latest available information on the burden of alcohol related harm in the EU, based on several studies, including his recent contributions to the work of WHO Europe, the Global Burden of Disease and the alcohol comparator report¹.
- Figures indicate that alcohol consumption is high and stable in the EU and continues to cause considerable harm. Despite differences between countries and regions, there is no country in the EU where the share of male deaths due to alcohol would be below 10%. Whereas some diseases are 100% attributable to alcohol (for example alcoholic liver cirrhosis) there are some 200 diseases attributable to alcohol at the level of 5% or more. This is a challenge for the analysis and contributes to public perceptions of relatively low risk of harm from alcohol.
- Professor Rehm highlighted that the largest part of the burden from alcohol, both in terms of mortality and ill health measured in DALYs, is due to heavy drinking (women drinking more alcohol than 40g/day and men drinking more than 60g/day).
- The exponential nature of the risk related to alcohol was also highlighted and related to the predicted patterns of mortality: the more consumption is reduced, the less probable is mortality.
- The role of heavy drinking and alcohol dependence was also addressed. The question whether alcohol dependence should be conceptualized as “heavy drinking over time” was raised. Alcohol consumption was presented as a continuum ranging from low risk consumption to heavy drinking. The need for early intervention/treatment was emphasised.
- Unless effective interventions are implemented, the harm will continue to cost more than one million premature deaths over the next 10 years in the EU.
- A debate on methodological aspects followed.
- The Chair informed the participants that several of the issues raised would be addressed in the Joint Action on alcohol.

4.2. Impact of research on alcohol related mortality

¹ Interventions for alcohol dependence in Europe: a missed opportunity to improve public health (J. Rehm, K.D. Shield and colleagues) (2012)

- Professor Matthias Löhr (United European Gastroenterology, UEG) gave a presentation on the strong link between alcohol and cancers of the digestive tract. These cancers are one of the most lethal consequences of excessive alcohol consumption. He also stressed the importance of epidemiological studies to investigate the relationship between alcohol-consumption and alcohol-related diseases and pointed out the main planned and ongoing UEG activities.

4.3. Tackling liver disease: opportunities for action in the EAHF

- Fiona Godfrey (European Association for the Study of the Liver) informed about their present activities, commitments to the Forum and their future plans regarding the reduction of alcohol related mortality.
- For 2014, the continued partnership with key EAHF members to raise awareness and advocate for meaningful policy interventions and more targeted research was highlighted.
- Some Forum Members noted the lack of current research on liver diseases, especially after 1980, which obliged several studies to rely only on old data. The Chair invited EAHF to give an input to identify areas for investment in further research and suggested this topic to be discussed on the next meeting, in order to contribute to the exchange between SANCO and DG RTD.
- This topic is closely related to the invitation for expressing views on the future role of the Science Group of the Forum.

5. Highlights of commitments by Forum Members

5.1. SABMiller

- SABMiller presented the results of the DEMOS latest report “Feeling the effects” on the impact of alcohol abuse on families. The importance of informing parents on the effect of their parental style to their children` drinking behaviour was stressed. Intervening through the workplace was pointed out as a logical next step.
- Several aspects related to how far parenting style affects children’s drinking behavior later in life versus the adversity of the present drinking environments was discussed.

5.2. Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)

- SHAAP briefed EAHF Members on their recent commitment on providing information and support on alcohol related harm to health professionals that will run until 2015. SHAAP activities cover raising awareness, evaluating research and feeding synergies between key organisations towards tackling alcohol misuse.

- The importance of exploring new areas of research was again highlighted in the following discussion. The Chair also added the importance of SHAAP ensuring monitoring of their professional recommendations.

6. World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) online consultation

- WFA clarified some aspects referring to their consultation on the implementation of common standards for responsible advertising and marketing as part of the Responsible Marketing Pact (RMP). They said that the proposal was set out in detail in the consultation and that there is no need to register to respond to the questionnaire. Any further questions related to the consultation should be addressed directly to WFA.
- SANCO offered to facilitate the process of improving the monitoring and the evaluation of the commitments and thus, to share with EAHF Members any relevant documents of interest to the Forum.

7. Conclusions by the Chair

- The Chair stressed that we are at an important stage in the work of reducing alcohol related harm. Through the Forum, the CNAPA, the Joint Action and now by the development of the Action Plan, the work under the current alcohol strategy will be carried forward.
- SANCO will send to Forum Members a consolidated version of the draft framework structure of the Action Plan after collecting and considering the contributions from CNAPA members in the consultation.
- The Joint Action is considered as a crucial contribution to the implementation of the EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm.
- The Chair stressed the importance of upholding the Forum's credibility, by improving and better monitoring the commitments and by moving the focus from a process-based approach to an evaluation-oriented approach.
- The Chair highlighted that the future role of the Science Group of the Forum and Forum Members' possible contribution to determining gaps in existing alcohol related research will be discussed in one of the coming Forum meetings.
- The Chair welcomed the commitments presented and underlined the importance of mobilizing all stakeholders to reduce alcohol related harm.
- The next Forum meeting will be on 9 April 2014.