

EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

20th JUNE 2013 14.00-16.30

**VENUE : CCAB
ALBERT BORSCHETTE CONFERENCE CENTRE
36 RUE FROISSART - [ROOM : 1A]
B – 1040 BRUSSELS**

CHAIR: John Ryan

Minutes

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The Chair, Mr John Ryan opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and underlined that the session was mainly dedicated to the Irish Presidency proposal for an Action Plan on childhood obesity.

2. CHILDHOOD OBESITY

2.1 PRESENTATION BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DONAL O'SHEA , SCHOOL OF CHEMISTRY & CHEMICAL BIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Professor **Donal O'Shea**, School of Chemistry & Chemical biology from University College Dublin, presented highly alarming figures indicating that obesity causes, and worsens, the outcomes of many other diseases such as; diabetes, cancer, etc. 25% of 3 year olds are overweight/obese, and 25% of 9 year olds are overweight/obese in Europe. Moreover, the younger the age of onset, greater the final weight. Therefore, Professor O'Shea claimed that it is imperative to further examine prevention strategies. Over an interval of almost 25 years, only 15% of the individuals who were a normal weight as children were obese as adults, whereas 65% of those who were overweight or obese as children, and 82% of those who were obese as children, were also obese as adults. The figures suggest that targeting interventions for obesity prevention and treatment, specifically to children who are at high risk for becoming obese, will prove to be a more valuable and cost-effective strategy than targeting interventions to whole populations of children. He then highlighted a recent study from Harvard, which concluded that weight regulates the immune system and the immune system regulates weight and glucose. Thus, in obese children, the innate immune system is switching off and genes for type 2 diabetes and heart disease are getting stronger, while genes for cancer prevention are diminishing. Professor O'Shea concluded his presentation by stating that obesity must be recognised as a health burden, and that the financial cost for prevention must be acknowledged.

After the presentation the Chair opened the floor for questions.

Slovenia asked whether lack of sleep could be seen as a risk factor.

Mr O’Shea replied that sleeping patterns are emerging in literature through themes such as; breastfeeding, physical activity, education, and nutrition.

2.1. 2.2 PRESENTATION BY IRELAND AND FRANCE
- FOLLOWED BY A DISCUSSION

Mrs Ursula O’Dwyer, Ireland, presented the Presidency proposal to mandate the High Level Group to draft a proposal for an Action Plan on Childhood Obesity. Mrs O’Dwyer mentioned that she got very consistent comments back from the Irish questionnaire, from which 16 Member States had replied. The idea of an Action Plan was discussed at the Irish Presidency Informal meeting of EU Health Ministers in Dublin in March 2013, at which childhood obesity was a major theme. During the morning session of the Joint meeting of the High Level Group and EU Platform, Commissioner Borg affirmed his support to the Presidency proposal to mandate the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity to draw up an Action Plan to address childhood obesity. The possibility for Member States to engage in a Joint Action on some of the initiatives was mentioned and supported by Mr Michel Chauillac, France. Joint Actions are designed to stimulate governments, academic, and other non-profit organisations to join forces at the EU level, in order to tackle problems shared by many Member States. They should involve partner organisations from many different Member States to jointly develop the most appropriate solutions that can be put into practice directly at national level.

Therefore, the Joint Action Proposal would be aimed at:

- Building the base for a follow-up to the Irish Presidency debate on childhood obesity,
- Looking into the French idea of developing an initiative/tool to share ideas/ good practices on the monitoring of self-regulation initiatives (OQUALI model)

Mr Michel Chauillac pointed out that a lot of propositions are offered for future actions and all of them are needed. The issue of reformulation has been at stake for a long time in the High Level Group, and it should benefit all socio-economic groups in the EU. He also recommended that comparability between countries is important, and that we should work with as many countries as possible in order to harmonise our efforts.

After the presentation the Chair opened the floor for questions.

Italy suggested that the work should concentrate more on schools, as education on healthy habits is an overriding factor. They stressed that it was imperative to focus on fewer topics in order to maximize efficiency.

Hungary agreed that education is crucial, as is creating healthy environments in schools. Regarding this topic, Hungary has created the “cool canteens” public event. They stated that 10 actions to work on seems too much, and that we should prioritise.

Spain asked for more precision on the forward process, including whether the High Level Group and the Platform will continue their activities. Spain stated that there is a need for a clear objective, so that a Joint action can result in an added value.

Finland shared their hesitation on focusing only on children, since influencing parents is also important, but were in favour of the Action Plan.

Denmark mentioned that children are the most important focus, but they need more written information before joining the Action Plan. Denmark also supported France in harmonisation.

Philippe Roux stated that the Strategy and its tools remain valid, since there is a need to do more, and not to replace. It is necessary to add a new dimension and, therefore, to focus on children with an additional tool. The Joint Action is another potential tool where Member States need to agree and join. Platform members already mentioned their interest in knowing the focus areas.

Germany agreed on the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity and found the written comments from UK very useful. There is a need for criteria to identify successful approaches.

Austria mentioned the importance of food at school and agreed on the Action Plan.

The United Kingdom wondered what could be done for children who are already obese. The rate of obese children in the UK is already high.

Belgium stressed that the 10 actions are all relevant, but they should be better oriented. Belgium also pointed out the need for a common framework, as well as a better evaluation of the already existing approaches.

Slovenia is in favour of acting immediately, but wondered whether the focus on children is too narrow, as the School Fruit Scheme has been a successful endeavour.

Spain also addressed the lack of work on prevention, education, and canteens. Acting collectively for more efficiency is crucial.

Portugal agreed on the Joint Action.

The World Health Organisation is happy to be involved and to provide support, and mentioned that they are working with the Member States. The results of the 4-5 July conference in Vienna could be useful.

The Chair reminded attendees that no new Strategy will be formulated. The European Commission do believe that to focus the work and to continue the Strategy is a good idea. This can be developed by identifying a small number of issues, and some areas can be implemented at a national level. Another idea is also to link the Platform and the High Level Group more. The Chair also mentioned that funds can be provided from the European Health programme, in order to have more data available. He added that the results of this meeting are a milestone for members of the High Level Group. It was decided that a subgroup of High Level Group members would be formed that could draft the proposal for an Action Plan. The proposal will be presented at the next meeting 25 November 2013.

3. STATE OF PLAY CONCERNING HEALTH ENHANCING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, PRESENTATION BY DG EAC

Susanne Hollman (European Commission) updated the members of the High Level Group on Commission initiatives and actions in the area of physical activity. She stated that physical activity, including regular sporting practice and exercise, is one of the most effective ways of staying physically and mentally fit, combating overweight and obesity, and preventing related conditions. Susanne Hollman also explained that, within the Commission, the work on physical activity is coordinated through the Expert Group on Sport, Health and Participation. She added that many EU Member States have recommendations and specific strategies in place to encourage their populations to become more physically active, therefore the EU has been promoting physical activity through its policies and financial instruments to support the Member States. In addition, Susanne Hollman stated that the EU has provided evidence-based guidance to policy makers in the form of the EU Physical Activity Guidelines.

She further informed the group that the Council has called on the Commission to present a proposal for a Council Recommendation promoting a cross-sectoral approach, based on EU Physical Activity Guidelines, including a light monitoring framework. She concluded this presentation by stating that DG EAC has already begun working on this initiative and the preparations for a European Week of Sport in 2015 have commenced.

After the presentation the Chair opened the floor for questions.

France stressed that physical activity is a crucial issue and mentioned the establishment of a week of sport in France. He also pointed out the concern on sugary food and drinks, which should not be neglected.

4. JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE – SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT TO THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP PRESENTED BY MR JAN WOLLGAST, JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Mr Jan Wollgast (Joint Research Centre) presented an analysis on school food standards in the EU28 + Norway and Switzerland. He stated that 7 countries have mandatory policy schemes in place, while 23 countries have voluntary policy in place. He explained that based on feedback from the countries, the Joint Research Centre will now analyse the different policies in greater depth. At the next High Level Group meeting on November 25th, 2013, the Joint Research Centre will present the final results of the mapping exercise on school meals.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair confirmed that there were no comments on the minutes of the meeting of 7 February 2013 and therefore the minutes were adopted.

6. CONCLUSIONS OF THE CHAIR

The Chair concluded that

- There will be a sub working group on drafting the Action Plan on childhood obesity and called for members to join this group in order to present a proposal for an Action Plan at the next meeting in the High Level Group.
- The Joint Research Centre will involve the members of the High Level Group before their analysis on the school meals is considered final.