

JOINT MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND THE PLATFORM FOR ACTION ON DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH

20TH JUNE 2013
10.00 - 13.00

VENUE: CENTRE DE CONFÉRENCE ALBERT BORSCHETTE
[ROOM 1A]

CHAIR: JOHN RYAN

MINUTES

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE COMMISSION, DIRECTOR-GENERAL PAOLA TESTORI COGGI

The Chair, Mr John Ryan opened the meeting by welcoming the participants. The Chair highlighted the presence of **Mrs Paola Testori Coggi, Director-General of Health and Consumers Directorate-General**.

The Director-General welcomed the conference participants to the fifth joint meeting of the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity and the Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. In light of the fact that the meeting was dedicated to the outcomes of the final evaluation report on the Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related Health Issues, the Director-General stressed the importance of investing in health and efficient expenditure aimed at prevention. She also underlined the current average of 3% of the national expenditure devoted to prevention in national health budgets.

2. STATUS ON OBESITY LEVELS, PRESENTATION BY DR JOÃO BREDA, WHO

Dr Joao Breda, WHO, presented the status on obesity levels and nutrition policies in the EU27, Norway and Switzerland. According to WHO 2008 estimates, the prevalence of overweight among adults has risen above 50%. He added that the latest 2010 WHO COSI project findings indicate that 1 in every 3 children aged 6-9 are overweight or obese, which is a concerning increase from 2008, when only 1 in 4 children were overweight or obese. The prevalence of overweight (including obesity) is roughly 24% to 57% among boys and 21% to 50% among girls. Of these figures, Dr Breda contended that, 9% to 31% of these boys and 6% to 21% of these girls were obese.

Dr Breda also updated the members on salt intake rates among the population of the EU27, Norway, and Switzerland. He stated that, at present, none of these countries were meeting the World Health Organization recommendations of a maximum of 5 grams of salt per day.

In the area of promoting physical activity, Dr Breda stated that tremendous progress has been made, as 19 countries have adopted national guidelines to promote active lifestyles.

Following the presentation, the **Director-General** emphasized the necessity of having updated, complete data so that national surveillance systems are comparable and can be streamlined in the WHO system. **The Chair** added that the Commission supported this through the EU Health programme.

Dr Breda mentioned Belgium as a case of good practice on surveillance tools and called for a step by step approach.

After the presentation the Chair opened the floor for questions.

The European Cyclist's Federation asked how we all can do more.

The International Baby Food Action Network pointed out that global codex standards for baby foods are not mentioned.

Dr Breda replied that we can achieve results with a combination of different instruments. In order to operate on different levels, thereby increasing the responsiveness of the health systems. The WHO has a global action plan that requires a comprehensive approach. Moreover, breastfeeding remains an important issue, although there is a lack of data on breastfeeding.

3. EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGY FOR EUROPE ON NUTRITION, OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY -RELATED HEALTH ISSUES, DISCUSSION OF THE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT, PRESENTATION BY BRADFORD ROHMER, PUBLIC HEALTH EVALUATION AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT CONSORTIUM (PHEIAC)

Mr Bradford Rohmer, Public Health Evaluation and Impact Assessment Consortium (PHEIAC) presented the final evaluation report. The report generally recognises the added value of EU-level coordination for the Strategy and underlines its effective implementation. The report also supports continuation of the current Strategy and implementation of instruments in light of the growing concerns of overweight and obesity issues. Further, Mr Rohmer discussed specific recommendations of the report for future work, including; continued coordination at the EU-level by the Commission as necessary for bolstering policy developments and actions at EU and national levels, a greater focus on physical activity promotion, and a careful consideration of the effects of action on lower socio-economic groups to minimize health inequalities.

The report reaffirms the objectives and strategic direction of the High Level Group for Nutrition and Physical Activity, however it was recommended that there should be efforts to affirm greater political backing in order to regain political momentum and re-launch new objectives and goals. In order to maintain momentum and keep members engaged, he stressed that the Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health should focus on making progress towards generating better evidence of the efficacy and impact of the commitments.

He also stated that more work could be devoted to increasing voluntary front-of-pack labelling, nutrient profiles, and monitoring of self-regulation. Mr Rohmer underlined that the

Commission, by way of DG SANCO, has been successful in integrating Nutrition, Obesity, and Physical Activity (NOPA) concerns into EU policies and that EU co-funding for schemes and programs related to NOPA objectives have been effective and should continue. Finally, Mr Rohmer suggested that the Commission and the WHO should increase the focus on the NOPA database's user-friendliness and dissemination of information.

The Chair highlighted the interest of the report as well as of the two others; the Platform Annual report and the Special report on the monitoring of the Platform. He also pointed out the need to set a joint working group to have a common methodology on commitments' reporting.

The Chair stressed that factual comments are still welcome and mentioned that the final evaluation report will be published by the end of June on the Europa website.

4. KEY ADDRESS BY COMMISSIONER TONIO BORG - FOLLOWED BY A DISCUSSION

Commissioner Borg shared his views on the implementation of the Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related Health Issues and on the way forward.

The Commissioner endorsed continuation of the Strategy and its implementing instruments (High Level Group and EU Platform) based on the positive findings of the PHIEAC evaluation report. He added that Member States' efforts in the area of food reformulation have been impressive and stressed the need for action on other nutrients or portion sizes, for example. Regarding the Platform, the Commissioner recognised results delivered by members, but underlined a need to reinforce actions, particularly in the areas of reformulation and advertising to children. Having acknowledged the progress made so far, the Commissioner highlighted priorities for future action in the field of nutrition, overweight and obesity-related health issues.

He also emphasized that there should be a greater focus on physical activity promotion and on health inequalities counteraction. He also endorsed the Irish Presidency proposal to mandate the High Level Group to develop an Action Plan on childhood obesity. The Commissioner concluded that there is a vital political commitment to maintain the high level of action on these issues and to strengthen it, which the Commission is extremely committed to pursue.

After the speech, a discussion was held with the members on the evaluation as well as on the future of the area of nutrition and physical activity.

Questions/Comments on the evaluation report, regarding the High Level Group

Ireland informed that the afternoon session with the High Level Group will be dedicated to the Presidency proposal regarding an increased focus on childhood obesity. Tentatively, a draft on the Action Plan on Childhood Obesity will be ready by the end of the year.

FoodDrinkEurope stated that the organisation is fully supporting a continuation of the Strategy, an extension of its scope, and better reporting of the commitments. They are aware that they play an important role in fighting the risk factors for communicable diseases. Half of the Platform commitments come from FoodDrinkEurope, which is indicative of their

importance. Regarding the Platform, they fully acknowledge that monitoring and surveillance need to be strengthened in order to generate better evidence. FoodDrinkEurope thanked the Commission for having a partnership based approach.

Freshfel Europe promoted the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables; the intake needs to be increased.

Cyprus stressed the importance of the High Level Group for policy's inspiration and the wish to see more action and implementation.

The Chair mentioned that progress has been made in cooperation with DG AGRI for the School Fruit Scheme. With a bigger budget, more schools can participate and there are possibilities for a greater focus on the deprived regions. However, the element of education should be a more integral part of the scheme. DG SANCO is also implementing pilot projects concerning the promotion of healthy diets and increasing fresh fruit and vegetables consumption in vulnerable societal groups.

Questions/Comments on the evaluation report, regarding the Platform.

The Chair asked whether there is a lack of evidence. **Mr Rohmer** replied that the monitoring system does work, but that it is necessary to formulate a common method of evaluation, which should be more evidenced-base.

FoodDrinkEurope suggested the creation of an advisory board with experts to evaluate the commitments. Regarding reformulation, pre-screening has already been used in France for the past 5 years, and the industry has successfully accepted it.

Copa-Cogeca suggested that a discussion on the efficiency of government initiatives including regulation (e.g. health claims or food information regulation) could be held as it is also important to monitor these actions in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of policies.

The Chair replied to Copa-Cogeca that the presentation made by Hannah Brinsden shows well the benefits of regulation. He also highlighted that having a commitment in the Platform database does not mean that the European Commission has approved it. He also stressed that pre-screening, if manageable, could be a good idea and that monitoring should be improved by using the results of the evaluation. This could be looked at in the working group on monitoring.

Questions/Comments on the evaluation report, regarding EU legislation.

The European Heart Network mentioned that cardiac related illnesses are responsible for increasing death rates in the EU, and physical activity is a good example of bringing Member States and industry together on initiatives to decrease these rates. Profiling is another good example of improving the situation, and presentations at the Platform meeting showed that it can be done at EU level. The organisation urged the Commission to propose nutrient profiles. Finally, it is important for DG SANCO to be closely involved in the DG AGRI School Fruit Scheme.

The European Consumers' organisation mentioned the traffic light labelling in the UK that has received positives responses from the consumers.

The World Federation of Advertisers mentioned that the European Commission was supposed to present a report on health claims. They also asked what the effects of labelling could be on a European scale.

The Chair replied that the School Fruit Scheme is currently undergoing an impact assessment and DG SANCO is following it closely and continuing its cooperation with DG AGRI. The list of health claims has only recently been implemented; therefore, it is too early to report on it.

The Commissioner mentioned the paradox with implementing regulations at the EU level, as some Member States are reluctant to implement EU proposals. The Commissioner prefers regular small steps. In the area of the nutrient profiles; we first adopted the list of the health claims, then we have to deal with the issue of claims on botanicals, and then the nutrient profiles. The Commission needs to apply the law and move forward on the file; this was decided by the Member States and the European Parliament. But this takes time. Our efforts should also focus on the sustainability of health systems, in order to prevent higher health costs, as well as on reducing health inequalities. That is why the activity of the Platform and the High Level Group remains important. Commissioner Borg hopes that, next time, the list of the achievements will be longer.

The European Food Information Council asked about dissemination of research results by the EU.

The Chair recommended looking at the report and Bradford Rohmer added that there is a demand for more dissemination. It is important to publish research results in peer review or at conferences.

Questions/Comments on the evaluation report, regarding the link between the WHO and the European Commission.

The WHO agreed with the recommendations in the evaluation report and mentioned that the WHO already is working on improving the NOPA database.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND CONCLUSION

The Chair concluded that

- The final evaluation report will be a useful tool for future action under the Nutrition Strategy.
- It is not a European Commission report, by the High Level Group or the Platform, but an external evaluation report.
- The evaluation report will be published online by the end of June.
- The work to improve activities will continue for the Platform and the High Level Group.