



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HEALTH & CONSUMERS DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Directorate C - Public Health and Risk Assessment
Unit C4 – Health Determinants

OPEN ALCOHOL AND HEALTH FORUM

3rd Meeting

BRUSSELS, 19 NOVEMBER 2010

Report

The meeting was chaired by Despina Spanou, Principal Advisor to the Director-General for Health and Consumers.

1. Welcome and scene setting by Paola Testori Coggi, Director-General for Health

- Ms Spanou welcomed all participants, set out the programme and introduced Ms Testori Coggi, Director General, who addressed the audience to set the scene for the meeting.
- Ms Testori started by saying that she is very motivated to take further the Commission's work to reduce alcohol-related harm, and reminded the audience of the ambitious targets set out the EU Alcohol Strategy launched in 2006. The Strategy is running until the end of 2012, and the preparations for the evaluation have started. The data available on trends thus far do not really allow for complacency: for instance regarding binge drinking among young people. Ms Testori said she is especially concerned about young people. The active contribution of various sections of society, such as the members of the European Alcohol and Health Forum, is crucial as the problem of alcohol-related harm can not be tackled effectively by public authorities alone. But it is equally crucial that the Forum is able to show clear impact and progress. Therefore she had urged its members to be more ambitious and submit commitments with more potential for impact.

2. Social Costs

- The topic was introduced by Ms Alison Douglas, Head of the Alcohol Policy Team at the Scottish Government. She gave an overview of what is covered by the rather general terminology "the social costs of alcohol": harm to others than the drinker, for instance (unborn) children, families, traffic participants. For this reason the terminology "third party harm" is also used. Then Ms

Douglas presented data on the situation in Scotland and gave an overview of effective responses.

- Three presentations followed. Michel Craplet, Chairman of the European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare), spoke about Eurocare's activities to prevent Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). Then Christian Andrei presented his involvement in the Romanian "Alcohol does not make you big" campaign, designed and initiated by the Romanian brewers in collaboration with the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Youth. The campaign is aimed at 14-18 year old high school students. Ennio Palmesino, Chairman of the Board of the European Mutual-Help Network for Alcohol-Related Problem (EMNA) described the positive impact of group sessions on people who have been hospitalized for alcohol problems in Italy.
- In the following discussion it was among other things put forward that moderate consumption in combination with other risk factors can also entail health harm. Other points raised included discussion on the challenge of formulating risk communication, for example on risks from alcohol relating to conception and pregnancy, so that scientific knowledge helps minimise risk rather than cause unnecessary anxiety.

3. The World Health Organization: update on the Global Alcohol Strategy

- Dag Rekve, technical officer at WHO Headquarters in Geneva, presented the Global strategy to reduce harmful use of alcohol that was adopted at the World Health Assembly in May 2010. He briefly set out the underlying evidence base regarding alcohol consumption and related health harm at global level, as well as the structure and aims of the strategy. He outlined next steps and concluded that reduction of harmful use of alcohol should be an ongoing concern from local to global level, with political and professional attention and allocation of resource in line with the magnitude of the problem. This implies among other things ongoing consultation with various stakeholders.

4. Consumer Information

- Philippe de Witte, Head of the Laboratory of Behavioural Biology at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium), set the scene for a round of presentations and discussion on this topic. He first said the current situation with diverging information on what is a standard drink is not very helpful to consumers. He further stressed that growing up in a family with alcohol problems and starting to drink alcohol at an early age are key determinants for developing problematic alcohol consumption later in life.
- Nick Sheron, Head of Clinical Hepatology in the University of Southampton and representative of the UK Royal College of Physicians in the European Alcohol and Health Forum, observed a knowledge gap around the health impact with the general population. He then described a confusing situation by giving an overview of the diverging way standard drinks or units are defined in

different countries. As alcoholic drinks are liquids, expressing standard drinks in centilitres of pure alcohol is preferable to grams.

- Jamie Fortescue, Director-General of the EU umbrella organisation of spirits producers CEPS, gave an overview of communicating Responsible Drinking Messages (RDMs) via websites, such as www.drinkaware.co.uk. The new CEPS roadmap, describing CEPS' actions on alcohol and health in the next five years, includes a commitment to place RDMs on labels.
- Moët Hennessy/Diageo's External Affairs Director Anne-Marie Cailloux presented on MH/D's Doctor Training Program. This program is based on the idea that general practitioners have a crucial role in curbing alcohol abuse, but that in general their knowledge and training in alcohol issues is limited. The results of a survey to measure the improvement of professional practices will be available in November.
- Mariann Skar, Secretary-General of Eurocare, presented Eurocare's view on alcohol labelling in the light of the principle of a basic consumer right to full information, including information on health and safety aspects related to alcohol consumption. She showed examples of possible health and safety messages on labels.
- Vice-President Isabel Doz Muñoz of the Spanish Consumer Association UCE presented on their social marketing campaign targeting 18-30 year old people through various media. The campaign is developed in partnership with the Spanish beer sector, and supported by public authorities.
- A lively discussion followed, touching upon a range of approaches to communicating about alcohol consumption to the public and specific target groups. The Chair concluded that the examples of joint actions presented were a good sign and that it would be useful to strive for a uniform EU understanding of standard drinks/units.

5. The RAYPRO web resource

- The on-line database RAYPRO, Resource on Alcohol and Youth Projects, intended to capture information on good practice initiatives, developed by DG Health and Consumers along the lines formulated by the Forum's Youth taskforce, and launched in April this year was briefly presented by the Commission's services. Participants of the meeting were encouraged to make use of RAYPRO, accessible through the Commission's web site¹, to share information on their good practices with others working in the field.

6. Responsible Selling and Serving

- Scene setter Nacha Torres da Silva from the Portuguese Institute on Drugs and Drug Addiction gave a comprehensive overview of the various aspects of responsible selling and serving: offering a safe drinking environment, no serving to intoxicated persons, marketing and pricing practices that do not

¹ https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/sanco_eahf/raypro/

encourage over consumption etc. The following presentations focused on compliance with and enforcement of legal age limits for selling and serving.

- Paul Kelly, External Affairs Director of UK supermarket chain ASDA, and Martin Rawlings, Director of Pub & Leisure of the British Beer and Pub Association, presented their organisations' activities in this area. These include test purchasing and requiring everybody who looks younger than 21 or 25 to show an ID in order to comply with the legal age limit of 18 years.
- Swedish police officer Roger Jansson described cooperation between the police in Sweden and relevant stakeholders, including the hospitality sector, to prevent alcohol-related problems caused by serving to intoxicated and underage persons.
- Adrian Farner Rogne, President of Juvente Norway (youth sobriety organisation) presented results from mystery shopping actions to test compliance with age limits which indicate that compliance may be far from ideal
- The last presentation was given by Monika Matak from the Polish Breweries and Agnieszka Rosloniak, a journalist working for the Polish public television. Breweries and television collaborate in a campaign that combines investigative journalism (candid camera) and education in order to change attitudes – both of economic operators and the general population – towards selling and serving alcohol to minors.
- In the discussion the need for better exchange of good practice in this area, as well as the need for strict law enforcement were highlighted. One question related to the impact of strict compliance with legal age limits on a economic operator's competitive position vis à vis others who are less strict: to what extent is good behaviour rewarded?

7. Update on the EU Alcohol Strategy implementation

- Michael Hübel (SANCO C4) started by summarizing the main findings of the first progress report on the implementation of the EU Alcohol Strategy adopted in 2006 that was presented in September 2009. An evaluation will be presented in 2012. This will include update data on alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm across the EU.. Monitoring of progress will also include independent evaluations of the European Alcohol and Health Forum and of the Commission's work with Member States. The information gathered will feed into the Commission's decision-making on EU alcohol policy after 2012.
- The Chair invited participants to give input for discussion on EU action on alcohol.

8. Discussion on perspectives, next steps, and concluding remarks

- When concluding the meeting the Chair highlighted the need to work with public health experts to gather further data on the social costs of alcohol. For consumer information she stressed the importance of the involvement of actors

across the board, and the need to implement multiple approaches, giving special attention to modern methods of communication. In responsible selling and serving, cooperation between different actors has been shown to yield good results.

- The Chair thanked all participants for their contribution, and invited everybody to give further input to the Alcohol and Health Forum's work..