



Monitoring the European Alcohol and Health Forum

Annual Report 2014



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Alcohol and Health Forum

The European Alcohol and Health Forum (EAHF) was established in June 2007 following the adoption by the European Commission of an EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm (October 2006). As defined in the Charter establishing the European Alcohol and Health Forum, the Forum is a “platform for all interested stakeholders at EU level that pledge to step up actions relevant to reducing alcohol-related harm”. The Forum is an innovative policy tool seeking to involve as many relevant actors as possible in a multi-stakeholder dialogue on a voluntary basis. It encourages participants, according to their own capacity and focus, to take action toward the reduction of alcohol-related harm.

DG HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY oversees and organises the activities of the Forum in a transparent way, informs the participants of the on-going work that could have an impact on alcohol-related harm, including relevant activities within the EU institutions and bodies described in the Annex I of the Charter.

EAHF Membership update

The Forum presently encompasses members with a variety of backgrounds. These include companies and associations in the fields of sale and production of alcoholic beverages, media and advertising; NGOs aiming to minimise alcohol-related harm; research organisations, and other professional bodies.

Although membership numbers saw a gradual increase over the years starting in 2007 (53), 2014 saw a small decrease in EAHF membership (from 70 in 2013 to 66 in 2014) which could be related to the financial burdens of low-resource organisations with respect to their commitments.

The overall composition of the Forum members has remained fairly constant despite some fluctuations over the years. In the present time, although NGOs and health professionals are still well represented in the Forum, a decrease from 2013 to 2014 can be noted (from 25 to 22). The largest share of Forum members falls under production and sales organisations, and their membership increased from 27 to 29. In terms of geographical coverage, almost all member organisations are based in the EU15; only two are based in the EU12 (in Estonia and Slovenia). Only one member organisation is based in Southern Europe (Italy).

EAHF commitments update

Members formally engage in contributing to reduce alcohol-related harm by means of one or several initiatives, which are referred to as ‘commitments’. These commitments relate to the seven priority areas identified in the Charter of the EAHF.

The number of active commitments has remained fairly stable over time until 2012, a trend which denotes a constant motivation by Forum members to implement new commitments. However, a major drop was noticeable between 2013 and 2014, with only 76 and 52 active commitments registered. These figures could be explained by the fact that a high number of commitments ended in 2012 together with the end of the EU Alcohol Strategy. Some members may not have tabled any commitment in 2013 because they were waiting for the launch of the Action Plan on Youth Drinking and on Heavy Episodic Drinking (Binge Drinking) to have some guidance on new priority targets.

On the other hand, however, many new commitments are the continuation of previous ones. This could be positively interpreted as willingness by some members to pursue long term activities. This trend could facilitate the assessment of the commitments' effectiveness in a longer term perspective.

More than half of the 285 commitments submitted up to July 2014 (62%) came from production and sales organisations, among which 87 came from producers of alcoholic beverages and 12 from retailers. The second most represented sector at 22% is NGOs and health organisations.

Commitments' actions have not been equally distributed, with a concentration of actions on some topics. The priority areas that received higher attention are: 'cooperation on commercial communication and sales'; 'information and education programmes on the effect of harmful drinking' and 'information and education programmes on responsible patterns of consumption'. The priority area that has received the lowest number of commitments is 'Develop a strategy aimed at curbing under-age drinking'. This is due to the fact that under-age drinking is also directly addressed under the action area 'Enforce age limits for selling and serving of alcoholic beverages'.

In general, the production and sales organisations and the advertising, marketing, media sponsorship organisations' commitments regarding responsible business practices include activities such as self-regulation of commercial communication (marketing), training of staff and encouragement of ID-checking (sales). The commitments of non-industry organisations address controls on the enforcement of legal age limits and alcohol policy laws, monitoring of the alcohol industry's advertisements, provision of information on alcohol marketing regulation and the impacts of marketing and minimum pricing. Action dedicated to education and awareness-raising has also been a leading area for member commitments. Among these activities, several alcohol producers have made voluntary commitments to provide information on the risks of alcohol on packaging labels; NGOs and health professional organisations implemented activities essentially aimed at raising awareness and increasing knowledge on alcohol related harm.

The 2014 monitoring exercise

Forum member's commitments are subject to a monitoring process as established in Annex II of the Charter ("monitoring commitment"). Self-monitoring takes place on an annual basis. Members use a standard template that has been developed by DG HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY in cooperation with Forum members. An external evaluation of the monitoring reports is also carried out annually, to ensure independent quality assessment, based on criteria of objectivity and comparability.

This year 58 monitoring reports were submitted by 33 Forum Members; 78 reports should have been received from 50 members. Since 2009, the number of monitoring reports submitted has decreased from 91 in 2009 to 88 in 2010, 66 in 2011 and 53 in 2012. It then started growing again marginally up to 58 in 2013, the same number as for the 2014 exercise.

While this gradual decline over the years is explained by the overall decrease in the number of active commitments, it is also noted that many members that owned an active commitment in 2014 failed to report. No report was indeed submitted for 5 new commitments that started between November 2012 and January 2014; for 13 continued commitments for which a monitoring report was assessed in 2013; and for 2 commitments for which a final report was expected to be submitted already last year. This confirmed the trend observed in 2013, when members failed to report on 29 commitments, although to a lesser extent.

Results of the quality assessment of commitment monitoring reports

Past assessment exercises have shown that Forum members on average have slightly improved their monitoring information over time. However, results vary considerably from section to section of the monitoring report. The evaluated sections include implementation of the commitment, objectives, relevance to the aims of the EAHF, input indicators, output indicators, outcomes, evaluation and dissemination, and recommendations update, if applicable. The maximum score is five for each section.

This year's evaluation results show a steady performance in the quality of information provided by the Forum members. Only few members of the Forum have succeeded in providing very clear and useful information with regard to their actions to reduce alcohol-related harm.

Overall, many of the challenges referred to in the previous Monitoring Progress Reports still remain. These include: a lack of sufficient information in some sections, especially information on quantitative data (e.g. in the approximation of the financial resources used as inputs and quantitative outcome and impact indicators) and the timescale of implementation; a confused distinction between outputs and outcomes (or impacts); and unclear linkages between the different aspects of the commitment (objectives, inputs, outputs and outcomes). Only few members demonstrably took into serious account the recommendations issued in previous assessments to address the main shortcomings in the quality of reporting. The following areas for improvement have been identified:

- **Outcomes and Impacts:** The number of monitoring reports that provide little or no information regarding the commitment's outcome and impact remains significant. Although the provision of this information is beyond the Forum's minimum monitoring requirements (as laid down in the Charter of the Forum), it is critical for appropriately understanding the effectiveness of commitments. When the information was provided, sufficient quantitative data were often lacking.
- **Linkages:** There was still a significant proportion of monitoring reports, where a description was lacking as to how the objectives, outputs and outcomes of a commitment link together. In fact, it was observed that while a number of reports scored high in sections on objectives and outputs, lower scores were registered for the outcomes and impacts section. Such inconsistency would be avoided if linkages were clearly identified already at the planning stage of the commitment rather than at the monitoring and evaluation phase.
- **Mandatory sections:** Some reports were silent on mandatory sections such as outcomes and input indicators and evaluation and dissemination (mandatory for final reports).
- **Wrong sections:** In a high number of reports, information was presented under the incorrect report section.
- **Quantitative data:** A good number of reports were still missing complete information regarding the quantitative data, especially in sections on inputs, outputs and outcomes indicators. In this regard, commitment holders should at least try to provide the approximate estimation of the quantitative data required for the reporting exercise.
- **Multi-part commitments:** Gaps were found in the presentation of the implementation steps that relate to different parts of the commitment. For example, certain subtasks or time periods were not covered in some reports; or whereas some components of the commitment were described very well, others were overlooked.

Recommendations to improve the overall functioning and governance of the EAHF

On the basis of the critical analysis presented above on the evolution of the Forum and its monitoring framework, the report also puts forward a set of recommendations and actions to be taken in order to improve the overall functioning of the Forum and the commitments' monitoring framework.

The first set of recommendations refers to potential solutions to tackle the decline in Forum members' levels of engagement, e.g. increase the frequency and extend the geographical coverage of the commitments, promote the involvement of new members, and the creation of joint commitments and partnerships as well as identify specific target groups.

Another set of recommendations mainly focuses on improving the monitoring and evaluation framework. This aims to address the challenges identified by the quality assessment and could be achieved by implementing a series of changes to the 'Action Plan Submission Form' and the 'Monitoring Report Form' (so as to streamline the approach while improving effectiveness).

Finally, a number of recommendations are proposed with regard to the structure of the plenary meetings, the role of the ad-hoc working group on governance and monitoring, and ways to enhance to coordination between members and the Commission.

Proposal for a User Guide on Monitoring and Evaluating Commitment

Finally, a '*Proposal for a User Guide on Monitoring and Evaluating Commitment*' was also developed as part of this Annual Report. It provides the members with detailed instructions on how to monitor and evaluate Forum commitments, ensuring greater consistency which in turn should lead to higher quality reports. The User Guide provides information on the methodology that Forum members should use in the process of planning, monitoring and evaluating commitments, in particular with reference to the application of an *intervention logic*. It consists of a systematic and visual way of presenting the key steps required in order to turn a set of resources or inputs into activities designed to lead to a specific set of changes or outcomes.

Members are encouraged to define the monitoring and evaluation details already at the planning phase of the commitment, to ensure that they are implemented in an effective manner. The clearer the monitoring and evaluation details are defined in the Action Plan - including potential indicators to be used to measure the progress of the commitment - the easier it will be to carry out the monitoring and evaluation at a later stage. Members are also requested to submit the monitoring report in time and a new calendar for the monitoring activity is further proposed.

The User Guide then outlines concrete examples of the different types of information required under the eight sections of the *monitoring report form* which members have to submit by filling the section *Details on the monitoring report* in the online Database. The examples concern the four most common types of activities undertaken within the commitments:

- Media and outreach
- Training/Education
- Responsible marketing/responsible consumer information
- Promoting/Enforcing compliance.

In addition, some examples of good practices collected from completed or ongoing commitments (for which monitoring reports have been assessed by the external evaluators) are also presented. For each example, an explanation is given as to why the external evaluators considered the report of good quality.