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TECHNICAL REPORT

The European Alcohol and Health Forum

First Monitoring Progress Report

Claire Celia, Stephanie Diepeveen, Tom Ling

Prepared for the European Commission Directorate General for
Health and Consumers (DG SANCO)

The research described in this report was prepared for the European Commission. The opinions expressed in this study are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

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1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138
1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050
4570 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-2665
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Executive summary

The EU Alcohol and Health Forum

The EU Alcohol and Health Forum was launched in June 2007 following the EU alcohol harm reduction strategy in 2006.² The Forum is a multi-stakeholder platform where members from different types of organisations – such as production and sales organisations, media and advertising organisations and NGOs – commit to taking concrete actions to combat alcohol-related harm on a voluntary basis. The Forum was created to involve industry and other stakeholders in ‘shaping the social environment to support healthy lifestyles, whether in relation to ensuring a responsible approach to labelling, selling, marketing communication, or, ultimately, in raising awareness about the harmful consumption of their product’.³

Forum members agree to commit formally and publicly to concrete actions to reduce alcohol-related harm. These concrete actions are referred to as ‘commitments’. Members need to provide monitoring information on the progress of their commitment(s) in writing. This information must be put in a standardised monitoring report (see Appendix B for the template of this report) which is then made publicly available in an online database (<http://ec.europa.eu/eahf/searchForm.html>). In these reports, commitment holders must provide monitoring information on the resources allocated to the commitment and on its objectives, outputs, outcomes and impacts, as well as on how the results were disseminated and evaluated, where feasible. These reports are therefore essential in enabling the Forum and its members to monitor the progress of their commitments.

The importance of monitoring the actions of the Forum

Monitoring has been strongly emphasised from the launch of the Forum in 2007. The Charter establishing the Forum makes it clear that monitoring is key to achieving its

² An EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm, 2006. http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/documents/alcohol_com_625_en.pdf

³ First Progress Report on the implementation of the EU alcohol strategy, 2009. http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/documents/alcohol_progress.pdf

objectives, reviewing progress and creating trust in the activities undertaken by its members.⁴

In addition, consistent monitoring facilitates a better understanding of commitments and their relevance to the Forum, and also contributes to providing more comprehensive evidence to inform practice, encourage trust and promote the duplication of good practice.

A total of 91 monitoring reports, submitted by 43 Forum members, were received in time to be included in this report. These 43 members belong to the following categories of members:

- 22 production and sales organisations;
- 13 NGOs and health professionals;
- 4 advertising, marketing, media and sponsorship organisations;
- and 4 research institutes and other organisations.

Of the 91 monitoring reports, 59 were intermediate reports and 32 were final reports.

Through these commitments, Forum members have engaged in initiatives to:

- curb underage drinking
- inform industry and other stakeholders better about responsible commercial communications and sales practices
- inform policy-makers about the range of policy options available
- provide adequate consumer information through logos and responsible drinking messages.

The monitoring reports suggest that a considerable amount of activity is being undertaken by the Forum. In that way, the Forum provides a foundation for building trust and sharing good practice. Nevertheless, care is needed in interpreting these findings as the monitoring of the activities of Forum members is sometimes incomplete or poorly articulated.

This report

DG SANCO commissioned RAND Europe to carry out a quality assessment of all the monitoring reports submitted by Forum members up to March 2009. This quality assessment builds on similar work that RAND Europe carried out for DG SANCO in relation to the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.⁵

RAND Europe's role is to provide support and recommendations in order to help improve what is undertaken by members in their monitoring reports. This assessment does not judge the value of the commitments detailed in the monitoring reports. The scores given

⁴ Charter establishing the European Alcohol and Health Forum, 7 June 2007. http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/documents/Alcohol_charter2007.pdf, p.3

⁵ For more information about the work of the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, please see: http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/platform/platform_en.htm and Hallsworth M, Krapels, J and Ling T (2007): http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR609/

are for the quality of monitoring in the reports, and do not relate to consideration of the scale, value or extent of the possible impacts of the commitment.

Methodology

In August 2009 the RAND Europe research team drafted a scoring matrix for the quality assessment of Forum members' monitoring reports. This matrix took into account the guidelines for monitoring included in the Forum Charter and built on RAND Europe's previous experience of assessing monitoring quality for the EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. A first draft of this scoring matrix was sent to DG SANCO for comments and subsequently revised before being 'tested' on ten random monitoring reports to ensure that it was fit for purpose.

The quality assessment process involved scoring different sections of the monitoring report as well as submitting feedback to members on their individual monitoring reports to help them improve their monitoring in the following rounds of submissions. The scoring took place in September 2009 and forms the basis for this first Monitoring Progress Report.

Criteria used for scoring

In order to award scores to different sections of the monitoring reports, RAND Europe, in collaboration with DG SANCO, decided to use a set of four criteria defined by key questions, as follows:

- **Specificity:** Does the report clearly state what the commitment aims to do, for whom, how it will be done, and by when its actions will be accomplished?
- **Clarity:** Does the report allow the reader to understand the commitment fully? Does the report offer clear links between objectives, inputs, outputs and outcomes (if present)?
- **Focus:** Does the report include relevant information only and provide necessary contextual information so the reader can understand the scale of a commitment's impacts?
- **Measurement:** Does the report include quantitative data that has been measured accurately and at appropriate intervals, and that is framed in an understandable manner?

Overview of results from the quality assessment

The wide range of scores awarded (from 0 to 5) show that there are significant variations in the quality of monitoring between the reports submitted by Forum members and that some members appear to struggle with monitoring their commitments. For example, some members have had difficulty in being able to clearly communicate how they relate to the aims of the Forum or what they have produced in terms of outputs. It is hoped that this Monitoring Progress Report, along with the feedback and scores which have been disclosed to individual Forum members, will act as a catalyst to ensure an overall improvement in monitoring which can then be reflected in future reports on the quality of monitoring of Forum commitments.

Key recommendations

The quality assessment has highlighted three key recommendations that would substantially improve the monitoring of commitments made by members:

- Providing clear and sufficient information to make the commitment's progress and outcomes understandable to those not directly involved in the commitment.
- Emphasising the relevance of the commitment to the aims of the Forum.
- Clearly differentiating between objectives, inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

Outlook

The European Alcohol and Health Forum is the first multi-stakeholder platform at the EU level to discuss voluntary actions towards reducing alcohol-related harm. Therefore the Forum raises important and interesting questions as an alternative mechanism for pursuing public benefits through the innovative actions of its members. At a later stage, it is envisaged that an evaluation of the Forum's activities could contribute to understanding how far the Forum has achieved some of its aims and how successful it has been as an alternative mechanism for change and action on the issue of alcohol-related harm, compared to policy and enforcement mechanisms more commonly used in this field.