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The EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

Third Monitoring Progress Report

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Prepared for Unit 02 of the European Commission's Health and Consumer
Protection Directorate-General

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Executive summary

The Platform

The EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health was launched in March 2005 to “provide a common forum for all interested actors at European level where: (a) they can explain their plans to contribute concretely to the pursuit of healthy nutrition, physical activity and the fight against obesity, and where those plans can be discussed; (b) outcomes and experience from actors’ performance can be reported and reviewed, so that over time better evidence is assembled of what works, and Best Practice more clearly defined.”⁴

This Monitoring Progress Report presents the achievements of the EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health in 2007. It also examines how successfully the Platform’s members are monitoring the Platform’s progress. This report builds on research and analysis conducted by RAND Europe for the EU Platform’s Second Monitoring Progress Report in 2007.⁵

Achievements

The information on the Platform’s achievements that is included in this Monitoring Progress Report is derived from RAND Europe’s analysis of 148 monitoring forms submitted by Platform members by the deadline of 31 January 2008. This report does not include all the commitments being undertaken as part of the Platform because not all Platform members submitted monitoring forms for their commitments or they submitted them after this deadline. All of the Platform commitments, which numbered over 200 for 2007, can be accessed via the online Platform database.⁶

This report attempts to include information on all of these achievements, except where the specificity, clarity, focus or measurement displayed in the monitoring forms was so poor that it was not possible to communicate their content in a meaningful way, or when the actions were not applicable to 2007. It should be noted that the inclusion of information

⁴ EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (2005): Diet, Physical Activity and Health – A European Platform for Action.
http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/platform/docs/platform_charter.pdf (accessed 23 June 2008).

⁵ Hallsworth, M. and Ling, T. (2007) *The EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health: Second Monitoring Progress Report*, RAND, TR-474-EC.

⁶ Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/platform/platform_en.htm (accessed 23 June 2008).

on commitments in this Monitoring Progress Report does not mean that the RAND Europe team has independently verified such information.

This report illustrates the considerable range of activities associated with the Platform in 2007. These activities include: measures to improve the labelling of food products; schemes to reformulate food products; initiatives to modify the range of products available and their portion sizes; activities to address advertising and marketing; attempts to educate and inform European citizens about nutrition and physical activity in general and the health qualities of particular products; changing food consumption patterns at the point of purchase; implementing workplace based programmes to improve healthy lifestyles; attempts to influence policy-makers; projects to promote participation in sport and non-sport physical activities; programmes to facilitate access to sports activities; sponsoring sports teams and events; and conducting and supporting research. In terms of crude numbers, the areas of nutrition education and information, product labelling and advertising controls have been covered by the most commitments, with relatively few commitments addressing the physical activity sector.

Progress in monitoring

In order to measure the standard of monitoring that is being undertaken by the Platform members with greater precision, in 2007 RAND Europe developed a process to assess the quality levels of monitoring forms by scoring them from 1 to 5 on four criteria: specificity, focus, measurement and clarity. RAND Europe utilised this scoring mechanism again for the current report. A crude interpretation of these scores suggests that, on average, the monitoring forms just meet an “adequate” standard where: objectives are sufficiently clear to be understood, and include some quantitative targets and timescales; reporting allows, with some effort, an understanding of what has been done; there is a focus on many important activities, whilst less attention is paid to more trivial activities; and, on balance, there is an approach to measurement that is appropriate, if not complete. Nevertheless, it should be noted that 46.3% of monitoring forms fall short of this “adequate level”.

It is noticeable that scores for new commitments were lower than for those commitments that continued from 2006 to 2007; the scores for these continuing commitments increased from last year’s scoring exercise, which may suggest that Platform membership has encouraged a learning process with regard to monitoring. However, these averages conceal many variations between different categories, as well as between different selections of commitments (for example, new and continuing commitments). For example, there were variations within the different categories used to carry out the quality assessment: commitments tended to score higher on measurement and clarity than on specificity and focus, a finding that was also present in the Second Monitoring Progress Report. Interpretations of the scoring exercise should therefore be made with care and with reference to the appropriate category, as well as to the selection of commitments concerned.

Conclusion

Like its predecessor, this Monitoring Progress Report shows that the Platform can point to a wide range of activities and achievements that reflect the diverse capacities of the Platform members. Again, a plausible case can be made for linking these claimed

achievements to a successful delivery of the aims of the Platform. In addition, this Monitoring Progress Report suggests that Platform members continue to develop a range of skills in producing monitoring data, although the picture is complicated by the fact that the Platform's membership is continually in flux. However, it is clear that significant variations in the quality of reports remain, and that some Platform members are struggling with the monitoring of their commitments.