EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
Priority Area Health: Improving and promoting people’s health, including its social aspects

Progress report by the
Northern Dimension Partnership in
Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS)
covering the period between mid-2011 to mid-2013

This document has been developed by the NDPHS Secretariat based on the contributions received from the NDPHS Expert Groups, Task Groups and respective stakeholders engaged in the implementation of health actions included in the EUSBSR Action Plan.

1. What concrete results (in terms of objectives and sub-objectives of the EUSBSR) have been achieved by the implementation of PA Health since reporting in 2011?

Fostering macro-regional cooperation in health. The Partnership continued to approach key regional stakeholders to involve them in the implementation of the EUSBSR and foster selected activities, such as project facilitation, development of policy recommendations and advocacy. Examples include, but are not limited to: the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), the ScanBalt BioRegion, the ESF Baltic Sea Network, the Union of the Baltic Cities, the Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association, the Northern Dimension Institute, the eHealth for Regions network (the latter was granted a status of a NDPHS Associated Expert Group in 2012), and many other actors.

In 2011 the NDPHS received a technical assistance grant from the European Commission to contribute to the implementation and coordination of the actions and one flagship project included under PA Health of the EUSBSR Action Plan. As a result of this action, the Expert Groups and Task Groups of the NDPHS increased collaboration among countries and organisations when developing reports and completing a number of workshops, training seminars, and country visits.

Improving the coordination of PA Health. In 2012 the NDPHS received a technical assistance grant from the European Commission to contribute to the implementation and coordination of PA Health. So far, 1 extra staff member has been hired, the EUSBSR section of our website has been updated, and general project development, coordination, and information dissemination efforts with contacts and stakeholders have been supported as a result of this grant.

Development and completion of regional Flagship Projects. The expert level structures of the NDPHS continued developing regional flagship projects. As a result of the technical assistance granted in 2011 (described above), the Expert Groups and Task Groups of the NDPHS also developed 11 project drafts/proposals/applications – 3 of which have received funding and 1 of which has been accepted for further development for submission to the ENPI Regional East Indicative Programme. The NDPHS played an active role in helping applicants to the EUSBSR Seed Money Facility to prepare and improve their applications before submission.

Two Flagship Projects were completed in December 2012. Concrete results from the ICT for Health Flagship Project included: developing four web based tools, conducting two
pilot runs, developing models on eHealth education, publishing various reports, and holding a conference on eHealth acceptance. Concrete results from the Imprim project included: developing reports on funding primary health care (PHC) in the BSR and quality indicators for PHC performance; establishing a Quality Bonus System in Latvia; developing a joint basis and approach for the implementation of a new remuneration system that is meant to foster efficiency and quality; completing a number of regional pilot projects; developing strategies on professional development of PHC in the BSR and the containment of antimicrobial resistance. Both projects contributed to the PA Health action of fighting health inequalities through the improvement of primary healthcare and the EUSBSR objective of increasing prosperity. Additionally, ICT for Health contributed to the PA Health action of preventing lifestyle-related non-communicable diseases and ensuring good social and work environments.

Fostering cooperation with Russian partners. The NDPHS co-organized (with the Turku Process) a well-attended seminar at the 3rd EUSBSR Annual Forum entitled *Making Success Stories with Russian Partners*. The session aimed to help advance cooperation between EU and Russian partners that would contribute to fostering the objectives of the EUSBSR. The session concluded that there are more opportunities than constraints for a fruitful collaboration between EU and Russian partners, though a number of challenges need to be considered when developing initiatives.

2. **What is the added value/benefit of interventions/activities being implemented under PA Health for the objectives and sub-objectives of the Strategy?**

Investing in health not only contains future health care costs – it is an investment in economic growth. The implementation of PA Health’s actions contributes to increasing the prosperity of the region and to reaching Europe 2020 goals. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 5 additional years in average life expectancy will give a 0.5% annual increase in GDP per capita. In addition, the negative impact of chronic diseases on GDP can be as high as 7%. A mobile, educated population contributing to a well-functioning labour market necessarily is healthy and has equal access to quality healthcare services.

With regards to Europe 2020 goals, inclusive growth necessarily addresses demographic shifts and improves the social inclusion of yet vulnerable populations. Poor health and unhealthy lifestyles are linked not only to absenteeism but also stress, discomfort, distraction, pain, and suffering – all of which lead to social exclusion due to lower activity in the labor market. Conversely, individuals in good health are better able to acquire the necessary skills to enter the labor market, be productive, and work longer, thus reducing social exclusion.

The potential of e-health to increase the quality and cost-effectiveness of health care, to boost innovation and competitiveness and to create new business opportunities has been recognized in two Flagship Initiatives of the Europe 2020, namely, “A Digital Agenda for Europe” and “Innovation Union.” However, the potential of e-health is far from being fully exploited, mainly due to the following two main challenges: (i) acceptance by patients and health professionals and (ii) legal and technical barriers. The activities being implemented under PA Health, including the ICT for Health flagship project described above, help to address challenges in the area of e-health.

Although the organisation and delivery of health care is a national competence, investment in regional cooperation in health is advantageous and essential, especially
since the region faces many of the same health and demographic challenges. Health expenditure is a vast item in our national budgets, and it will continue. Utilizing timely and coordinated investments that are focused on improving health and optimizing the delivery of health care can contain future costs.

3. **What are the main problems encountered/challenges to be addressed and solutions found?**

Only a few European funding programmes currently operating in the Northern Dimension area have explicitly included health among their priorities. As a result, health-related projects receive considerably less funding than other, more visible sectors. The link between social inclusion and health ought to be more explicitly articulated.

Securing co-financing for projects has consistently been a common challenge among our partners from the various Northern Dimension countries. To alleviate the problem, a few countries in the Region, including Finland and Lithuania, have allocated money into mechanisms whereby national organisations are eligible to receive co-financing for various types of projects. This has been an effective solution that should be replicated elsewhere.

Territorial cooperation has been focused internally instead of on transnational cooperation. This has limited the possibilities to fund and implement projects.

Engaging Russian partners in EUSBSR activities remains an important premise for the NDPHS. To that end, the NDPHS hopes more programmes operating in the BSR during the next programming period will allow for both EU and Russian stakeholders to benefit from the programmes on equal footing.

4. **What steps are planned in order to improve the implementation of PA Health? How is the NDPHS involved in the preparation of the 2014-2020 programming period?**

Preparing for the next programming period is a permanent agenda item during the meetings of our Expert Groups and the NDPHS governing body, the Committee of Senior Representatives.

The NDPHS has been invited to participate in the Reference Group of the Baltic Sea Region Programme for the funding period 2014-2020 and contributed to the development of the Programme. In 2012, the NDPHS participated in a survey, which aimed at gathering expectations related to the scope and content, as well as other important aspects of the future programme. In 2013, the NDPHS submitted comments on the draft proposal for the Thematic Objective 11 of the future Baltic Sea Region Programme that includes three horizontal support facilities for the EUSBSR implementation.

The current four-year NDPHS Strategy expires at the end of 2013. The next NDPHS Strategy will, presumably, be the first to take into consideration the aims and objectives of the relevant regional strategies, including the EUSBSR. This will bring both strategies closely in line with one another and improve the mandate the Partnership has to facilitate the project-to-policy cycle in ways that are integral to the implementation of the EUSBSR Action Plan.
The NDPHS foresees holding a regional conference as a side-event of the 4th EUSBSR Annual Forum. The conference aims to increase the visibility, understanding and appreciation of public health initiatives in the Region in the context of the various Regional strategies and to help prepare the activities in the area of health for the 2014-2020 programming period. The conference aims to find ways to reduce fragmentation among interventions by improving strategic cooperation and coordination in the design and implementation of projects, improving the flow of information among stakeholders, and better coordinating project and policy development efforts. The conclusions and recommendations from the regional conference will be discussed by the NDPHS expert level bodies and be subsequently presented for consideration by the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives and/or the ministerial-level NDPHS Partnership Annual Conference.

Project proposals developed as a result of the TA grant received by the NDPHS secretariat in 2011 will, where possible, be adjusted to donors’ requirements and submitted for funding in 2014.

5. **What are the main uses of Technical Assistance?**

In 2011 the NDPHS received technical assistance to complete the following types of activities to implement PA Health:

- Project drafts/proposals/application development;
- Report development and dissemination, covering: expert/consultant contracts, country/site visits;
- Coordination meetings/ seminars/ workshops for the above activities, covering: travel and subsistence;
- Training seminars.

In 2012, the NDPHS received technical assistance to complete the following types of activities to implement PA Health:

- Hiring support staff, including covering travel costs;
- Holding a regional conference, covering: travel and subsistence, venue and equipment, and meals;
- Information development and dissemination.

6. **What actions has the NDPHS taken in implementing its roles and responsibilities as defined in the revised Action Plan?**

Along with fulfilling its role as a focal point for PA Health, the NDPHS developed and maintains a [separate section of its website](#) specifically to promote the activities and decisions of the EUSBSR and PA Health. EUSBSR related matters are regularly discussed during meetings and daily work to ensure the active engagement of Russian partners.

Along with fulfilling its responsibilities in liaising with other PACs and HALs, the NDPHS co-organized a well-attended seminar at the 3rd EUSBSR Annual Forum entitled *Making Success Stories with Russian Partners* (detailed above). With regards to general EUSBSR engagement efforts, the NDPHS takes part in the Task Force for Communication of the EUSBSR, contributed to the development of the EUSBSR Seed Money Facility related Terms of Reference, and developed targets and indicators for the EUSBSR Action Plan.
Along with fulfilling its responsibilities in facilitating the involvement of and cooperation with relevant stakeholders from the entire macro-region, the NDPHS encourages stakeholders at all levels to become involved in the implementation of the EUSBSR. Many EUSBSR activities are implemented at local and regional levels, such as the Alcohol and Drug Prevention among Youth flagship project.

Furthermore, the Expert Groups of NDPHS focus much of their work on bringing project results to the policy level. Progress and results are discussed internally, during NDPHS meetings among them the Partnership Annual Conferences, which biennially meet on the ministerial level, as well as externally, e.g., during meetings of the Northern Dimension Steering Group and the Senior Officials of the Northern Dimension. The NDPHS regularly supports project proposal development and applications for funding, including but not limited to applications for EUSBSR Seed Money.