

EG on Alcohol and Substance Abuse (ASA EG)

Tenth working Meeting

Tallinn, Estonia

December 2, 2014

Title	Minutes of the 10 <sup>th</sup> working meeting of the ASA EG
Submitted by	ITA in Coordination with the Chair
Summary / Note	This document outlines the main discussion points and decisions made during the 10th working meeting of the ASA EG

Tuesday, December 2

### 1. Opening of the meeting and welcome

Mr. Bernt Bull, the ASA EG Chair, who chaired the meeting, opened the meeting. The host, Triinu Taht from the Estonian Ministry of Social affairs, welcomed the participants and wished them a fruitful meeting.

### 2. Adoption of the Agenda

The Meeting **adopted** the Provisional Agenda with timetable as submitted in document ASA 10/2/1.

### 3. Reports from the Chairs and ITAs and SWG meetings

The Chair of the ASA EG informed participants about the last Chairs and ITAs meeting, which took place in Helsinki at the end of September. The main topic of that meeting was related to the development of the NDPHS strategy for the period of 2014-2020. The Chair Country, Germany, wishes that the strategy process would be completed by the end of this year. Per Germany suggestion, there is no time to establish new drafting teams, so Expert Groups need

to take a practical approach and to work with their experts and inform others concerning common issues in their plans. The ASA EG Chair noted that according to the decision of the CSR the ASA EG had anticipated one or maybe two or three drafting teams to be established. The ASA EG has nominated two representatives for this drafting team. However, the agreed process was not implemented, and each EG started to draft its action plan.

During the Helsinki meeting, some concerns were expressed regarding the fact that NCD EG lacks a sponsor for the next period. Unfortunately, the situation is still unclear, even the first draft of the action plan developed by the NCD EG, is one of the most extensive.

The discussions concerning the development of the NDPHS strategy and the action plan were continued at the NDPHS Strategy Working Group (SWG) meeting, which took place in Vilnius, in October. The ITA of the ASA EG had briefly informed about the meeting, based on the minutes of the meeting, which is available at the NDPHS web page. During that meeting, the Norway recalled the statement of the WHO representative regarding the use of globally agreed on terminology and asked that the word substance abuse be removed from objective 4.4. also, moreover, return to the original version developed by the ASA EG. This request was adopted, and the objective 4 of the NDPHS strategy is formulated now as following - “Strengthen and promote multi-sectoral approaches to reduce social and health harms from ~~substance abuse~~ alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs”

The SWG meeting also agreed that the Action Plan would be much shorter than the presented version. The results need to be concrete and realistic, and the inputs under different objectives should be consistent. The SWG consultant was asked to prepare a guidance document for the EGs/TGs in order to facilitate the revision and the finalization of the action plan.

As a follow up, the EGs had received the letter from the Chair of the SWG, with the request to revise EG inputs to the Action Plan based on the guidance document developed by the consultant. Plus, the EGs were asked to organize an additional drafting meeting of EG.

The Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs kindly agreed to host the additional meeting of the ASA EG drafting team.

The ITA of the ASA EG informed that the SWG would meet on 10 February 2015, review the submitted Action Plan and agree on further steps to finalize it for submission to the CSR 24 for adoption

The CSR meeting will take place in April 2015, and will discuss and possibly agree on the Strategy and the Action Plan

The meeting took note of the presented information.

#### **4. Revision of the ASA EG inputs to the action plan in accordance with the new guidelines.**

The ITA of the ASA EG, briefly introduced the guidelines for the revision of the draft action plan, developed by the SWG consultant and submitted as document ASA 10/4/info 1. The main change proposed by the consultant was the request to produce two types of expected results, so called direct and indirect. According the consultant the direct results mean, "*measurable changes at the executive or managerial level in the work of policy stakeholders in the given priority area*" and the indirect results indicate "*measurable changes of a socio-economic and behavioural character in the target group in the given priority area*"

Based on this request, the EGs were asked to develop two separate tables for each type of expected result, with the aim to have not ore than 3-4 direct and 2-3 indirect outcomes. The ASA EG noted that the new format was not in accordance with the one agreed by the CSR and expressed their concern towards this matter.

The ITA had also mentioned that he suggested to the representatives of the chairs and ITAs at the SWG to propose and organize a one day meeting with the consultant to discuss and clarify all matters related to the new guidelines, before the EG will start the revision of the action plan. Unfortunately, nothing happened with this suggestion.

During the next several hours, the ASA EG representatives were discussing the draft action plan. Mr. Jürgen Ojalo, from the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, joined the meeting and the discussions around the action plan, during the second half of the meeting.

Having thoroughly discussed the draft action plan, the meeting agreed as follows:

1. The ITA will incorporate all changes and addition towards the draft action plan and will develop a new version of it by end of December
2. The revised draft action plan will be distributed among the ASA EG members for their final comments and approval
3. The ITA will forward the revised draft action plan to the SWG chair and the Secretariat
4. The meeting nominated Triinu Taht (Estonia) and Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) to represent the ASA EG at the final drafting team.

### **5. Presentation of the ASA EG Thematic report**

Ms.Mariliis Tael (Estonia) and Mr.Konstantin Vyshinsky (Russia) presented the thematic report "Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol Policies in the Northern Dimension Partner Countries ". The young researchers, who had drafted this report, were unable to come to Tallinn, so the presentation and discussions were held on the Skype video conference call. The Government of Norway financially supported the development of the report.

The following policy measures are reviewed and assessed in the report, in order to outline possible policy advises:

- Public attitudes towards alcohol policy;
- Alcohol related harm;
- Harm to others;
- Unrecorded and illicit alcohol consumption;
- Local initiatives that support national alcohol policy.

The report includes chapters on those specific topics related to various aspects of alcohol policy in eight partner countries of the NDPHS that are members of the ASA Expert Group. Relevant publications and best experiences from around the world and from international sources have been summarized with the attempt to provide the most up-to-date picture. There is also a chapter with country profiles of Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden, with a more comprehensive overview of the same topics from the perspective of individual countries, including an introduction that includes a short presentation of each country's alcohol policy, which is supported by alcohol policy timeline.

The researchers answered to several questions roused after their presentation and clarified some issues for the EG members.

The meeting thanked the researchers for their work while developing the report and the ITA for coordinating the work and agreed:

1. To ask the representatives from Russia, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Poland to submit the missing “policy timelines”.
2. To ask the representatives from Sweden, Finland and Norway to submit the missing information to their country profiles.
3. The researchers will collect all information and will finalize the report together with the ITA of the ASA EG by the mid-February.
4. The report will be then forward to the Royal Ministry of Health and Care Services of Norway and the NDPHS

#### **6. Collaboration with the International bodies - NordAN**

The general Secretary of NordAN, Mr.Beekman joined the ASA EG meeting during the second half of the meeting. He briefly informed the meeting about the current activities of the organization and his vision of the possible cooperation with the ASA EG. **As a network, NordAN advocates** the prevention and reducing of alcohol- and drug related harm through effective evidence based alcohol- and drug policy in the Nordic and Baltic countries and in the entire Northern dimension region of Europe. NordAN supports the idea that a high price of alcohol, reduced availability and age limits are the most efficient instruments, both in reducing the total consumption and in reducing problem drinking. The policy of restrictions is supported by modern alcohol research as the most effective preventive alcohol policy. Organisation is actively involved in the discussions related to the Alcohol advertisement. The goal is to restrict alcohol advertisement as far as possible. Rules against alcohol advertising crossing national borders should be as strong as those against tobacco advertising. NordAN is one of the supporters of Alcohol advertisement ban initiative in Lithuania. The organization is also actively involved in the discussions related to the Nordic Alcohol Strategy.

Ms.Nina Karlsson, (NVC) commented on the last topic. She mentioned that in its initial response to the Nordic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers wanted to dismiss the

recommendation on development of the Nordic Alcohol Strategy, because they think that the existing cooperation and activities are adequate and cover everything mentioned in the recommendation. The Nordic Council was, however, not satisfied with this answer and requested further explanations from the Council of Ministers as to why no action will be taken. Again, in their second response, the Council of Ministers dismissed the recommendation to develop separate Nordic Alcohol Strategy. The main argument for rejection is the view that there is already much-existing cooperation in the field of substance abuse (among those listed are NVC, the NDPHS cooperation and ASA EG, as well as Nordic civil servant cooperation), and that it is adequate. They do however add that the on going process of reviewing the Nordic health cooperation (the so called 'Könberg report on Nordic health cooperation') may result in additional tasks in the field of strengthening public health.

NordAN is also involved in the drug policy issues. Recently the organization started the collaboration with the global platform "Drug Policy Futures", which was established with the aim of a new drug policy debate based on health. This platform gives an opportunity for an open dialog about the strengths and weaknesses of global drug policies. It advocates for evidence-based strategies to promote public health, safety and the well-being of society, including those addicted to drugs and their families.

As for the possibility of collaboration between the NordAN and the ASA EG, both parties expressed their interest and willingness to strengthen it and make more efficient. As a first step, it was proposed to start the discussions concerning the possibility of organizing of joint PAC side event in 2017 and collaboration in work with Policy makers and Parliamentarians.

The meeting took note of the presented information and agreed to continue discussions with the representatives of the NordAN, to develop more detailed and concrete plan for collaboration.

## **9. Next ASA EG meeting**

Mr. Bernt Bull (Norway) invited the ASA EG to consider offering to host the next meeting of the ASA EG in spring of 2015. Due to the fact that Latvia will be chairing the EU for the first six months in 2015, and as one of the priorities of Latvian presidency was indicated Alcohol issues, it was proposed to discuss the possibility of holding the next meeting of the ASA EG in Latvia.

It was also noted that because the future structure of the NDPHS is not clear yet, it is difficult for the countries to decide the host the meeting.

The Meeting took note of the presented information and agreed to consider the location further while planning for the first half of March 2015.

## **10. Any other business**

Mr. Janusz Sieroslowski, (Poland) informed that the pilot study of RARHA SMART survey would be finalized by January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The participant countries completed the translation of the survey questionnaire and tender of the institutions who will carry the study. It is expected that based on the pilot study the questionnaire will be revised, and the main study will be implemented during the summer period. There are some problems with the implementation of the pilot study in Estonia and Russia.

The ITA informed that despite the unsuccessful attempt of the ASA EG to get financial support for the RARHA SMART survey in Russia (through the proposal submitted by the EU delegation in Moscow), the leadership of the EG is continuing to seek the possibility to find other ways of financing. In the meantime, the Russian Co-chair of the ASA EG is discussing this issue with the MoH of the Russian Federation.

Mr.Sieroslowski, confirmed his willingness to lead the process of the development of thematic report and policy recommendations on cannabis usage, which is included in the action plan for the new strategy of the NDPHS. He is foreseeing to develop the report in 2016, and the issues covered by the report will be based on the finances available to carry out the study. In the case of the absence of funds, there will be still possibility to develop a small-scale study, but in that case, the active involvement of the members of the ASA EG will be necessary.

He also informed that the representatives from the Oslo community visited National Bureau for Drug Prevention to discuss the possibility of the development of the joint project on alcohol and drug demand reduction among the Polish workers in Norway. The first step would be needs assessment.

The Chair of the ASA EG asked to share with him the contact information of the representatives from Oslo, in order to follow up on this issue.

Mr.Sieroslowski proposed reconsidering possibility to come back to idea of the project: “Drinking habits and alcohol related harms in ND Region – a qualitative study”. Although the project did not get financial support in the past the idea of such study seems to be worth of further consideration.

Finally, Mr.Sieroslowski informed that he was approached by DG Justice to lead the new EU project on Drugs in Prisons. He proposed to consider the inclusion of the ASA EG as a Collaborating partner of this project.

The meeting took the note of the presented information and thanked Mr.Sieroslowski for it. It agreed that :

- 1) The contact information of the representatives of Oslo Commune will be given to the Chair of the ASA EG
- 2) Mr.Sieroslowski will follow up on the discussions with the DG Justice on inclusion of the ASA EG as an associated partner in the possible new project on Drugs in the Prison Settings

## **11. Adoption of the meeting minutes**

The ASA EG Chair proposed that it would send out draft ASA EG Tenth Working Meeting minutes to the participants on 17 January, 2015 and that comments on the draft would be due, at the latest, on 24 January 2015. The revised minutes would be distributed on 27 January 2014 to be adopted per capsulam provided that no further comments are submitted within one week.

The Meeting **agreed** to the proposed procedure.

## **12. Closing of the meeting**

The Chair thanked the participants for a superb meeting.

The Meeting closed on 2 December 2014 at 17:45 hours.