

EG on Alcohol and Substance Abuse (ASA EG)

Working Meeting

Online (Microsoft Teams)

February 2, 2022

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

#### Opening of the meeting and welcome

Mr Bernt Bull, Chairman of the ASA EG, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

#### 1. Adoption of the agenda

Mr Bernt Bull (Chairman) presented the draft meeting agenda. The meeting adopted the Provisional agenda with the timetable.

#### 2. 13.15 – 13.45 ASA EG projects under the EU Grant to the NDPHS (Working Package 4 and 5)

Dr Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) briefly presented the working package contents 4 and 5 under the EU Grant to the NDPHS and opened the discussion around the plan project activities for 2021 (a list of activities and sub-activities, by when they should be implemented and by whom).

The working package 5 - Contribute to improved policy response to the use of Cannabis and Novel Tobacco and Nicotine Products (NNTP). The project activity includes to carry on two

studies: 1) Study on - Drug Policy, epidemiological situation, treatment and early intervention offers and legislation issues related to Cannabis collected from the health professionals, policymakers, researchers and through the literature review and 2) Study on - The legal cases on NNTP, arguments and facts brought at those cases to get the NNTP under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) regulation in the ND countries, collected through the Health officials and parties involved in the disputes.

Before the ASA EG meeting, the Chair and ITA had a conversation with the NDPHS Secretariat Director, Ms Ulla-Karin Nurm, who confirmed that the ASA EG would carry on the researchers' selection through the NDPHS Secretariat. The ASA EG needs to submit the names of three or four candidates, from which the ones who will carry on the study will be chosen.

Ms Jelena Talackiene (Lithuania) noted that it would be essential that the researchers chosen for both studies are independent, not related to any industry activities. She also stressed that for the study on NNTP, it is quite important to tackle emerging issues, like the attempt of the industry to present the NNTP as a reduced harm products, or even as harm reduction tool. Plus, as novel nicotine products, like snus without tobacco is a synthetic product, but in fact such products are used with the same aim as tobacco products and cause nicotine dependence, it is important to address the issue of application of the FCTC and its article 5.3 to be attributed to those products. The impact and harm of these products to health can also be the topic of the study. Finally, she mentioned that the study also needs to touch upon the device issues. The tobacco industry tries to push the agenda that the device does not belong to the novel tobacco products and cannot be regulated by the same regulations as tobacco products.

Ms Triinu Taht (Estonia) and Ms Sanita Ladzina (Latvia) both agreed with the topics presented by Ms Talackiene.

Mr Bernt Bull (Chairman) raised the question if both studies can be carried on by one researcher, or should the themes of the studies be divided between the two researchers, separate for each topic (one for Cannabis and one for NNTP).

Ms Eleonor Saftsen (Sweden) noted that the ASA EG needs to find researchers with the right competencies. As the study topics are also different, it will be preferable to have separate

researchers for each subject. She also stressed that it is essential to clarify how the ASA EG report on Cannabis will be different from the reports produced by the EMCDDA.

Dr Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) proposed to develop the ToR for the studies, where both the aim and topics to be covered will be clearly defined. The suggestions from Ms Jelena Talackiene (Lithuania) can be used as a basis for the ToR. ToR can also help in identifying the right consultants for the study. He also mentioned that the duration of the project is three years, and the idea is that at the end of the study, to organize two significant events (seminar or conference) where the ASA EG will present the findings of the study.

Mr Janusz Sieroslowski (Poland) agreed that it is preferable to have two different researchers. He also noted that while working on the NNTP issues, it is vital to cover these topics' legal and health (biological) aspects.

Ms Triinu Taht (Estonia) stressed that the main problem with the NNPT in the Baltic countries is still the legal issues, and even health (biological) aspects are part of the discussions around the legal issues.

It was decided that ASA EG members from the Baltic countries will draft and present the ToR for the NNTP study, and Mr Janusz Sieroslowski (Poland) will outline the ToR for the study on Cannabis. The ToR will be ready by the end of March. The ASA EG members will also start the search to identify potential candidates to carry on the research. The aim will be to finalize the selection process by mid-May.

Work package 5: Prevention Approaches – learning, experience, training (PALET)

Dr Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) reminded that the project aimed to establish the Network of local municipalities focused on preventing work to reduce the harm caused by Alcohol and drugs to exchange experiences and learn from one another's approaches activities, and outcomes.

Mr Janusz Sieroslowski (Poland) asked if it was decided about the number of the municipalities per country to be nominated for the Network and the municipality's size.

Dr Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) noted that the establishment of the Network could be seen as a first step to the more significant project and activities in the coming years. At this moment, the main aim of the three-year project is to establish the Network and, during the discussions between the municipalities to identify interesting topics and ideas for the future projects/activities of the Network. So, maybe it will be feasible to identify/nominate two municipalities per country at this stage.

Mr Bertn Bull (Chairman) raised the question if the municipalities can be chosen from the previous NDPHS project - ADPY, which was covering the issues related to the prevention work on the local level, or the new municipalities can be chosen for this Network.

The ASA, EG members proposed to choose the new municipalities for this project.

Ms Jaana Markkula (Finland) asked if it was decided what the municipalities need to commit and how many meetings per year to be organized.

Ms Eleonor Saftsen (Sweden) noted that while recruiting municipalities for the Network, it will be essential to define the goal of these activities and what the project requests them to contribute. So that municipalities in all participant countries will receive the same information. She also asked to clarify what type of representatives and position from the municipalities can participate in the meetings of the Network.

Dr Zaza Tsereteli (ITA) suggested that he draft the ToR for the Network where all these issues will be listed. The ITA will share with the ASA EG members their inputs. After the finalization of the ToR, it will be then possible to share it within the participant countries. He also underlined that one of the ideas of the project was also to ask the host country to bring to the discussion table the topic interesting for them so that Network had an opportunity to cover different aspects and experiences around the prevention work on the local level.

Mr Bernt Bull (Chairman) underlined that a main purpose for the project is to gain local benefit from improved cooperation between the many actors at a local level affiliated to different levels of government. In Norway for example the local police is directly linked to the national police authority under the Ministry of Justice; the secondary schools are under the authority of the regional government, whereas primary health, social services and primary schools all are

under municipal authority. These actors will quite often work simultaneously in the same area and even dealing with the same individuals. The idea is to find methods to facilitate contacts to assess the local situation, and or exchanging notes on special problems locally, that the different actors' formal affiliation to different governmental levels do not provide the actors with.

Ms Eleonor Saftsen (Sweden) mentioned that it would be good to invite also the representatives of CAN to participate in the establishment of the Network as they were working with the ADPY project and are also closely involved in this kind of activities in Sweden.

Mr Janusz Seiroslawski (Poland) suggested that it would be advisable that the first meeting of the establishment of the Network takes place in Autumn, with the possibility of a physical, face to face meeting. It will be essential to establish informal, interpersonal connections between the network members.

Mr Espen Andresen (Norway) suggested contacting the Bergen municipality in Norway to participate in the work of the Network. Their participation can be later used to follow up on possible submission of the future project for the EEA grant application.

The meeting decided that ITA will draft the ToR for the Network and will share it with the ASA EG for their inputs to finalize it by the end of March. The NDPHS Secretariat will hire one person Secretariat to facilitate the establishment of the Network and follow up on its activities. The ASA EG participant countries will then start to seek and nominate two municipalities to participate in the network work.

### 3. Any other business

The ASA EG has discussed the situation around the implementation of the study on “Affordability and cross-border trade of alcohol in the Baltic Sea Region – implications for prevention”. Last year, the ASA EG contacted the Secretariat and asked to discuss the problems related to the consultants working on the study with the EU Office in Moscow. The Head of the NDPHS Secretariat, Ms Ulla-Karin Nurm, informed the Chairman and the ITA of

the ASA EG that she had this discussion with the office in Moscow. Their suggestion was to keep the consultant working on the alcohol affordability part of the study and change the one working on the cross-border trade part.

The ITA of the ASA EG invited the group members to discuss this proposal and to decide how to proceed.

Conclusion of ASA EG discussion was the following: ASA EG is not sure that it can get much out from the study, based on the draft report the EG has now, so it seems there is no reason to continue the project. ASA EG is convinced that the continuation of the research may come to a result that can be harmful to the research in general. When somebody trying to harm alcohol policy advocacy can use this report for their purposes. Probably the consultants are the right specialists but not in the field ASA EG was looking for this study. It was mentioned that in the ToR developed for this project, the ASA EG indicated that one of the main requirements for the consultant was to have a background in the Economy. Unfortunately, those requirements were not taken into account while selecting the researchers.

The unanimous decision was to abort the whole thing and to ask the NDPHS Secretariat to convey the message to the EU Office in Moscow to stop this research project.