

Promotion of Breastfeeding in Europe

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Coordinator: Adriano Cattaneo

Unit for Health Services Research and International Health

Istituto di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico (IRCCS) "Burlo Garofolo"

Via dei Burlo 1, 34123 Trieste, Italy – Phone: +39 040 322 0379 Fax: +39 040 322 4702

E-mail: cattaneo@burlo.trieste.it

The Project addresses a recommendation made by a previous EU Project (EURODIET): to formulate an action plan for the promotion of breastfeeding in Europe. Its overall objective is to develop a model plan of action (Blueprint for Action) to protect, promote and support breastfeeding, to be used as blueprint for country-specific initiatives and planning.

The Project started on 1st October 2002. The initial month was spent on:

- Completing the list of project participants from countries to ensure that at least one participant per country would attend the scheduled activities and would respond to the requests for information and comments.
- Developing the questionnaire to be used for collection of country data on the current situation for the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.

On 8-9 November 2002 the members of the Steering Committee met in Lyon to complete the above questionnaire and to plan subsequent project activities in preparation of the 1st general meeting. Over the following months, information was collected from the participating countries. During this phase, the European Office of WHO decided that the requested information would be useful also for the activities of its Unit for Nutrition and Food Security and extended the request to fill in the questionnaire to EU accession and applicant countries.

All the information was brought together and analysed in Trieste to prepare a draft report on the current situation. This, together with subsequent planned activities, was discussed during the 1st general meeting held in Trieste on 21-22 February 2003. The 2nd Steering Committee meeting took place at the same time. Project participants asked to revise extensively the draft report. Also they contributed ideas for the development of the second project document, the review of interventions.

The draft document on the current situation was revised, distributed again to all project participants, then discussed during the 3rd Steering Committee meeting held in Trieste on 21st June 2003. At this point clearer indications were also provided for the further development of the document on review of interventions.

The document "Protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding in Europe: current situation" was finally completed and approved by all project participants. It includes the body of the report and two annexes: the questionnaire used to gather information and a summary table of quantitative and qualitative data.

The document "Protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding: review of interventions" went through six different drafts. The 7th draft has been approved by all participants and completed in March 2004. The final version has been delivered to the European Commission and is available upon request.

Before the 2nd general meeting, held in Luxembourg on 28-29 November 2003, project participants were also asked to measure the gap between what is currently being done in their countries and the effective and feasible interventions that should be implemented based on the review of interventions. They were requested to suggest what actions would be needed in order to fill the gap. Based on their suggestions, the Blueprint for Action was drafted and revised twice. The 3rd draft was reviewed also by important stakeholders in the promotion of breastfeeding in each country, leading to the development of the 4th and final draft after the 5th meeting of the Steering Committee (Barcelona, 26-27 March 2004) The final document will be approved by all project participants and will be officially presented to a larger public of interested parties at the final conference to be held in Dublin on 18 June 2004.

The Blueprint for Action will be delivered to the European Commission, Directorate Public Health and Risk Assessment, before the end of September 2004, translated into the main languages of the European Union. A concise version in a less technical language will be made available to the public and the media at the same time.

It is hoped that Member States will use the Blueprint for Action to develop or revise their national plans. It is also hoped that some countries will participate in a pilot project aiming at field testing the application of the Blueprint.