

Report on the Alcohol Policy Conference in Budapest, Hungary

By Walter Farke

In the scope of the country visits of the Building Capacity Project the conference “Reducing Alcohol-related Harms – Tools of Local Interventions” was held on 3rd December 2009 in Budapest, Hungary. The conference was organised and carried out by the Hungarian *National Centre for Addictions* in cooperation with the *German Centre for Addiction Issues (DHS)*. The aim of the national conference was to identify fields that require more activities on alcohol policy, while actual measures to reduce alcohol related harm were taken into consideration. Further, the conference allowed the participants to get an overview on the current activities in the alcohol policy field of national and international stakeholders. Additionally it allows especially EURO CARE to identify possible partners for their network.

One hundred participants from different organisations (such as self-help organisations, universities, counselling centres, hospitals etc.) used the conference to receive information from experts who are active in the alcohol policy and the prevention as well as in the research field.

Dr. Melinda Medgyaszai (Secretary of State for Health Policy), Dr. Ferenc Falus Ferenc (National Chief Medical Officer) and Dr. Péter Brunner (Director of National Centre for Healthcare Audit and Inspection) welcomed the audience to the conference. Afterwards the Hungarian speakers Erika Vandlik and Dr. Tamas Koós reported facts about alcohol consumption and alcohol related harm in their country, which based on national surveys. Additionally further speakers gave an insight into the manifold national prevention programmes to reduce alcohol related harm in Hungary, which covers mainly the intention to change behaviour and drinking habits and a bit drinking environments (see conference programme). International contributions were given by Ruth Ruiz (*EURO CARE*), Pieter De Coninck (*European Commission DG-SANCO*) and Walter Farke (*DHS*). Pieter de Coninck reported on the European Alcohol Strategy on reducing alcohol related harm and lined out the necessity of national activities for the success of this strategy. The international presentations stressed also the importance of the implementation of evidence based policy measures on national level to reduce alcohol related harm. Ruth Ruiz (*EURO CARE*) concluded the international presentations by describing the activities of her organisation on European level. The audience was very interested in the presentations and started afterwards lively discussions on the topics.

Outlook

The conference was successful in giving a detailed overview of the commitment of the Hungarian organisations as well as of the international players to reduce alcohol related harm. The *National Centre for Addictions* would be able to take over the central coordination of an alcohol policy network if they have the possibility to extend their resources (financially and personally). At present the centre is also responsible for several topics (i.e. also illegal drugs), which bind a lot of personal and financial resources. On the other hand two national programmes on health promotion have been passed, in which the topic of alcohol is included, but the implementation of the programmes has not been realized until now. The self-help groups are committed to the advancement of their groups and group work. They do not consider alcohol policy advocacy as their core task. Two of them are involved in international activities and

they were member of international networks, e.g. European Mutual-Help Network for Alcohol-Related problems (EMNA). Limiting factors are financial resources as well as the demographic composition of the members of the self-help organisations. In contrast, most of the Universities are nationally and internationally embedded in networks. Nonetheless research on alcohol related harm and alcohol policy starts at Hungarian Universities recently. This might be attributable to the fact, that experts on alcohol with a Public Health background were rare in Hungary in the past years. Gradually the rate of Public Health professionals increases and they are more and more interested in alcohol policy research. One of the main reasons for this growing interest seems to be the importance of alcohol policy, which is emphasized by the tremendous number of projects on alcohol policy issues on European level.

Finally it has to take in consideration that most governmental and non-governmental organisations have to cope with limited resources, especially the lack of finances. On the other hand, the alcohol industries, especially brewers, are active in different fields (e.g. prevention) in Hungary. Unfortunately, an alcohol policy network that would work as a counter-balance to the influence of the alcohol industry is missing in Hungary up to now.

The APN welcomes the request of Hungarian organisations to be more involved in the activities of this international network. Finally it should be taken in consideration that smaller projects would be after the BC project more suitable and effective to establish a national alcohol policy network.