

Alcohol Policy Youth Network

Youth Empowerment for a better life!



Report on Social Inclusion and alcohol policies



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Introduction

The Alcohol Policy Youth Network is a direct outcome of a series of political processes that continuously asked for higher youth participation in the definition, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes tackling the harmful consumption of alcohol.

During our first Constitutive meeting that was held in March 2008 in Budapest we gave birth to the first ever all embracing youth network on Alcohol harm reduction and identified the working areas the future network would tackle, the needs that youth organizations must satisfy to be more involved in alcohol policy-making and its implementation, as well as developing the first action plan that has been revised and updated on last years' annual coordination meeting in Lisbon, Portugal.

APYN has organized the following events / held the following activities to address the issue of alcohol and social inclusion.

- I. **7th - 9th May 2010 - European Conference of the Alcohol Policy Youth Network, Budapest (Hungary)**
- II. **15th-19th April - Training for trainers, Kanuas (Lithuania)**

There were two presentations and several Working Groups working on Social Inclusion and Alcohol during these two events.

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Background and methodology

Firstly, an introduction to Social Inclusion took place, which explained that there is no agreed definition of social inclusion as a concept. It is widely regarded as a process that seeks to ensure that everyone regardless of their circumstances and background has the possibility to participate in society. Inclusion policies generally try to prevent people from becoming **marginalised** in society or excluded from communities. They also seek to ensure that everyone has the same access to the same quality of services and public structures. Social inclusion generally goes hand in hand with **reduced inequality and increased social cohesion**.

The social groups that can be excluded have been identified. People that are socially excluded often come from the most vulnerable groups in society, they include but are not limited to:

- Religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people
- People living in poverty
- People suffering from illness or disability
- People dependent on drugs and alcohol

Young people who vulnerable to exclusion often come from one or more of these socially marginalised groups. However, young people can also experience unique forms of social exclusion due to their age and other circumstances. For example, young people can face **hidden** or “technical” discrimination in the labour market due to a “lack of experience” and are **excluded** from being active citizens due to voting age restrictions. Young people can also have **difficulties relating** to mainstream society, where they are ignored and are even sometimes represented by the media as a **threat to the society**. This can often lead to a “feeling” of exclusion.

With regards to health and the social exclusion of young people it is important to stress that many young people with health issues feel socially

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excluded due to **stigmatisation** and also due to a lack of **youth friendly health services**. One health area where young people face both of these issues is that of **Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)**. Many young people are reluctant to use health services when they have Sexually Transmitted Diseases or other complications because they fear being judged, fear for their confidentiality or fear not being understood.

Sometimes services provided don't understand the **needs** of young people. One example of this is with regards to HIV where there is a focus on prevention, but little information on how young people already living with this condition can live sexually fulfilling lives. When services are not youth-friendly in the way young people may use them, they can become socially excluded and often this has a negative effect on their health. Young people living on the margins of society are more likely to suffer from health problems, and are less likely to have access to the services that they need to overcome them.

Being socially excluded can also have a serious impact on the health of young people, particularly in relation to poverty. The WHO HBSC Report from 2005/2006 reported that young people from a “lower education, lower occupational status, and lower income backgrounds, suffer more from poor health and have higher mortality rates.” Young people from less affluent backgrounds are more likely to be overweight or obese, engage in “risky behaviours” and suffer from depression. There are different levels of inequality and social exclusion in different countries and regions. For example a young person from Eastern Europe or Central Asia is much more likely to suffer from poverty and social exclusion than one from the UK or Nordic Countries. Overall in Europe 20% of young people aged 18-24 are at risk of poverty (European Public Health Alliance). In addition, it must be acknowledge that there exists health inequalities within countries as well based on demography and economy.

Discussion and outcomes I

Budapest, Hungary 7-9 May 2010

One of the main discussions during the APYN European Conference in Budapest in May 2010 was about the role of youth organizations in social inclusion. Youth organisations and youth clubs promote and enable **active citizenship** and are an important resource for the social inclusion of young people. Many youth organisations specifically reach out to young people from vulnerable groups with fewer opportunities. The core aims of youth organizations and youth clubs are often based around social inclusion due to an emphasis on **community participation**. The **non-formal education** provided by these organisations can help break down barriers, develop skills, increase confidence and involve young people in society. However a key issue that many youth bodies face is recognition and support for their work in this topic.

Several positive effects of alcohol on social inclusion were identified:

- Bars and clubs are meeting places for young people where they can interact,
- young people feel “liberated” and grown up when they drink,
- relaxation effects of alcohol break down social barriers,
- drinking can mean you are involved in social events involving alcohol,
- family and cultural traditions often involve alcohol,
- it can be connected to moral of individuals and
- values and traditions.

However several negative effects of alcohol on social inclusion were also identified:

- Young people from abusive families that were torn apart by alcohol, are marginalized and socially excluded,
- victims of violence caused by alcohol are often marginalized and excluded,

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- mental health problems caused by alcohol can lead to social exclusion,
- drinking during pregnancy caused dangerous health complications for the baby that later might lead to social exclusion of that person,
- “passive drinking”: car accidents, sexual assaults, unprovoked violence, self esteem impact, exacerbates existing health problems, can lead to social exclusion,
- sexual performance is diminished,
- a low debut age can lead to a higher risk for high alcohol consumption as an adult,
- extreme consumption is bad for health and society and can lead to social exclusion of the misuser.

The action points that were identified in terms of tackling the issue of alcohol in social inclusion are categorized in two areas:

1. Ideas for young people and Youth Organizations

- Sober and non-alcoholic activities are very important - Concerts that are drink free,
- Organizing sports events for young people, creating and promoting “sober bars”,
- Making clear about the immediate consequences of alcohol,
- De-normalization of drunkenness (campaigns, posters, advertisements, new media),
- Killing the myths of alcohol (that it is “cool”, sexy, good for you),
- Promoting non-alcoholic drinks, especially in bars, clubs, festivals, music events etc.,
- and respect abstinence from alcohol.

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2. Policy

- Non-alcoholic drinks should be much cheaper than alcoholic ones,
- Youth organizations should take advantage of the lobbying capacities of AYPN and the European Youth Forum,
- Police should enforce existing regulations on buying alcohol, e.g. Young people under 25 years must always show ID
- Enforce division between weak and strong alcohol in stores and bars (strong alcohol separate, more difficult to access and more expensive),
- Ensuring alcohol awareness is part of school curriculum from pre-school to high school,
- Banning promotions and bulk buying of alcohol.

Discussions and outcomes 2

Kaunas, Lithuania 15-19 April 2011

During this meeting there were two activities held to define certain aspects of social inclusion of young people with few opportunities (YFOs).

At first, participants gathered in the middle of the room forming a line. The trainer made statements and the participants were asked to go to the right and to the left if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, respectively.

The statements that were raised were:

- a. YFOs don't get involved in NGOs' work.
- b. YFOs don't get involved because they don't care.
- c. YFOs don't get involved because they can't.
- d. YFOs don't get involved because they don't know about activities held by NGOs.
- e. YFOs don't get involved because NGOs don't want to involve them.

The outcome of this activity was, all in all, that participants felt that it is crucial that NGOs include YFOs in their work and that they try to outreach YFOs to inform them about what possibilities exist for them to get active in youth organizations and youth clubs. YFOs mostly do not know that there are groups, which they can work with, and even if they would have the potential and motivation to do so, they lack information about where they can become useful.

The second activity was to do a mapping of ideas concerning three levels of action and influence, to identify the needs and the key points of each level, which has to be done in terms of alcohol and social inclusion.

Individual level:

On the one hand, YFOs as individuals should look for information, making use of the different sources, on YFOs and how they can get involved in the NGOs' work. On other hand, individuals that are not YFOs are encouraged to seek information about YFOs so that they know about this group of young people and try to include them in their activities. It is important that individuals that are not YFOs explore their environment (family, school etc.) to identify what situations YFOs are dealing with in their everyday life and use this information to include them in the NGOs' work. Another important aspect here is that non-YFOs raise awareness to their family and friends. It is crucial that individuals help their NGOs identify the need of getting YFOs involved and to help the NGOs in finding ways of how to include YFOs in their work. Individuals should use their experience and networking to get in touch with NGOs that do involve YFOs in their work so as to seek help for their own organizations. YFOs should be invited to get involved with adequate approaches and social marketing actions.

Organizations:

There is a need to conduct a need analysis on Alcohol in terms of YFOs, so that NGOs know where there is a need to work on about YFOs. There is a need to adapt and change currently running activities in such terms so that the YFOs are included in the agenda. Outreaches to YFOs directly are of great importance, because many times YFOs do not know that an event/ an outreach is being held. However we have to take into consideration that while doing this, we do not want YFOs to feel part of another society, other than ours, because this would mean that we are socially excluding them just by trying to include them. Members of the NGOs often do not know about how to deal with YFOs, how to approach them etc., so it is important that NGOs hold several trainings on a regular basis in these terms. NGOs, being able to reach high level positioned people, have the opportunity to advocate in terms of providing YFOs more opportunities. NGOs should get in

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contact with other NGOs that are already working with YFOs and/ or on YFOs to share best practices.

Member States:

Member States have the privilege of influencing society. That makes them able to create health systems that are socially responsible towards YFOs. They often get to talk to NGOs that try to advocate and they are encouraged to be open to advocates, and get the support in terms of creating policy papers. There is also the need of having an official definition of the term YFOs, so that everyone is on the same page.

There was a common agreement that nothing has to be done for YFOs without YFOs, therefore member states must work towards including YFOs and youth in discussions concerning them.

Conclusion

Social inclusion is as a process that seeks to ensure that everyone, regardless of their circumstances and background, has the possibility to participate in society. Social inclusion generally goes hand in hand with reduced inequality and increased social cohesion.

There are several factors that leads to social exclusion, and as this report is stating, alcohol is one of those factors. Alcohol can in some settings be seen as a social lubricant and lead to inclusion in a specific group of people, however it's also connected to a lot of negative atributes and might lead to social exclusion. To ensure inclusion of all groups, and as this report focuses on Young people with fewer opportunities (YFOs), there is a need to strengthen alcohol policies and include young people and YFOs in decision making processes.

This report states suggestions both for policy-makers and youth organizations what they can do to ensure the inclusion of young people and YFOs.