



Attitudes to alcohol among young people in the Baltic Sea Region will be investigated

Baltic countries join forces to fight drugs among young people

Work on fighting alcohol and drug abuse among young people is a priority task for Sweden which has been pressing for the issue to be highlighted in the European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The countries surrounding the Baltic Sea are currently planning a flagship project that is expected to become a pillar of the strategy's health focus.



During the Swedish presidency of the European Union in the latter half of 2009 there was a decision by the union on a Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. One of the focus areas of the Strategy is health and Sweden and the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs played a leading role in ensuring that alcohol and public health were included in the document.

“Thanks to this strategy, the countries round the Baltic Sea will now be working on these issues in a concrete manner”, claims Stefaan De Maecker who is responsible Program Manager for health issues at Sida's Baltic Sea Unit. “The strategy has helped to bring to life the desire among the countries and Russia for joint solutions to the great challenges that we face in the region”, he continues.



“People are no longer protected from alcohol advertising just because it is forbidden by law”, says Maria Renström, head of the Swedish government’s secretariat for alcohol, drugs, doping and tobacco. She claims that alcohol manufacturers nowadays use social media like Facebook to invite young people to attend events.

The planned flagship project has been given the name BADY – Baltic Sea Region Project on Reducing Alcohol and Drug-related Harm among Young People. The foundations have been laid by Sida financing a preliminary study that will result in an application for funding for the project being submitted to the European Union in the spring of 2011.

The BADY project comprises both a quantitative aspect and a part that is more qualitative and profound. The participants will map out the situation in the various countries and regions. They will investigate what problems exist and which methods and strategies the local authorities and organizations use in their preventive

activities. The project will also look into how initiatives are organized and where in the social structure work on alcohol and drug problems actually take place.

Advertising ban – not comprehensive protection

Under the auspices of the project a more profound study will be conducted to determine how accessible alcohol is and how it is marketed. Media habits and attitudes to alcohol and drugs among young people will also be investigated. Maria Renström who is head of the Swedish government’s secretariat for alcohol, drugs, doping and tobacco at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs mentions alcohol manufacturers who use social media like Facebook to invite young people to attend events. “One is no longer protected from alcohol advertising just because this is forbidden in law”, she maintains.

The various parts of the project will be used to produce checklists or strategy protocols with guidelines and examples of how one can work. What is it that directs young people towards drinking alcohol or using drugs? How do people deal with these issues in the various countries concerned?





Anna Skvortsova, head of the Russian NGO Development Center, thinks that Russia should collaborate with the Baltic States in fighting drug abuse.

Differences and similarities are made visible

“A really positive effect of this collaboration is that countries gain insights into the situation obtaining in other countries”, project manager Anna Liedbergius explains. “Other countries can have similar problems and one can work on joint solutions. At the same time it is important to take note of and to show respect for cultural differences, the same measures do not always work in countries with very different policies on alcohol. “That is why it is so important to make use of qualitative studies along side the quantitative surveys”, Maria Renström adds. The creators of the project were keen to avoid cultural relativism – both the risks of substance abuse and the factors that protect against this are largely the same in the different countries.

Most of the focus areas in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region are led by one of the member countries. But in the field of public health the leadership role is in the hands of the Northern Dimension which comprises countries both inside and outside the European Union. Even though Russia is not an EU member state, there is strong desire in the Baltic Sea Region for Russian participation – not least in the field of public health. “As regards alcohol-related diseases, Russia and the other Eastern European countries are very much affected”, Maria Renström notes.

New political will in Russia

There is growing awareness in Russia of the damage that is caused by alcohol and its relation to the social and economic development of the country. Anna Skvortsova, who is head of the Russian NGO Development Center, ran a project in the years 2007–2008 concerning alcohol and drug prevention among children and young people in St. Petersburg. There were many local initiatives attached to the project such as anti-drug campaigns in nightclubs and schools and an anti-doping project at gyms. “Today there is the political will to address these issues, something that was not the case when we started work in 2007, but there is a lack of methodology and of established praxis”, she maintains.

Anna Skvortsova also thinks that Russia should collaborate with the Baltic States and compare their situation with its own. “They have great success with their social work today despite the fact that their starting point was much the same as ours at the end of the 1990s”, she explains.

Facts about the BADY-project



The BADY project – Baltic Sea Regional Project on Reducing Alcohol and Drug-related Harm among Young People – only exists currently as a preliminary study in progress. Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) has granted a budget of 300 000 SEK for the study. The goal is to produce an application for project funding from the EU for submission in the spring of 2011. The preliminary study is also expected to result in a constructive network of partners from EU countries round the Baltic Sea, as well as Russia on preventive measures pertaining to alcohol and other drugs.

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) is responsible for health issues under the Baltic Sea Strategy. Besides eight Baltic Sea countries, the NDPHS includes Canada, Norway, Iceland and nine international organizations including the ILO, WHO and UNAIDS.

STAD, which is a section within the Stockholm Addiction Unit (Beroendecentrum Stockholm) that is concerned with prevention of alcohol and drug-related problems, is in charge of the BADY project that will result in a survey of the problems and methodologies in the participating

countries. The second part of the project, which is concerned with young people's media habits, neighbourhood environments and attitudes to alcohol and drugs is being run by the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues (NVC). This is an organization that reports to the Nordic Council of Ministers.

BADY is a flagship project intended to implement the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in the field of alcohol and street drugs. Funding for the project has not been prepared as part of the Strategy but will be sought from the European Union's public health programme.

Sida's Baltic Sea Unit develops cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. We have a special assignment from the Government based on Swedish interests to support activities in the fields of the Environment & Energy, Social and Health issues and Civil Security. Our projects and activities aim at facilitating the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.