

HEPROGRESS's First Conference on health related social and gender inequalities

Written by Administrator

Monday, 31 October 2011 07:35

On September 16, 2011 Østfold County Council (Norway) and Amata Municipality (Latvia) organized the first HEPROGRESS conference in Latvia on health related social and gender inequalities and barriers to social and economic participation.

Read More The main purpose of the conference was to encourage debate on health inequalities and its impact on development processes in the countries. HEPROGRESS Project Manager Niels Kr. Rasmussen presented the HEPROGRESS project and the EU program - PROGRESS (2007-2013) which financially supports the project and the partners. During the discussions in the national groups the challenges for the policies and administration in each of the countries for the future project work were indicated. This first conference brought together local and regional politicians, professionals and academics from Norway, Latvian and Finland who shared their experiences about the development of local evidence based policies, interventions and empowerment planning.

The main speakers during the conference were:

- Ms. Inga Šmate from Public Health Department – the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia. Ms. Šmate introduced the importance of Latvian Public Health strategy in response to the participation of local government in its implementation and improvement of public health.
- Assoc. prof. Anita Villerusa from Riga Stradins University. Ms. Villerusa signified main public health problems among different population groups and their consequences.
- Mr. Knut-Johan Rognlien, Head of the Public Health Programme in Østfold. Mr. Rognlien led the discussion of the Norwegian group on the needs of municipalities and region to continue the work done in HEPROGRESS project.



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During the discussion the participants raised the questions about and challenges for future health related interventions aiming at tackling inequalities. The Norwegian delegation concluded that the field of reducing health inequalities usually is not the top priority of the politicians. However, the politicians themselves proposed that health impact assessment could be used in the city of Moss as a standard procedure of all political cases. They also agreed to be able to implement the principle of Health in All Policies, and to focus more on political and administrative leadership where needed. The financial effectiveness and potential payoff of the good public health work, both in the short and long term, were particularly interesting for a local decision-makers.

Latvian delegation stressed that the local policy planning should be organized with a shared understanding on public health. It is evident that public health initiatives has to start on bottom and has to be addressed specifically in response to the needs. Main conclusion was that policy tools and determinants have to be carefully defined and implemented. Latvian local politicians prised a high value of the use of the best practice and exchange of information among partners within HEPROGRESS activities. According to many, is interesting to see in practice how the public health policies are implemented in Østfold County.

In his overall evaluation of the conference Niels K. Rasmussen particularly stressed the high level of interest and dedication expressed by the participants.

The financial crisis has hit Latvia much harder than Norway, but both countries are faced with great and increasing social inequalities in health. They also share the same challenge with an increasing aging population. Local and regional municipalities in both countries are taking over more and more responsibilities for the citizens' social and health welfare.

HEPROGRESS is a project supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). This program aims at supporting interventions of local communities and authorities against social inequalities.

The aim of HEPROGRESS project is to contribute to this development by raising the local awareness of the problem, and to raise the competence of key professional groups who dispose means to reduce the differences.

[Find full overview of the Conference here](#)

[More information about HEPROGRESS can be found here](#)