

Final Conference of HEPROGRESS project brought an opportunity to sum up the two-year efforts of public health practitioners and local decision makers to understand and tackle the problem of growing health inequalities in the municipalities. The politicians from Latvia and Norway had a chance to discuss the issue during a panel moderated by Assoc. Prof. Iveta Reinholde.

Ms. Reinholde asked the participants to indicate the possibilities for improvement in their organisations and at the same time to give the opinion about what factors create health inequalities in the municipalities. The understanding of the causes can bring the solutions, said Ms. Reinholde.

Aivars Damroze from Rauna Municipality, Latvia, sees the biggest problem in the lack of the education in the society and that the situation can be improved by the programmes targeted to the kids. More information and education concerning the health issues is needed and they should be started already in the kindergarten.

- We need new recognitions and new conclusions because we are not able to work the way we did. We also cannot work alone, society, NGOs, municipality have to be involved, said Mr Damroze. The municipality of Rauna is now working with the data from the Health Profile, trying to identify the priorities in regards to actions and directions for the future.

Knut-Johan Rognlien from Østfold County Council stressed the importance of understanding of "cause of the causes" of health inequalities and the need for development of actions by public sector but with the principles of democracy and with the balance between market and state.

- I also agree that we have to invest in the education of the children, as they are the citizens of tomorrow, said Mr Rognlien.

The issue of democracy, especially participatory democracy was also raised by the representative of Østfold County Council. It was mentioned that the lessons from the previous actions taken by municipalities must be learned – bad and good and that definitely the effort must be put towards the education of children.

Politicians reflect on HEPROGRESS

Written by Karolina

Tuesday, 15 January 2013 13:44

- We need to remember that the poverty exists in Norway as well. Now we have a plan concerning the children and young people living in the poverty. I hope soon we can share our experience with other municipalities.

Geir Tufte, Assoc. Prof. from Østfold University College closed the discussion by the reflection on the process of decision making.

- Democracy is necessary to solve all those issues and politicians need to communicate with their citizens when planning the interventions, said Mr Tufte. It is all about people., he concluded.

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