

APN (the Alcohol Policy Network Europe) had a great one-day Symposium in wonderful Edinburgh 6th October 2015.

More than 40 persons participated, most of them from non-governmental organisations, some coming from cancer societies - and a few coming from as far away as New Zealand and Australia!

Alcohol Focus Scotland had generously offered to host the meeting at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC), the venue for the Global Alcohol Policy Conference (GAPC) that took place immediately after the APN Symposium, 7 – 10 October. The combination with the GAPC was a great asset, as this offered an easy opportunity to become informed and involved in the global debate.

At the beginning of the Symposium a moment of silence was observed to commemorate Evelyn Gillan, the recently deceased Director of Alcohol Focus Scotland: She had been the driving force behind many of the recent brave efforts for a new alcohol policy in Scotland and she had taken the initiative for having the GAPC and the APN in Edinburgh.

It was felt a particular privilege to have the meeting in Scotland which is indeed pioneering in Europe – and in the world – in the debate about an alcohol policy which aims at establishing a minimum pricing system as an effective instrument for reducing alcohol related harm.

The debate in the Symposium centred further round

- Recent developments in alcohol policy making in selected countries and internationally (with presentations by Barbara O'Donnell, Alcohol Focus Scotland; Alise Krumina, Ministry of Health, Latvia; Suzanna Costello, Alcohol Action Ireland; Julie Brummer and Lars Moeller from the Regional Office for Europe of WHO; and Peter Anderson for ALICE RAP). John Ryan from the European Commission's DG Health and Food Safety had sent apologies, assuring however '... that the Commission is always open to the views of the stakeholders...' and that '... A decision on the format of future action has not yet been taken: a dedicated strategy or a wider framework to tackle the key risk factors of chronic diseases ...';
- Marketing and sponsoring (with presentations by Karine Gallopel-Morvan, School of Public Health, Rennes, France; Nils Garnes, IAS, United Kingdom; Irma Kilim, IOGT-NTO, Sweden; and Gerard Hastings of the University of Stirling, United Kingdom);
- Young people (with presentations by Jan Peloza, APYN; Wim van Dalen, STAP, Netherlands; and Lukas Galkus of the Lithuanian Medical Students' Association);
- Developing countries (with a presentation by Oystein Bakke, FORUT, Norway).

Without exception all the presentations were of a very high standard; thus evoking interesting discussion and offering valuable opportunity for exchange of views and experiences.

Copies of the ppt files which were used in the presentations will be available at the APN web-site.

At the end of the day some time was set apart for a discussion on the future of APN, led by Joan Colom and Lidia Segura from the Generalitat de Catalunya, which knowingly offers the Secretariat of APN. There was a unanimous opinion that APN should continue, serving as a very valuable neutral platform in Europe for exchange of knowledge, views and experience on alcohol policy development; bringing together and supporting persons from both governmental and non-governmental agencies who have an interest to promote public health oriented alcohol policies.

A majority of the persons who responded to the evaluation exercise at the end of the Symposium had an excellent overall impression of the meeting, while the remainder said that they 'had a good overall impression'. Opportunity for interaction with colleagues, increase in personal competence and value for daily professional activity were mentioned by many as potential impact of the Symposium.