ITARDD: working towards an Italian harm reduction network

On the 20th April 2011, under the invitation of ITACA (European Association of Professionals in Drug Services – Italian Delegation) and hosted by the Emilia Romagna Region, a group of Italian experts and organisations involved in harm education work and advocacy gathered in Bologna to discuss the need for formalising cooperation at national level to revitalise the value of their work and of harm reduction approaches in Italy.

The room was crowded as people got together from all over the country, Milan to Rome, Venice to Naples, Bologna to Turin to define needs and priorities of development for the Italian harm reduction movement. This included representatives from service providers in the harm reduction area, representatives of national and regional umbrella organisations such as the CNCA and advocacy organisations such as Forumdroghe as well as single experts, some representatives of local health services and of the national network of People Living with HIV/AIDS.

Italian organisations survive in a political climate where the word “riduzione del danno” (harm reduction) cannot even be spoken out loud – it has been substituted in the last National Drugs Action Plan with the expression “prevention of drug related pathologies” - and where public funding to the sector is shrinking. It was time to join forces to give dignity to those working in the harm reduction field in Italy and to come together on the development of common definitions and advocacy plans.

The lively brainstorming of the day covered areas such as: the need to bring back harm reduction into the national agenda beyond local interventions, to reaffirm the evidence-base and scientific value of harm reduction theory and interventions, to look at new consumption patterns and define the new challenges for the harm reduction movement as well as opening to European exchanges. Priorities for action included the need to look into the meaningful involvement of drug users in future developments.

The meeting concluded with a firm commitment to start working on the priority areas identified and find means and methods to get together under the umbrella of a national network. Next meetings of core groups of experts are scheduled at the margin of events organised by the different organisations (the seminar Dipendenze e Consumi organised by Gruppo Abele in April – hyperlink to PDF programme and Fuoriluogo’s Summer School on Harm Reduction in September, to start with – hyperlink to http://www_fuoriluogo.it/sito/home/rubriche/agenda/summer-school-2011/ with the possibility of organising a dedicated bigger gathering in autumn.

We cannot but wish the best of luck to the newly born ITARDD – Italian national harm reduction network, for its first moves.

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