

## STAND AGAINST DRUGS: OVERVIEW OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

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**Abstract.** *The article provides a brief overview of Erasmus+ project “Stand Against Drugs”, the first Youth project in Uzbekistan, its core objectives, activities and gained results. The project addresses the burning problems of youth, deals with their possible solutions and gives appropriate recommendations on preventive measures in the work with youth.*

**Keywords:** *individuals, organisations, deals.*

The European Union's Erasmus+ programme is a funding scheme to support activities in the fields of Education, Training, Youth and Sport. The Programme is made up of three so-called "Key Actions" and two additional actions. They are managed partly at the national level by National Agencies and partly at the European level by the EACEA. Erasmus+ provides grants for activities in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. It offers opportunities for both individuals and organisations.

The actions under KA2 make it possible for organisations from different participating countries to work together, to develop, share and transfer best practices and innovative approaches in the fields of education, training and youth. This subprogramme focuses specifically on the following actions:

- Sector Skills Alliances,  
Knowledge Alliances,  
Capacity Building in the field of youth,  
Capacity Building in the field of higher education.

Capacity-building projects in the field of youth cover a range of activities that encourage cooperation between organisations active in youth, education, training and other socio-economic sectors in Programme and Partner Countries from different regions of the world. These projects aim to recognize and improve youth work, non-formal learning and volunteering and link them to education systems and the labour market. They also support regional and transnational non-formal learning mobility schemes to encourage the participation of youth in society.

Stand Against Drugs is the first Youth Project in the Republic of Uzbekistan that was developed by two partners from Romania and the partner from Uzbekistan, that is Tashkent State Pedagogical University (TSPU). After publishing the call for partners, 3 more partners from Malta, Italy and Norway were selected to join the consortium. After the consortium was full and met the requirements of the project call, TSPU has asked the partners to introduce one more partner from Uzbekistan in order to increase the number of participating organisations from Uzbekistan. Thus, TSUULL was also introduced into the consortium. The project application was submitted by Norwegian partner and in the end of 2017 the project was successfully selected with 80% of EU funding and 20% consortium partners' share.

Stand Against Drugs, as the translation of the name reveals, is a project that intended to promote drug abuse prevention through youth work, by engaging with young people within the

society through community-based interventions to tackle the effect of drug abuse among young people from different countries and contexts, and thereby, promote good health, which is an integral part of Europe 2020, the EU's 10-year economic-growth strategy. Health policy is important to Europe 2020's objectives for smart and inclusive growth.

Thus, it was an international project in the EU education programme ERASMUS+. The seven project partners from five different countries: Norway, Romania, Malta, Italy and Uzbekistan implemented the project. It was about mobility of youth and of youth workers to improve drug abuse prevention interventions in youth work. Hence, the project's name sends a positive signal towards standing against drug abuse among young people to foster both the learning needs of youth workers and learning approaches with young learners in drug abuse prevention through non-formal education practices.

The SADs project introduced youth to concepts of universal drug abuse prevention programmes through youth work in order to make great strides in developing both the knowledge and tools that can stem the tide of drug abuse and curb its devastating effects on young people and on the community as a whole.

Partners grasped complex challenges of drug abuse on a youth's social, educational, cultural and personal development and become familiar with multiple forms of community-based drug abuse prevention programmes, as pathways to empowerment in developing youth-centered actions to address drug abuse and consequences: weak parenting, school dropouts, unsafe sexual practices, sexual or domestic violence.

Since these daunting drug problems are likely to be paired with any number of other difficulties in youth and adult lives, the project had the goal of exploring these questions: how can young people be educated and empowered to reduce and prevent them from abusing drugs? What are their special needs and what kind of drug abuse prevention programs should be created to help them? And what are the learning needs of those facilitating youth empowerment in drug abuse prevention?

Hence, the project was designed to seek answers to these questions by promoting sustainable youth work in drug abuse prevention through non-formal education to create community-based interventions, which are meant for everyone in a youth association, a youth center, school, a community, or a similar group to reduce the prevalence of drug abuse among young people and raise awareness on the effects of drugs abuse on youth's mental health and well-being as well as their social consequences.

With Europe having the highest alcohol, tobacco and drug consumption in the world: in 2009, average adult (aged 15 + years) alcohol consumption in Europe was 12.5 liters of pure alcohol a day, more than double the world average. Alcohol, tobacco and drugs are the most cause of non-communicable diseases; communicable diseases with increased sexually transmitted infections; and all types of intentional or unintentional injury, including homicides and suicides. See (WHO, 2009), (WHO, 2009; Rehm et al., 2010); (Blomgren, Martikainen & Makela, 2004).

Thus, this project contributed to the literature through youth exchanges and training programmes for youth and youth workers, by developing pathways to empowerment in drug abuse prevention.

Alcohol, tobacco and drugs harm people other than the abuser, whether through violence on the street, sexual and domestic violence in the family, or simply using government resources, notably through the costs of providing health care, unemployment and incapacity benefits, and

dealing with crime and disorder. Further, socially disadvantaged young people, youth at risk and youth who live in socially disadvantaged areas experience more harm than others due to different factors: chaotic family environments, ineffective parenting, poor academic performance, deviant peer influences, etc.

What leads to abuse? There are several situations that increase a teen's risk for abusing drugs or alcohol. These are when:

- The young person is depressed;
- The young person suffers from low self-esteem;
- The young person manifests early signs of aggressive behavior;
- The young person feels rejected socially;
- Parents do not provide enough supervision or care;
- The family suffers from poverty;
- There are many drugs readily available, either in the home or close by.

What happens when you use alcohol or drugs? Alcohol and drugs target a part of the brain, which allows people to feel pleasure. This causes the brain to release certain chemicals that make people feel good. At first, these may make a person feel happy, energetic, social, self-confident, and powerful. But after the "high" from the alcohol or drug wears off, the person may feel the opposite effects. Depending on the used drug, a person may feel tired, anxious, or depressed after it wears off. Or may be more sensitive to pain, have sleep problems, lose interest in everyday activities, or withdraw from family and friends.

Since the pleasure only lasts a short time, people crave more to get the good feeling back. Over time, the brain adjusts to the drug by making less of the "feel good" chemicals. With less of these chemicals, the brain can't function well, and it becomes harder to feel pleasure. So people abuse alcohol or drugs to get the good feeling back.

Thus, this further affects the parts of the brain that deal with judgment, decision-making, problem-solving, emotions, learning, and memory. They change how the cells in the brain send and process information. These changes in the brain make it harder for people to think and make good choices. And they may be less able to control their actions.

Therefore, increased empowerment and awareness about the effects of drugs and alcohol abuse on mental health, well-being and healthy lifestyle and their social consequences: weak parenting, school dropouts, unsafe sexual practices and domestic violence can mitigate the impact of alcohol, tobacco and drugs on economic downturns and unemployment, and reduce alcohol, tobacco and drugs-related deaths. Hence, our approach aimed at fostering factors protecting young people from alcohol, tobacco and drugs abuse: strong parent-child attachment, appropriate parental supervision, commitment to school, academic success, friends who have conventional values, supportive environments, youth-centered information, etc.

Further, the project approach differentiates drug use and drug abuse. Young people should be given the right information about using alcohol, tobacco and drugs from an earlier age in life, so that they can make informed decisions about their lives. On the other hand, not providing supportive environments and youth-centered information on using alcohol, tobacco and drugs and making the conversation a taboo, leads young people to explore on their own, which leads to abuse due to a lack of knowledge and information.

There is no single age group of people more affected by alcohol, tobacco and drugs than youth. In some ways, it feels like it is an issue everywhere: for us, our family, our colleagues or

our friends. Plain and simple, try as we might, we cannot escape the issues of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. Alcohol, tobacco and drugs affect each and every one of us, directly or indirectly: in our homes, our families, our schools, our work, our community, town, society or city, etc.

For some, one time or infrequent use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs can result in a tragedy: alcohol overdose, an accident when under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or an arrest associated with Marijuana or other drugs that may cost us our reputation and/or our freedom. For others, even though they may not use alcohol, tobacco or drugs, they could become a victim of an alcohol or drug-related crime. Yet for others, what may have started as occasional use can turn into an addiction that presents extraordinary health consequences due to a lack of supportive environment and information.

To prevent the situation where most alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse starts in teen years, there should be created youth-centered information and programmes so that the risks are prevented. These are open pathways to educating young people on the serious problems that can result from drug abuse. Often times, when a young person sees their friends seeming to enjoy themselves or experience excitement or euphoria, this can look very attractive. Especially, if the person is bored or stressed by their experiences at home or at school. The right time to prevent drug abuse is before the addiction begins. Before a person is addicted, they have a much greater ability to set drugs down and walk away from them. If they have just begun abusing alcohol, marijuana, club drugs or prescription drugs, if they can be inspired to leave them behind and create a healthy life, this relieves the family of endless heartbreak and may even save that person's life.

Young people who don't abuse alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes are less likely to have problems with them once adults. Efforts to prevent drug abuse should begin early in life with education, training, mentorship, and youth-centered information to encourage healthy behaviours, resilient communities, and good family bonds, which help young people gain confidence and self-esteem to make good choices for a healthy life.

Thus, to meet the project results at Outputs and Outcomes level, the project combined consultations, youth exchanges, training programmes and community-based interventions such as: street campaigns, online campaigns and community forums and focus groups as a means to voice the priorities, concerns and ideas of young people and youth workers in drug abuse prevention processes, to ensure that their opinions are fed into the overall drug abuse prevention programmes, which are youth-centered.

Stand Against Drugs is a KA2-Capacity building project in the field of youth, presented the updated prevention principles, an overview on youth workers and young people's empowerment towards community and media based drug abuse prevention programmes planning, and critical steps for strengthening youth workers' capacity in meeting young people's learning needs about drug abuse prevention.

Thus, this article serves as an overview of the project and the methods used to close the gaps in drug abuse prevention through youth work in the field of drug abuse prevention. We aim to continue our work towards drug abuse prevention through youth work to provide effective, appropriate, and practical approaches for youth workers addressing the challenges to preventing drug abuse among children and adolescents on different levels, through community and media-based programmes.

Today's youth face many risks, including drug abuse. Drug abuse has serious consequences in our homes, schools, and communities. Responding to these risks before they become problems

can be difficult. Our goal is to strengthen youth workers' capacity to understand the causes of drug abuse and to prevent its onset.

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