



## Availability of Alcohol Best Practice Example Responsible Beverage Service **FACT SHEET**

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### Availability - the role of the regions

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) organised an AER Alcohol Peer Reviews on the availability of alcohol, looking at the various policies in place across Europe to restrict availability, how these are implemented and the key challenges regions encounter in this area.

A separate fact sheet exists with the key outcomes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AER APR on the availability of alcohol.

Regulating availability is not a regional competence in Europe. Regions can however, in cooperation with local authorities and relevant stakeholders, contribute to the successful implementation of availability measures.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> AER Alcohol Peer Review on the availability of alcohol, participating regions identified the Responsible Beverage Service model as a successful method for enforcing rules on availability that can be transposed across Europe.

### RESPONSIBLE BEVERAGE SERVICE A SUCCESSFUL METHOD FOR ENFORCING RULES ON THE AVAILABILITY OF ALCOHOL

#### Introduction to the method

The Responsible Beverage Service method has been implemented successfully in Sweden. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> AER Alcohol Peer Review on the Availability of Alcohol, Jönköping County Council (S) presented the method and how they have been working with it in their region.

## Why look at responsible beverage services?

Sweden has evidence of a strong connection between alcohol and violence, with 80% of assault cases in Sweden linked to alcohol consumption. With the number of restaurants having tripled in the past years and longer opening hours, consumption has also increased and with it, alcohol-related harm.

The purpose of the Responsible Beverage Service method (RBS) is to reduce violence and harm in and outside bars and restaurants by not serving minors and guests that are considered to be too drunk.

In Sweden, there is a legal obligation on bar and restaurant owners to prevent drunkenness and keep order in their establishments. It is illegal to serve people under the age of 18 or people who are too drunk, although what constitutes 'too drunk' has proven hard to define. Establishments in breach of these legal provisions risk losing their serving licences and staff who serve alcohol against the law risk fines or a prison sentence.

## Success Factors

The method is grounded in the **successful cooperation of different stakeholders**: local authorities, who grant licence agreements, regional authorities in a supervisory capacity, the restaurant and pub industry and the police all have to work together in implementing this method in order to reduce alcohol-related harm.

There are clear **incentives for the bar and restaurant industry** to participate to this programme. First of all, it is important for the industry to uphold the law on serving alcohol. The RBS method provides training for their staff to identify the cases where alcohol should not be served. Secondly, it is important for owners to provide a safe working environment for their staff. They therefore need to train their staff to be able to identify risks early on and to know how to deal with difficult situations in order to prevent violence and harm.

The participation of **the police** is essential. It is important for the industry to know that they can rely on the support of the police, rather than worry that the appearance of the police on their premises may cause them problems or give rise to customer dissatisfaction. It is also necessary to illustrate to the industry and consumers that any contravention of the law will receive an immediate response.

The programme tries to ensure the **cooperation between bar and restaurant owners** in the same area and encourages them all to participate. Getting all establishments on board is important for the success of the method: the industry is more likely not to serve a given individual when they know that all establishments apply the same policy and that the person in question will not get served in the next bar.

## How does it work?

The RBS method was developed by the STAD project (Stockholm combats Alcohol and Drugs problems) between 1995-2001 and has been implemented in Stockholm-S ever since, while also spreading out to other Swedish counties and municipalities.

It consists of providing training to bar and restaurant staff in order to help them understand the links between alcohol and violence and to teach them how to detect high-risk situations and diffuse them in a calm and safe manner. It also helps establishments develop their own alcohol serving guidelines, in terms of the attitude of their own staff towards alcohol on the one hand, and their rules on serving alcohol on the other.

Training is targeted primarily at staff in charge of serving customers, although the owners, the doormen and other personnel can also be included. The training covers the following modules:

- The medical effects of alcohol: the physical impact alcohol has on you
- The Swedish Alcohol Act: the legal rules in place
- Alcohol-related violence: information on the current situation in the municipality
- Group discussions: allow participants to share experience, learn from each other and develop common definitions and policies
- Drug problems at the pub: the law on drugs, the current problem, what can the establishments do about it?
- Conflict management using role-play: scenarios on refusing to serve a drunk customer, diffusing a potentially violent situation etc.
- Written exam
- Evaluation: what have we learned; what next?

## Evaluating the RBS method

The implementation of this method has proven to be successful. Pub-related violent crime fell by 29% between 1998-2000 in Stockholm city centre. It dropped by 30% in the centre of Gothenburg (Västra-Götaland, S) in 2002-2004.

The municipalities have found that the application of the RBS method allows them to improve their links with the bar and restaurants industry and to communicate more easily with them. It has also improved their methods for collecting and evaluating information about alcohol-related harm in their areas.

The industry find the RBS method allows them to better take on their legal responsibilities as regards serving alcohol, as they are now equipped with the knowledge on how to deal with problem situations and have the necessary partners to assist them in this task. The implementation of the programme has also satisfied any concerns the industry had that they may lose money if they refuse to serve certain persons. Bars and restaurants that have applied the method have seen that their profits have not decreased - on the contrary, they now attract customers with more money who previously did not come to the premises because of the environment.

## How do you get started?

The Swedish National Institute for Public Health has developed a guide to the RBS method - details are available in the bibliography notes below.

To successfully implement the RBS method in your region, you need to:

1. **Get political support** – get politicians to agree with this method and allocate staff time and funds to its implementation.
2. **Appoint a project manager** – someone in your administration who will liaise with all the stakeholders and keep the project on track.
3. **Form a reference team** – get decision-makers from the regional and municipal authorities and the police. Make sure you get people with different backgrounds and expertise to ensure a rounded approach (e.g. doctors, nurses, the representative of the serving staff trade union and of the restaurant and bar owners etc.).
4. **Foster a creative work environment** – help members develop trust in each other and the method - Document progress carefully.
5. **Analyse the status quo before you start trying to change it** – go out and test the availability of alcohol, talk to the staff involved in the industry.
6. **Disseminate information widely** – keep telling decision-makers and the public what you are doing, why you are doing it and how far you have come.
7. **Train the staff** – help them understand what the problem is and what they can do about it.
8. **Introduce change management** – the RBS methods require all participating stakeholders to reconsider their role and responsibilities and revise how they work.
9. **Help the industry develop their own alcohol policy** – this increases understanding and ownerships of the policy.
10. **Enforcement** – regularly check that the law is being upheld and apply sanctions where it isn't.
11. **Monitor and evaluate your work** – get feedback from your partners and regularly evaluate how you can improve the implementation of the method.
12. **Make change permanent** – work towards transforming the RBS method from a strategic project to the way you work with stakeholders in your territory to implement the law on availability.

And the lesson the AER Alcohol Peer Reviews have taught us: talk to your peers from other parts in Europe – find out what they did and how they did it, learn from their successes and, perhaps most importantly, from their mistakes.

## Bibliography, References & Links

- B. Lindewald, "Alcohol and Drug Prevention at the Local Level – Responsible Beverage Service – a method for preventing alcohol-related injuries in bars, pubs and restaurants", Swedish National Institute of Public Health, Alcohol and Drugs Division (2007)
- For more information on the AER Alcohol Peer Reviews, visit the AER website: <http://www.aer.eu/main-issues/health/alcohol-prevention/aer-alcohol-peer-reviews.html>

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