

Eastern Europe and Central Asia Funders Working Group Draft Concept Note – May 2022

Background

Although the global community has the tools to end the HIV epidemic, HIV is still rising in the Eastern European and Central Asian region (EECA) where an estimated 1.7 million people live with HIV. While globally new infections have declined by 37% and new deaths have halved, over the last 20 years in EECA new infections have increased by 183% and deaths from related illnesses have risen by 190%. This picture is further complicated by many countries in the region also having high rates of TB. TB is the largest cause of death among people living with HIV. Ukraine as an example has the world's fifth highest MDR-TB burden. During the last two years, COVID-19 also hit the region with over 5 million cases being reported in Ukraine resulting in over 100,000 deaths.

At the same time, over the last years private philanthropic funding for HIV-related programming and advocacy in EECA has significantly declined. Only a handful of private funders currently support HIV-related efforts in the region. This is particularly worrisome given unaddressed needs of large, marginalized populations such as LGBTI communities, people who use drugs, and sex workers all of whom are disproportionately impacted by the dual epidemics of HIV and TB.

Responding to this picture in late 2021, Funders Concerned about AIDS, AidsFonds and others began a conversation focused on highlighting and lifting up critical EECA programming and resourcing needs, seeking to engage more donors in support. The idea of forming an HIV-focused donor working group was proposed.

Then the Ukrainian war broke out in late February 2022. The impetus around the working group quickly evolved from a focus on filling gaps in the HIV response, to crisis response and the converging stresses particularly on key populations of the HIV, TB, and COVID-19 epidemics with military invasion and mass regional dislocation.

In the first five weeks of the conflict, private donors pledged \$1.5 billion in humanitarian response. While this outpouring of support is a positive sign and much needed, it is noteworthy that less than 5% of these funds include any mention of human rights considerations. Marginalized populations are not at the center of ongoing humanitarian support, which means that communities who are living with or at greater risk for HIV are particularly vulnerable.

Given the quickly changing landscape and unclear future, the working group will continue to evolve as needs and opportunities surface.

Purpose, Goals, and Outcomes

The proposed working group's purpose, goals, and outcomes are the following:

- Provide situational analysis to donors
- Link and coordinate donors, international organizations, and regional/national NGOs.
- Align and grow funding for impact, particularly to community-based organizations.

Short term goal and outcomes (2022-2025)

- Understand and coordinate low threshold emergency and flexible funding during conflict.
- Recognize and act on funding gaps, including more intentional coordination with humanitarian actors and others. Beyond funding gaps, understand what is missing from regional programming and response efforts and use resources to catalyze action.
- Perceive how the epidemic(s) is changing in the context of conflict and work to align funding to reduce new infections.
- Encourage donors to fund in the EECA region, particularly as it grapples with a “mega-crisis” of health and conflict. Utilize mechanisms such as pooled funds making it easier for new donors to fund in the region.

Longer term goals and outcomes

- Work towards an aligned funding landscape in and for the region, leading to reduced new infections and aids-related deaths and an HIV epidemic that is no longer growing.
- Grow the number of donors who commit to sustained investment particularly for community-based organizations, increasing the overall amount of funding flowing into the region.

Membership and Outreach

Working group membership will include interested current and future HIV-related donors to the EECA region. Coordination and outreach beyond this membership group is extremely critical to the purpose of the working group, and other organizations in adjacent fields will be actively invited to participate in calls and other actions as appropriate.

Communication and Coordination

Working group communication and coordination will include:

- Regular topic-focused calls (suggested topics for upcoming calls include EECA humanitarian response and key populations needs, SRHR needs and gaps in the conflict, key populations in Russia needs and strategies). Other organizations invited to participate as appropriate.
- Materials tailored for internal donor advocacy including funding gap analysis, CBO needs, analysis of who is receiving funds and who isn't, donor funding landscapes, analysis of donors who could be encouraged to fund in region.
- Discussion/reception at Montreal AIDS 2022 focused on lifting up needs and opportunities in EECA region.

Operations

Funders Concerned About AIDS has volunteered to host and staff (for coming months) the working group. AidsFonds has also agreed to serve as Working Group Chair for the coming year.