



Aidspan

Independent observer
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BOTH CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENTS NEED TA IN RESOLVING CRG-RELATED CHALLENGES IN THE EECA REGION

Governments and civil society – including key affected populations (KAPs) – in Eastern Europe and Central Asia need to collaborate better to ensure that services related to community, rights, and gender (CRG) are provided. And they need technical assistance (TA) to make that happen.

These are the main findings of an assessment conducted by the Global Fund–supported regional project Regional Civil Society and Community Support, Coordination and Communication Platform – EECA. The project is implemented by consortium of key TA providers and regional networks led by the Alliance for Public Health (Ukraine). Consortium members include the East Europe and Central Asia Union of People Living with HIV; the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network; the Eurasian Coalition on Male Health; the Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network; the Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs; and the TB Europe Coalition.

The main purpose of the assessment was to better understand the TA needs related to CRG and to develop recommendations on how to increase the use and improve the quality of CRG-specific TA. A final report on the assessment will be released shortly. Near-final results were presented at the International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa, in July.

The assessment found that civil society and communities need to learn how to engage in dialogue with government officials, how to become more literate in financing and budgeting, and how to enhance their ability to negotiate on budgets with government agencies. It also found that state agencies need to develop leadership skills in order to be able to work with community services organizations (CSOs); and need to improve their tendering and contracting skills.

The methodology for the study involved a review of documents, 22 key informant interviews and an online survey of 30 participants. Survey and interview participants were selected from 16 countries in all parts of the EECA.

The assessment found that most of the CRG-related needs in the region were linked to the ongoing and forthcoming transition of programs previously supported by the Global Fund to domestic financing and national leadership. The Global Fund remains the biggest international donor in the region supporting highly stigmatized vulnerable KAPs, such as people who inject drugs, sex workers, and men having sex with men. At the same time, most EECA countries have restrictive policies in regards to these populations.

There is a risk that services to these populations will be discontinued unless CSOs and representatives of the affected populations acquire vital skills to survive, including, but not limited to, advocacy. Either the CSOs and the affected populations convince governments to fund these services, or they must find other innovative ways to keep the services going.

“We acknowledge that with phasing out of the Global Fund programs in the region, there is a risk of reduced role of CSOs and communities in HIV and TB response region-wide,” said Kateryna Maksymenko, the project manager. “Therefore, the strategic aim of our team is to sustain CSO participation in decision-making at the highest level possible. Identification of the needs, gaps, and barriers through the research was an initial, but crucial step towards resolving problems. But we are looking beyond the project lens in trying to achieve sustainable regional-wide synergy between all players that should ensure informational, technical, and financial support to the affected populations in the long run.”

The assessment also found that CSOs sometimes have limited access to information on what TA is available and where. In some cases, TA received by organizations did not meet their needs, which indicated that the CSOs need more skills in identifying and describing what their needs are.

Another need is support for CSOs in CCMs and other Global Fund–related processes, such as applications for funding or TA. CSOs and representatives of affected communities involved in such processes lack skills in the collection, analysing, and interpretation of data. They also need help in better understanding donors’ policies; the language barrier and the lack of documents translated into Russian is often an issue for them.

Other areas for TA are capacities of staff, organizational development, legal education on the rights of KAPs, and support in identifying alternative funding opportunities.

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