



Independent observer
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E-LEARNING PORTAL FOR RUSSIAN SPEAKING CSOS AND COMMUNITIES IS LAUNCHED BY A REGIONAL PLATFORM SUPPORTED BY THE GLOBAL FUND

An innovative, educational, [e-learning portal](#) has been launched to help civil society organizations (CSOs) and communities (i.e. key populations) enhance their knowledge of the responses to HIV and TB. The main focus will be on building the capacity of communities to enable them to become meaningfully involved in the national response to HIV and TB.

The e-learning portal was created by the Regional Civil Society and Community Support, Coordination and Communication Platform, a regional program supported by the Global Fund as part of its special initiatives. The platform, which is hosted by the Alliance for Public Health, from Ukraine, developed a website in 2016 to provide information and training resources for Russian-speaking communities and CSOs (see [GFO article](#)). The portal is located on the same website.

Since 2014, the capacity building of communities has become a strategic priority of most programs and organizations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) because communities are considered as main players in planning for and executing transitions. In a region where most countries are either transitioning from Global Fund support, or preparing to transition, the Fund has encouraged communities to play a leading role in national advocacy efforts to ensure that services continue to be provided even after the Fund withdraws.

However, it has become apparent that the involvement of communities in different decision-making forums is often not effective because the representatives of these communities often lack the basic knowledge and skills required to participate in discussions and influence national policy decisions (see [GFO article](#)).

Despite the focus on communities, the potential audience for the e-learning portal is quite broad and includes the social and outreach workers, volunteers, activists, students, experts in other professional fields, medical professionals and government representatives who work with CSOs in the responses to HIV and TB – and who seek to learn “the basics” easily without having to spend a lot of time researching.

According to Kateryna Maksymenko, manager of the platform, “Online education is becoming a valuable technology and resource in the context of gradually reduced funding in the region, where live regional gatherings, trainings and discussions might soon become unaffordable.”

The content of the courses on the e-learning portal is based on a thorough analysis of the capacity building needs assessment conducted by the platform. The topic of the first course, which was successfully beta-tested by 20 participants between February and April, is the “Role of Civil Society and Communities in Responding to HIV and TB Epidemics.”

The course consists of 11 lessons covering the following topics: the current HIV and TB situation in the EECA and worldwide; the types of HIV epidemics; who are the most at-risk key populations and why; the role of key populations in national responses, including in program development, implementation, coordination and monitoring; and transitioning to domestic financing, including how communities can contribute to this process.

The course lessons, which can be viewed online, can also be downloaded as PDF files. The language is very clear, simple and easy to grasp for non-professionals. Illustrations and figures help to visualize the information provided in the text. Some content is also available as a video. There is a test in the end of each lesson, so participants can check how well they have absorbed the information. Each participant can take the course at his or her own pace, but it is estimated that the course requires 15-30 hours of time commitment.

All participants who pass the final exam online and answer 70 % of the test questions accurately can claim a certificate of completion. Twenty participants have already completed the first course as part of a beta-testing process. They have provided valuable feedback that allowed the developers to improve the content of the course.

Each course will provide space for participants to get to know each other and discuss different issues (through online forums). A system of evaluation has been integrated into the portal. It allows developers to monitor the courses and to modify the content as required. Maksymenko explained that the portal has the technical capability “to track the general statistics of participation – i.e. the number of registered participants, their progress through the course, and the percentage of those who have completed the course and received a certificate.”

During the beta-testing of the first course, feedback was given in the form of letters with suggestions. In future, a course evaluation form will be e-mailed to participants.

Aidspan talked with one of the participants in the beta-testing of the first course, Vitali Lavruk. He is a representative of HIV-positive community, and a seasoned activist who has provided peer voluntary support and consultancies to different communities. Lavruk said that he was motivated to participate because he wanted to test his own knowledge and learn more about the role of civil society and communities in responding to the HIV and TB epidemics.

“I enjoyed the course, as it is very easy to follow, and the language is simple and concise. I got short and to-the-point answers to all my questions,” Lavruk said. “The course gave me updated statistical figures and other facts that are not easy to track down independently for a practitioner like me. The course helped to organize, refresh and broaden my knowledge.”

Each course on the portal comes with an introduction that spells out the objectives of the course and the potential target audiences.

A second course on Harm Reduction Lessons is being added to the e-learning portal. This course had been developed earlier by the Alliance for Public Health. The course provides HIV/AIDS prevention and harm reduction basics. It is a popular and well-tested course specifically developed for the EECA context. It has already been used in several countries, including Belarus, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Poland.

The next course which the developers are planning to add is about the Basics of Technical Assistance. The target audience for this course are representatives of communities who already possess good knowledge of the epidemics and who intend to provide peer-support and consultancies within their communities.

The platform plans to launch more courses in coming months.

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