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With eye on transition, a boost to investment in community systems in EECA

Seeking to bolster local capacity to advocate for resources, implement and monitor programs ahead of countries' graduation from Global Fund eligibility, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine will lead a new regional technical assistance project across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The project will be supported by the Global Fund's Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Special Initiative and will run through 2017.

The aim of the project, which will be replicated in other Global Fund regions, is to ensure that knowledge, skills and experience — with particular emphasis on community systems, rights and gender — are transferred and ingrained in local groups to help continue with programs started and maintained with Global Fund grants.

Many of the 16 EECA countries currently eligible for Global Fund resources are likely to transition away from eligibility in 2017 when the next allocation period begins as the Fund shifts its attention and investments towards those countries with the highest disease burden and least ability to pay.

This reprioritization of Global Fund support has evoked concern in the EECA region amid fears that programs supported by the Fund — including harm reduction work among people who inject drugs, outreach to sex workers and men who have sex with men, and work with economic migrants — will not find financial support in tight state budgets.

The Regional Civil Society and Community Support, Communication and Coordination Platform is, essentially, a boot camp for local NGOs and governments designed to frontload as much information on best practice, strategic development, advocacy and monitoring and evaluation as possible, to try and

sustain momentum built under the Fund.

One of the key deliverables expected from the project is an online database of technical assistance providers working in the region and familiar with the issues facing EECA. By having such a database at their fingertips, it is hoped that national implementers of HIV and tuberculosis response programs will seek support, going forward, to address the challenges they are facing in garnering support, both financial and practical, for their activities.

A first planning meeting for the regional work was held in mid-April in Kiev. Hosted by Alliance Ukraine, the meeting was attended by representatives from some of the major civil society stakeholders around the region, among them existing recipients of Global Fund support including the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network and the EECA Union of People Living with HIV.

According to Ganna Dovbakh, deputy director at the EHRN for information and technical support, the platform is a “good starting point for community leaders and civil society activists” as they dive into the difficult task of soliciting state funding for specific areas in the national HIV response.

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