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FIRST HURDLE FOR REGIONAL PROPOSAL PASSED BY EECA UNION OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

The Eastern European and Central Asian Union of People Living with HIV (ECUO) has passed the first hurdle in its effort to be a driver of Global Fund-supported programming, becoming one of 16 entities invited to submit a proposal for a regional initiative under the new funding model (NFM).

Of 43 regional proposals received, for a total of some \$600 million, 16 were invited to submit concept notes. These submissions are expected in early 2015, to access \$200 million approved by the Global Fund Board for regional initiatives to be implemented from 2014-2017.

ECUO, together with the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network, has asked for \$7 million to promote domestic financing for HIV treatment around the region. The funds would also be used to encourage a more holistic approach to harm reduction in a region where the primary method of transmission of HIV is among injected drug users sharing dirty needles. World Health Organization estimates conclude that 80% of new infections recorded in EECA are related to injected drug use.

The program will emphasize advocacy work at the regional level to help encourage individual countries to shoulder a larger percentage of the costs of prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care in the national HIV response. As donor support dwindles, there is immense concern around the region that the gap being left will not be filled in a timely fashion by national governments, said Aleksandra Volgina, the senior advocacy officer for ECUO.

Another program objective is to raise awareness of the real nature of HIV treatment; Volgina noted that current conventional wisdom suggests that all that is needed to manage HIV is to "take the pills" when the reality of anti-retroviral therapy is more complicated. Testing and counselling remain crucial components

of any treatment regimen and more work needs to be done to emphasize this.

The number of countries included in the regional initiative has yet to be determined; regional dialogue coordinated by the two partners is ongoing, drawing representatives from 16 partners in the ECUO network.

Technical support has been solicited from the UN and WHO to develop the regional proposal, which is likely to include some elements of the Global Fund-supported 'Harm reduction works: fund it' initiative led by EHRN in six countries.

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