

LESSON 1 | EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

ENGAGE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES FROM THE BEGINNING IN ALL RESPONSE MEASURES

— TO BUILD TRUST, ENSURE SUITABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS, AND TO AVOID
INDIRECT OR UNINTENDED HARMS AND ENSURE THE FREQUENT SHARING OF
INFORMATION

In Armenia, the New Generation NGO launched a fundraising campaign to support those in need during the COVID-19 outbreak and related restrictions. The team switched to the new methods of HIV prevention and support for people living with HIV and key populations, including ARV provision at home, food supply for the most vulnerable and other essential services.

In Belarus, a group of activists from NGO Positive Movement organized targeted delivery of ART to people living with HIV in Minsk. In close cooperation with the Minsk City Clinical Hospital, keeping strict confidentiality and the measures to protect people's health and prevent the spread of COVID-19, they have been reaching 30-50 locations daily.

The network of Women Living with HIV, Kyrgyzstan conducted a rapid survey among women living with HIV to understand their needs, prepared appeals to city administrations, international organizations and business and as a result, provided affected women with food and personal protective equipment.

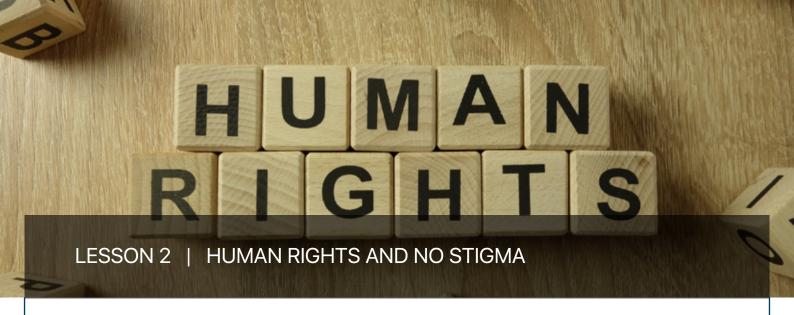
The network of Women Living with HIV and the Revanche Social Assistance Foundation in Kazakhstan opened a shelter for women who suffered from domestic violence during the quarantine measures, including those who use drugs.

The GENDERDOC-M Information Center in Moldova informed and counselled people from the key affected groups; thus, over 90 PrEP beneficiaries received and continue receiving drugs at home, thus enabling the PrEP treatment run without interruption.

The Patient Control in the Russian Federation in collaboration with other nonprofit organizations applied and received charitable donations from several companies and organizations to help patients who face medication shortages and out of stocks during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Sex workers in 11 Ukrainian regions helped each other to ensure the basic needs and allow temporary opportunities for sex workers to adhere to COVID-19 prevention recommendations, not to return to work and maintain health.

More community initiatives of fighting the COVID-19 and AIDS pandemics in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, supporting people living with HIV and saving lives can be found here http://act.inyourpower.life.



COMBAT ALL FORMS OF STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION. RESTRICTIVE, STIGMATIZING AND PUNITIVE MEASURES CAN LEAD TO SIGNIFICANT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, WITH DISPROPORTIONATE EFFECTS ON ALREADY VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES. THEY CAN OFTEN UNDERMINE EPIDEMIC RESPONSES, SENDING PEOPLE WITH SYMPTOMS UNDERGROUND AND FAILING TO ADDRESS THE UNDERLYING BARRIERS THAT PEOPLE FACE IN ATTEMPTING TO PROTECT THEIR OWN HEALTH AND THAT OF THEIR COMMUNITY

UNAIDS continues to monitor human rights violations and stigma level towards people living with HIV and key populations during COVID-19 epidemic and proposes critical actions to prevent human rights violation at the regional and country level.

According to the recent Memorla report presented by The Anti-discrimination Centre (ADC) 'LGBTI+ in the regional Central Asia: repression, discrimination, exclusion', members of the LGBTI+ community in Central Asia regularly endure numerous violations of their rights, homophobia, and discrimination in all areas of life, including employment, education, family life, personal interactions, and commercial and state services. LGBTI+ people do not feel safe in any country in the region. Governments largely ignore recommendations concerning the situation of LGBTI+ people made by international bodies. In the majority of these countries, NGOs are not able to register or work openly.

A National Action Plan on Reducing Stigma and Discrimination in Kazakhstan has been developed in cooperation with the National Network of PLHIV and the National AIDS Centre.

During the period of self-isolation case managers of The St. Petersburg Charitable Foundation 'Humanitarian Action' continued advising lawyers and case managers on legal issues related to alternative criminal sanctions for drug offences.

In Tajikistan, the legislation criminalizing the transmission of infectious diseases has been introduced during the COVID-19. UNAIDS states unequivocally that there is no evidence to support the effectiveness of criminal law enforcement for HIV transmission in preventing HIV transmission. Rather, it undermines public health goals and the protection of human rights. UNAIDS commends the country's introduction of such legislation.

REAct system, designed by Frontline AIDS, is the first-ever system in Ukraine used to monitor, record and assist in response to human rights violations when it comes to key populations in the country. The project is being implemented by the Alliance for Public Health in four pilot regions - Kyiv, Dnipro, Kryvyi Rih and Odesa. The majority of over 400 cases of human rights violation were registered among PWID, PLWH and MSM. Most of them got assistance with access to medical services or legal advice.



ENSURE ACCESS TO FREE OR AFFORDABLE SCREENING, TESTING AND CARE FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE AND HARD TO REACH. REMOVE BARRIERS TO PEOPLE PROTECTING THEIR OWN HEALTH AND THAT OF THEIR COMMUNITIES: FEAR OF UNEMPLOYMENT, HEALTHCARE COSTS, PRESENCE OF FAKE NEWS/MISINFORMATION, LACK OF SANITATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND SO FORTH

HIV testing and support for homeless people during the COVID-19 pandemic launched by charity organization "Street Medicine", UNAIDS, the Positive Movement and the Ministry of Health in **Belarus**.

An online platform offering **psychological services and support to people from key populations launched in Kazakhstan**. People can get answers to questions related to different aspects of mental health, request for professional consultations of psychologists or psychotherapists, and receive broader information about health and wellbeing.

The most affected women living with HIV received psychological assistance in a mentoring program as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in **Moldova** through participation in the online sessions covering such topics as prevention and mitigation of the risk of infection, the right to health and stress management.

The Charity Steps Foundation in Russia continued supporting migrants in Russia during the COVID-19 outbreak, by providing them with HIV testing, consultations, referring to doctors and ensuring timely access to treatment.

The Charitable Foundation 'Humanitarian Action' in Russia within the project 'Medical and social assistance to people with limited mobility living with HIV" delivered ART at home, carried out blood samples to clinics, provided consultations on health issues.

The program "Positive motherhood" was implemented by the Ishonch va Khaet NGO and the Tashkent AIDS Center with the support of AFEW for pregnant women and women in labor living with HIV in Uzbekistan. Peer counselors provided special support delivering ART, infant formula, PCR testing for infant diagnosis and when necessary escorted women to health facilities.

Community organisations "100% of life. Odesa" and "Positive Women" in Ukraine helped women living with HIV to maintain communication, share experiences of living with HIV under quarantine and reduce anxiety through online support groups.

During the COVID-19 outbreak **The Teenergizer Union** (EECA network of adolescents living with HIV) refocused all their activities to online format and intensified psychological support to adolescents affected by HIV in EECA countries, helping them to adapt to lockdown and emphasizing security measures for both pandemics.

In Tajikistan, public organisation SPIN Plus during the COVID-19 pandemic provided support to people who inject drugs by delivering disposal tools directly to PWID.



CREATING TRUST BETWEEN AFFECTED COMMUNITIES, THE GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS, WITHOUT WHICH IT IS UNLIKELY THE RESPONSE WITH BEING EITHER RAPID OR EFFECTIVE

In Kazakhstan UNAIDS together with the Narcology Service of Kazakhstan advocated for distribution of methadone to PWID by car in a pilot town of Karaganda reducing the need for PWID to travel daily to a medical facility.

Peer consultants working in 10 multidisciplinary HIV teams in Kyrgyzstan together with family doctors and nurses were in contact with people living with HIV, delivering medicine to people's homes, distributed food packages and provided psychological support.

A team of social workers together with employees of regional centers for people living with HIV, which was trained by the WHO, UNAIDS and the Ministry of Health experts on personal protective measures and techniques of risk assessment, ensured the timely delivery of ART drugs for about 800 people living with HIV according to the stated need and developed routes all over **Moldova**.

The network of the Russian Federation's more than 100 AIDS prevention and control centres has been mobilized to support the country's fight against COVID-19. Those centers are now using their technology and expertise on HIV testing and diagnosis to scale-up testing for COVID-19 and work closely with community organisations across the country.

CO 100%LIFE Ukraine together with multiple partners developed and implemented a new algorithm of HIV services, including ARVs delivery by the social workers and by the postal services under the agreement with the biggest post operators in the country 'Ukrposhta' and 'Nova Poshta'.

Several Mobile Clinics initially focused on HIV related services have been reprofiled to provide COVID-19 testing to people in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. The clinics, tests and information materials were provided by the Regional Cooperation Programme funded by the Russian Government.

The ITPCru Treatment Preparedness Coalition together with Life4Me in cooperation with partners from all over the world, was arranging the delivery of medicines and offered other assistance to people living with HIV who due to the closure of borders faced a lack or shortage of medicines, or have other urgent issues to solve.



UNAIDS IS WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO UNDERTAKE RAPID SURVEYS THROUGH NETWORKS OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV IN COUNTRIES TO ASSESS INFORMATION NEEDS, MEDICATION ON HAND AND ABILITY TO ACCESS SERVICE SUPPORT NETWORKS AND FIND OUT IF MULTIMONTH DISPENSING OF ANTIRETROVIRAL THERAPY IS BEING FULLY IMPLEMENTED, AND, IF NOT, TO IDENTIFY THE CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY. A RAPID NEEDS ASSESSMENT CARRIED OUT IN FIVE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION - ARMENIA, BELARUS, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Finding from rapid needs assessment provided evidence for new innovative ways of delivering HIV related services during the COVID-19 pandemic. To support social distancing people living with HIV were offered up to 6 months' supply of antiretroviral therapy. Social distancing and quarantine measures put serious psychological pressure on people living with HIV and members of key populations with strong feelings of anxiety and isolation. To overcome such important barriers online counselling is available for those who need it. Survey participants indicated that internet and other digital platforms are critical in supplying scientifically rigorous evidence-based information about the epidemic, prevention measures and how to maintain good health.

50% of the 6-month core budget of the EECA Regional Support Team was reprogrammed to support 6 UNAIDS Country offices Work Plans in urgent COVID-19 and HIV related activities. The funds cover urgent needs in information and distant clinical consultation support, treatment delivery, including OST, and protective measures in delivering HIV prevention services.

Three Joint Teams (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus) reprogrammed 50% of the Country Envelopes to cover the emerging needs in maintaining community-based services for key populations during the time of quarantine. Up to \$0.8 mln can be reprogrammed from the Country Envelopes for the COVID-19 and HIV related activities of the Joint Teams till the end of 2020.

\$4.1 mIn has been requested by the Country Coordinating Mechanisms of 13 EECA countries through the flexibilities of savings and reprogramming of the Global Fund grants. Ukraine is using grant savings to procure PCR reagents, translate epidemiological and clinical evidence, filed reports, guidance materials for public and professional use, support of data management and analysis, COVID-19 hotline, development of data collection tools and prediction models, support of case investigation teams and addressing other relevant issues in relation to COVID-19. Kazakhstan is using grant savings for the procurement of Personal Protection Equipment for the medical facilities, as well as protective equipment for TB program implementers and COVID-19 clinics that are organized on the base of TB services. Azerbaijan is using grant savings to procure supplies and equipment for infection prevention and control in civil and penitentiary sectors as part of the national response to COVID-19.



ALL PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY MARGINALIZED, HAVE A RIGHT TO CLEAR, ACCURATE, AND ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION ABOUT THE COVID-19 AND RESPONSE EFFORTS. THEY NEED INFORMATION IN A LANGUAGE AND FORMAT THEY UNDERSTAND. IT MUST ALSO BE PRESENTED IN A WAY THAT IS RELEVANT TO THEM, AND AVAILABLE IN A CHANNEL THEY CAN ACCESS AND TRUST.

In Armenia, the NGO 'Real World, Real people' used it's hotline as a strategic communication platform, receiving calls 24/7 since the introduction of the COVID-19 restriction's measures.

Online learning sessions to improve digital literacy for PLHIV and key populations in Belarus are organized on interactive learning platforms to teach people how to use online tools, organize effective communication and ensure that people living with HIV get timely and reliable information during the COVID-19 epidemic.

The Tajik diaspora NGO NUR through it's 24/7 telephone hotline helps vulnerable migrants in the Russian Federation to get vital support during the restriction measures due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

UNAIDS-UNESCO information cards have been developed to provide accurate and evidence-based information about how to prevent infection, how to talk about the virus and the current situation with children of different ages, how to work and study in isolation, and how to prevent and address COVID-19-related stigma and discrimination in a simple and clear language.

Live Broadcast 'Telling the Truth' on the major Russian language social media network Odnoklassniki continued with a COVID-19 series devoted to the topical issue related to the coronavirus outbreak, e.g. prevention and treatment, lockdown, domestic violence, distance learning tec. Every broadcast reaches an average of 2 mln viewers. Among participants are experts, people living with HIV, women's networks, UNAIDS GWA and friends and others. The broadcast on the ok.ru/test platform is a joint initiative of UNAIDS RST EECA, the UNESCO IITE and other UN agencies (WHO, UN Women).

#WinTogether online marathon initiated by UNAIDS RST to highlight examples of HIV community support and solidarity practices during the COVID019 was conducted by UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassadors and friends in Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the different social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook). The reach varies from 1000 to 5000 viewers of each show.

Additional information can be found at:
Rapid Needs Assessment http://eecahub.unaids.org/
Community initiatives map
http://act.inyourpower.life
Other stories www.unaids.org