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STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO CRISES IN THE EECA REGION

A map of the EECA region (Europe, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia) is shown in the background. The region is highlighted in a dark blue color, while the rest of the world is shown in a light blue color.

ANNUAL REPORT
2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, AFEW and its partners faced significant challenges in the EECA region due to the war in Ukraine and the prolonged effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These crises have intensified mental health issues, civil rights limitations, and reduced healthcare access for vulnerable populations. In response, AFEW updated its strategy for 2022-2025 to address these issues effectively.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE:

AFEW's updated strategy focuses on a people-centered, integrated model, prioritizing underserved populations, including those living with HIV, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis. The strategy aims to tackle stigma, poverty, discrimination, and exclusion, while enhancing community-led responses in the EECA and EU regions. The strategic directions are:



Greater Visibility: Advocate for underserved populations' health needs and rights and secure increased resources.



Strengthening Partnerships: Enhance partners' capacities to improve health and social protections.



Linking and Learning: Provide effective knowledge exchange and learning platforms.



Improving Resilience: Address the negative consequences of the crisis in Ukraine and support Ukrainian PLHIV in the Netherlands and Poland.



AGENDA FOR 2023:

AFEW will continue to focus on increasing international visibility for the needs and rights of underserved populations in the EECA region. The organization will strengthen partnerships, reduce stigma, create enabling environments, and promote knowledge exchange. Emphasizing the EECA region as a priority for international donors, AFEW aims to support the HIV response and public health initiatives effectively.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2022:

Greater Visibility:

- Participated in global events like AIDS 2022 and the Human Rights Film Festival to advocate for EECA region's health issues.
- Launched the "SEE WHAT MATTERS" campaign against the stigma and discrimination of women living with HIV, supported by Gilead's EHE program.

Strengthening Partnerships:

- Finalized the EU COVID-19 Solidarity Programme in the Eastern Partnership countries.
- Continued and initiated projects in Uzbekistan to improve HIV services and advocate for vulnerable groups' rights.

Linking and Learning:

- Organized the EECA INTERACT 2022 workshop, including participants from 28 countries discussing HIV, TB, and hepatitis.

Improving Resilience:

- Mobilized resources to support Ukrainians affected by the war, provided emergency funding, and facilitated humanitarian aid.
- Collaborated with organizations to meet the urgent needs of Ukrainian refugees and vulnerable communities.

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the unfolding security, political, and economic crises across the EECA region due to the war in Ukraine have significantly impacted the work of AFEW and its partners. Moreover, the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable, underserved populations has intensified mental health issues, civil rights limitations, and diminished access to necessary healthcare.

Taking this into consideration, in 2022 we have invested efforts into updating our new strategy and programming until 2025 to ensure that we are able to address the negative consequences of these crises on the underserved populations in the region.

The new strategy is based on a people-centred, integrated model that puts underserved populations including those living with HIV and the hepatitis C virus (HCV) and who have experienced tuberculosis (TB) at the centre of our collective efforts. In parallel, we aim to highlight and address the stigma, poverty, discrimination, and exclusion faced by underserved populations, all of which continue to drive underlying health and social inequalities, while working towards better-coordinated EECA- and EU country-specific community-led responses.



Towards the second half of 2022 we focused on developing a comprehensive approach to **IMPROVING RESILIENCE** of communities and addressing the negative consequences of the crisis in Ukraine and the implications for the entire region. We have updated our strategy to include this fourth strategic direction and started fundraising for projects supporting the Ukrainian PLHIV in Netherlands and Poland.

Please learn about our main accomplishments in 2022 in line with these strategic directions.

AFEW INTERNATIONAL'S VISION:

A WORLD IN WHICH UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS GAIN ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FREE FROM STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

AFEW INTERNATIONAL'S MISSION:

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND A STRONG INTERNATIONAL VOICE ON RIGHTS AND ON HEALTHCARE ACCESS FOR UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS IN THE EECA REGION

As a result we developed the following strategic directions:

GREATER VISIBILITY

for underserved populations' needs and rights related to health in the EECA region, including advocacy & increased resources

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

and partners' capacities on improving health and social protections for underserved populations and communities

LINKING & LEARNING,

providing platforms and opportunities for effective exchanges and access to knowledge to the wider EECA region and neighbourhood countries.

GREATER VISIBILITY ▶▶▶

Following our objective **GREATER VISIBILITY** for underserved populations' needs and rights related to health in the EECA region, including advocacy & increased resources, we attended key expert and networking events around the world, such as:



AIDS 2022 in Montreal, Canada, where we participated in a panel discussion to ensure the visibility of the EECA region. [Read more](#)

Human Rights Film Festival in The Hague, Netherlands, where we presented a project for HIV-positive displaced Ukrainians currently living in the Netherlands. [Read more](#)



Ambassador conference in The Hague, Netherlands, where we had knowledge exchange meetings with ambassadors from Georgia, Latvia, Poland, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and other relevant countries.



15th Netherlands Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Epidemiology, Prevention and Treatment (NCHIV) in Amsterdam and AIDSFONDS Soa Congress in Utrecht, where we updated our knowledge about key developments in our field in the Netherlands.



29th AIDS Conference "A person living with HIV in the family and society" in Warsaw, Poland, where we hosted a panel session "Various faces of support. Poland-Ukraine session". [Read more](#)

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

COMBATING STIGMA TO END HIV/AIDS IN EECA

In 2022 AFEW International joined forces with other members of AFEW Partnership to develop a social impact campaign against stigmatisation and discrimination of women living with and affected by HIV, which was supported by Gilead's Zeroing In: Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) programme.

The "SEE WHAT MATTERS" campaign was based on the input from comprehensive community-based participatory research and was launched in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Another component of this project was a series of knowledge and empowerment trainings for women in the participating countries, which ensured that the issues of self-stigma were also addressed.



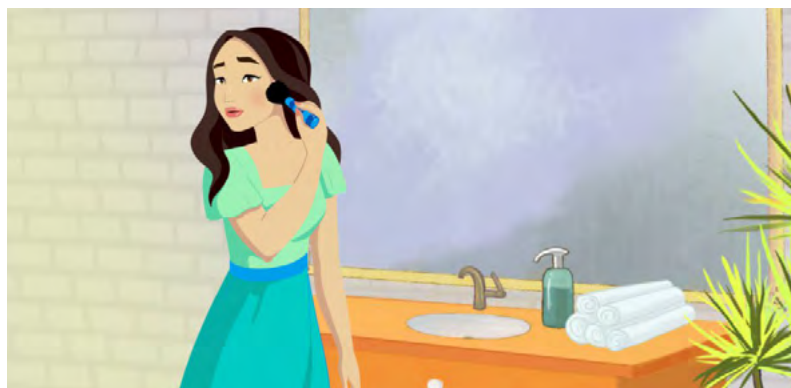
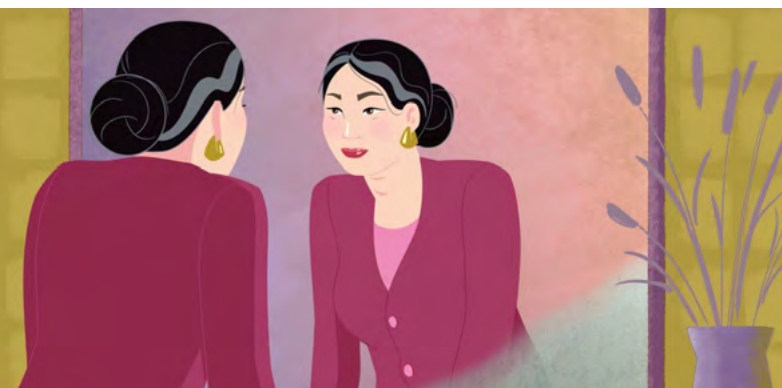
Yulia Komo, Project Manager:

"The campaign was created in the "anima-doc" style, which allowed us to combine artistic elements with realistic ones. We used direct quotes of the women involved in the research, photographs of their eyes, and their real voices in national languages as a voiceover.

According to testimonies of partner organisations and women from the affected communities, the created materials give them more flexibility and support to their daily work on reducing self-stigma and advocating for less discriminatory practices in their societies."



#SeeWhatMatters



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTNERS' CAPACITIES

In 2022 we worked on strengthening partnerships and capacity of our partners in several countries by implementing our projects.

WE FINALISED



“EU COVID-19 Solidarity Programme in the Eastern Partnership countries” with the financial support of the European Union (July 2020 – December 2022).

WE CONTINUED



“Expansion and improvement of HIV services in Uzbekistan”, financed by Elton John AIDS Foundation (May 2021 – April 2023).

WE STARTED



implementing a new project “Advocating vulnerable groups’ rights through a stronger civil society in Uzbekistan” (February 2022 – August 2024).

EU COVID-19 SOLIDARITY PROGRAMME IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (JULY 2020 – DECEMBER 2022)

In the framework of this project, we addressed the COVID-19 needs and advocacy for support of the key populations organisations.

In 2022 AFEW International conducted the Advocacy workshop in Istanbul on June 29-30 for our previous subgrantees from Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova, and following that, together with AFEW Ukraine, launched a closed Call for local advocacy proposals. The small advocacy grants have enabled subgrantees in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine to implement projects addressing post-pandemic challenges, such as threats to funding stability, the growing refugee crisis and health systems underfunding, will contribute to the strength of grassroots organizations serving communities that are often left behind.

We have organised a monitoring visit to Georgia in October 2022. Special attention was paid to the extent and range of knowledge and skills gained by CSOs through the Capacity Building Program and small grant advocacy program, as well as the feedback on the relevance and challenges of the advocacy strategies of CSOs during the current period of implementation.

Finally, we have continued collecting and disseminating information on the epidemiology of COVID-19 in the six countries of the Eastern Partnership, as well as on the measures taken by local governments to contain the epidemic and information on access to health services.



EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENT OF HIV SERVICES IN UZBEKISTAN, FINANCED BY ELTON JOHN AIDS FOUNDATION (MAY 2021 – APRIL 2023)

This project implemented in partnership with a local partner NGO “ISHONCH VA HAYOT” (a community-based membership NGO uniting key populations - KPs) addresses the existing gap in the access of KPs to testing and relevant HIV services. Through the rapid HIV testing system developed by the community and the subsequent social follow-up of clients to the health facility, clients are linked to ARV treatment in a timely manner. Community-based HIV self-testing has been effectively implemented in many EECA countries for several years. However, for Tashkent, this approach is new and has not yet been reflected in the national HIV protocol. The project aims to assist the Republican AIDS Centre of Uzbekistan in adapting the new WHO recommendations on the provision of HIV testing services.

In 2022 AFEW International provided technical support to ensure better coverage of key populations in HIV testing services, and better treatment adherence of those tested positive for HIV. Main focus of the support given in 2022 was organisational development, monitoring & evaluation and human resource management.

There has been effective cooperation with the AIDS center in solving gaps to reduce the period of D registration (the green corridor the client is sent directly to the commission analysis with one blood sampling) and the beginning of taking ART. Three staff members of Ischonch va Hayot have been trained in CBPR (community-based participatory research) – with these increased knowledge and skills the organisation is able to have more evidence, which can be used to increase the quality of the projects, as well as for raising awareness and policy influencing.



Petra Kuipers, Project Manager:

Within this project, we addressed the most difficult-to-reach people, such as people who use drugs, sex-workers, men who have sex with men. Our approach was based on peer-to-peer relationships and included aspects of trust, equality and life experience of ISHONCH VA HAYOT staff members.

We need to learn and experience how to serve the most difficult-to-reach people in a restrictive environment. We should clearly understand that we cannot easily change the restrictive environment into a more client friendly one. We need to work under these circumstances to improve the lives of underserved populations. Our project proves that it is possible, although difficult, to reach these people by working through community-based organisations, collaborate with outreach workers from the community and really being relation-oriented. This is key, as people are scared, criminalised and stigmatised. Our approach was successful, and it is a great global lesson.



ADVOCATING VULNERABLE GROUPS' RIGHTS THROUGH A STRONGER CIVIL SOCIETY IN UZBEKISTAN, FINANCED BY THE EU DELEGATION IN UZBEKISTAN (FEBRUARY 2022 - AUGUST 2024)



Funded by the
European Union



The project is dedicated to empowering underserved groups in Uzbekistan, such as people vulnerable to discrimination – women, people with disabilities, people living with or at high risk of HIV, and migrants, and to protecting their rights and freedoms through strengthening and building local CSOs' own organisations and capacities, thereby strengthening civil society in Uzbekistan.

The outputs reached during the first year of the project implementation led to the

strengthened capacities of 30 CSOs related to project management, grantmaking, monitoring, evaluation, research (based on the CBPR method), learning skills and skills on how to deal with COVID-19 consequences required to develop sustainable projects for advocating the rights of vulnerable groups with different topics. Additionally, they established informal connections among CSOs serving vulnerable populations, being a necessary precondition to developing further cooperation.

The project achievements lead to establishing networking base and a regional coalition to advocate for the rights of the project's final beneficiaries. The second year of the project, starting in February 2023, will be used respectively to build strong civil society cooperation in Uzbekistan and reach the planned outcome of strong and empowered CSOs that can hold the government accountable for the fulfilment of the rights of underserved/vulnerable groups.



LINKING AND LEARNING



EECA INTERACT 2022

The third scientific workshop on HIV, Hepatitis C and Tuberculosis in Eastern Europe and Central Asia was organised on December 13-14 in Riga, Latvia.

EECA INTERACT 2022 expanded and included the Baltics, the Balkans, and several countries in Central Europe. Overall, 106 scientists, clinicians, NGO delegates, civil society representatives, and policymakers from 28 different countries attended EECA INTERACT 2022 to discuss the latest developments on HIV, TB, and hepatitis. 70 abstracts were submitted.

The event was co-organised by AFEW International, Amsterdam Institute of Global Health & Development (AIGHD) and Riga Stradins University.



Professor Michel Kazatchkine,
Co-Chair of the EECA INTERACT
Scientific Committee:

“Eastern Europe and Central Asia continue to see increasing numbers of HIV infections, year after year. The INTERACT workshop is a unique forum of scientific discussion on HIV, TB, and hepatitis in the region, open to all, and held in both Russian and English language. It helps young investigators from the region to promote and present their findings. The science is here to help implement policies, which will improve the situation on HIV, TB, and Hep in the region”.



[Read the full report here](#)

WWW.EECA-INTERACT.ORG

IMPROVING RESILIENCE

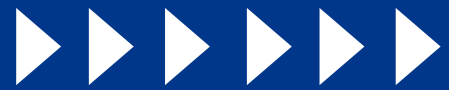


From the first days of the war in Ukraine, AFEW immediately mobilised all the resources to aid the Ukrainians who suffered. We have aligned with our network in Ukraine and started gathering their requests. We talked to our international partners and donors and found ways to reallocate some of the funding for emergency aid. We have co-signed and co-created several statements to the decision-makers

to draw attention to the needs of underserved groups. We were continuously updating lists of needs and locations and matched them with potential funders and resources they needed, while connecting and coordinating the information and aid flow with the organisations in the Netherlands and other European countries.

- 1 In the framework of a project “Humanitarian aid to local Civil Society Organizations in Ukraine “SOS-Ukraine”, implemented by AFEW-Ukraine with financial support of the International Humanitarian Organization People in Need and with technical support of AFEW International, Ukrainian organisations have received emergency funding in March-May 2022. With this help they were able to get food, water, medicine and other essential supplies.
- 2 AFEW International joined the SAZ, a project of 29 Dutch regional hospitals, to help our partners in Ukraine. Within the project, healthcare workers and doctors contacted hospitals and non-profit organisations in Ukraine and investigated their colleagues’ requests. After that they collected medicines and medical devices to send to Ukraine.
- 3 We started a collaboration with the Vattenfall Foundation in the Netherlands, which helps vulnerable people and groups in society. We have received humanitarian aid, which partly went to Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands and partly was delivered to Ukraine.
- 4 De Samenwerkende Hulporganisaties (SHO), also known as Giro 555 in the Netherlands, raised 500 mln euro to help Ukrainian people. With the help of our partners in the Netherlands Dokters van de Wereld, a portion of these funds were transferred to AFEW-Ukraine to get medicines and respond to the needs of vulnerable communities, such as prisoners, people who use drugs, sex workers, LGBTQI.
- 5 We have set up an online campaign called “Voices from Ukraine”, in which our community-based partners from different parts of the country shared what was happening in their areas and how they were helping their clients and beneficiaries.
- 6 We collaborated with Pharos, a Dutch Centre of Expertise on Health Disparities, which works to improve the safe use of medicines among semi-literate people, non-western migrants and people with limited health literacy. Pharos has developed a sheet with information for health professionals about health risks and specific health issues among Ukrainian refugees that need attention.
- 7 We launched a project aiming to strengthen the Ukrainian PLHIV arriving in the Netherlands and other neighbouring countries. [Read more](#)

OUR AGENDA FOR 2023



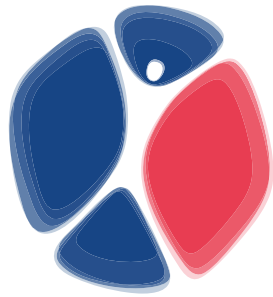
“According to our Strategy for 2023-2025 and based on the lessons learnt in 2022, AFEW will continue working to ensure greater international visibility for Eastern European and Central Asian underserved populations’ needs and rights.

We will focus on strengthening AFEW Partnership and specifically developing our joint programming in Central Asia, as well as continue contributing to increased resilience and stability in the region by reducing stigma and creating a more enabling environment for underserved populations we serve, as well as facilitating linking and learning for the community-based organisations and experts from different parts of the region.

We firmly believe that, given the emerging needs and crises, EECA should become a priority region again for the leading international donors, governmental institutions, and private donors investing in the HIV response and public health.”

Yuliya van Polanen,
Executive Director





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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST
AND SUPPORT!**

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