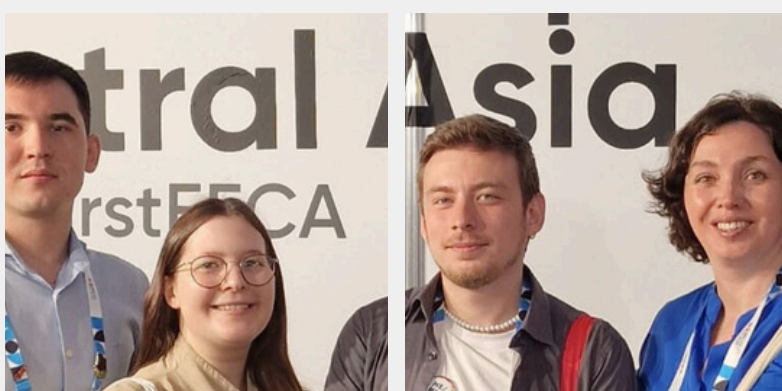




Annual Report 2024

Empowering communities and
driving inclusive change -
AFEW International in 2024.



Welcome word

Dear colleagues, partners, and friends,

As we look back on 2024, we do so with profound gratitude for the strength, resilience, and solidarity that continue to define AFEW International and our network of partners throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This Annual Report is more than a summary of our work—it shows what we can achieve when we come together, even in difficult times.

In a region marked by geopolitical instability, displacement, public health crises, and shrinking civic space, AFEW International has remained unwavering in its mission to catalyze support and amplify the voices of underserved populations.

From women living with HIV to youth at risk, from displaced persons to LGBTI communities, we have worked to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to access care and exercise their rights free from stigma and discrimination.

Guided by our Strategic Plan 2023–2025, our efforts in 2024 focused on four core objectives:

- Greater visibility of the needs and rights of underserved communities,
- Strengthening partnerships and partners' capacities to improve health and social protections,
- Improving resilience of communities impacted by crises, and
- Linking and learning through shared knowledge, innovation, and collaboration.

In 2024 we launched important programs like Rights and Resilience in Georgia, Empowering Voices in Uzbekistan, and we expanded digital health efforts with SafeSpot.online.

We contributed to regional and global dialogues, supported displaced Ukrainian communities, and scaled up participatory approaches like Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD).

At the core of our work is a deep belief in the power and potential of communities to drive their own change. We do not impose solutions; we unlock strengths. Our partners—civil society organizations, grassroots advocates, and affected populations—are the drivers of real, lasting change. Our role is to stand beside them, amplifying their voices and creating pathways for inclusion, dignity, and justice.

On behalf of AFEW International, we extend our thanks to the partners, donors, team members, and community leaders. Your dedication enables us to build a healthier, more just EECA region—one where no one is left behind.

We also would like to express our gratitude to our CEO Yuliya van Polanen for her commitment throughout 2024. The progress detailed in this report was accomplished under her leadership. Due to her current long-term leave, this foreword has been prepared by Yulia Komo and Petra Kuipers - two members of the Management Team.



With determination and hope,

Yulia Komo, Programmes Eastern Europe and Public Affairs
Petra Kuipers, Programmes Central Asia

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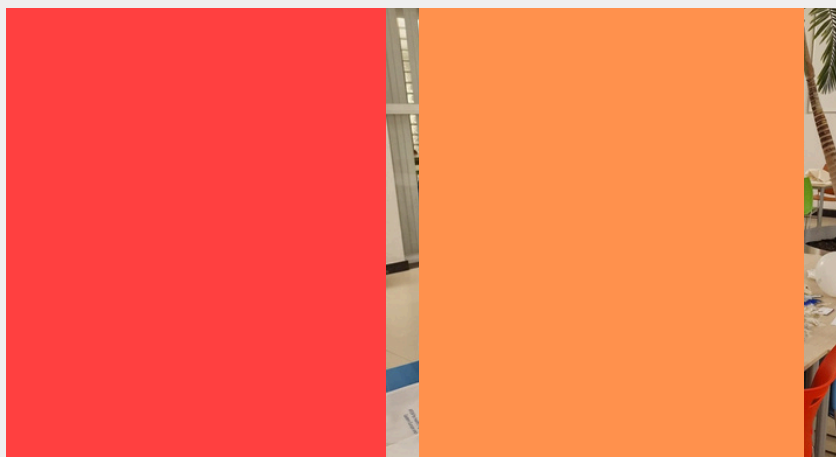
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What is AFEW today?



Framework Partner of the European Commission for selected Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) in 2024-2027.



Member of FCAA (Funders Concerned about AIDS), including EECA funders regional group.



Member of Share-Net Network. We are the only EECA-focused organisation in the Network.



Member of EU Civil Society Forum (Berlin), founders of the working group on Inclusive Health.





In 2024 we continued working according to our strategy 2023-2025.

The AFEW International STRATEGY for 2023—2025



VISION:

a world in which underserved populations gain access to health care free from stigma and discrimination

MISSION:

catalysing support and providing a strong international voice on rights and on healthcare access for underserved populations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA)

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS



GREATER VISIBILITY

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

What do we want to achieve?

Measurable change in awareness, levels of social justice, and funding for underserved populations in civil society across EECA with supported communities having more awareness about existing inequalities and their specific health needs.



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTNERS' CAPACITIES

on improving health and social protections for underserved populations and communities.

What do we want to achieve?

Strengthened AFEW Partnership and partners with greater capacity working on improving health and social protections for underserved populations in at least eight countries in the EECA region (Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan).



IMPROVING RESILIENCE

of communities and addressing the negative consequences of the crisis in Ukraine and the implications for the entire region.

What do we want to achieve?

Agile targeted support for displaced migrant underserved populations due to the war in Ukraine and enhanced coordination of civil society actors in the EECA region and across Europe contributing to recovery processes.



LINKING AND LEARNING

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

What do we want to achieve?

Effective exchange and access to knowledge, best practices, innovations and research for EECA civil society actors and public authorities for mutual learning and greater awareness on underserved populations health needs and services as well as how to better protect their fundamental (human) rights.

HEALTH-RELATED FOCUS AREAS

communicable diseases with a specific focus on HIV, tuberculosis, hepatitis, COVID-19; sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR); harm reduction for people who use drugs



[Read more](#)

Our projects in 2024

In 2024, AFEW International continued to respond to the evolving needs of underserved populations across Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). Through innovative, community-driven projects, we worked to strengthen health systems, elevate underrepresented voices, and ensure equitable access to care and support—especially in the context of ongoing crises, displacement, and funding gaps.

Our projects this year reflected AFEW International's core mission: advancing health and human rights for all, with no one left behind.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTNERS CAPACITIES

Advocating vulnerable groups' rights through a stronger civil society in Uzbekistan

In 2024, AFEW International, in partnership with ISHONCH VA HAYOT and with EU support, completed a project aimed at empowering vulnerable groups in Uzbekistan—such as women, people with disabilities, people living with or at risk of HIV, and migrants—by strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs).

Key achievements:

- 30 CSOs trained in advocacy, fundraising, project management, and CBPR.
- Covid-19 response skills enhanced through digital tools and public health training.
- Small grants provided to support CSO growth and community outreach.
- Knowledge sharing and advocacy potential assessed and disseminated.
- Regional cooperation fostered with similar CSOs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
- CSO-government dialogue supported to advance inclusive policies.

This project contributed to the UN's SDG 16, promoting inclusive, accountable institutions and stronger civil society engagement.



[Read more](#)

Empowering voices for inclusive development: strengthening civil society organizations in Uzbekistan, focusing on women and youth

In 2024, AFEW International launched a new initiative titled “Empowering Voices for Inclusive Development: Strengthening Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Uzbekistan, focusing on women and youth.” This project aims to build the capacities of 15 local CSOs working with people living with HIV (PLHIV) and those affected by HIV, with a strong focus on supporting women and young people.

The project seeks to reduce stigma and discrimination through the implementation of an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which leverages existing strengths within communities to foster inclusive and sustainable change. By equipping CSOs with innovative tools and strategies, the project contributes to the development of a more resilient and inclusive civil society in Uzbekistan.

[Read more](#)



EMPOWERING VOICES FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT:
STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Uzbekistan

Rights and resilience: empowering Georgia's community for Inclusive change

In 2024, AFEW International, together with its Georgian partners Equality Movement and Tanadgoma, launched the project “Rights and Resilience: Empowering Georgia's Community for Inclusive Change.” The initiative is designed to strengthen the capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) and advance social inclusion by actively engaging communities, particularly those most marginalized and stigmatized, including groups living outside the capital.

The project takes a holistic approach to change by combining theory with practice in capacity building, using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model to build on the strengths of individuals and communities. Through sustained outreach to rural areas and community-led advocacy efforts, the project aims to shift societal attitudes, foster cooperation across sectors, and empower communities to drive inclusive change. Ultimately, the project envisions a more equitable Georgian society in which all people can fully enjoy their rights, participate without exclusion, and live free from discrimination.

[Read more](#)

GREATER VISIBILITY

International campaign 16 Days of activism against gender-based violence

In 2024, the AFEW Partnership proudly joined the international campaign 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, held annually from November 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to December 10 (Human Rights Day).

This global initiative, launched in 1991, mobilizes individuals and organizations to raise awareness, support survivors, and advocate for the prevention of violence against women and girls. AFEW focused its efforts on women in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, sharing empowering messages, educational resources, and personal stories in local languages to encourage action and resilience.

Articles from our regional partners provided practical tips on seeking support, recognizing signs of abuse, and challenging harmful stereotypes. The campaign reached diverse audiences—including men and youth—promoting collective responsibility in addressing gender-based violence. The campaign’s messages reached more than 15 000 people in four countries. Through digital engagement and community outreach, AFEW contributed to a stronger, more informed civil society, committed to upholding human rights and fostering safety for all.



[Read more](#)

See what matters!

Although the project “Combating Stigma to End HIV/AIDS in EECA” (stopstigma.afew.org) was officially completed in 2023, AFEW International continued to actively promote and build on its legacy. The powerful social impact media campaign “See What Matters,” developed in five languages—Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian, Ukrainian, and Uzbek—plays an important role in our ongoing efforts to combat HIV-related stigma. Throughout 2024, we leveraged the campaign’s momentum to further empower women living with HIV, promote inclusion, and raise awareness across the region. The campaign’s messages, which directly benefited over 2,000 women and reached more than 200,000 people in five countries with the support of Gilead’s “Zeroing In: Ending the HIV Epidemic” programme, continued to resonate and inspire action well beyond the project’s conclusion.



[Read more](#)

IMPROVING RESILIENCE

Support for Ukrainian women living with HIV at the AIDS 2024 conference

In 2024, AFEW International supported the participation of Ukrainian women living with HIV at the AIDS 2024 Conference in Munich.

In particular, representatives of Help Now Hub Poland attended the event on behalf of displaced Ukrainian women living with HIV, participated in multiple sessions, and led a Global Village panel showcasing community mobilisation efforts in Poland. They built new partnerships, exchanged knowledge, and amplified the voices of Ukrainian PLHIV refugees. Their participation ensured visibility for an underserved group and contributed meaningfully to the global HIV response dialogue with assistance of AFEW International.

[Read more](#)



LINKING AND LEARNING

Bridging the Gaps: advancing effective chemsex treatment strategies

In 2024, AFEW International successfully completed Bridging the Gaps project, aimed at improving sex treatment responses for GBMSM communities affected by problematic chemsex, particularly in hostile environments. Through participatory research and collaboration with affected communities and service providers, we addressed critical knowledge gaps and developed evidence-based recommendations.

The project engaged both community members and experts to identify needs, gather good practices, and formulate strategies focused on restoring the ability to enjoy sober sex. The resulting knowledge product will support policymakers and practitioners in designing more effective, rights-based interventions—ultimately improving access to care, autonomy over sexual life, and the fulfilment of sexual rights.



[Read more](#)

EVENTS 2024

In 2024, AFEW International actively participated in a variety of key regional and international events to share expertise, strengthen partnerships, and advocate for the rights of communities affected by HIV. Our team attended major conferences, including AIDS 2024, where we presented outcomes from our recent initiatives and engaged in high-level dialogues on stigma reduction and community empowerment. These events provided valuable platforms to amplify the voices of the communities we serve, disseminate our learnings, and foster collaborations that will shape future programming and advocacy

AIDS 2024

In July 2024 we attended AIDS 2024, the 25th International AIDS Conference in Munich, Germany and met with stakeholders, scientists, activists, policymakers, and representatives of the underserved communities. During AIDS 2024, AFEW actively participated in various events that highlighted crucial aspects of the HIV response in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.



Read more



Share-Net Netherlands annual members meeting

On May 16, 2024, AFEW International took part in the Share-Net Netherlands Annual Members Meeting at KIT in Amsterdam. We presented our project “Bridging the Gaps – Effective Sex Treatment Response for LGBTI Communities,” supported by the Share-Net International Activation Grant. The session, titled “Innovative Problematic Chemsex Responses,” showcased research on sober intimacy approaches and featured expert contributions from ECOM and the Technical University of Munich. Facilitated by AFEW’s Yulia Komo and Michal Pawlega, the discussion focused on developing practical guidance for supporting drug-free sexual health within LGBTI communities.



Europe Day celebration in Tashkent

On 18 May 2024, AFEW International joined the Europe Day Festival at the Tashkent Botanical Garden, celebrating 30 years of EU-Uzbekistan partnership. Organized by the EU Delegation to Uzbekistan, the event showcased 50 EU-funded projects, including two supported by AFEW International. Our partner organization Ischonch va Hayot (IVH) presented a project advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups through stronger civil society engagement. Together with NGO Nurbonu Centre, IVH also introduced a new initiative strengthening 15 CSOs in Tashkent, Namangan, and Samarkand to support HIV-affected women and youth.

[Read more](#)

AFEW International at the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Summit

In 2024, AFEW International took part in the first Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (CSF) Civil Society Summit in Vienna, Austria. The event brought together over 250 civil society representatives and decision-makers from the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the EU to discuss regional cooperation and the role of civil society. AFEW International used this platform to highlight the ongoing challenges underserved communities face in accessing healthcare and social services. Our participation reaffirmed our commitment to promoting human rights, public health, and social inclusion across the EaP region.



[Read more](#)

Recap 2024. Our products

As we reflect on the past year, we are proud of the impactful progress we've made—not only through our achievements and partnerships, but also through the innovative products we've brought to life. In 2024, our team focused on creating solutions that respond to urgent needs, drive value, and reinforce our mission.

Thanks to strengthened memberships in key networks and fruitful collaborations, we were able to broaden our scope and deliver offerings that are more relevant, sustainable, and forward-looking than ever before.

Now, let's take a closer look at the standout products we developed in 2024

Safespot.online

At the end of March 2024 AFEW International launched safespot.online, a new website on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), serving individuals across Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. With the invaluable support of our partners in these countries, information about SafeSpot.online has been swiftly localised and disseminated among key populations through various channels, including closed groups on Telegram, social media platforms, and directly to outreach workers and clients. Through popular dating apps, the campaign reached 150,000 MSM, while the dedicated website attracted 10,000 visitors, helping to raise awareness about STIs among the target group.



Recognizing the diverse needs of specific key groups in these countries, we have initiated collaborations with Grindr, one of the world's largest social networking app. These collaborations aimed not only to provide information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) but also to connect individuals with organizations that can address their sexual health concerns.

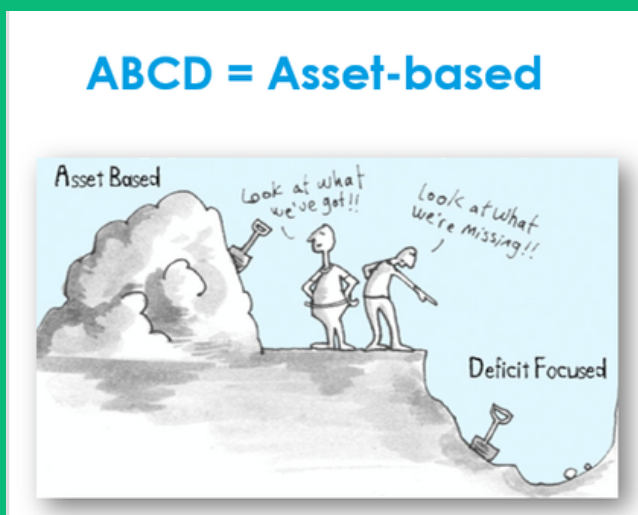
8
countries

[Read more](#)

ABCD approach

Since 2024, AFEW International has been applying the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Rather than focusing on what communities lack, ABCD empowers them to identify and harness their own strengths, resources, and skills to drive sustainable development.

This approach has already shown success in several countries, where communities have taken ownership of their progress and unlocked new opportunities using what they already have. By shifting the focus from needs to assets, ABCD fosters long-term resilience and self-sufficiency.

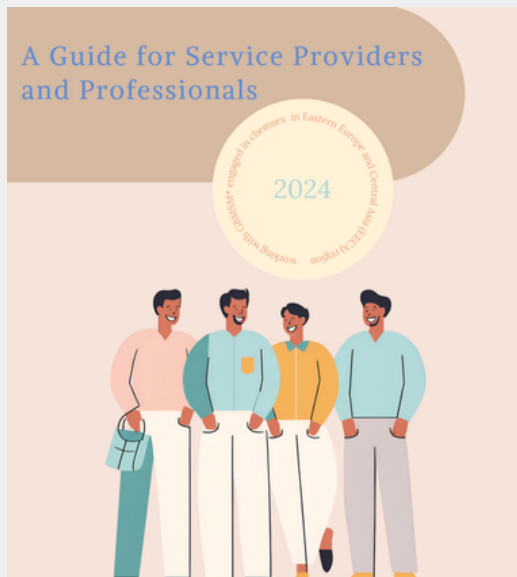


Yulia Komo, Director of Programmes (Eastern Europe) and Public Affairs at AFEW International, trainer:

“I appreciate how ABCD shifts the power dynamic. Instead of NGOs stepping in as the fixers, it’s about helping communities realize their hidden strengths and lead the change. It’s not about filling gaps for them — it’s about helping them see they can bridge those gaps on their own. That kind of empowerment is what leads to real, long-lasting impact”.

[**Read more**](#)

A guide for service providers



In 2024, we published a comprehensive and practical guide tailored specifically for professionals and service providers who work with gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) engaged in chemsex practices across Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine. This guide addresses the unique health, psychosocial, and harm reduction needs of this community, offering evidence-based recommendations, real-world case studies, and culturally relevant approaches.

Developed in collaboration with regional experts and community representatives, the guide serves as a vital resource for improving the quality and accessibility of services. It is available in both English and Russian, ensuring broad reach and usability among stakeholders across the region.

[Read more](#)

Community-Based Participatory Research Report

Assessment of the level of stigma and discrimination among young people living with HIV in three cities of Uzbekistan.
Available in English and Russian.

[Read more](#)

Assessment of the Level of Stigma and Discrimination Among Young People Living with HIV in Three Cities of Uzbekistan

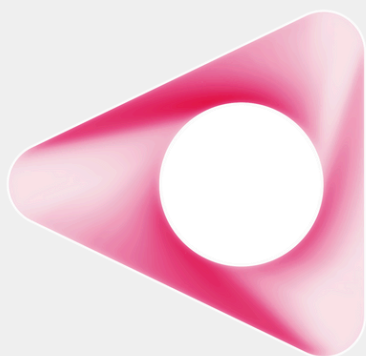
Looking ahead to 2025

In 2024 we started preparations for the next EECA INTERACT Workshop, originally scheduled for November 2024 in Tbilisi, Georgia. However due to the ongoing instability in the country, after careful consideration the Organising Committee made a decision to postpone the event to November 2025, tentatively to be conducted in the hybrid format.

EECA INTERACT remains a vital, abstract-driven platform focused on HIV, hepatitis, and tuberculosis in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The workshop brings together early-career researchers, leading scientists, clinicians, policymakers, and civil society to exchange knowledge, foster collaboration, and strengthen regional research capacity. With abstract submissions already strong, we encourage authors to update and resubmit their work in 2025.

The EECA INTERACT workshop is co-chaired by Prof. MD Cate Hankins and Prof. MD Michel Kazatchkine.

[Read more](#)



**EECA
INTERACT**

As we look ahead, 2025 marks the final year of our current strategic cycle. It is both time to consolidate and build upon our achievements, and a critical moment to begin envisioning our next phase of impact. The challenges in the EECA region remain urgent—but so does our commitment to health, equity, and human rights for all.



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Provisional Balance Sheet as of 31 December 2024

ASSETS		
	31-12-2024	31-12-2023
	€	€
Tangible fixed assets	3.872	468
Receivables		
Other accounts receivable	107.279	134.306
Accruals and prepaid expenses	16.017	9.563
	123.296	143.869
Cash and cash equivalents	586.602	539.040
Total assets	713.770	683.377
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Reserves	46.119	542.900
Current liabilities		
Trade payables	6.638	1.630
Payables related to taxes and social security contributions	5.595	16.873
Current other payables, liabilities and accrued expenses	655.419	121.974
	667.651	140.477
Total equity and liabilities	713.770	683.377