

**EURASIAN COALITION
ON MALE HEALTH (ECOM)
STRATEGIC PLAN
2011-2016**

Introduction

In November 2010, in Kiev, Ukraine, following the Regional Consultation “Hidden Epidemic: HIV, men who have sex with men, and trans in Eastern Europe and Central Asia” a number of recommendations, defining priorities for the implementation of an effective response to the HIV epidemic in communities of men who have sex with men (MSM) and trans in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) were drafted. These recommendations were developed for governments of countries of the region, civil society organizations, and for multilateral and bilateral donor organizations. At the meeting, it was suggested to establish a coordinating mechanism in the EECA region in order to implement these recommendations.

During a meeting of activists from MSM/LGBT initiative groups from EECA countries, held from June 21-23, 2011, a decision was made to establish a regional mechanism, aimed at creating an enabling environment for an effective response to the HIV epidemic among MSM and trans in the countries of EECA. This mechanism was given the name: “Eurasian Coalition on Male Health” (ECOM).

The Eurasian Coalition on Male Health’s (ECOM) meeting on strategic planning took place in Tbilisi, Georgia from October 5-7, 2011. 15 people participated in the meeting, representing 7 countries of the region: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia. The participants were comprised of current Board members, members of the Coalition, as well as members of technical support groups (representatives of the UNDP and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria).

At the time of the strategic planning meeting, the current Board of the Coalition prepared a draft document “ECOM Regulations”, as well as possible key areas of activity, according to which, the Coalition will contribute to:

- supporting the development of public health and community systems;
- developing an evidence base for the planning and evaluation of HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support measures for MSM and trans;
- collecting strategic information on the needs and vulnerabilities of MSM and trans in relation to HIV;
- building capacity to implement HIV prevention and treatment programs among the given groups; and
- promoting effective, evidence-based methods of work, based on respect and observance of human rights.

THE EURASIAN COALITION ON MALE HEALTH (ECOM) STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2011-2016

The Eurasian Coalition on Male Health's (ECOM) Strategic Plan for 2011-2016 is a document designed to bring together and coordinate the efforts of the Coalition's members and other stakeholders on the Coalition's strategic approach, and is comprised of:

- General Vision,
- Mission,
- Basic Strategy, and
- Strategic Goals.

The Strategic Plan provides a basis for work at the national and regional levels for the realization of recommendations aimed at the implementation of an effective response to the HIV epidemic in communities of men who have sex with men (MSM) and trans in the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA), in accordance with the Regional Consultation "Hidden Epidemic: HIV, men who have sex with men, and trans in Eastern Europe and Central Asia." The Strategic Plan also provides a basis for the implementation in EECA of the WHO and UNAIDS strategy for 2011-2015 and measures envisaged by the "Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV/AIDS" of the UN General Assembly on HIV/AIDS from June 2011.

Context of the development of the Strategic Plan

The "Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV/AIDS" states that "many national HIV-prevention strategies inadequately focus on populations that epidemiological evidence shows are at higher risk, specifically men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and sex workers". It further states that "each country should define the specific populations that are key to its epidemic and response, based on the epidemiological and national context". Countries commit to: "continue engaging people living with and affected by HIV in decision-making and planning, implementing and evaluating the response, and to partner with local leaders and civil society, including community-based organizations, to develop and scale up community-led HIV services and to address stigma and discrimination"¹.

MSM have been included in the WHO and UNAIDS strategies, as well as in the European Action Plan for HIV/AIDS for 2012-2015. In accordance with these strategies, a goal was set to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV by half, including among men who have sex with men².

HIV/AIDS remains a major public health problem in Eastern Europe. The HIV epidemic in this region is developing at one of the most rapid rates in the world. In 2009, in Western and Central Europe, MSM accounted for nearly half of all newly diagnosed HIV cases with a known path of transmission, and, for the past five years, there has been a clear upward trend in the number of cases of HIV infection through same-sex sexual contact between men³.

¹ "Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV/AIDS". UN General Assembly. June, 2011.

(http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/65/L.77&referer=/english/&Lang=R)

² "Getting to Zero": Strategy of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). 2010 (http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/unaidspublication/2010/JC2034_UNAIDS_Strategy_ru.pdf)

³ HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2009. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe. Stockholm: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; 2010. (http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/101129_SUR_HIV_2009.pdf)

According to the results of the European MSM Internet Survey, in which more than 40,000 people participated from EECA countries (Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine), HIV was diagnosed in 5.11% of the MSM surveyed (Russia-6.4%, Estonia 8.9%); in the last year, only 34% of the MSM surveyed had taken an HIV test.

In the EECA region, measures to combat HIV infection in MSM and trans communities generally do not lead to the achievement of universal access to services for these populations. The problem is either ignored due to a lack of necessary data and analysis or it is given secondary importance because of a low level of political commitment and resource allocation within the framework of national HIV programs⁴.

At the same time, in many countries of the region, MSM are included as a key population in national HIV-prevention programs and plans and experienced and developed services for MSM exist.

The opinion of civil society is being more often listened to during the development of HIV programs, and civil society participation in the formation of HIV policies and in decision-making is increasing in a majority of countries of the region⁵. The direction of these developments must be kept moving and must be strengthened. Currently, national networks of HIV/AIDS service- and LGBT organizations are being developed in the EECA region. There are good international examples of the formation of regional networks, such as EHRN, ECUO, ITPCru, and APCOM.

Thus far, it remains possible in a number of countries of the region to adopt legislation, which could contribute to the deterioration of the situation or even criminalize homosexual behavior. Thus, a discriminatory law, adopted in one country, could be an example for other countries (the domino effect). Almost all traditional religious groups in EECA countries continue to hold intolerant views towards MSM and on issues regarding changing one's gender.

⁴ Regional Consultation "Hidden Epidemic: HIV, men who have sex with men and trans in Eastern Europe and Central Asia". Kiev, Ukraine. Information Sheet. November 2010.

⁵ Progress made in the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS – Report by the Secretary-General. New York, United Nations, May 2009. (http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2009/20090616_sg_report_ga_progress_en.pdf)

The Mission of the Eurasian Coalition on Male Health (ECOM)

ECOM is a network of organizations and activists working in the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. We aim to create favorable conditions to ensure that men who have sex with men and trans have access to services in the field of sexual and reproductive health, in particular to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, based on respect for their human rights.

Introduction

We work in the countries of EECA to ensure that:

- MSM and trans have the opportunity to seek timely treatment and support in the areas of sexual, reproductive and mental health, without having to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- The level of stigma towards MSM and trans decreases, especially among sexual, reproductive, and psychological health service providers.
- MSM-service organizations recognize the importance of human rights in fighting the HIV epidemic, and that LGBT organizations include sexual and reproductive health issues in their work.
- Governmental, non-governmental, and international organizations and private-sector stakeholders partner up to build health service systems for MSM and trans. Representatives of MSM service- and LGBT organizations should be included in coordinating and working with structures at the international and national levels.
- The legal framework and political climate are, at a minimum, supportive of creating conditions favorable to MSM/trans-service- and LGBT organizations. MSM and trans should also be included as key populations in national HIV programs.
- A comprehensive packet of services for MSM and trans should be introduced in the majority of EECA countries. HIV prevention, treatment, and care services for MSM and trans should be consistently provided with resources, including funding from the national budget(s).
- A comprehensive system of monitoring and evaluation of the HIV epidemic is developed, including an evaluation of the quality of community participation in the HIV response.

The vision of ECOM's development as an organization:

- ECOM will be an authoritative and influential organization at the international and national levels. ECOM will publish regular reports on the achievement of universal access of MSM and trans to HIV prevention, care, treatment and support services and on the defense of their human rights in countries of the region. ECOM will initiate and regularly hold regional conferences on HIV among MSM and trans in the countries of EECA.
- ECOM will be a registered organization with a professional team of employees, expert capacity, effective management and transparent representation and decision-making mechanisms. In all EECA countries, there will be active ECOM members.
- ECOM will be a resource center, a broker, and provider of timely and quality technical assistance; will support the mobilization of resources for its members; will maintain an operational system of communication and feedback that corresponds to the needs of its members.

- ECOM will have an effective communications and advocacy strategy that it will implement. It will promptly respond to requests from Coalition members on issues related to human rights protection and advocacy actions.
- ECOM will consistently be provided with resources through effective fundraising, as well as through contributions from ECOM members and affected communities.

What can help the future to take shape?

- Existing examples of the inclusion of MSM as a vulnerable group in national HIV prevention programs and plans. Existing experience and developed services for MSM in countries of the region.
- Existing experience of network collaboration at the country level, the development of national networks of HIV/AIDS-service NGOs and LGBT community networks, with their own communication channels and developed systems of cooperation.
- The use of best practices and cooperation with regional networks: EHRN, ECUO, ITPCru, APCOM.
- High personal interest, the motivation of Coalition members. Widespread involvement of volunteers: the need to mobilize the community(-ies). The formation of an intuitive system of values, based on the equality and importance of each vote, collective decision-making mechanism, communication system, network listserve.
- The presence of international declarations and conventions, support and influence of European political institutions (Council of Europe, Strasbourg Court, OSCE, etc).
- The presence of technical, financial, and image support from UN agencies and the Global Fund. The presence of funds for which MSM/LGBT are (and have always been) a priority, which may facilitate the formation of the organization. The possibility of involving businesses working with MSM and trans.

What can prevent the future from taking shape?

- Homophobia, stigma, and discrimination in society, as well as a lack of tolerant attitude on the part of specialists providing services.
- A lack of recognition of the necessity of working with MSM and trans at the political level in countries of the region, as well as a negative political and social climate with respect to MSM/LGBT. The criminalization and pathologizing of homosexual sex in a number of countries of the region.
- The low availability of funding for prevention programs targeting MSM and trans.
- A lack of accepted standards for service provision, as well as an agreed upon and unified system of evaluation for monitoring and assessing programs aimed at MSM and trans.
- The low involvement of civil society in political life in EECA countries. The small number of opinion leaders from the LGBT community, expressing the opinions of this group.
- The self-stigmatization of MSM (internalized homo-/transphobia) and the low level of awareness of the services needs of MSM and trans.
- The low level of coordination, organizational working culture, organizational opportunities, communication systems, and feedback on international advocacy and PR experience among organizations working with MSM and trans.

ECOM's Strategy until 2016

The formation of the Eurasian Coalition on Male Health's activities on the basis of the meaningful involvement of MSM and trans communities and experts, the development of organizational structures, and the mobilization of resources necessary for such involvement.

ECOM's Strategic Goals:

1. The creation of a communication system allowing the Coalition to work effectively in the areas of program and organizational development and advocacy for MSM- and trans-service organizations.
2. The development of the capacity of the Coalition's members in order to enable them to implement their program activities on MSM health services. The provision of support to trans organizations to ensure conditions necessary to implement these services.
3. Mobilization of resources for the activities and development of the Coalition and its members.
4. Development of the organizational structures of the Coalition (registration, procedures, rules, management, staff).