



*Eurasian Coalition  
on Male Health*

## **«Long-term Effects of Short-term Funding»**

Success stories in the implementation  
of ECOM small grants  
«Together for Our Rights»

Tallinn, 2018

**Semchuk N., Yoursky Y.** "Long-term Effects of Short-term Funding". Success stories in the implementation of ECOM small grants "Together for Our Rights". Eurasian Coalition on Male Health (ECOM). – Tallinn, 2018.

The information presented in this document may be useful for non-governmental organizations, community activists, and government representatives in planning advocacy processes and in promoting the rights of gay men, other MSM and trans people, as well as in overcoming barriers that limit their access to services.

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Alexandr Paluyan, Vitaly Djuma and Elena German for their substantial assistance in the preparation of the publication.



This publication was prepared and published under the project "Coordinated, strategic, and resolute: MSM and transgender networks united" with support from the MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights implemented by the Eurasian Coalition on Male Health (ECOM) with the financial support of the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund (RCNF).

The project was designed to support the global efforts to alleviate the impact of HIV and AIDS among gay men and other MSM and trans populations around the world and to enable gay men and MSM and trans people to safely seek HIV care and services.

The views described herein are the views of the authors, and do not represent the views or opinions of MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights.



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## The goal of the Project was to contribute to:

- reducing the level of stigma and discrimination, and human rights violations experienced by gay men and other MSM, and trans\* people in healthcare settings, in particular in HIV services;
- increasing access to health services through community-based collaborations with healthcare workers and administration and local governments.

## Project objectives:

- Strengthen the capacity of HIV and LGBT NGOs in documenting and revealing stigma and discrimination, and human rights violations in healthcare settings, in particular in HIV services;
- Study stigma and discrimination, and monitor human rights violations in healthcare settings, in particular in HIV services;
- Advocate for addressing related barriers in access to health, including HIV services for gay men and other MSM and trans people;
- Work with healthcare workers and officials to overcome stigma and discrimination, and mitigate human rights violations in healthcare settings, including in HIV services;
- Participate in health policy-making at local and national levels.

## Project duration:

2017–2018

## List of Abbreviations:

<b>ECOM</b>	Eurasian Coalition on Male Health
<b>HIV</b>	Human immunodeficiency virus
<b>IG</b>	Initiative group
<b>LGBT</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people
<b>MSM</b>	Men who have sex with men
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>PLHIV</b>	People living with HIV
<b>SOGI</b>	Sexual orientation and gender identity
<b>STI</b>	Sexually transmitted infection



PROJECT TITLE:

**«Right to Health of MSM and Trans People in Ukraine: Increasing Access to Health Services»**

ORGANIZATION:

**PUBLIC ORGANIZATION «ALLIANCE.GLOBAL»**

REGION:

**KYIV, DNIPRO, KHARKIV, ZHYTOMYR, POLTAVA, UKRAINE**

*Since 2002, the public organization, "ALLIANCE.GLOBAL", which focuses on the development of and uniting sub-groups of gay and bisexual people and the LGBT community as a whole, has been providing HIV and other STI prevention services to MSM, helping to reduce the level of homophobia and transphobia in society, and has been advocating for access to medical and social services for groups vulnerable to HIV.*

In Ukraine, homophobic and contemptuous attitudes towards MSM and trans people are widespread in the provision of medical services. Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), as well as HIV and/or sexual transmitted infections (STI), may be a reason for limitations in or the refusal to provide health services, and may also lead to the provision of low quality services. The level of trust among MSM and trans people towards medical institutions is low, while stigma and discrimination prevent them from accessing services in such institutions.

The goal of the project "Right to Health of MSM and Trans People in Ukraine: Increasing Access to Health Services" was to build and develop a monitoring network to monitor cases of stigma and discrimination towards gay and bisexual men, other MSM and trans people in the healthcare settings, including in the provision of HIV-related services.

A monitoring network was established within the framework of the project to identify cases and incidents of stigma and discrimination towards the target group in five regions of Ukraine: Kyiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, and Poltava. During the project monitoring, 14 significant cases of stigma or discrimination in the health sector were documented. The development of the monitoring network allowed for timely responses to rights violations and the provision of legal consultations. To this day, the cases identified also serve as an evidence base for advocating for changes in legislation regarding the introduction of antidiscrimination mechanisms. In addition, the recorded cases

will enable to draw the attention of public authorities, and national and international organizations to the existing problem, and help to prevent such cases in the future, which will improve access to health services for our communities.

The identification and documentation of cases of stigma and discrimination was also facilitated by focus groups organized by the implementing organization, in which 44 people took part from communities of gay and bisexual men, and trans people. The focus groups identified existing barriers to accessing health services, pointed out incidents of stigma and discrimination towards the target group, and acted as a basis for the development of recommendations for overcoming barriers to accessing health services for the project's target group.

A number of trainings conducted by the implementing organization for representatives of the LGBT community, titled "Basic concepts of stigma and discrimination in medical institutions", raised the level of awareness of LGBT people about existing incidents of stigma and discrimination in the medical field, and also taught them about the necessary actions to take in case their own rights are violated. In general, the effectiveness of the trainings was confirmed both by the interest demonstrated by representatives of the LGBT community, and by the requests to hold trainings in other regions not covered by the project.

The project results were presented during a round table with representatives of state and non-governmental organizations. "ALLIANCE.GLOBAL" also strengthen cooperation with human rights organizations. As a result of the event, recommendations were developed on reducing stigma and discrimination in the field of health services, as well as on the provision of support from healthcare professionals in distributing informational materials about countering discrimination in medical institutions.

"ALLIANCE.GLOBAL" plans to use the experience gained through this project, in its future activities aimed at reducing the level of stigma and discrimination among healthcare workers, including training events for the healthcare workers.



PROJECT TITLE:

**«Quality Services without Labels»**

ORGANIZATION:

**CHARITABLE FOUNDATION «GENDER Z»**

REGION:

**ZAPORIZHIA AND ZAPORIZHIA OBLAST, UKRAINE**

*The charitable foundation "Gender Z" began working as an LGBT initiative group in December 2008. The Foundation is a human rights organization, working in the fields of human rights monitoring, HIV/STI prevention, combating stigma and discrimination towards MSM and trans people, as well as improving the quality of life of representatives of the LGBT community.*

MSM often face biased and homophobic attitudes when accessing services in medical institutions. A high level of stigma among healthcare workers, as well the fear of disclosing their SOGI significantly affect the desire and intention of MSM to seek medical assistance.

Healthcare workers are insufficiently informed about the needs of this group. Even where medical staff have information about how to conduct HIV testing and counseling, there are often doubts about the quality of the services provided.

The goal of the project "Quality Services without Labels" was to reduce the level of stigma and discrimination, as well as to reduce the number of rights violations faced by gay and bisexual men, other MSM and trans people in the healthcare institutions of Zaporizhia and Zaporizhia Oblast. The target group was healthcare workers in Zaporizhia and Zaporizhia Oblast.

The project was implemented in close cooperation with state institutions, which allowed for the achievement of excellent results. The efforts of the organization received support from the health department, which greatly improved the effectiveness of the project. The successful implementation of the project in 2017 allowed the organization to receive an extension of the grant for 2018.

The main achievement of the organization and a successful example carried out within the project was the practical monitoring of the attitudes of medical workers in state medical institutions in Zaporizhia and Zaporizhia Oblast regarding the sexual orientation of their patients, which was carried out with consultants using the "secret client" methodology.

This monitoring also allowed for the assessment of the quality and completeness of the HIV testing services provided. In 2017, "secret clients" visited 95 medical institutions, and another 92 institutions in 2018. In the future, the implementing organization plans to conduct such monitoring annually.

Based on the monitoring results, the implementing organization developed recommendations (an algorithm) on consultations for MSM and on preventing stigma and discrimination in the provision of medical services. These recommendations were widely presented to the public at round tables held in 2017 and 2018.

"Gender Z" was able to address issues regarding the prevention of stigma and discrimination in the provision of medical services to MSM at a higher level. The medical institutions in which the monitoring was conducted and that received mediocre results, received an instruction from the health department to unconditionally comply with legislative requirements when conducting HIV testing, as well as to conduct training with its staff with a follow-up report on the implementation of necessary measures. "Gender Z" is making efforts to ensure that the recommendations are adopted at the regional level.

The experience of "Gender Z" in assessing the quality of HIV testing services was adopted as the basis for the development of ECOM's manual on the "Secret Client" methodology for assessing the quality of services in the field of HIV prevention and treatment among MSM and trans people.

The results of the assessment of violations by medical institutions when providing HIV testing and counseling services were included in ECOM's Regional Report on violations of the right to health of gay and other MSM and trans people in the CEECA region in 2017.

Within the component of the project aimed at increasing the level of trust of MSM towards healthcare workers, as well as at the formation of more tolerant attitudes of healthcare workers towards representatives of the LGBT community, trainings entitled "Specificities of Consultations for MSM", were conducted for 127 medical specialists.

The activities carried out by the implementing organization were covered by the media, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to adopt its experience and introduce the "secret client" methodology into their activities. In addition, the implementing organization itself promotes the dissemination of its experience among NGOs working to form tolerant attitudes towards LGBT people.

The project implemented by "Gender Z" is innovative for Ukraine. The display of interest from medical institutions also confirms the success of the project and attests to the significant increase in the capacity of the organization.





PROJECT TITLE:

«Equal Access with Equal Rights»

ORGANIZATION:

**PUBLIC ORGANIZATION «EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES»**

REGION:

**DUSHANBE, KHUJAND, KULOB, TAJIKISTAN**

*The public organization "Equal Opportunities" has been operating since 2009 to protect the rights of the MSM and LGBT communities, safeguard health and prevent HIV and other infections that threaten public health, as well as to strengthen the role of the MSM and LGBT communities in Tajikistan by promoting their mobilization and social integration.*

Attracting MSM and LGBT people to HIV services, as well as the availability of such services in general are complicated in Tajikistan given the existing political and social context. Homophobic and transphobic attitudes are widespread in society, and negative feelings towards representatives of the LGBT community are dominant. There is evidence of violence against and ill-treatment of members of the LGBT community. The state encourages the fight against norms that are not accepted by the majority. NGOs working with MSM and LGBT people are under pressure from the government and are forced to work under conditions of harassment and limitations on the freedom of their organization's activities.

In addition to this, there is a high level of stigma and discrimination among the staff of medical institutions, with frequent refusals to provide services due to intolerant attitudes regarding the SOGI of patients. In such circumstances, opportunities for MSM and trans people to protect their rights are limited and significantly complicated.

The goal of the project, "Equal Access with Equal Rights" was to ensure equal access to health services and HIV prevention for MSM and representatives of the LGBT community in Tajikistan through medical and public institutions.

A significant achievement within the implementation of the project is the first qualitative study conducted in Tajikistan on "Determining the level of stigma and discrimination among medical workers in the healthcare system towards gay, bisexual, and trans people, as well as MSM". 155 people from the MSM and GBT populations, as well as medical workers took part in the study. Possible complications during the study could include obtaining permission to survey medical workers, however, given that the implementing organization was able to establish communication with individual ministries, the survey was successful even in the face of obstacles on the part of the government as a whole.

Carrying out the study filled significant gaps in knowledge that previously existed. The implementing organization intends to use the results of the study in future informational activities aimed at overcoming stigma and discrimination among health workers towards key populations. In addition, advocating for better access to quality health services is done more convincingly when it is on the basis of national research.

Thanks to a number of trainings carried out in the cities of Dushanbe, Khujand, and Kulob, "Equal Opportunities" managed to raise the level of knowledge of the target groups of the project. Trainings, aimed at reducing the level of stigma and discrimination towards MSM and GBT people were carried out among 35 medical workers and helped to raise the level of awareness of medical staff about the specificities of working with MSM and the LGBT community. 39 MSM and GBT activists were trained on the "Equal Consultants" method for addressing legal issues, which will help to spread information to other members of the community in the future.

The project helped to identify 10 cases of human rights violations on the basis of SOGI in medical institutions. A lawyer from the implementing organization took further action in support of each case.

A practical guide for physicians, "To help you, dear doctor", was developed within the framework of the project with recommendations on interacting with MSM and trans patients. The document is aimed at ensuring the tolerant and qualified provision of medical services to this target group.



PROJECT NAME:

«**Health Under Protection**»

ORGANIZATION:

**SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PUBLIC HEALTH FOUNDATION**  
**«POSITIVE WAVE»**

REGION:

**SAINT PETERSBURG, RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

*The Social Support and Public Health Foundation “Positive Wave” has been working since 2008 to eliminate stigma and discrimination towards PLHIV and to develop activism and mentoring for the rights of PLHIV, advocating for equal access to high-quality medical and social services for PLHIV, promoting the involvement of PLHIV in HIV/AIDS decision-making processes and program evaluations, and developing non-medical services for PLHIV.*

Guarantees to ensure the rights of HIV-positive people in Russia, which are included in national legislation, are only of a declarative nature. Moreover, existing norms in the field of HIV/AIDS often violate human rights.

The fact that a person is infected with HIV is often seen as a reason for refusing to provide medical services to PLHIV, especially in rural regions. Noncompliance with medical secrecy and the principle of confidentiality is also often a barrier to accessing treatment for PLHIV. HIV-positive MSM are afraid to seek medical services due to possible intolerant attitudes and to their fear of having to reveal their HIV status or sexual orientation.

The goal of the project, “Health Under Protection”, was to increase the level of rights protection for HIV-positive MSM in the medical field. The target groups of the project included HIV-positive MSM living in the central regions of Russia, as well as the medical staff of institutions working with PLHIV in Saint Petersburg (in person) and in other regions of Russia (remotely via the Internet). The organization managed to achieve its initial plans in terms of the implementation of the project activities.

In order to identify gaps in the protection of the rights of HIV-positive MSM and to better respond to cases of rights violations, the organization monitored cases of the violations of rights of the target group.

Using various data collection methods, “Positive Wave” compiled the report “Invisible Group. Problems with Ensuring the Rights of HIV+ MSM.”, which presents a broad analysis

of the situation with regard to violations of the rights of the target group, describes gaps in legislation, identifies the legal barriers faced by HIV-positive MSM, and outlines the availability of HIV services in general. The content of the report is crucial: the report acts as an important basis for further advocacy activities and may serve as an evidence-based strategic guideline for the planning of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

The organization widely disseminated information about the possibility of obtaining legal advice, in part to document incidents of rights violations with regard to the target group. Using an interactive form accessible on the organization's website, 51 legal consultations were held, which were aimed at increasing the level of protection of HIV-positive MSM. The implementing organization plans to use the information collected about rights violations in its future work on preventing such violations.

To ensure that MSM could find the necessary information themselves, informational blocks about 10 different topics were created on the organization's website based on the findings of the identified rights violations with information about the main rights violations faced by HIV-positive MSM. The information has been used by more than 11,000 people. Thus, a significant contribution was made to raising awareness among the target group about their rights.

Information about the rights of HIV-positive MSM was also distributed among healthcare workers in a convenient format adapted to them: special webpages for doctors were developed on the website of the project and in social network groups. Based on the experience of the implementing organization, this method to raise awareness of healthcare workers is very effective.

Within the framework of the project, "Positive Wave" took concrete actions to protect the rights of HIV-positive MSM in response to the identification of rights violations. Through appeals to the authorities, it was possible to directly influence the observance of the rights of patients with HIV: for example, the Russian Federal Service for Oversight in Healthcare, Roszdravnadzor, cited to a private medical center for a legislative violation and demanded to respect the rights of patients with HIV. In some clinics, it was possible to abolish restrictions on the provision of certain services for HIV-positive people (such as restrictions on the provision of eye microsurgery services, as well as on the provision of dental services).

Through its efforts, the implementing organization managed to hold round tables with the participation of health authorities, and medical and HIV-service organizations, where the results of the project were presented. The event facilitated an inter-sectoral exchange of experiences, and identified existing system and service gaps in the field of HIV. The main achievement was the development of concrete measures to overcome violations of the rights of HIV-positive MSM occurring in the medical field, including the planning of a number of informational events and trainings on the rights of HIV-positive MSM.



PROJECT TITLE:

## «Improving Access of LGBT People to Medical Services»

ORGANIZATION:

**INITIATIVE GROUP «YUG-ANTILOPA»**

REGION:

**OSH AND JALAL-ABAD OBLASTS, KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

*The Initiative Group (IG) was organized in Osh in 2013 by leaders and activists of the LGBT community with support of the PO "Kyrgyz Indigo" and the PO "Labrys". The IG carries out activities on HIV prevention and strengthening the LGBT community in partnership with other non-governmental organizations in the region.*

The southern region of Kyrgyzstan is characterized by the inconsistent access of MSM to medical services. For example, services are more widespread in the Osh oblast, where the activities of non-governmental organizations are more developed, while in the Jalal-Abad oblast, such services are limited. Even when services are available, MSM are wary of accessing them, due to the fear of revealing their HIV status or because of discrimination by healthcare workers.

Access to healthcare is also complicated by widespread and direct discrimination against the LGBT community by healthcare workers due to traditional religious views and to intolerance of society towards LGBT people in general.

The goal of the project, "Improving Access of LGBT People to Medical Services", implemented by the Initiative Group "Yug-Antilopa", was to improve the access of representatives of the LGBT community to medical services, including HIV prevention, in the southern region of Kyrgyzstan, in particular gay men and other MSM living in the Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The project was implemented despite the stigmatizing attitudes of the majority of healthcare workers, who openly demonstrated their non-acceptance of the LGBT community and lack of interest in cooperation during the project activities. Despite these barriers, "Yug-Antilopa" made every effort to implement the project.

"Yug-Antilopa" conducted seminars on reducing stigma and discrimination in the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad for 26 healthcare workers. The seminars clearly demonstrated

the high level of discrimination towards the target group. Negative attitudes among medical workers during the seminars only confirmed the need for such events in order to eradicate antiquated views and to form tolerant attitudes towards the LGBT community. As a result of these seminars, the IG managed to establish friendly relations with three doctors, who expressed their readiness to work together. The "Yug-Antilopa" is determined to continue carrying out informational and awareness-raising activities among healthcare workers.

14 focus groups were held in the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad with a total of 209 community representatives. Focus groups helped to determine the level of accessibility of services for MSM and to identify the main barriers to accessing these services. The results of the focus groups may be used in the future to develop strategies for improving the access of the target group to services and for overcoming barriers. They may also serve as the basis for the development and implementation of other prevention programs in the region.

The project helped to identify cases of violations of the rights of the LGBT community. As part of documenting cases of violations of the rights of the LGBT community, 37 cases of rights violations in medical settings and 4 instances of violations on the part of law enforcement officials were recorded in Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts. "Yug-Antilopa" established cooperation with friendly lawyers in order to provide legal services to representatives of the target group.

"Yug-Antilopa" made efforts to expand the coverage of information on human rights and on ways of ensuring the protection of human rights: 390 representatives of the LGBT community were able to receive consultations on these topics. The Advocacy Officer provided telephone consultations to the community (this was the preferred format chosen by the target group, which attests to the high level of self-stigmatization).

Although "Yug-Antilopa" has carried out many activities for the LGBT community focused on the importance of mobilizing the community to fight for their rights, the community still needs to strengthen the practical skills needed to do this.



PROJECT TITLE:

«Suddenly I have HIV! What Do I Do?»

ORGANIZATION:

**PUBLIC ORGANIZATION «AGIHAS»**

REGION:

**RIGA, LATVIA**

*“AGIHAS” Society is a support group for people with HIV and AIDS, founded as a public organization in 1993. The organization provides socio-psychological support to PLHIV, promotes the integration of PLHIV into society, protects human rights in the context of HIV, and also works to improve the quality of life of PLHIV and protect their interests in government institutions.*

Gay and other MSM living with HIV face stigma and discrimination, which are generated by stereotypes about the way HIV is transmitted. Among PLHIV, self-stigmatization and self-isolation are widespread, especially among people newly diagnosed with HIV. The integration of PLHIV is complicated by the lack of knowledge about HIV both among the community and among the general population as a whole.

The goal of the project was to promote the active involvement of gay and other MSM living with HIV in community activities.

The efforts of the organization helped contribute to raising the awareness of MSM about HIV and about different ways of transmitting the virus. A booklet, “Suddenly I have HIV! What do I do?”, was published, which aims to motivate MSM who do not know their HIV status to get tested. For those who know their HIV status, the booklet also contains information regarding HIV services, as well as about rights related to HIV. The booklet is based on an analysis of the needs of Latvian gay men and other MSM living with HIV, carried out by the implementing organization in conjunction with informational and psychological support services.

Thanks to existing cooperation with the NGO “MOZAIKA”, an LGBT organization, it was possible to provide information about the booklet to the general public during the opening of Baltic Pride in the spring of 2018. Places where the booklets were distributed also include HIV prevention centers of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, laboratories, medical clinics, community offices of the LGBT association “MOZAIKA”, partner NGOs, as well as other organizations.



## Conclusions and Recommendations


The implementation of projects in different regions has helped to study and identify the problems of MSM and trans people in accessing HIV services in healthcare settings. The following general problems can be highlighted: homophobic, intolerant, and often unprofessional attitudes of healthcare workers, cases of stigma and discrimination on the basis of SOGI and HIV status, provision of low quality or incomplete services, and refusals to provide services. In addition, barriers to achieving good health and well-being included a low level of knowledge of MSM and trans people about their rights, as well as having weak skills related to the protection of their own rights.

Through the implementation of various projects, community-based organizations have been able to strengthen their capacity to identify incidents of stigma, discrimination, and violations of the rights of MSM and trans people in the field of HIV services, and to develop future activities to prevent such incidents and violations.

In order to better respond to incidents of stigma and discrimination and to violations of the rights of MSM and trans people, the experience of organizations implementing projects demonstrates that it is necessary to:

- have the organizational capacity for quality, timely, and efficient planning of project activities and use of resources;
- establish cooperation and foster partnerships with government agencies and human rights organizations for more effective activities;
- send appeals to relevant organizations that have the authority to influence rights violations in the medical field;
- use documented cases of violations of the rights of MSM and trans people when advocating and lobbying for the interests of the target group with regard to accessing quality and qualified medical services;
- conduct training activities for healthcare workers aimed at raising the level of knowledge about the needs and specificities of the target group;
- assess the quality of training of healthcare workers, including the level of use of the knowledge obtained during training activities in the performance of professional duties;



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- increase the awareness of MSM and trans people about their rights and ways to protect their rights, and develop the skills necessary to do so by conducting informational activities with subsequent evaluations of their effectiveness;
  - share success stories regarding the implementation of activities with partner organizations at home and abroad, as well as online and through social networks;
  - establish cooperation with friendly lawyers and expand the provision of legal services;
  - use project results in future activities.

In addition, in order to create the conditions necessary to ensure equal and quality access of MSM and trans people to healthcare services, it is necessary to regularly:

- conduct fundraising campaigns to ensure a stable implementation of successful activities;
- carry out activities aimed at changing attitudes towards LGBT people in society as a whole.

## Notes





*Eurasian Coalition  
on Male Health*

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