

**Success Stories
of ECOM Members:
Best Practices in Supporting
the LGBT Community in EECA**

2022

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Introduction

The Eurasian Coalition on Male Health (ECOM) is a membership organization, open to non-profits and activists working in the field of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention, treatment, care and support for men who have sex with men and trans* people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA).

The activities of ECOM are aimed at supporting the national LGBT+ communities, their activism, promoting human rights, advocating for health and social wellbeing of sexually and gender diverse people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Our main driving force is the members of ECOM! Our coalition joins the efforts of all the stakeholders in our region to improve the access to health and human rights services for LGBT people.

In this publication, we would like to present the best practices of our incredible and very different organizations, initiatives and activists, who fight to improve the quality of life for LGBT people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia every day. We have collected the stories about different approaches to improving the quality of life of LGBT people in EECA: about cooperation with the government to revise the estimated number of MSM in the country, collaboration with bloggers and influencers, public events and campaigns.

Maybe some of those practices and approaches will be an example for other regions.

UKRAINE

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Story 1.

100% Life. Kyiv Region NGO

100% Life. Kyiv Region NGO is a patient organization based in Kyiv, which strives to improve the quality of life of HIV positive people and to protect the rights and freedoms of people living with HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis.

100% Life. Kyiv Region NGO continues providing HIV prevention services and protecting the health of Ukrainians even in the midst of full-scale war happening in Ukraine.

The organization covered the topic of LGBT people and the war. They created posters with the stories of real people from the LGBT community who did some great things. It made people look at each of those heroes as a human being with no regard to their sexual orientation and forget about their discomfort about those people's sexuality.

There were four stories published on the organization's Facebook page:

about a soldier defending Kyiv region;

about a construction worker who helped to rebuilt the city infrastructure after bombings;

about a rescue worker who saved people from the rubble;

about a doctor who helped the wounded.

They are all part of the LGBT community and they deserve the same respect and the same rights that any other heterosexual people.

ECOM is very happy that our partners are doing such a great job working with the topic of the war and LGBT people in this war. Such stories undoubtedly help to change the public opinion regarding the LGBT community and debunk a lot of stereotypes.



Story 2.

Convictus Ukraine and Cohort NGO

Convictus Ukraine is a charitable organization working to prevent HIV and other socially dangerous diseases. It also strives to improve the quality of life for people with dependencies, imprisonment and domestic violence experience.

Cohort NGO is a trans* community organization focusing on the equal access to health services, visibility and rights protection.

After February 24, almost all Ukrainian organizations, including those working with the trans* community, had to drastically change their plans for 2022. Even despite the full-scale war in Ukraine, Convictus Ukraine together with Cohort NGO keep doing a lot of important things to support the trans* community in the EECA region and in Ukraine.

1. ICD-11: implementation in Ukraine

Due to the war, the Ukrainian trans* community had to rapidly adjust its advocacy plans, change the priorities of the Trans* Map project and focus its advocacy efforts on the emerging problems. Thus, a lot of attention and efforts are focused on implementing the eleventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), which includes important changes related to trans* people, in Ukraine.

ICD-11 contains revised provisions on the health conditions related to gender identity. The diagnostic category “Transsexualism” in chapter “Mental and behavioral disorders” was substituted with “Gender incongruence of adolescence and adulthood” and “Gender incongruence of childhood” in chapter “Conditions related to sexual health.” Those changes reflect the research data showing that trans* and gender diverse identities are not health disorders, and if they are classified as such, it can lead to severe stigma.

Thanks to this document, transgenderism will no longer be a medical diagnosis.

2. Representation of trans* community

The fact that the trans* community is represented in the Working Group of the Program Committee of the National Council on HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis at the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine allows scaling up the advocacy of the trans* community’s agenda.

The above-mentioned Working Group, which consists of 10 members, includes 8 trans* people.

3. Developing a comprehensive package of HIV services for trans* people

Conducting studies and surveys on the needs of trans* people is the basis to understand the whole range of the community needs, including humanitarian needs. Convictus Ukraine in partnership with Cohort NGO reviews and analyzes all the studies to understand the barriers trans* people are facing.

It is expected that the visibility of trans* people in HIV/AIDS prevention will grow thanks to the package of services developed and thanks to the trans* community being included as a “risk group” for HIV.

4. Leadership School for Trans* People

Convictus Ukraine and Cohort NGO developed a course for trans* people who would like to become activists, promoting the values of equal rights and opportunities for trans* people within the Leadership School for Trans* People launched within the Trans* Map in EECA project supported by the Elton John AIDS Foundation. In total, there are 42 lessons to be offered within the course.



5. Performances using the forum theater approach

The approach of forum theater allows showing all the challenges, which trans* people experience in their everyday life, in interaction with police, with the military recruitment offices or at the border. The war gave us an opportunity to recognize all the restrictions of the rights of trans* people, show and process those situations, look at them from a different angle, and launch a different scenario.

Such an approach was used to create the performance “It Looks Like We Look Alike” that was shown in Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Kyiv. The performance was attended by trans* people, their allies, health workers and representatives of the local NGOs.

Systematically addressing the problems of trans* people in the EECA region is a big and important task. The diversified approach that the Ukrainian organizations use in their work can be an example for other countries.



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Story 3.

GENDERDOC-M

GENDERDOC-M is the first civil society organization protecting the rights of LGBT people in Moldova. The number of areas of work covered by GENDERDOC-M never ceases to amaze us. Those are just some of our partner's achievements in the recent year:

ADVOCACY

Legal gender recognition

In 2022, GENDERDOC-M started strategic litigation on legal gender recognition. A complaint was submitted to the Equality Council blaming the Government of Moldova and the Public Services Agency in discrimination on the grounds of "gender identity" in the issue of changing documents of trans* people. The Council has recognized the fact of discrimination.

Thanks to this successful litigation case, the procedure of changing documents for trans* people will be considerably simplified.

Criminalization of hate speech and homophobic crimes

In the same year, the Parliament of Moldova voted to make amendments in the Criminal Code related to hate speech and hate crimes, specifying the protected grounds, in particular such as sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). Adoption of this law is a result of more than five years of work of many civil society organizations, including GENDERDOC-M. The law toughens punishment in cases when offenses are committed on the grounds of prejudice.

Discrimination of gay people in the army

The topic of discrimination of gay people in the army was first raised in Moldova at the end of last year, after a soldier who experienced homophobic discrimination and harassment sought help in GENDERDOC-M. Strategic litigation resulted in recognition of the fact that gay people face discrimination in the army, so the Ministry of Defense was given the task to address this problem. In May 2022, the first training was held for the army psychologists, where they received the necessary information on SOGI.

Prevention of bullying of LGBT adolescents

Suicide of a trans* adolescent girl as a result of bullying and response of the organization to this case gave a start to the joint work with the Ministry of Education to prevent bullying of LGBT adolescents at schools. 38 school psychologists from all over Moldova were trained in SOGI-related issues and learned how to work with LGBT adolescents.

MOLDOVA PRIDE

Moldova Pride organized by GENDERDOC-M was held on June 19. About 500 people took part in the Pride, which is the biggest number of participants since the first time it was organized in Moldova.

This year's march was also marked by another record: six members of the Parliament of Moldova attended the event.



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SUPPORT TO LGBT+ REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE

GENDERDOC–M rapidly responded to the full-scale war in Ukraine. They launched inclusive services for LGBT+ refugees from Ukraine, offering them basic support in crisis.

Besides, they opened a shelter — a safe space, offering all the basic necessities, food, hygiene sets, and essential medicines. The organization also made sure that LGBT+ refugees can have access to friendly specialists, such as psychiatrists, endocrinologists, infectious disease doctors, family doctors, general practitioners, gynecologists, urologists, dermatologists, surgeons, etc., who prescribed therapy for various diseases if needed. It offered covering any emerging needs of the refugees, who were able to use all the services provided by the organization.

ECOM admires the fact that one organization is able to cover all the needs of LGBT people in the country.

We hope that the experience of cooperation with government agencies shared by GENDERDOC–M will inspire other organizations to engage in this challenging but important interaction.

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Story 4.

Individual ECOM member Anna Dovbakh



Currently, the individual ECOM member Anna Dovbakh lives in Lithuania, but her work and activism are of great importance for the whole EECA region.

This summer, Anna organized a Ukrainian group to participate in the Baltic Pride! For Anna and her colleagues from the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) as well as other LGBT activists from Ukraine it was important to organize a Ukrainian group to take part in the march and voice the Ukrainian slogans, to reiterate for the international community that Ukraine is fighting for human rights and equality.

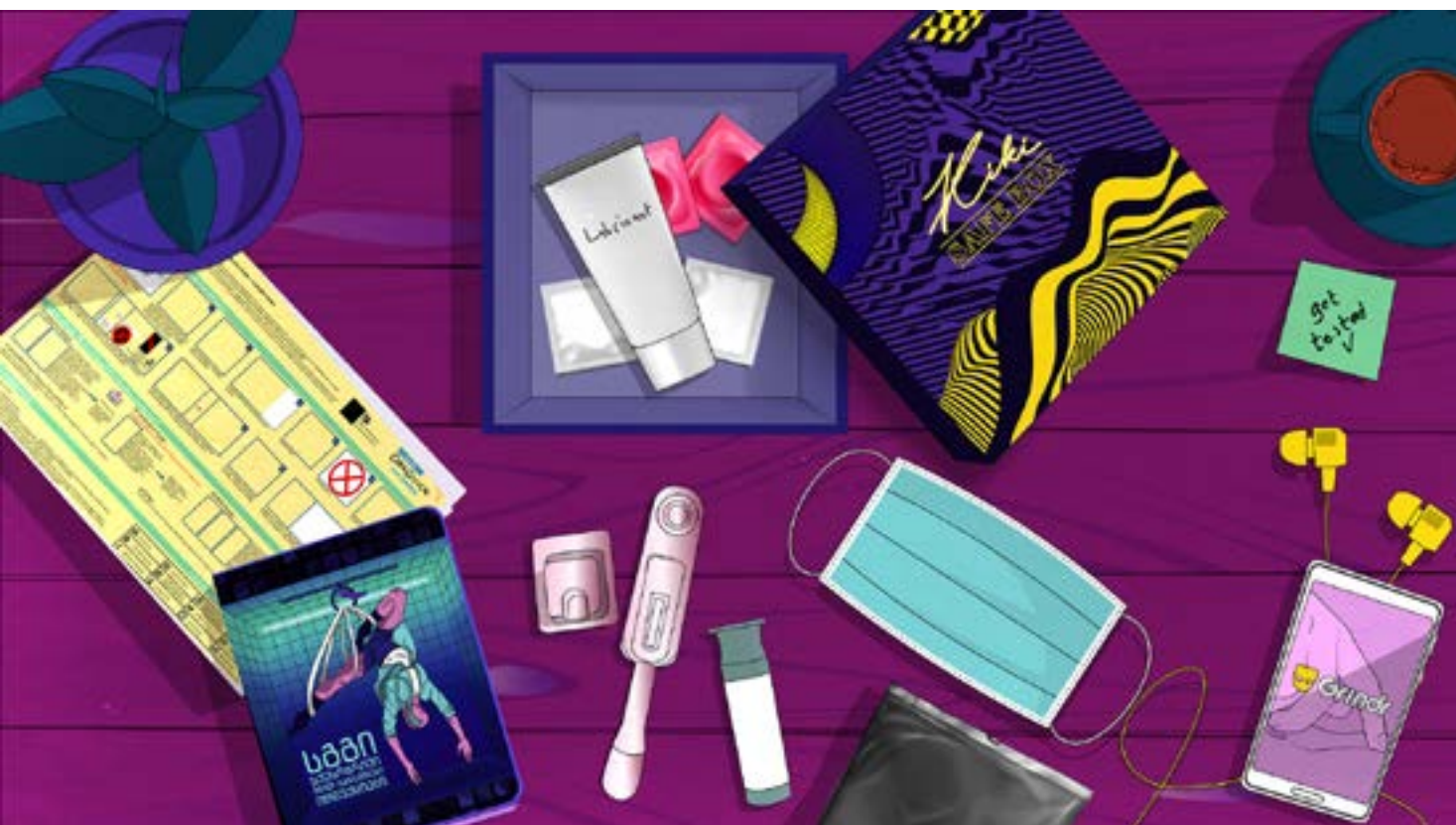
Based on the chants and slogans used by KyivPride, organizers of the Ukrainian group came up with some chants for the Baltic Pride and made posters in several languages – Ukrainian, Lithuanian, English, Latvian and Estonian. During the march, the Ukrainian group members were singing the famous Ukrainian folk song “Oi u luzi chervona kalyna” (Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow). There were about 25 people in the Ukrainian group, but it was supported by all the Pride participants, especially when they heard the words “Glory to Ukraine!”

This is a great example of how the agenda of one country can be raised at the regional level. Let’s use the prides which are held in our region to raise the issues of those countries which are not able to organize marches.



Story 5.

TANADGOMA Center for Information and Counseling on Reproductive Health



TANADGOMA Center for Information and Counseling on Reproductive Health works to improve physical and mental health of people in Georgia by implementing programs aimed at prevention, education, diagnostics and rehabilitation.

Our partners from Georgia found a very creative and interesting way of HIV prevention among gay and bisexual men.

They developed KiKi Safe Boxes containing the materials for HIV/AIDS prevention, such as oral HIV tests, condoms and lubricants, brochures with useful information.

Such boxes were developed to raise the awareness of the LGBT community about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and motivate people to get tested for HIV. Another goal of this initiative is to take care of every person's health.

Bright and youth-oriented design helped the KiKi brand to become recognizable in the community. To make KiKi Safe Boxes even more accessible, TANADGOMA organized a series of parties for the queer community. Before entering the party, visitors received brochures telling about sexually transmitted infections, HIV self-tests and other handouts from the KiKi Safe Box.

If they wanted, they could get tested for HIV in the mobile clinic right there. The parties were organized not only in the capital of Georgia – Tbilisi – but also in Batumi and Kutaisi.

During summer, different open air and other festivals were used as platforms to promote this campaign: ROKVA Festival in Racha and Tbilisi Open Air. This year, participants of the festival could receive KiKi branded bags instead of the KiKi Safe Boxes (as it was more convenient). They also had a chance to make photos in the colorful KiKi photo zone. Besides, KiKi branded T-shirts were created, which were very popular among the LGBT community members. This approach helped to attract new clients, give them information about STIs and distribute HIV self-tests among them or test them for HIV at the venue.

Thus, Safe Boxes became not only an HIV prevention tool, but also a brand recognized in the community.

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Story 6.

Kyrgyz Indigo NGO

Kyrgyz Indigo is an LGBTIQ organization based in Bishkek, which is one of the biggest human rights organizations not only in Kyrgyzstan, but in Central Asia in general.

ECOM members from Kyrgyzstan use their social media really effectively to promote the ideas of equality.

Kyrgyz Indigo implemented the Queer MediaBox project. Within the project, videos were created, which were later posted on social media to build a positive image of the LGBT community.

To launch the media campaign, the organization collaborated with a famous blogger Zee Marat, who has over 140 thousand subscribers on TikTok and over 16 thousand subscribers on Instagram (@ohmybabyzee).

The videos were filmed in the format of interviews: the participants were talking to creator Zee, sharing with him stories from their lives: how they recognized and accepted themselves, their SOGI, what challenges they faced in the society because of their SOGI and how they dealt with such situations.

IN TOTAL, FIVE VIDEOS
GOT 230 THOUSAND
VIEWS ON TIKTOK.

It proves once again that collaborating with bloggers is a great way to attract the attention of a new audience, which may share your views, but does not know about your organization yet. That is why civil society organizations should not be afraid to work with famous bloggers as it is a very effective channel of communication. We hope that the experience of Kyrgyz Indigo will inspire you to give it a try!



Любовь есть любовь ...

Besides, lately Kyrgyz Indigo has had great achievements in the area of HIV prevention and advocacy. Those are some of the successfully implemented cases:

HIV PREVENTION IN KEY POPULATIONS:

The Kyrgyz Indigo team was engaged in the process of editing and revision of the Regulation on the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM).

CCM is an advisory body at the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, which was created to coordinate and improve the activities of central and local executive bodies, international and national civil society organizations, including faith-based and educational organizations, mass media, and other legal entities irrespective of their form of ownership, which are involved in HIV/AIDS and TB response.

As a result of such efforts, trans* people were defined as a separate group in CCM. It means that trans* people will be able to engage in CCM voting and strategic planning processes as well as in developing national and international programs to protect the health of key populations.

For the first time, a biobehavioral study was held in the Kyrgyz trans* community. The study will allow assessing the risks of HIV infection among trans* people and estimate their number. Kyrgyz Indigo provided technical support in reviewing the documents, recruiting people from the trans* community and sharing information to organize this community-led study.

Besides, Kyrgyz Indigo was involved in developing a plan to mitigate the negative consequences of COVID-19 for HIV and TB programs.

ADVOCACY:

In May 2022, Kyrgyz Indigo filed a petition with the Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan saying that the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On acts of civil status”, which restricts the right of trans* people to change their gender marker, was unconstitutional.

Intersectional gender advocacy is gaining momentum: currently, Kyrgyz Indigo is carrying out the first large-scale study on LBQT+ women.

ECOM is very proud that those changes, important for the whole LGBT community in the region, are taking place in Kyrgyzstan. Besides, we are very happy that civil society is getting engaged in the governmental processes. That is a great example for all of us.

Story 7.

Labrys NGO

Labrys NGO is a community platform with human rights and advocacy tools, which is led by different generations of activists to protect the rights of LGBT+ communities in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

It is one more ECOM member covering a range of areas, one of which is working with youth.

Labrys has a very interesting experience in this area as it was the organizer of the five-day Factory of Activism. This activity helped to build the capacity of young activists as they were able to learn more about the work of Labrys and received a lot of new and useful information about activism in general.

Some alumni of the Factory joined the organization as volunteers. As a result, Labrys team now has proactive, inspired and responsible volunteers, who to this day invest their time and efforts in the development of Labrys activities as well as their personal potential.

In addition to working with young people so that they can become volunteers of the organization, Labrys has many years of experience in developing the trans* community.

Recently, Labrys organized a meeting attended by trans* activists, their parents and allies. This meeting became a platform to analyze the situation, understand the roles and build joint plans within the national trans* advocacy. After this meeting, Labrys together with trans* activists organized a series of mini sessions for health workers in different regions of Kyrgyzstan.

For two weeks, trans* activists were visiting a wide range of regional hospitals, polyclinics, private and state-run clinics to talk to health workers and try to change their attitude to trans* people and make their professional services more inclusive, sensitive and understanding.

ECOM IS CONVINCED THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF LABRYS CAN SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER NGOS IN THEIR REGIONS.



ARMEN

ARMEN

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MENIA

ARMEN

MENIA

Story 8.

DiverCity

DiverCity is a social, cultural and human rights organization.

In summer, DiverCity made a series of podcasts #5PrideStories with five representatives of the LGBT community dedicated to the Pride Month.

The goal of those podcasts was to raise the awareness of the LGBTQ people. The experience shared by the participants with their own voices and their personal stories were a great way to change the attitude to LGBT people. We are happy that ECOM members use new unconventional methods to share their messages.

You can listen to the five best podcasts #5PrideStories published by The Voice of Diversity with LGBTQ+ people as hosts here: <https://divercity.am/87280/?lang=ru>

ROBERT CARR FUND For civil society networks

ECOM

DIVERCITY

The Voice of Diversity

5 PRIDE STORIES

The series of podcasts "5 Pride Stories" was created by the support of ECOM (The Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity) and the financial support of Robert Carr Fund for Civil Society Networks (CSF), dedicated especially to the day of struggle against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (#IDAHOBIT2022).

#DiverCityNGO #Բազմազանություն Կ #5PrideStories

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Story 9.

National Trans* Coalition

The National Trans* Coalition is a human rights NGO, which is fighting for the rights of trans* people.

The National Trans* Coalition decided to use their skills and knowledge to reduce stigma through social media.

It made a series of videos about trans* people, which it shared on its TikTok channel: <https://www.tiktok.com/@national.transcoalition>

The new platform welcomed the National Trans* Coalition as there are not so many videos on this topic on TikTok, so this niche is not yet taken.

Now there are nine videos with popular questions to trans* people on the TikTok channel of the Coalition, but that's not all.

In total, those videos got over one million views, and that is a great change for our community!

It shows again that we should not be afraid of using new platforms and opportunities in our work.



#pride #trans ...



@monasi2

Story 10.

New Generation NGO

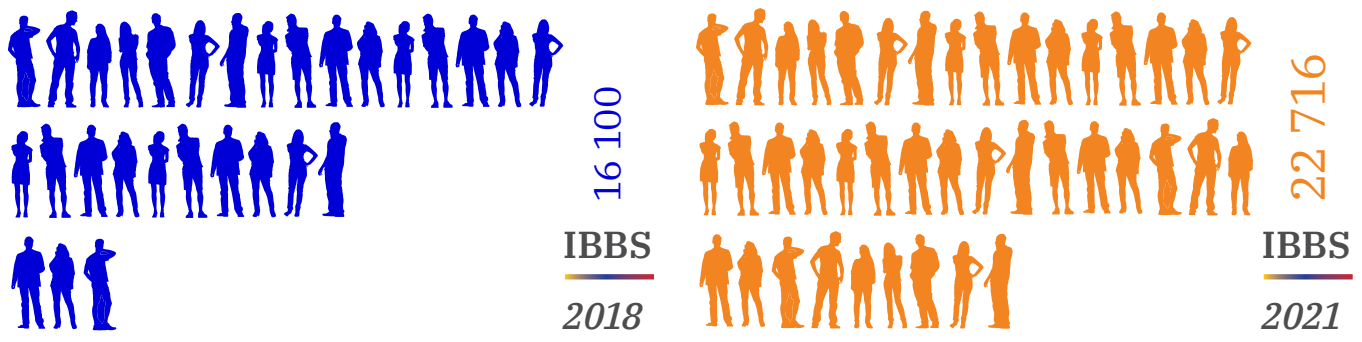
New Generation NGO is a humanitarian civil society organization, which strives for the equality of rights, fairness, diversity, dignity and well-being by protecting human rights and ensuring access to the right to health and community capacity building.

The organization has 25 years of experience. It is the biggest community organization in Armenia.

New Generation NGO has great achievements in advocacy at the national level. It was able to increase the estimated number of MSM by 41%!

According to the results of the integrated biobehavioral study **IBBS-2018**, the estimated number of MSM in Armenia was **16,100 people**, which failed to reflect the real picture. Even the UNAIDS estimates in 2020 showed that the global median of adult men who have sex with men was 1.9%.

That is why New Generation NGO did a tremendous work at the country level when **IBBS-2021** was conducted, which led to the consensus that the estimated number of MSM in the country was **22,716**. It meant an increase in the estimated number of this group by 6,616 people or 41%.



One of the arguments used in advocacy was review of the HIV prevention and treatment cascade for MSM, which had been prepared by New Generation NGO with support of ECOM.

It is a very important result of the work of our members and partners as the increased estimated number of MSM will contribute to:

- ▮ Increase in the funding of HIV prevention services for MSM;
- ▮ Sustainability and uninterrupted provision of HIV prevention services;
- ▮ Review of the objectives of the current prevention project implemented within the country Global Fund grant in Armenia;
- ▮ More effective planning of HIV prevention and treatment activities among MSM in new projects and the national program in Armenia.

RUSSIA

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Story 11.

Parni.Plus

Parni.Plus website covers such an important area of activities as offering a queer media for Russian-speaking LGBT people.

This summer, Parni.Plus joined an information campaign dedicated to the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) launched by ECOM and released a series of articles and video interviews (available in Russian):

Article “20th century – the most homophobic century” (<https://parniplus.com/lgbt-movement/hh-vek-samyj-gomofobnyj-vek/>), telling about the history of homosexuality depathologization. This article was dedicated to May 17, and the article “17.05.1990” (<https://clck.ru/rgbFx>) is telling the story of this prominent day.

XX век — самый гомофобный век

0 00:00

ECOMent Facebook Twitter



There is also a series of interesting interviews released on Parni.Plus website within the campaign:

- Interview with a homophobe Timur Bulatov (<https://youtu.be/Lexi4Brtaac>)
- Only recommended to people with the nerves of steel as it contains a huge flow of homophobic statements.
- Interview with a city council member Sergey Troshin (<https://clck.ru/rgbH2>), who is the first acting deputy in Russia who came out as gay.

Information activities are an important part of work to support the LGBT community as it is crucial to have media speaking about the LGBT community and created by the community members. It is a very positive trend that the community now has such queer media.

