



# Eurasian Coalition on Male Health Annual Report for 2014

Eurasian Coalition on Male Health  
Annual Report for 2014

The document is produced by ECOM—Eurasian Coalition on Male Health, a network of organizations and activists working in the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. We aim to create favourable conditions to ensure that men who have sex with men and transgender people have access to services in the field of sexual and reproductive health, including HIV that is based on evidence and respect for their human rights.



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## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2014

The Eurasian Coalition on Male Health (ECOM) is an international non-governmental association, located in Tallinn, Estonia, working in the field of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention, treatment, care and support for men who have sexual relations with other men (MSM) and transgender people, in the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). Currently, the network is made up of 45 members from 12 countries, ranging from Latvia to Kyrgyzstan. ECOM seeks to create favorable conditions in the EECA region to ensure that MSM and transgender people have access to services in the field of sexual and reproductive health, mainly related but not limited to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, and that those services are evidence-based and human rights oriented.

ECOM is pleased to present a report on its activities in 2014. This report comprises five main areas of activities: (1) development of ECOM's network and communications strategy; (2) project deliverables related to grants from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF); (3) organizational development; (4) advocacy and capacity building; and (5) challenges in development.

### I. Development of ECOM's Network and Communications Strategy

As ECOM is a coalition of other member organizations and individuals, strengthening ECOM's network and developing communication between members is one of our highest priorities. To this end, during 2014, ECOM has worked to increase cohesion and facilitate communication between the Secretariat and ECOM's members. Through the use of social media, such as Facebook, vkontakte, and Twitter, ECOM is able to disseminate a wide variety of relevant information to its members. ECOM has advertised job postings and internships, sent communications about Global Fund, UNAIDS, and MSMGF initiatives, and has also circulated relevant articles about current events related to HIV and human rights.

ECOM was also pleased to launch its new website, [www.ecomnetwork.org](http://www.ecomnetwork.org). The website is an invaluable tool, as it provides ECOM with a single platform to release documents, post articles and links, and to provide interested parties with relevant information about the organization's activities and structure. In addition, the new website contains a social media element, as ECOM members can create profiles and use the site to interact with one another. As ECOM grows and increases both its activities and members, the website will be essential to ensuring a strong and centralized communications framework.

This past year, ECOM has concentrated efforts on developing and expanding its network. Members of the ECOM's Steering Committee have implemented a procedure for individuals or organizations applying to become ECOM members. This process will help to streamline future applications. Recently, ECOM has added members from Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia.

## **II. Project Deliverables Related to UNDP, UNFPA, MSMGF Grants**

ECOM operates thanks to generous grants from the UNFPA, UNDP, and MSMGF. Much of ECOM's fall activities were devoted to the planning of a regional consultation "Partnership for Healthy Communities: Regional Civil Society and Government Consultations on MSM and Transgender People in the Context of HIV and Health in Eastern Europe and Central Asia." The consultation took place on November 29 in Chisinau, Moldova. ECOM coordinated a process of national level discussions among the network members to collectively nominate over 20 representatives from Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia for participation at the consultation. Together they represented MSM and LGBT organizations, as well as national governments and UN agencies.

Over the course of the consultation, the participants discussed global HIV initiatives and regional and national human rights instruments. Participants also evaluated the human rights and public health situations in the region and called for greater human rights protections and access to treatment for people living with HIV. It was agreed that community empowerment, access to public health services, and sensitization towards LGBT issues are essential to promoting the health and human rights of people living with HIV. In addition, discrimination, anti-gay and anti-HIV stigma, as well as violence were cited as significant obstacles to achieving equal rights and access to care for the MSM community. The consultation allowed participants to make practical recommendations to inform ECOM's future human rights work and identify key steps towards improving the human rights and public health environments in the region.

ECOM has also been in the process of preparing an analytical report on the status of MSM and transgender engagement with the Global Fund new funding model and national HIV/AIDS planning processes. In order to effectively carry out this project, ECOM drafted a monitoring tool to collect information at the national level on the status of MSM and transgender engagement in the Global Fund country dialogue process. Informal monitors from Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Ukraine collected data on the subject and submitted reports, which will be used to inform ECOM's final analytical report. The report, which will be finalized in January, will be published on ECOM's website. The report will be used to identify key areas for ECOM's future activities and provide a basis for additional analytical reports.

## **III. Organizational Development**

In order to increase ECOM's capacity and ability to effectively carry out and implement its programs and activities, much focus was placed on the organizational development of ECOM this year.

ECOM's Secretariat supported the network members in going through the democratic process of elections for the first round of membership for the new governing structure, an elected Steering Committee. The Steering Committee's main

role will be to provide strategic leadership to ECOM and oversee its operations. The Steering Committee is an essential structure for the future success of ECOM because it embodies the voice and the vision of all of ECOM's members. The whole process leading towards the Steering Committee becoming functional consisted of a collaborative procedure to draft the Steering Committee's Charter, which outlines its roles and responsibilities, implementing the online technical solution for the elections, collecting nominations and organizing discussions around the nominations, and, finally, organizing the voting process.

The Steering Committee became operational in June and started functioning immediately through an internal listserv and teleconferences. The first face-to-face meeting, that took place in Tallinn, Estonia, in August, had the ambitious goals to build a consistent vision of ECOM's brand and role in the region, including a review of its Strategic Plan, to review and revise the organizations' main projects and project outcomes, to discuss a fundraising and a communication strategy and, more generally, to provide the Secretariat with guidance for its work.

With guidance from the Steering Committee, ECOM has been working on building an Internal Management and Policy Manual, which is crucial for a stable functioning of ECOM's operations.

In September of this year, ECOM was able to secure a grant from the UNFPA in order to expand its staff. ECOM hired a new Program and Advocacy Officer, responsible for contributing to ECOM's programs through network facilitation, knowledge gathering and management, advocacy and partnership development. Marcus Oda, an American-trained attorney, was hired and has joined ECOM as a committed member of its Secretariat.

In The Secretariat moved into a larger and newly renovated office. The move was a welcome change and provides ECOM's Secretariat with a spacious and professional working environment.

In December, ECOM secured a small grant together with a consortium of MSM regional networks and MSMGF that will allow the group to work on advancing MSM representation in national country dialogue processes.

#### **IV. Advocacy and Capacity Building**

A large portion of ECOM's activities are devoted to advocacy work and building the capacity of its members. To this end, ECOM has implemented a wide range of initiatives over the past year and has also supported the activities of its partner organizations.

ECOM was invited to provide input into a consultation on "Implementation and Operational Research Priorities for Strengthening Access to Care and Treatment Services for MSM living with HIV". The meeting informed the programmatic and research agenda on increasing engagement in the HIV treatment cascade for gay men and other MSM in low- and middle-income countries, including optimizing provision and mitigating barriers to services. In addition, the participants provided input for WHO

consolidated guidelines on HIV prevention, care and treatment for key populations, which was launched at the International AIDS Conference in July 2014.

ECOM maintained an active advocacy program and responded to important legal developments related to LGBT rights in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In October, ECOM supported an Estonian bill recognizing same-sex partnerships in Estonia and was thrilled when the Estonian Parliament passed the measure. ECOM also issued statements decrying a proposed anti-gay propaganda bill that was under consideration in Kyrgyzstan.

During September, ECOM was represented in the European yearly meeting of MSM experts and activists organized and hosted by Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, one of the leading European organizations working in HIV prevention, care and support for MSM. The meeting was a good forum of exchange of recent updates (such as on PreP and PreP's future in Europe, HIV home-testing and self-testing initiatives) and of ideas and possible common pan-European projects, such as exploring the possibility of an online platform with cross-national resources for MSM tourists and migrants.

In November, ECOM was glad to provide financial support to the organizers of the 2nd Regional practical Conference "Eurasian Trans Health" in Moscow.

ECOM was invited to share its unique experience and perspective on the impact of human rights infringements on the personal access of LGBT people to health services during a panel in an UNAIDS regional meeting on the inclusion of human rights in the agenda of national HIV planning processes and strategies, organized in November, in Yerevan, Armenia.

During the second half of the year, ECOM was contributing to the development of a tool to operationalize the Consolidated Guidelines on Prevention and Treatment of HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections for Key Populations in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, which was launched by WHO, UNFPA and UNAIDS in July 2014. The Guidance will be published in spring 2015 and will set out recommendations for effective interventions among men who have sex with men and other key populations. It will be intended for use by public health officials, managers of HIV and STI programs, community-based organizations and civil society stakeholders.

In November, ECOM released a Call to Action document, "Addressing the Health Needs of Men Vulnerable to HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia." The document explores the key factors that place the MSM communities of Eastern Europe and Central Asia at greater risk for HIV infection and offers a detailed discussion about HIV prevention strategies for MSM and about harmful policies and practices that limit MSM access to HIV care. The document is being distributed to stakeholders, including NGOs, government ministries, and other interested individuals.

In December, ECOM agreed to join efforts in an initiative to contribute to the increase of public funding for sustainability, quality and availability of HIV testing, treatment and support services for key populations in the EECA region. ECOM, the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN), the East Europe & Central Asia Union of People Living with HIV (ECUO), and five other regional organizations joined the initiative and signed a Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation.

Throughout the year, ECOM was invited to participate in the working group for planning and organization of European HIV Testing Week 2014 and provided input during the working group's teleconference calls and face-to-face meeting. ECOM actively promoted the campaign to its members and provided direct technical support to a Ukrainian organization on how to organize successful community testing outreach activities.



## V. Impementation of ECOM's Strategic Plan

Strategic Objectives	Project objectives	Results	Resources	Key partners	Gaps and recommendations
Setting up communication systems that allow the coalition to work effectively in the field of programs, organizational development and advocacy for MSM and TG-service and LGBT organizations.	Strengthened community responses via consolidated mechanisms for information exchange, community mobilization, and awareness-raising through media outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created and developed ECOM's new website which provides a platform to highlight ECOM's members and their activities and to share information and resources;</li> <li>• Engaged audiences on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter);</li> <li>• Provided frequent updates to ECOM's members using email groups on HIV and human rights related news, available resources and grant opportunities;</li> <li>• Engaged ECOM's members in working groups using email, phone and Skype to inform strategies and decisions;</li> <li>• Participated and provided input in regional and global initiatives relevant to improving access of MSM/Trans to HIV services;</li> <li>• Co-signed petitions, expressing support for joint advocacy actions and took public positions on political human rights developments relevant to LGBT people</li> </ul>	Funding from ECOM's core operational grant (MSMGF project), volunteer time contribution	MSMGF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An analysis of the effectiveness of ECOM's email group through personal interviews with members and a survey of their communication habits;</li> <li>• A collection of detailed contact information of all ECOM members;</li> <li>• Setting up an emergency response and update system based on simple and fast channels – SMS, Whatsapp (depending on the results of the survey);</li> </ul>

Strategic Objectives	Project objectives	Results	Resources	Key partners	Gaps and recommendations
<p>Capacity building for members of the Coalition of their program activities for the implementation of services in the field of health and MSM and TG through improving conditions for the implementation of these services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthened community responses via consolidated mechanisms for information exchange, community mobilization, and awareness-raising through media outreach.</li> <li>• Improving dialogue between LGBT community and national governments in the area of responses to HIV epidemic among MSM and TG.</li> <li>• Promotion of universal access to scientifically-based and cost-efficient HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services for MSM/TG.</li> <li>• Promotion of sexual health agenda for LGBT movements.</li> <li>• Strengthening partnerships and promoting regional and national collaborations through the development of mutually agreed priorities and actions.</li> <li>• Exploring opportunities for cooperation and synergies with other regional initiatives in HIV and rights, supported by UN agencies, such as the Regional HIV Legal Network.</li> <li>• Producing narrow outputs that contribute to UNFPA objectives for improved advocacy and rights-based responses to the needs of MSM and TG people: analytical reports, training, national/regional meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported ECOM's members with frequent information updates regarding available resources, reports, scientific articles, conferences and trainings;</li> <li>• Facilitated dialogue between organizations working in HIV and human rights for LGBT/MSM/Trans and national government representatives, including cross country exchanges, facilitating peer learning and support and fostering new partnerships;</li> <li>• Produced documents which analyse the current situation of MSM representation and involvement in Global Fund country dialogue processes and which provide an advocacy tool for calling out for national governments to devote more and better attention to the threat of HIV among MSM and Trans people.</li> </ul>	<p>Funding from MSMGF project, UNDP Micro grant, UNFPA grant</p>	<p>MSMGF, UN (UNAIDS, UNFPA, WHO), regional MSM networks, European CDC, various European organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore practical ways to increase capacity of ECOM's members through assessing capacity building needs (see above, as part of improving communication within the network), specific topic webinars, organizing training events and national and/or regional level;</li> <li>• Exploring the possibility to provide more opportunities for caucusing and coordination at national level for a stronger and better MSM response and representation in country dialogue processes and national HIV plans;</li> <li>• Concluding a MoU with the Regional HIV Legal Network outlining joint activities at regional and national level.</li> </ul>

Strategic Objectives	Project objectives	Results	Resources	Key partners	Gaps and recommendations
Mobilization of resources for the operation and development of the Coalition and its members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidified organizational capacity of MSM networks.</li> <li>• Strengthened community responses via consolidated mechanisms for information exchange, community mobilization, and awareness-raising through media outreach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secured two grants from UNFPA and RCNF to increase ECOM's capacity and responsiveness to the needs of the network;</li> <li>• Provided the network members with information on various opportunities for learning, accessing funding, participation in wider regional and global initiatives.</li> </ul>	UNFPA grant, MSMGF core operational grant	European HIV Testing Week, AHF, MSMGF, AMFAR, UNAIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to work on the fundraising strategy drafted during ECOM's first Steering Committee meeting by adding a specific work plan and outlining financial resources needed.</li> <li>• Increase understanding of nationally specific funding opportunities and ECOM's member work specificities for a better access to focused funding opportunities.</li> </ul>
Development of the organizational structure of the Coalition (registration procedures, law, management, human resources).	Solidified organizational capacity of MSM networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased member's participation into leadership by electing a Steering Committee which provides leadership, vision and guides the implementation of the Strategic Plan;</li> <li>• Designed and implemented transparent financial procedures for contracting, making payments, recording expenses;</li> <li>• Drafted ECOM's internal policy and procedures manual for a more effective management of the organization;</li> <li>• Identified and procured a more appropriate office for ECOM's Secretariat and renovated and equipped it;</li> </ul> Renegotiated the core operational grant with the main donor for an improved calendar of tranches to optimise ECOM's cash flow.	MSMGF core operational grant	EHPV	Finalize the endorsement and the adoption of the policy and procedures manual, including a staff appraisal strategy.

## VI. Challenges in Development

Although ECOM is proud to have enjoyed a number of successes over the past year, it has also encountered several challenges that must be addressed in 2015.

One of the major challenges involves communication between the Secretariat, Steering Committee and ECOM members. Due to the nature of ECOM's structure as an organization made of up individual organizational members, communication within the coalition often poses challenges. Key communication problems often include untimely information, lack of responsiveness and slow dialogue between these three structures. In order to address this issue, ECOM will assess a number of approaches, such as updating its member list, revamping existing communication channels or using alternative ones, such as social media sites or ECOM's own website, to improve communication within the organization.

Another challenge faced by ECOM at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015 was the unexpected departure of ECOM's Executive Director, Tudor Kovacs. Unfortunately, he left ECOM after a little less than a year and ECOM was without a director for the first two months of 2015. Vitaly Djuma was named as the new Executive Director starting March 1, 2015. He will bring experience and enthusiasm to the position. However, as with any transition of this nature, it may take some time before operations are fully integrated again.

Nevertheless, ECOM is cognizant of the challenges it faces and will continue to work to overcome them during 2015.