



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR

2022
2026

*ECOM — Eurasian Coalition on Health,
Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity*



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INTRODUCTION

Today, among LGBT+ communities and allies, there is already significant experience and knowledge, as well as activists, opinion leaders and volunteers. The issue of LGBT+ rights and health and gender policy are firmly on the agenda in countries of the region, with a growing number of parliamentarians, practitioners and government officials working on these issues in most countries. Not only is the LGBT+ entertainment industry developing, but also friendly physical and mental health, education and tourism services. The region is home to a wide range of humanitarian community organizations, from the local to international (regional) levels. There is a growing body of research on health, rights, and LGBT+ subculture. The community is actively using social media, and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the development of the digitalization of social support services. All this allows us to set ambitious goals for the protection of the health and rights of LGBT+ people, and to develop the community's capacity to protect its members.

ECOM is the leading regional LGBT+ community organization in EECA. It actively works on issues related to the health and rights of gay men, other MSM and trans people. Over the 11 years of its existence, ECOM has raised approximately \$10 million from international donors, which has been used to build the capacity of national and local community organizations, advocate for amending homophobic laws, improve the quality of data on the needs of the community, and to protect community activists in the EECA region.

Nevertheless...

According to research, from 1 to 3.8% of the adult population are LGBT+ people¹. And if so, then there are more than 4 million LGBT+ people in the EECA region. If 15%² of us are HIV-positive, then 600,000 people in our community are living with HIV, and not all of those hundreds of thousands are aware of their HIV-positive status, which means that not everyone is able to receive treatment to protect their health. Unfortunately, much data on this and on other issues related to LGBT+ health and rights is still missing as EECA governments continue to downplay or ignore the needs of the LGBT+ community.

Around the world and in the EECA region, growing populism and conservatism is affecting the LGBT+ community, its activists, and opinion leaders, putting them at greater risk of stigma, violence and threats to their health. At the same time, funding conditions for ECOM and its members are changing due to the reduction in international funding for non-governmental organizations in EECA countries, economic restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and from the insufficient development of national health and economic policies.

¹ https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2020-rEKOMmended-population-size-estimates-of-men-who-have-sex-with-men_en.pdf и <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/how-many-people-lgbt/>

² «The HIV Treatment Cascade for MSM in the Countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia», ECOM, 2019.

Since the early 1990s, thanks to international funding, EECA countries have involved patients and other HIV-affected populations in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of HIV programs. Now that funding for the HIV response is shifting from international to national sources, primarily the state, there is an increasing focus on medical and pharmaceutical interventions at the expense of social care and support, such as the prevention of human rights violations and discrimination against LGBT+ people, and the strengthening of LGBT+ community systems. At the same time, the system of medical care in EECA countries is still underdeveloped and cannot provide residents of these countries with universal access to health care services. One of the main reasons for this is the significant inequality between different groups of the population in access not only to medical care, but also to social support and legal protection.

Much work remains to be done in EECA countries to provide the LGBT+ community access to universal health care services on an equal basis with other population groups.

In 2021, a new Global AIDS Strategy for 2021-2026 was adopted specifically to address inequities in access to HIV-related health services. The similarity of ECOM's vision of these issues with that of the global expert community allows us to count on fruitful cooperation with international and national structures. The evolving, albeit often polarized, discourse on gender and sexuality and their implications for human rights and health issues also provide ECOM and its members with opportunities for development and leadership.

In the face of increasing pressure caused by homophobia and new social challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the growth of labor migration and the number of refugees, the problem of affordable housing, the use of community members in politics, the increase in the number and severity of mental health risks, the intensification of the persecution of community activists, etc., solidarity within the LGBT+ community in EECA is also growing.

At the same time, within LGBTI communities in EECA countries, there are also divisive tendencies that may be the result of interstate conflicts, such as Russia's armed intervention against Ukraine, Russia against Georgia, and conflicts between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan, etc. The combination of unifying tendencies and conflicts in EECA is one of the major challenges that complicates the work of the Coalition.

The activity of many ECOM members was initially associated with the prevention and treatment of HIV infection and STIs, as well as with issues of gender transition. After some success in the fight against infections and the establishment of cooperation with doctors, ECOM members began to pay more attention to involving LGBT+ people in the protection of their human rights. Today, hundreds of thousands of LGBT+ people in EECA countries have experienced living with HIV and/or treatment for STIs, navigating an unfriendly medical system, and have faced violence, discrimination and humiliation. This experience is used to develop community systems that allow them to interact with local and national governments and networks of other communities in order to protect themselves.



MISSION






ECOM's mission is to support the development of national LGBT+ communities and their activism, promote human rights, and to protect the health and social well-being of gender- and sexually diverse people in Eastern Europe and Central Asia



ECOM'S VALUES

Values are the basic, ethical norms that ECOM members are convinced are correct and importance, and that will not change due to external conditions or the possibility of obtaining more funding.

The following values form the basis of the very idea of ECOM and all of its work:

-  Commitment to human rights.
-  Confidence in the importance of the knowledge and experience of the LGBT+ community, and in the need to study and preserve such knowledge and experience.
-  The need for community organizations to be accountable and open to the community at large.
-  The importance of protecting diversity as a basis for development.
-  The importance of community collaboration and solidarity to achieve meaningful change.



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The vision for the future describes what ECOM is working for, what kind of society it wants to build, and how the Coalition sees itself in the future. In addition, the changes described here may become topics for ECOM's projects and programs.



ECOM

In 15-20 years, ECOM will be a sustainable and influential LGBT+ community network, bringing together a significant number of national activists and community organizations in the EECA region. ECOM will support national communities and governments in the development and evaluation of strategies and programs for the protection of health and rights, cooperate with state and international institutions and organizations, the media and media personalities, and will provide technical and other support in matters related to the health, human rights, gender, sexuality and other issues for LGBT+ people.



COMMUNITY OF GENDER- AND SEXUALLY DIVERSE PEOPLE

In 15-20 years, most community members will have sufficient knowledge, skills, and support from the community as a whole to protect themselves, their partners, loved ones, and families from the negative effects of HIV and STIs, including by protecting against human rights violations and promoting gender-transformative policies and practices. Each EECA country will have LGBT+ community networks, activists and service organizations actively working and cooperating with ECOM. National LGBT+ community activists and organizations will conduct advocacy and other cooperation with national governments to protect the human rights, the sexual, reproductive, and mental health, and social well-being of the community. Community organizations will collaborate with universities and scientific organizations for research and knowledge management. Community organizations will have sustainable financial support from the state, international charitable organizations and the community itself.

GOVERNMENTS AND THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Over the next 15-20 years, national governments and local administrations will actively cooperate with LGBT+ community organizations in the long term, and use them as platforms for working with LGBT+ people. Funding from the government and local administrations will be available to LGBT+ community organizations on an equal basis with other non-governmental organizations in the country, ensuring the sustainability of community organizations. The governments of EECA countries will regularly collect, analyze and publish information on the health, safety and social well-being of LGBT+ people and use this information to make their decisions. Government-recognized national experts on issues related to LGBT+ rights and health will exist in the country. Existing laws and law enforcement practices will protect LGBT+ people from violence and discrimination on an equal basis with other population groups.

STRATEGY FOR 2022-2026

GOAL

The goal defines the main change in the situation that ECOM plans to make during the period of this Strategic Plan.



ECOM'S GOAL FOR 2022-2026

Ensure sustained and active attention to LGBT+ health and human rights issues in national and international policies and programs, including the necessary funding and technical support for the development of community organizations in the countries of the EECA region.

Strategic objectives describe the areas of work and results that are important in order to achieve the goal.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1. HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

Support the sustainable development of effective LGBT+ community organizations and initiative groups working in the field of human rights protection in each country of the region, taking into account national specifics.

IMPACT INDICATORS:

- ✓ In at least 70% of countries in the region, community organizations and initiative groups conduct and/or participate in regular (once a year or every 2 years) collection, analysis and publication of disaggregated data on the needs of representatives of the LGBT+ community in relation to human rights protection, the availability of human rights services, and the quality of these services.
- ✓ At least 70% of members of the LGBT+ community have continued access to effective assistance and support to protect their human rights and to protect against the risks of discrimination.
- ✓ At least 50% of the countries in the EECA region have adopted laws and introduced enforcement practices to protect LGBT+ people from human rights violations and discrimination on an equal basis with other citizens (protection from rights violations and discrimination based on sexuality, gender and gender expression).
- ✓ At least 50% of countries in the region have depathologized transgender identity, in accordance with the provisions of ICD-11.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2. SEXUAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Develop the ability to effectively protect sexual and mental health, including in connection with HIV infection, STIs, and other issues, within the LGBT+ community.

- ✓ In at least 70% of countries in the region, community organizations and initiative groups conduct and/or participate in regular (once a year or every 2 years) collection, analysis and publication of disaggregated data on the needs of members of the LGBT+ community in relation to sexual and mental health, their access to health and human rights services, and the quality of these services.
- ✓ At least 60% of trans* people, gay men and other MSM in EECA countries have continued access to:
 - information, support, prevention and treatment in connection with HIV, infectious hepatitis and other STIs, based on WHO recommendations.
 - WHO-based information, support, prevention and treatment for mental health, including substance abuse and other addictions.
 - information, support and assistance in relation to violence, including the availability of safe places of temporary residence (shelters).
- ✓ At least 80% of EECA countries have all the following conditions for the meaningful participation of LGBT+ community activists and organizations in the development and implementation of national sexual health programs:
 - An effective, institutionalized system at the state level for the participation of LGBT+ representatives in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of health care programs.
 - Inclusion of objectives and funding in a social order for work with LGBT+ people in connection with HIV, hepatitis B and C and other STIs, and mental health, and the possibility of equal participation of LGBT+ community organizations in the implementation of this social order.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3. DEVELOPMENT OF ECOM

Develop ECOM as an influential international (regional) LGBT+ community network that operates based on human rights and best management practices.

IMPACT INDICATORS:

- ✓ The number of ECOM members increased by 40% with representation from all countries of the region.
- ✓ at least 70% of all of ECOM's programs and projects will be aimed at introducing the best international practices at the national level,
- ✓ at least 40% of all of ECOM's project ideas will be funded.

APPROACHES TO WORK

Approaches are collections of tactics that will be used to achieve the established objectives. Depending on the availability of resources, each of the described approaches can be implemented as a separate long-term project (program), or as a component of many projects implemented successively. In addition, the list of approaches determines the competencies that employees and experts involved in ECOM's work should have.

DEVELOPMENT OF A POSITIVE REPUTATION

ECOM strives to make the work of LGBT+ community organizations as visible and recognizable as possible, and thereby increase the attention of donors and international organizations, primarily those that cooperate with national governments, to these organizations in the EECA region. In addition, ECOM, in cooperation with national community organizations, will develop and maintain an agenda and coordination mechanisms with national and local authorities, and promote community organizations as effective and flexible partners for state and municipal structures in anti-epidemic work among marginalized populations, including issues such as migration, drug use, the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty, mental health, violence and others.

Both partnerships with like-minded people, and relationships with opponents depend on reputation. ECOM and its members should strive to have a strong reputation as an organization that is honest, open to criticism, attentive to the needs of others, and that cares sincerely about the community.

All of ECOM's work, including technical support, community representation, information campaigns, research and advocacy, should not only benefit members of the LGBT+ community, but also strengthen the positive reputation of ECOM and its members.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

ECOM will provide technical support and promote best practices in organizational and program development of public organizations as the primary form of assistance to national community organizations. By doing this, ECOM aims to increase the programmatic and financial effectiveness of LGBT+ community organizations, as well as their credibility among the LGBT+ community as a whole, national governments and local administrations. Technical support is a key mechanism for helping the LGBT+ community in countries as ECOM is an international structure that does not replace national community systems, but rather strengthens and protects them.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND INNOVATION

Advocacy work, as part of knowledge management, is aimed at making effective decisions. To this end, ECOM will facilitate the regular collection and wide publication of reliable and complete information on the needs of LGBT+ communities in the fields of sexual and mental health, trans health, and human rights.

All of ECOM's projects will focus on data quality, data security, and the effective use of data for advocacy and other collaboration with partners, and for the overall development of the community.

Innovations, especially those that have already been successfully tested and recommended by experts (for example, the WHO) for widespread use can not only increase efficiency, but also establish the basis for cooperation between community organizations and government institutions. All of ECOM's projects will include information on existing innovative approaches and practices and, where possible, will propose the implementation of such approaches.

PROACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF ECOM MEMBERS

Active coalition members are ECOM's most important resource. ECOM will continue to strengthen the participation of existing members and attract new ones in order to have representation from all countries of the EECA region and all LGBT+ subgroups, thereby increasing its political resources and its capabilities as an international (regional) network/coalition. The main tools for increasing the activity and interest of members will be: attracting new financial resources to the region, offering ECOM members a mutual exchange of experience (training), support for joint projects of ECOM members, support for participation in conferences and other meetings, technical support in program work and organizational development, the development of common mechanisms for the protection of activists and community organizations in cases of violence and/or other forms of persecution, and the creation of tools to ensure the sustainability of the activities of community organizations.

ECOM members should become the main initiators of ECOM's projects and programs and active participants in their implementation. To do this, ECOM needs a strong and active Board that maintains close and productive relationships with existing members of ECOM, and with those who could potentially become members of the Coalition. In addition, all projects implemented by ECOM should include components and resources for cooperation between ECOM members from different countries and different subgroups of the community, and to ensure their security and development.

PARTNERSHIP TO INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES (MATERIAL, INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL/POLITICAL)

ECOM needs stable links and mutual assistance both with networks of other communities and with donors and expert structures. By collecting and disseminating information about the needs of the community, new behavioral and situational trends, and about how the interests of the LGBT+ and other communities intersect, ECOM will contribute to the work of expert and donor organizations, including governmental bodies, and offer them the opportunity to obtain new data and improve the effectiveness of their investments.

In order to improve the effectiveness of partners' investments, ECOM will pay special attention to identifying and documenting the best practices of local administrations, NGOs, institutions, national governments and international organizations in order to help partners stop investing in approaches and methods that do not work. In addition, ECOM has and will continue to develop its capacity for the provision of technical assistance aimed at strengthening the capacity and work of partners, and involve ECOM members in this work.

INTERNAL SYSTEMS

In order to ensure transparency and effectiveness in planning and managing work, ECOM already has and will continue to develop a set of simple and open regulatory documents, policies, procedures, and recommendations. A well-functioning internal mechanism for decision-making and managing people, finances and information is an important resource for ECOM. This resource needs to be maintained and strengthened, which is an important task for the Board and the Executive Director of ECOM's Secretariat. It is equally important that ECOM members clearly understand the rules for the functioning of the Coalition. This will allow them to participate responsibly in decision-making, and can also be a useful example for the development of national community organizations.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Finance is an essential tool for ECOM's work. Today, the availability of funding for the operation of non-profit LGBT+ organizations is limited and may continue to decline in the future. As part of the development of its financial policy, ECOM will not only continue to ensure the security of the funds received and the transparency of their use, but will also look for ways to reduce costs while maintaining quality, and determine the possibility of significantly increasing effectiveness and quality with modest additional investments.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND THEIR MITIGATION

The list of risks will be used to plan projects and strengthen ECOM's internal systems to create a safe working environment for ECOM staff and volunteers, and to reduce both political and financial risks for ECOM's beneficiaries, partners and donors.



RISK: Reduction in international funding available for HIV work and to support community organizations in the EECA region.

Approaches to mitigate this risk:

- ✓✓ Diversification of funding sources for ECOM and its members. Avoidance of depending on one source of resources (donor).
- ✓✓ Development of a fundraising strategy. Ongoing analysis of the availability of resources for certain work.
- ✓✓ Development of fundraising skills among ECOM's staff and its member organizations.
- ✓✓ Diversification of fundraising methods, including participation in international grant competitions, as well as crowdfunding, cooperation with commercial organizations, participation in government NGO support programs and social order competitions, etc.
- ✓✓ Development of partnerships, and creation of coalitions and joint projects, including beyond the topic of «HIV infection».



RISK: Security of ECOM staff and ECOM members in countries (violence, harassment, burn-out...)

Approaches to mitigate this risk:

- ✓✓ Conducting a thorough assessment of risks and ways to mitigate them during the planning of each project.
- ✓✓ Increasing the visibility of the positive results of the work of ECOM and its members among governments and the media so that they recognize such results.
- ✓✓ Widely publicizing incidents of violence and harassment against ECOM staff and members.
- ✓✓ Strengthening ECOM's relations with influential media, and national and international organizations interested in or directly involved in the protection of human rights.

- ✓✓ Development of a common protection system for all members and activists persecuted for their activist activities (shelters, legal and psychological support).

In addition to the main risks listed here, ECOM's existing Risk Mitigation Policy contains a description of all risks identified by ECOM and approaches/methods for mitigating them.

The full text of the policy can be found in the Appendix.



THEORY OF CHANGE FOR 2022-2026

Achieving ECOM's strategic goal for 2022-2026 will be possible if *regular monitoring of rights violations and restrictions on access to health services is carried out in the region, and if support is provided to national organizations for the protection of victims.*

In order that monitoring and victim protection be sustainable and regular, rather than periodic, it must be based on real opportunities to protect LGBT+ people who experience human rights violations, and to respond to the lack or insufficient quality of health care services. Given that politicians in EECA countries not only often fail to counteract homophobia, but also use it as a political tool, it is difficult to expect that national human rights institutions and healthcare systems will be able to provide these conditions. *Currently, only LGBT+ community organizations have the necessary motivation to advocate for LGBT+ rights and for changes in the health care system to ensure that LGBT+ people have equal access to health care services, including social assistance, on an equal basis with other population groups.*

But for this, LGBT+ community organizations themselves must have both the skills to work effectively and access to resources. Experience shows that national organizations are focused on working within their own countries and may not be aware of positive experiences abroad, while community activists are vulnerable to discrimination and harassment by national governments. *The involvement of independent international LGBT+ community associations can develop solidarity, and solve issues related to effective knowledge sharing and the protection of national activists. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and strengthen such international associations.*

The development of ECOM as an international structure supporting national LGBT+ community organizations is an ongoing process, as the external environment of LGBT+ organizations, both within countries and internationally, is constantly changing. *The key areas for development for ECOM are:* 1) further strengthening of ECOM's systems to make them flexible, simple and strong, enabling ECOM to adapt in a timely manner to changes in the external environment and to the needs of national LGBT+ organizations; 2) attracting resources for LGBT+ organizations, both from international partners and from national governments (it is important that resources, including financial, technical and political, are diverse) and increasing the effective use of these resources; 3) development and strengthening of partnerships between LGBT+ organizations, and involving them in a common association, ECOM, where they can effectively exchange information and experience, and support each other. Different elements of ECOM's development will be included in each Coalition project.

Increasing the involvement of ECOM members in the work of the Coalition is a promising way to strengthen and develop ECOM: ECOM should continue the existing policy of hiring staff and selecting experts, supplementing it with a targeted expansion of opportunities for ECOM members to become participants in the development and implementation of joint projects between organizations from different countries. ECOM will help develop joint projects, and support fundraising and the establishment of long-term and productive relationships with donors.

In parallel with this, ECOM will develop its capacity to increase the cost-effectiveness of its work: together with experts from international organizations, ECOM will develop/adapt easy-to-use approaches and tools for monitoring and evaluating the cost-effectiveness of non-commercial projects, and after testing them, will transfer them to ECOM members and partner and donor organizations, including national governments.

In order to make ECOM membership attractive to national organizations, and the work of ECOM and its members valuable to partners and donors, as part of its informational policy, ECOM will publish and actively promote the results of the work of the Coalition itself and its members (both successes and lessons learned). As a result, ECOM should become a leader in issues related to the development of national organizations that protect the sexual and mental health of LGBT+ people, including the issues of trans-health and LGBT+ rights in the countries of the EECA region.

Support for national LGBT+ organizations is impossible without ensuring coordination with national governments, as well as with international organizations established as part of intergovernmental cooperation. For example, through governmental and international experts and academic institutions/organizations that influence individual and/or joint actions of the governments of the countries of the EECA region in the field of LGBT+ sexual and mental health and the protection of human rights. Throughout the planning period, ECOM will develop this coordination and support national organizations in cooperation with national government structures.

By 2022, ECOM and national LGBT+ organizations and activists, as well as partners from government and international organizations, have already accumulated much information and data, and have created tools for regularly collecting new data. ECOM will develop initiatives to improve the use of accumulated and new knowledge and data for decision-making and learning: knowledge management. In this way, ECOM will prevent systemic amnesia ("the project is over, its results are forgotten") and develop the intellectual capital of the LGBT+ community and national health care systems. This work will also be carried out during the entire period of this strategic plan.

Given the significant successes in medical care for PLH, in the use of drugs for HIV prevention, and the vast experience accumulated in HIV prevention and the formation of social enablers to combat the HIV epidemic, ECOM will expand the scope of its work by developing activities in the fields of STIs, Hepatitis B and C, LGBT+ mental health, and trans-health, bringing the successful experience gained in the fight against HIV infection to these new areas.

In order that national organizations develop and share experiences in a coordinated manner, it is necessary to ensure that there is a consistency of knowledge about health and human rights and about mechanisms for their protection among employees and volunteers. This will facilitate the use of similar approaches by national organizations in their work, and cooperation with recognized international experts in the fields of health and with human rights institutions. In turn, this will allow the experiences of different countries to be compared.

An important intermediate step in the implementation of ECOM's strategic plan is to ensure the inclusion of disaggregated information on the health and rights of LGBT+ people in national reports submitted to international bodies on the implementation of international treaties by states, and on progress made towards achieving the SDGs. To this end, ECOM will hold consultations with international partners, attract resources for national LGBT+ organizations and negotiate with governmental bodies of EECA countries. In order to be able to conduct advocacy and cooperate with international and national partners, including donors, ECOM will continue to actively (directly or through partners) participate in the work of international working groups and oversight bodies, where the necessary organizations and experts are represented.

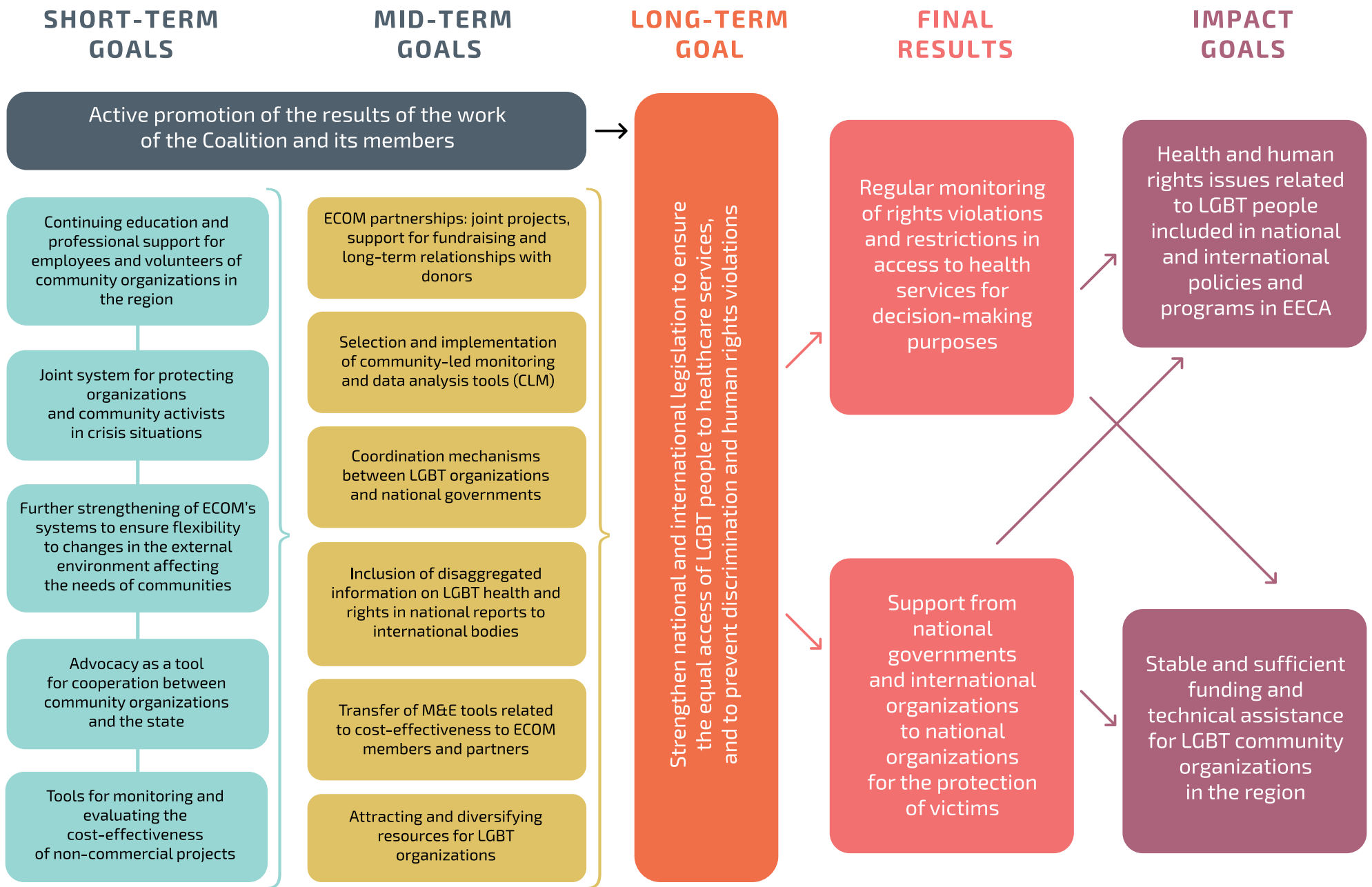
In the first half of the term of the strategic plan, it will be necessary to strengthen mutual assistance between national organizations in the event of homophobic threats to LGBT+ community activists and organizations. In addition to maximizing publicity of cases of violence and harassment (while taking into account the wishes of the victims and potential additional risks posed by publicity), and providing legal support, ECOM will facilitate the creation and stable operation of a shelter for LGBT+ activists from EECA countries.

In parallel with increasing the level of protection for LGBT+ organizations and activists, it will be necessary to change the understanding of governments and of LGBT+ organizations and activists themselves of the meaning and practice of advocacy: advocacy must be based on qualitative evidence and must be constructive. In other words, it must contain clear and feasible proposals to change the situation, and be part of a broader process of collaboration between national governments and civil society organizations, where advocacy is not an end in itself, but a process of change that is part of achieving the goals set by national health and rights programs. Given that many LGBTQI people also belong to other communities, it will be important to develop cooperation with organizations from other communities, including the promotion of the understanding of advocacy discussed above.

If there is an understanding of advocacy as an integral part of cooperation, this will improve the availability of resources for LGBT+ organizations.

By fulfilling these objectives, it will be possible for LGBT+ community organizations to gain the necessary significant impact on key national programs on health and rights, and to ensure the regular collection and analysis of data on the actual needs of the LGBT+ community, and its use in decision-making.

An illustration of the theory of change is provided on the next page.



The logo for ECOM, featuring a white icon of a 2x2 grid of squares to the left of the word "ECOM" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The logo is centered within a large, semi-transparent red circle that overlaps a larger, semi-transparent purple circle. The background consists of various overlapping shapes and colors: a red circle with diagonal stripes, a solid purple circle, a solid orange circle, a solid teal circle, and a dark grey horizontal band at the bottom. The bottom left corner features a yellow and dark grey striped pattern, and the bottom right corner features a large orange ring shape.

ECOM