

**Expert Group on HIV/AIDS
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Expert Group on HIV/AIDS

Work Plan for 2009

1. Objectives

The objectives of the NDPHS HIV/AIDS EG include promotion of regional collaboration around the Baltic Sea involving partners through activating common projects and creating networks of experts, NGO's and other implementing bodies. Another objective is to enhance harmonization of procedures when it comes to primary and secondary prevention, surveillance and case management. Monitoring tools for these objectives are developed.

2. Resources

Funding for the chairperson (travel costs) has been covered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland, and is ensured by an annual contract. Funding for ITA activities (50% of working time) have been covered through a project financed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and implemented by STAKES ("Controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Barents and Northern Dimension Partnership Programme Regions. Phase II"). Project is planned for 2008–2010, and financing is confirmed each year on basis of an application and reporting.

Each partner funds the travel costs of its representative in the EG meetings.

3. Working principles

The HIV/AIDS EG will continue its work during the next two years with a financial support from the Lead Partner (Finland). Following the election in 2008 of Ms. Anna Marzec-Bogusławska of Poland as HIV/AIDS EG Vice-Chair, the discussions regarding Poland being the Co-lead Partner in the group are expected to be finalized in the beginning of year 2009.

The current working concept will be continued with two working meetings during the year. Following the nomination of a Belarusian expert to the HIV/AIDS EG, cooperation with Belarus will be supposed to take further steps ahead. Also, TB-related issues will be highlighted by inviting an expert from the Finnish Lung Health Association (FILHA) to attend the meetings. In addition, the expert group will continue its active participation in CSR and PAC meetings and side events. Participation/contributions to relevant stakeholder meetings will be included in the working plan (examples include HIV think tank by CEC and certain international conferences).

Collaboration with other NDPHS Expert Groups, in particular with the NDPHS Prison Health Expert Group (PH EG) and NDPHS Primary Health Care Expert Group will continue. The PH EG Chairperson and ITA have taken part in the HIV/AIDS EG meetings in 2008 and this arrangement will continue in 2009.

In 2008 the HIV/AIDS EG published a list of priorities which should be observed when projects or actions are being planned or implemented through the group. Attention will be drawn to ensure that the number of participants representing different partners

in projects is sufficiently high to support the first priority of promoting regional collaboration. Main concern is still how to successfully implement various prevention strategies among high risk groups such as injecting drug users and their families and other contacts, vulnerable adolescents and young adults, socially excluded, etc. An emerging threat, increasing incidence of co-infections by HIV and TB along with the spread of drug resistance will also get special attention. Several projects will support social and medical rehabilitation.

Careful surveillance and follow-up of the epidemiological situation and risk factors will continue. They will regularly be reviewed country by country in the EG meetings.

4. Remarks on project based activities

- **Regional collaboration**
Several projects are ongoing but it is problematic to promote truly collaborative projects where i.e. the Baltic countries, the Nordic countries and NW Russia would be equally involved;
- **Integration of social and health care for HIV-infected individuals**
Integration of social and health care is mentioned in several ongoing and planned projects. Some steps towards this have been taken in the Murmansk low-threshold service centres (LTSC) project, as well as in the Leningrad Oblast project which supports HIV positive pregnant women. However, it is still problematic to combine social and health care for PLWHA in many countries including Russia, and this will be a long time priority;
- **Prevention of HIV among drug users**
This remains a priority, as it has been so for several years now. There are ongoing projects and several under development. A model of LTSC developed through the projects of the HIV/AIDS EG in the previous years has been copied already to new regions and locations and this process should be supported also in the future;
- **Enhancing cross-border bilateral activities**
A project on HIV prevention among drug users in the neighbouring cities of Narva (Estonia) and Ivangorod (Leningrad Oblast, Russia) has been under planning for some time. First actions to take concrete steps are underway;
- **Promoting harm reduction policies among drug users**
This is an important part of the working principle of the LTSC-network which is expanding and under development;
- **Prevention of HIV/TB dual infections**
New project proposals are ready and waiting for funding;
- **Prevention of HIV among MSM**
A thematic report on situation among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Partner Countries is planned. This would be a good basis for planning of further prevention measures;
- **Prevention of MTCT**
Included in several projects, e.g. in the Leningrad Oblast project mentioned above;
- **Enhancing implementation of common best practices**
Included in some projects but would benefit from a separate project.

5. Other issues

Following the PAC 5 side event on health of indigenous and remote northern communities held in November 2008 in Canada, to which the HIV/AIDS EG contributed, the group will continue a dialogue with Canada on the issues related to HIV prevention among indigenous populations in the region.

Planning and implementation of activities that will effectively include them should be started as soon as possible. As Belarus is one of the collaboration areas in focus for Sweden, the latter will facilitate financing of project-based activities, whereas the coordination and networking shall go through the HIV/AIDS EG.

6. Collaboration with other expert groups

Common project with the NDPHS Prison Health Expert Group and the NDPHS Primary Health Care Expert Group are under development. A representative will also participate in the working meetings of the other expert groups whenever relevant,

HIV Think-tank meetings (organised by the European Commission) have been a forum for discussions about the priorities and involvement of NGO's in HIV prevention in the EU. A member from the expert group will participate in the meetings,

Collaboration with the SEEHN (South-East European Health Network) will be discussed during the year 2009.

7. Thematic report

The thematic report will be updated in the beginning of the year 2009. A new section dealing with HIV prevention among MSM will be developed during the year. Another topic, aspects concerning post-exposure prophylaxis using anti-retroviral medicines will be reviewed and a paper representing common view of the EG will be developed to be included into the thematic report,

8. Barents region collaboration

There is a close link between the activities of NDPHS EG and the Barents Euro-Arctic (BEAC) programme HIV group. A large number of HIV-related projects have been and are being implemented in the Barents Sea Region in close collaboration with the EG. ITA of the EG is financed through a project that includes activities in the Barents Sea Region further promoting the collaboration and coordination between these two programmes,

Baltic Sea Region strategy and action plan

A strategy concerning collaboration within the Baltic Sea Region is under development and includes also the NDPHS as a potential contributor. The EG group will review the plans and get involved in the development process as relevant/appropriate,

9. TB-related activities

A new project proposal is under development concerning prevention and treatment of TB among high risk groups including HIV-infected persons. Another TB-prevention project is being developed

in collaboration with the Prison Health Expert Group and its implementation will probably start in 2009.

10. Meetings

The spring meeting of the EG will be held in Canada in March 2009. A side-event with strong Canadian involvement and a site visit will be included into the programme.

The autumn meeting is being planned to be held in Gdańsk in early September 2009.

5th European Conference on Clinical and Social Research on AIDS and Drugs. Vilnius, April 28-30 2009. A special session to discuss about regional collaboration and the involvement of NDPHS is being planned.

Other conferences where the EG will probably contribute include the Nordic-Baltic meeting on Infectious Diseases and the Eastern Europe and Central Asia AIDS conference to be held in Moscow.