

Regional meeting "Health of migrants living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia"

March 10-11, 2022

Almaty, Kazakhstan

RESOLUTION

Constant flows of migration in the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia involve and affect millions of people and all spheres of human life, including health. Almost all countries in the region treat chronic infectious diseases of their citizens to maintain health, ability to work and quality of life, but not for international migrants.

Modern medical science enables people with HIV to live long and healthy lives, avoid HIV transmission to a partner, and give birth to healthy children. Therefore, in most countries, including the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, HIV travel and residence ban has been lifted, but it is still in force in the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Multiple barriers faced by migrants and refugees during and after migration, put them at the increased risk of contracting HIV.

Due to the war in Ukraine, the number of international refugees and internally displaced people in the region of Eastern and Central Europe increased and continues to grow in the last couple of weeks. It changes migration patterns in the EECA region as some countries that have been traditional countries of migrants' origin become the countries that receive migrants. And the humanitarian crisis is already affecting access to HIV care and other services for key population groups.

Officials from the Ministries of Health of the EECA region are now mentioning the inability to transfer medicines to their citizens - registered patients living with HIV who currently stay in the Russian Federation. Therefore increased restrictions on transportation and post services in the region significantly hinders access to ART for foreign migrants living with HIV in Russia.

Understanding the importance of the expert dialogue, representatives of the ministries of health, deputy heads of the Republican AIDS Centers, scientific and civil society of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region countries (including Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), as well as representatives of the World Health Organization/Europe and the EECA Regional Office of the UN Population Fund gathered in Kazakhstan, Almaty on March 10-11, 2022 at the regional meeting **Health of migrants living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia**, and formulated a number of proposals and recommendations for the governments and civil society organizations in the countries of migrants' origin and international organizations.

Recommendations to the government authorities of the countries of migrants origin

1. Prepare and sign cross-border agreements between countries of the EECA region to organize timely and legitimate treatment of migrants, wherever they reside at the moment.
2. Develop mechanisms of ART provision to migrants in each EECA country.
3. Elaborate mechanisms of ART provision to the migrants and refugees arriving at the EECA countries.
4. Develop and implement a mechanism of remote registration and timely provision of ART for their citizens who learned about having HIV while residing abroad, but who do not have an opportunity to return to the country of citizenship for registration and starting treatment.
5. Consider the WHO-recommended minimum package of medical tests and analyzes required for remote registration of citizens in migration.
6. To consider the costs of treatment for citizens with HIV who live abroad in the National Programs budgets.
7. To continue negotiating joint measures to provide routine medical care, including HIV services with healthcare authorities of the Russian Federation, the country receiving the largest number of migrants from Central Asia.
8. To initiate negotiations with healthcare authorities of the Russian Federation in order to exchange data on HIV cases among citizens of the Central Asian countries identified in the Russian Federation.
9. To develop a unified information system to exchange medical data of migrants living with HIV in the Central Asian subregion (after receiving patient's informed consent).
10. To include costs of testing for HIV, tuberculosis, STIs and other diseases required for medical examination in the Russian Federation, so that citizens who plan to migrate can be examined before migration.
11. To ensure timely start of treatment and adherence for international migrants if they can't obtain ARVT in the AIDS centers of home countries.
12. Conduct biomedical research among internal and external migrants to assess their health status in order to develop support measures for them.
13. Cooperate with migrant communities and diasporas in the Russian Federation in order to integrate HIV issues into their activities.
14. Carry out mapping of services and clinics in the Russian Federation which provide medical care for migrants, raise awareness of physicians at "migrant clinics" in the area of HIV prevention, treatment, and care.

Recommendations to donors and international organizations

1. Include migrants in the list of key population groups vulnerable to HIV in the next round of Global Fund funding.
2. Conduct a situation analysis regarding availability of ART for migrants and refugees who may arrive in the EECA countries, as well availability of universal ART schemes.
3. Expand funding for projects aimed at creating migrant-friendly services for prevention, testing and organizing the timely start of treatment in various cities of the Russian Federation that receive migrants from EECA countries.

4. Given the unstable economic and political situation in the EECA region, allow recipients of international grants to convert funds into national currencies on the day of payment.

1) Recommendations to regional organizations

1. Continue active exchange of experience between organizations (NGOs, diasporas, medical institutions) in the EECA region that provide friendly services to migrants.
2. Given a changing picture of migration flows, prepare country analysis by country, which will include HIV-related migration restrictions, access to testing services, access to HIV care and treatment, and a list of friendly NGOs.
3. Create a unified database of service organizations providing HIV-related support for migrants.
4. Conduct face-to-face seminars and webinars for partners from the region on the HIV and migration issues counseling.

Recommendations to service NGOs

1. Expand the focus of work with migrants to provision of comprehensive support including HIV services, social services, and legal support.
2. Given the possibility of unplanned or spontaneous decisions about migration, train all staff in HIV and migration counseling.
3. Conduct face-to-face and online information sessions on migration issues among all clients .
4. Organize HIV testing for all those who plan to migrate.
5. Integrate HIV counseling into migrant organizations.
6. Organize treatment adherence activities for people returning from migration to the Russian Federation.
7. Ensure linkages between NGOs working in the areas of HIV and migration in order to expand the package of services for migrants.
8. To distribute leaflets and set up information boards about medical examinations, healthy and safe migration at the platforms of travel agencies, airline ticket offices, airports, railway stations and other transportation systems .
9. Recommend the Country Coordinating Mechanisms in the EECA countries to send a letter to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria about the need to confirm the new exchange rate (for dollars and euros) for the projects implementation (for the purchases and other procedures related to currency exchange), taking into account the recent devaluation in the EECA region.