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# #StandwithUkraine: Lessons from harm reduction response and needs for Ukrainians in the European Union

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# War conflict in Ukraine

Escalating large-scale war conflict in Ukraine causes enormous humanitarian crisis affecting millions of people, those leaving the country looking for safety and internally displaced people within Ukraine itself.

Impact of these happenings - felt also by people who use drugs who are particularly vulnerable during times of war and conflict.

According to IBBS data, the estimated number of people who inject drugs in Ukraine is 350,000. The estimated number of PWID who have moved only to Poland is more than 27,000.

# Responding to the needs of displaced Ukrainian citizens with drug-related problems

- Since the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine, a wide range of international, European, and national stakeholders have mobilized resources to coordinate the **response to the humanitarian crisis**.
- In the field of drugs, EU agencies (ECDC, EMCDDA), international organizations (WHO, Eurasian Harm Reduction Association, and other international civil society organizations), as well as national government institutions and NGOs in the EU and Ukraine, quickly established **platforms to coordinate actions** and facilitate contacts between stakeholders.

# Responding to the needs of displaced Ukrainian citizens with drug-related problems - 2

- **Mobilization needs assessment and monitoring.** NGOs have collected contact information about available services in different EU countries and have created unique information offline/online centers for patients who need information.
- **Lowering the thresholds for receiving OAT or other treatment for drug use disorders.** In line with the European Council directive, most EU countries have eased the legal conditions for accessing free drug use services.
- **Raising awareness of displaced Ukrainians about the availability of services.** Almost all EU countries produced posters and leaflets in Ukrainian and Russian, and many online platforms in Ukrainian (European Test Finder) were created.
- **Establishing communication with Ukrainian NGOs and Ukrainian health authorities.** The Ukrainian PHC communicates directly with the European partners to facilitate enrollment and ensure that the patient has the necessary medical documentation.

# Difficulties in providing services related to drug use to refugees from Ukraine

- Language problems
- Ensuring continuity of care:
  - Administrative - most EU countries have some minimum legal requirements to ensure access to OAT programs, ART, and other necessary assistance.
  - Concerns about stigmatization and protection of children's rights
  - Lack of gender-sensitive services.
  - Populations in the move - in many cases, patients are in transit to other countries, which has created particular challenges for service providers to ensure compliance and treatment continuation
  - Difficulties of European doctors in providing displaced populations with OAT drugs - different nomenclature and forms of drugs.

# What can be learned from these experiences to improve access to drug use services and ensure that they are properly addressed?

- Need in flexibility and fast actions of international donors to support Ukrainian people in the country and abroad
- Emergency harm reduction: access to medical care, housing, social care, and employment
- Flexibility of national programs for people who use drugs and PLHIV - need is unpredictable and could be much larger than national programs' capacity
- OST access - need is unpredictable and could be much greater than national program capacity
- Specialized shelters/support to key populations
- Integrated approaches to respond to the needs of diverse and changing population flows in a culturally sensitive manner



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