

# **EHRN Regional Program on HIV and Harm Reduction for Eastern Europe and Central Asia: first steps, processes and lessons learned**

Report

Part II: Preparing and Submitting a Concept Note within the Global Fund's New Funding Model

Eurasian Harm Reduction Network

November 2013

## Eurasian Harm Reduction Network

The Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN) is a regional network of harm reduction programs, groups of people who use drugs (PUD) and their allies from across 29 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA) who work to advocate for the universal human rights of people who use drugs in order to protect their lives and health. EHRN's mission it is to promote humane, evidence-based harm reduction approaches to drug use, with the aim of improving health and well-being, whilst protecting human rights at the individual, community and societal level.

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## List of Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CCM	Country Coordinating Mechanism
CSS	Community Systems Strengthening
ECUO	East Europe and Central Asia Union of People Living with HIV
EECA	Eastern Europe and Central Asia
EHRN	Eurasian Harm Reduction Network
ENPUD	Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs
GAC	Grant Approvals Committee
GIZ	German Society for International Cooperation
Global Fund	The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
GNSWP	Global Network of Sex Work Projects
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSS	Health Systems Strengthening
ICASO	International Council of AIDS Service Organisations
IDPC	International Drug Policy Consortium
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NFM	New Funding Model
OC	Oversight Committee
OSF/IHRD	Open Society Foundations / International Harm Reduction Development
OST	Opioid Substitution Therapy
PR	Principal Recipient
PLWHIV	People Living with HIV
PWUD	Person/People who use/s drugs
RTAG	Regional Technical Advisory Group
EHRN SC	EHRN Steering Committee
SR	Sub Recipient
TERG	Technical Evaluation Reference Group
TRP	Technical Review Panel
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Executive summary

On February 28, 2013, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) announced that Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN) had been invited to be an early applicant as part of the Global Fund's New Funding Model (NFM), with a proposal on HIV and harm reduction for the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). The funding amount indicated for this regional proposal was \$6 million over three years (2014-2016). Following a decision by EHRN's Steering Committee (EHRN SC), EHRN formally announced on April 2, 2013 that it had accepted the invitation and that it would develop and submit a Concept Note to the Global Fund.

EHRN recognized that it would need to strongly prioritize ongoing, open communication with partners about the regional program in order to ensure broad understanding, strong collaboration, and authentic regional ownership. To that end, EHRN developed a plan to document and communicate each stage of the process of developing the regional program, from the process of the regional dialogue and concept note development to the process of Sub Recipient (SR) selection and actual grant implementation. EHRN requested assistance from several technical partners for the technical and financial support to develop the regional Concept Note. The major financial support was obtained from German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), specifically the GIZ BACKUP Initiative. Funding was also secured from International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO) and Open Society Foundations (OSF) in order to specifically fund public communication activities as well as comprehensive documentation of each stage of the process of EHRN's participation as a regional early applicant under the NFM. ICASO and OSF have since started funding EHRN's documentation and communications efforts. And finally UNODF supported the meeting of the Regional Technical Advisory Group (RTAG) in July 2013.

Since accepting the Global Fund's invitation, EHRN has initiated and completed a regional dialogue process, established relevant regional governance structures for concept note development, and has prepared and submitted the regional program concept note. Information describing the first stage of work—the regional dialogue process—can be found [here](#). Subsequent reports to be published will cover the process of SR selection and the processes of grant negotiation and signing.

This report describes work by EHRN and its partners to complete the regional program concept note, mainly between July and September. The final concept note was submitted to the Global Fund on September 6 2013.

Recommendations and lessons learned from the process of concept note development are listed below:

- The Global Fund should adapt the concept note application form and the modular template for regional and country proposals that focus on advocacy and Community Systems Strengthening (CSS) rather than service delivery—a rapid consultation with relevant partners should be undertaken to generate recommended changes. In addition, amendments should reflect circumstances where an applicant selects implementers (and countries) through a competitive process, after concept note submission.
- The Global Fund Secretariat should prioritize providing proactive support, problem solving and guidance to regional applicants under the New Funding Model whose concept notes focus on CSS and advocacy, since they are likely to face particular challenges.

- The revision of the Global Fund’s CSS framework should be expedited and operationalized as a matter of priority so that partners can benefit from an appropriate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework as well as indicators for advocacy and CSS focused applications, in time for the full roll out of the New Funding Model.
- The Global Fund Secretariat should be congratulated for its proactive approach to partnership during the transition and it should become the “new norm” under the New Funding Model. If a change in Secretariat staff structure should be required to support such collaboration, the Global Fund Secretariat management should take on such changes.
- Provision of quality and timely technical support (in accordance with an applicant’s concept note development timeline) is extremely important for success in all stages of the process—partners should ensure such technical support is funded, and qualified providers are identified.

## Methodology

To prepare this report on EHRN’s work between July and September 2013 on the regional program concept note, the author reviewed a range of documents identified as relevant by EHRN including the final concept note, communications with CCMs, and minutes from various technical meetings. The author also administered a brief questionnaire to four relevant stakeholders who led or participated in the concept note development process either from EHRN or as consultants on the writing team. The questionnaire was completed either in writing or through semi-structured interviews conducted by telephone.

## Introduction

This report provides information about EHRN’s second phase of work—completing the concept note. The first phase of work was focused on defining and completing the regional dialogue process, establishing consensus among stakeholders as to the basic goals and objectives of the regional program, defining preferred implementation strategies for the regional program, and establishing relevant governance bodies for concept note development and oversight of grant implementation—as well as an appropriate division of labor among the governance bodies. That report can be found [here](#). Subsequent reports will focus on addressing the Global Fund’s response to the concept note, and grant making by EHRN (including SR selection).

A critical outcome of the regional dialogue process was that a range of partners and stakeholders developed and then validated the goal and objectives of the regional program. Participants in the regional dialogue process also discussed provisional activities necessary to achieve the objectives and goal.

The **overall goal** of the regional program is to strengthen advocacy by civil society, including people who use drugs, for sufficient, strategic and sustainable investments in harm reduction as HIV prevention in the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Under this goal, the regional program has two objectives:

**Objective 1:** To build an enabling environment for sufficient, strategic and sustainable public and donors’ investments in harm reduction; and

**Objective 2:** To develop the capacity of the community of people who use drugs to advocate for

availability and sustainability of harm reduction services that meet their needs.

Generating this goal and these objectives as an output of the regional dialogue process was the first step in the overlapping concept note development process, which got underway while the regional dialogue process was ongoing.

The final concept note was submitted to the Global Fund's Technical Review Panel (TRP) on September 6, 2013. The next stages of the process will include review of the concept note by the Global Fund TRP and Grant Approvals Committee (GAC), grant making, subsequent reviews by the GAC, approval by the Global Fund Board, grant signing and grant implementation.

## **EHRN and the Global Fund's New Funding Model**

EHRN is a regional network with the mission of promoting humane, evidence-based harm reduction approaches to drug use, in order to achieve improved health outcomes and protection of human rights of people who use drugs at the individual, community, and societal levels. Founded in 1997, EHRN today unites more than 450 individuals and organisations from 29 countries of EECA. EHRN is governed by its members through the election of representatives who serve on its SC. As of June 2013, the EHRN SC consists of 13 persons representing eight constituencies of the EHRN membership and elected by these constituencies: Baltic States, Belarus-Ukraine-Moldova, Caucasus, Central Asia, Central Europe, Russia, South-Eastern Europe, and the drug user community.

Executive work is carried out by a Secretariat based in Vilnius, Lithuania, consisting of 12 highly trained and experienced staff.

On February 28, 2013 the Global Fund announced the launch of the NFM and extended invitations to six countries and three regions to participate as "early applicants" using the full process of the NFM. EHRN was invited to participate as a regional applicant and to create a regional program focused on HIV and harm reduction in EECA for 2014-2016. EHRN accepted this invitation on April 2, 2013. The indicative funding amount for the project is US\$6 million.

The New Funding Model,<sup>1</sup> launched in February 28, 2013 by the Global Fund following approval at the 28<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting of the Global Fund, was designed to support more strategic, high impact investment by the Global Fund in the fight against the three diseases. The NFM replaces the previous funding system of annual funding 'Rounds,' where applicants were invited to submit proposals that were considered either technically sound and were recommended for funding by the Global Fund's Technical Review Panel (TRP) or were rejected by the TRP—with rejected applicants having to wait significant periods of time before having the chance to apply again for Global Fund funding. The new funding model has a number of major changes, including:

- 1) Country and regional applicants are expected to develop a concept note based on costed, evidence-based strategies developed through inclusive multi-stakeholder processes, including a full expression of demand;

- 2) The concept note is developed following a 'country dialogue' or a 'regional dialogue' to identify the priority objectives and activities. The dialogue must comprise members of the Country

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the New Funding Model can be found at: <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/activities/fundingmodel/regional-program>

Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) along with other key stakeholders from government, donors, civil society, and technical partners;

3) All countries eligible for the Global Fund funding will have access to an ‘indicative’ funding amount during a three-year replenishment cycle, determined based on country’s disease burden and country income level, adjusted for qualitative factors;

5) Applicants will also be eligible to apply for funding through an ‘incentive stream,’ that will provide a competitive opportunity for increased funding; and

6) Unfunded, technically sound expressions of country or regional demand will be captured for future funding (using a process that has yet to be finalized).

Regional applications will be possible under the NFM, where a regional approach can achieve an added impact that is not possible through national strategies alone. The Global Fund is in the process of agreeing on policies that will ensure regional applications do not suffer a disadvantage under the NFM, including through discussion of an amount of funding that would be ‘set aside’ for regional applications.

The experience of EHRN and the other regional applicants during the transition to the NFM will hopefully generate useful data about the role of regional proposals in providing added value in the response to the three diseases and will help ensure that the Global Fund’s policies on regional applicants under the full implementation of the NFM support lessons generated during the transition period.

Development and implementation of the regional program on harm reduction and HIV for EECA is closely aligned with EHRN’s policy and advocacy priorities, and will provide an important opportunity to intensify much needed high impact regional advocacy to increase access to quality harm reduction services while ensuring civil society-led regional proposals feature substantively as a relevant part of the NFM.

## Concept note development

### The purpose of the concept note

Under the New Funding Model, an applicant’s concept note must contain all aspects of the funding request to the Global Fund—including evidence of compliance with Global Fund requirements; an exhaustive project overview; national/regional epidemiological and political context; challenges and risk mitigation efforts; as well as detailed program goals, objectives, activities, budgets, performance frameworks and M&E plans. In the case of a regional applicant, the concept note also contains a justification for a regional approach, coherence with national strategic plans for participating countries, and evidence of endorsement by relevant CCMs.

Country and regional applicants under the New Funding Model use a relevant [modular template](#) to complete a concept note. While the regional dialogue process was ongoing, EHRN submitted an initial description of the regional program to the TRP on June 21, 2013 to ensure the concept note preparation team would receive early, top-level feedback, guidance, and “proof of concept” about its overall approach and focus. Generating early comments was particularly important given EHRN’s unique status as a non-governmental organization (NGO) making regional application for funding, and the Global Fund’s expectation that any regional applicant firmly justify a regional approach.

As a regional applicant, EHRN was expected to show compliance with the Global Fund’s minimum requirements:

1) That at minimum 51% of countries included in the regional application were eligible for

- Global Fund funding, according to the Global Fund's rules on country eligibility;
- 2) Evidence of involvement of people living with and affected by the diseases in concept note preparation;
  - 3) Completion of a robust and inclusive regional dialogue process; and
  - 4) Endorsement by relevant national CCMs.

However as a result of an inclusive and transparent regional dialogue process EHRN concluded that NGO grant implementers should be selected as a result of an open, competitive process among interested applicants from eligible countries in EECA rather than a "top-down" selection by EHRN. A set of country prioritization criteria and a purposive list of 10 eligible EECA countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova and Tajikistan)<sup>2</sup> was developed from which NGOs will be eligible to apply to become an SR for the regional program.

EHRN assessed that the indicative funding would be sufficient only to target 5 countries and therefore 5 NGOs (one per country) will be selected as SRs, based on an open competitive process. Selecting the 5 SRs will also determine the 5 countries that will participate in the regional program while ensuring the regional effect of the project activities.

During the regional dialogue and concept note development processes, EHRN was in communication with CCMs from the eleven priority countries about the regional program. EHRN also shared the regional program concept and work plan with all respective CCMs. Since final list of 5 participating countries would only be determined after the concept note submission deadline (between October and November 2013), it was agreed with the Global Fund that EHRN would initiate the direct communication with CCMs once the concept note is finalized and the majority of the endorsements would be supplied after the SR and country selection. The Global Fund was aware of and supported this flexible approach to CCM endorsement. The final concept note was submitted with endorsements already from three CCMs (Azerbaijan, Belarus and Moldova).

In addition to the support received from three CCMs, EHRN also solicited evidence of support from technical partners. EHRN received letters of support from UNAIDS, UNDP, the European Commission and WHO.

### **The process of concept note preparation and the regional project overview**

Preparing the regional program concept note was the direct responsibility of a drafting team comprising EHRN staff and external consultants, and was completed according to a detailed workplan defining tasks, timelines and division of labor among drafting team participants. Global Fund Secretariat provided EHRN staff with technical support to understand its M&E requirements as well as how to work with its modular template and budget forms. M&E and financial experts from the Eastern Europe and Central Asia team visited EHRN's office for one week in July and were available to discuss any questions. The Fund Portfolio Manager for this regional project was also very supportive throughout all 5 months of EHRN's work on the regional proposal and provided valuable support to the process of concept note development. The FPM also liaised successfully with Global Fund Secretariat departments, whose inputs were critical to ensure a smooth process overall.

Governance bodies, EHRN established during the regional dialogue process, were also substantially engaged: the Regional Technical Advisory Group (RTAG) met July 29-30, 2013 in Vilnius to further refine

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<sup>2</sup> Ukraine will also be included, but with the status of 'Associate Partner,' rather than eligible country.



the proposed goal, objectives and activities to be contained in the concept note and to address feedback generated by the early engagement of the TRP. The representatives of the Global Fund Secretariat from Eastern Europe and Central Asia Team and Senior Specialist for Community Systems Strengthening and Civil Society joined the RTAG meeting. A group of experts met in Vilnius on August 28-29, 2013 to provide final edits to and validation of the draft concept note. Lastly the EHRN Steering Committee (SC) reviewed and approved the final concept note prior to its submission.

The major activities that program implementers will undertake to achieve the goal and objectives of the regional program include: regional and national advocacy, communication and social mobilization, alongside community capacity building and mobilization, which will be carried out in partnership with NGO SRs and national drug user groups/networks, who will be directly engaged as small grantees within the regional program. The partners that will be engaged as key actors to carry out the activities described in the concept note include: high level regional advocates and experts, people who inject drugs and people engaged in opioid substitution therapy services, national level NGOs, and national decision makers and policy makers. Together these partners will collaborate and form a regional high impact advocacy movement committed to achieving the initiative goal and objectives. A regional advocacy campaign called “Harm Reduction Works: Fund It!” will be the overall framework for national and regional advocacy and social mobilization activities under the regional program. The regional program activities will also focus extensively on national and community level data collection and evidence generation.

The Regional program will employ a unique regional approach that will focus on:

- Enhanced regional and national cross-sector and cross-field partnerships to effectively reduce effects of negative influences.
- Enhanced regional and national evidence bases and knowledge banks on HIV and injecting drug use for use in developing effective advocacy messages.
- Increased influence of people who use drugs in decision-making and involvement in peer-to-peer sharing of best practices.

The scale of the challenge in HIV response requires region-wide approach to strengthening advocacy, rooted in and informed by common issues and contexts across countries, and empowering national actions through strategic grants to leading harm reduction NGOs and drug user groups. The Regional program will work at both regional and national levels to promote these actions, allowing for cross-border coordination for powerful and unified advocacy efforts, while providing flexibility for stakeholder-driven adaptations to country-specific contexts. This approach will build positive momentum in a core group of 5 target countries to support sustainable, sufficient and strategic investments to scale-up of harm reduction services, while also creating regional mechanisms and driving dialogue to promote broader change and adoption of best practices throughout the EECA.

Employees and/or outside consultants engaged by the SRs will participate in regional program activities throughout the entire duration of its implementation. They will receive appropriate technical assistance.

### **Experience of concept note drafting team members**

Four of the most engaged participants in the process of drafting the concept note were interviewed by the author about challenges and successes they experienced. Interviewees consistently noted the value of EHRN’s broad engagement of and consultation with an array of partners—but also acknowledged that the diversity of views generated as a result were at times difficult to reconcile. The ongoing, supportive

and proactive engagement of the Global Fund Secretariat as a collaborative partner throughout the regional dialogue process and concept note development was described as an important innovation, and one that in the words of one respondent, should “become the norm” under the New Funding Model. Involvement of the major donor supporting the concept note development process was also reported to be beneficial and appreciated.

A repeated concern expressed by drafting team members was the difficulties they faced in completing the Global Fund’s concept note form and modular template for regional applicants. Multiple interviewees felt that the form and the template were not well adapted to either a regional proposal or to a proposal for programs focused on advocacy and CSS (rather than service delivery). For example, the form (see section 3.3 “Regional Strategic Plans and Implementation”) required a description of the selected countries’ national strategic plans; the goals, objectives and priority program areas of those plans; and any implementation challenges and outcomes of recent program reviews and revisions. EHRN could not provide this given its decision to undertake a process of country selection through a competitive process although it was possible to refer to the relevant regional plans. In addition, interviewees acknowledged that such a focus on a country-by-country description could indicate an understanding that a regional proposal was being considered as merely the sum of unrelated country-by-country activities, rather than a synthesized, strategic regional approach valid across countries.

Interviewees also expressed concern that at the time of concept note development the Global Fund did not have guidance for developing M&E for proposals—regional or national—focused on advocacy and CSS rather than service delivery only. These limitations meant that the drafting team found it difficult to describe appropriate indicators of success for advocacy focused goals, objectives and activities.

Drafting team members also expressed concern about the unintended consequences of the very ambitious timeline—the work involved was substantial, but EHRN’s success in raising sufficient funds to organize the regional dialogue processes and to engage consultants for the drafting team meant that the timeline was difficult but manageable. It was noted that additional quality technical support from technical partners would have been valuable.

Finally, interviewees felt that section 4.1. of the concept note requesting a gap analysis should be better adapted to a regional project, particularly those that will not provide direct provision of services. Section 4.1 of the concept note form requires that certain tables be filled out, which was not feasible for a regional proposal focused on advocacy and CSS—the table was more relevant for a service delivery focused project. However, the form also provided the option of completing a narrative description “if the table is not possible as quantification is difficult”.

### **Lessons learned: assessment and recommendations**

The concept note development process has generated the following recommendations by participants and partners:

- The Global Fund should adapt the concept note application form and the modular template for regional and country proposals that focus on advocacy and CSS rather than service delivery—a rapid consultation with relevant partners should be undertaken to generate recommended changes. In addition, amendments should reflect circumstances where an applicant selects implementers (and countries) through a competitive process, after concept note submission.

- The Global Fund Secretariat should prioritize providing proactive support, problem solving and guidance to regional applicants under the New Funding Model whose concept notes focus on CSS and advocacy, since they are likely to face particular challenges.
- The revision of the Global Fund’s CSS framework should be expedited and operationalized as a matter of priority so that partners can benefit from an appropriate M&E framework as well as indicators for advocacy and CSS focused applications, in time for the full roll out of the New Funding Model.
- The Global Fund Secretariat should be congratulated for its proactive approach to partnership during the transition and it should become the “new norm” under the New Funding Model. If a change in Secretariat staff structure should be required to support such collaboration, the Global Fund Secretariat management should take on such changes.
- Provision of quality and timely technical support (in accordance with an applicant’s concept note development timeline) is extremely important for success in all stages of the process—partners should ensure such technical support is funded, and qualified providers are identified.