



ANNUAL PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT FOR 2007

Project Title: HIV/AIDS prevention and care among injecting drug users and in prison settings in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania
Project Number: XEEJ20
Total Budget: USD 5,000,000
Donor: The Netherlands

I. IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES

1. Build national and regional consensus on effective implementation strategies to address HIV/AIDS among injecting drug users and in prisons.
2. Increase coverage of comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention and care services among injecting drug users and in prison settings.
3. Generate and share strategic information to keep programme on track and to respond appropriately to the evolving HIV/AIDS epidemics among injecting drug users and in prison settings.

II. IMPACT OF ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS TOWARDS REALIZATION OF IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES

Through project activities the need of evidence informed HIV prevention among injecting drug users and in prisons has been brought to the attention of high level policy makers. A new national HIV programme has been developed for Latvia with appropriate emphasis on IDU as the main driver of the epidemic. Recommendations on scaling-up of long-term pharmacotherapy have been presented to and endorsed by the Latvian Council for Coordination of Drug Control and Drug Prevention chaired by the Prime Minister. Awareness of the Ministries of Justice and the Prison Administrations on HIV prevention has increased considerably since the beginning of the project. With the financial support provided through the small grants scheme, new needle and syringe and methadone maintenance programmes have been opened. Recruitment of new outreach workers has helped needle and syringe programmes to reach larger number of IDUs. Financial support has also been used to improve working conditions of the staff of low threshold cabinets. As a result motivation and job satisfaction of the staff has increased and turnover has reduced. Through provision of computer equipment for service providers data collection and reporting has improved. Evaluation of training activities shows that professional capacity of the service providers has increased, and the knowledge and skills obtained are practical and can be used to improve quality of the services. Information generated by the project has been presented to various target audiences, including high level policy makers, health care experts and civil society organizations.

III. MAIN ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS FOR YEAR UNDER REVIEW

1.1.1. Establish national, regional project steering committees and conduct stakeholders and commencement meetings. Develop and agree with the stakeholders of the three

countries a detailed budgeted work plan with achievement indicators and verification methods.

In Lithuania, the Project Steering Committee (PSC) has been established by an Order of the Ministry of Health. PSC is chaired by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Health, and it comprises members of various ministries, local municipalities, specialized governmental agencies and civil society organizations. Two meetings of PSC have been organized to present the project work plan and to discuss project achievements in 2008. In Latvia, PSC is chaired by the Director of Investment Department of the Ministry of Health, and the members represent the Public Health Agency, the Ministry of Justice, Prison Administration and Riga Centre of Psychiatry and Addiction Disorders. Two PSC meetings have taken place during the reporting period, and it has been acknowledged that the project has had a significant impact on raising awareness on HIV among policy makers and facilitating co-operation between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Justice. In addition, the project has been presented to the National Coordination Commissions on Curbing Spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV Infections. In Estonia, the functions of the project steering committee are performed by the existing Government Commission on HIV. In December, national workshops were organized in Latvia and Lithuania to review results achieved in 2007 and to prepare work plans for 2008. The workshops were attended by all major stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Prison Administration, HIV and drug dependence treatment experts, local governments and civil society organizations. In Latvia and Lithuania, Technical Work Groups (TWG) on HIV prevention in prisons has been established. The main goal of the TWGs is to promote inter-sectoral cooperation and to ensure involvement of all major stakeholders in the project implementation.

1.1.2. Conduct national rapid HIV/AIDS situation and response assessments related to injecting drug use and in prison settings and set coverage targets.

2.2.1. Carry out a needs assessment of service provision sites to scale up the provision of comprehensive HIV/AIDS services for injecting drug users and in prisons.

In March, a training workshop on UNAIDS/WHO methods and tools for HIV/AIDS estimates and projections was conducted in cooperation with WHO. The workshop identified gaps in current data estimates; in particular, reliable data are not available on the size of IDU populations in Latvia and Lithuania. Subsequently, an international expert was recruited to assist the Lithuanian Drug Control Department in assessment of IDU prevalence in the country. The study estimated that in 2006, the total number of problem drug users was 4,300 and the number of injecting drug users was 3,200. The number is much lower comparing with the previous estimate of 8,000 IDUs in Lithuania. Recommendations for further improvement of data collection and analysis were discussed with experts from the Drug Control Department, Ministry of Health, Vilnius Centre of Addiction Disorders, and Lithuanian AIDS Centre. A regional workshop was organized for the technical staff involved in surveillance, monitoring and evaluation of HIV and drug use with the aim to field test the WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS Technical Guide for Setting Targets for Universal Access to HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Care for IDUs. Baseline data on availability and coverage of essential HIV prevention interventions for IDUs in community settings have been collected. Currently, only 1-5 % of IDUs have access to substitution therapy. In Latvia and Lithuania, less than 7% of IDUs are reached by needle and syringe programmes (NSP). According to estimates, the highest coverage is in Estonia where 50% of IDUs are reached with NSP, mainly with the support of the Global Fund grant.

In Latvia and Estonia, assessment of methadone maintenance programmes has been completed. As a result, specific recommendations for scaling-up and improvement of the quality of methadone maintenance therapy have been prepared. It has been recommended to organize training for service providers, develop information materials for the clients and

medical professionals, assist in developing procedures for monitoring and evaluation, and facilitate regional networking and exchange of experience. Experts from Trimbos Institute have trained Latvian and Lithuanian prison staff and health care experts on rapid assessment and response (RAR) of drug abuse in prisons. RAR was conducted in Marijampole Correction House in Lithuania and Valmiera Prison in Latvia. The results of the study will be presented in the beginning of 2008.

1.1.3. In each country, conduct and consolidate reviews of policy, administrative and operational provisions related to HIV/AIDS prevention and care among injecting drug users and in prison settings.

In Lithuania, legal and policy review was conducted to identify obstacles for effective HIV prevention and treatment in prisons. The study concluded that there are no legal barriers for introduction of substitution therapy and needle and syringe programmes in prisons. In Estonia, revision of guidelines for provision of methadone maintenance therapy is under way. Analysis of legal barriers for introduction of evidence based HIV prevention in prisons was conducted in Latvia. UNODC project recommendations for scaling-up of substitution therapy were presented to the Council for Coordination of Drug Control and Drug Prevention, chaired by the Prime Minister of Latvia. The Council endorsed the recommendations and the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice were asked to prepare amendments of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations on the Order for Treatment of Patients Dependent on Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances.

1.1.4. Provide assistance in amending national HIV/AIDS strategies and action plans based on national situation assessment and policy reviews to reach coverage targets.

With the support of UNAIDS AIDS Strategy and Action Plan Service (ASAP), revision of the Latvian national HIV programme for 2008-2012 has been completed. Assistance was provided by a team of international consultants comprising an expert on HIV prevention among IDUs, expert on HIV prevention in prisons, expert on costing and the team leader with expertise in strategic planning and monitoring and evaluation. A workshop with the main stakeholders was organized to present and discuss the draft programme. Prevention among IDUs and in prison settings are explicitly indicated as the highest priorities, and essential interventions like substitution therapy and needle and syringe programmes with specific achievement targets have been included in the programme. The new programme also provides for increased involvement of civil society organizations in HIV prevention among hard to reach groups as well as provision of funds from the state budget for these services.

2.1.1. Conduct training needs assessment of service providers from both government and civil society organizations.

Assessment of training needs for the staff of needle and syringe programmes was conducted through dissemination of a questionnaire and interviews with the key informants. The assessment identified that outreach workers need to improve practical skills on motivational interviewing, establishing contacts with drug users and involving them in the programmes. Also more information is needed about drug dependence treatment, especially substitution therapy.

2.1.2. Identify and support a regional training centre for HIV/AIDS prevention and care service provision for injecting drug users and in prisons.

Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders has been identified as a regional knowledge hub on substitution therapy. Experts of the Centre have been involved in the following activities: assessment of methadone therapy in Latvia and Estonia, organizing study visits for Latvian and Estonian drug treatment physicians, development of a training module on substitution

therapy in Lithuania, and organization of a national conference on substitution therapy in Lithuania.

2.1.3. Develop curricula, training modules and materials for HIV/AIDS prevention and care for injecting drug users and in prison settings.

Training module on opioid substitution therapy has been developed by Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders and approved by Vilnius University. In August a regional workshop on reduction of risks related to drug use in prisons was organized in Riga. The participants were health care managers from the prison administrations, drug treatment and infectious diseases experts, and civil society organizations. During the workshop the manual “Risk reduction for drug users in prisons” was presented by experts from Trimbos Institute and Bremen University, and adaptations needed for each country were discussed. Experts from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania exchanged experience on current practices in organizing HIV and drug prevention in prisons and training of prison staff. Preparation of country workplans for adaptation and implementation of the manual was started.

2.1.4. Train a critical mass of professionals from both government and civil society organizations involved in service delivery.

In June a study tour on prevention and surveillance of communicable diseases was organized to Germany. During the study tour 16 participants from the Ministries of Justice, Prison Administration, Ministry of Interior and NGOs visited several prisons, research and academic institutions and NGOs to get acquainted with German experience in HIV prevention in prison settings. All participants acknowledged that they have received useful and practical information which will be used to improve HIV prevention in their countries. Drug treatment physicians from Latvia and Estonia took part in a study tour to Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders. The participants highly assessed the possibility to get acquainted with Lithuania’s experience in decentralization of substitution therapy and to improve their knowledge about methadone maintenance treatment. Two Lithuanian experts were trained on capture-recapture methodology in the University of Reading, UK. The knowledge and skills obtained in the training were used to assess the size of IDU population in Lithuania. Six experts from all 3 Baltic countries took part in the training seminar on HIV/AIDS in prison settings, which was organized within the framework of the 18th International Conference on Reduction of Drug Related Harm. In March, representatives from two local governments in Latvia took part in a study tour to Finland. The purpose of the study tour was to get acquainted with experience of local governments in organizing low threshold services for IDUs. 25 participants from governmental and civil society organizations improved their knowledge and skills in developing indicators for monitoring and evaluation of HIV prevention during a training workshop, which took place in May in Tallinn. Four police officers took part in a study tour to London on drug referral schemes organized by UNODC office in Russia. In preparation for scaling-up of substitution therapy in Latvia, a 3-days training seminar was organized for physicians, nurses and social workers from drug treatment centres and prisons. Training was based on CEEHRN Knowledge Hub training module on substitution therapy, and it was conducted by experts from Vilnius Centre of Addictive Disorders. The participants highly assessed the training and acknowledged that they had received new information and practical skills that they will apply in their work. In cooperation with the CEEHRN Knowledge Hub, 4-days training courses on needle and syringe exchange were organized in Latvia and Lithuania. Representatives from Latvian Public Health Agency acknowledged that training has been very useful for the staff of NSP and requested to repeat the same training course for other service providers. Seminar on burn-out prevention was organized for the staff of the national network of low threshold services in Latvia, and training on advocacy of harm reduction – for governmental agencies and civil society organizations in Lithuania. In September, a regional

seminar on substitution therapy of opioid dependence was organized in Riga. It was attended by psychiatrists, public health experts and civil society organizations from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The main objectives of the meeting were to present good practice of methadone maintenance therapy, to exchange information and experience among the Baltic States and to develop proposals for scaling-up and improving quality of substitution therapy. Presentations were given by international experts from Austria, The Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain, as well as UNODC and WHO experts. The meeting was opened by the Dutch Ambassador and the Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Health. In co-operation with WHO a conference was organized on future challenges of national response to HIV in Latvia. The conference was attended by high level officials from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice, members of the parliament, as well as HIV prevention and treatment providers representing state institutions and civil society. In total, more than 800 persons have participated in 33 training activities organized by UNODC in 2007.

2.2.2. Provide, where necessary, financial support for provision of services to both government and non-governmental organizations.

In Latvia and Lithuania, small grants have been provided to non-governmental and governmental organizations to improve and scale-up HIV prevention services for drug users. In both countries, national grant committees comprising representatives from the Ministry of Health, Prison Administration, Association of Local Governments and WHO were established to assist UNODC with assessment of applications. Grants for the total amount of USD 480,000 have been awarded to 10 organizations in Latvia and 13 in Lithuania. Good collaboration has been established with the Lithuanian Drug Control Department which is responsible for the national programme supporting low threshold services for drug users. Experts of the Drug Control Department take part in monitoring of the small grants programme, as well as organizing training for service providers. In addition to improving the already existing services, several new programmes have been opened: NSP in the Latvian State Agency of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases, two methadone programmes and one prison project in Lithuania. Small grants programme in Estonia will be started in 2008.

2.2.3. Assist governments in securing sustainable funding for sufficient access points to meet the targets.

Mechanisms for funding of HIV prevention services provided by NGOs were discussed during revision of Latvian HIV programme for 2008-2012. The Ministry of Health supported allocation of funds for NGOs within the new national HIV programme. Assistance by international expert was provided to cost the national HIV programme for Latvia. The Council for Coordination of Drug Control and Drug Prevention endorsed UNODC recommendation to assess number of clients in need for substitution therapy to ensure allocation of sufficient funding in 2008. To ensure sustainability of activities supported by the project grant scheme, all recipients were requested to provide co-financing and description of long-term development plans for activities supported by UNODC.

2.2.4. Carry out ongoing, mid-term and end-of-project monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation framework for the project has been developed during a regional workshop attended by the Government Focal Implementation Agencies and technical staff involved in project implementation. Participants are requested to evaluate all training activities organized by the project. In addition to semi-annual and annual reports, quarterly project progress reports are submitted to the donor of the project.

3.1.1. Establish a regional information centre to collect and analyze project related information.

Major stakeholders attending the regional workshop on monitoring and evaluation decided that establishment of a new regional information centre is not feasible. The countries already provide information about HIV and drug situation to several UN agencies, EMCDDA and other EU agencies. Instead of establishment of a new information centre, it was recommended to support improvement of national capacity on monitoring and evaluation of HIV response.

3.1.2. Document and share lessons learnt and experiences at various forums.

3.1.3. Participate in various technical and professional networks at the national, regional and global levels.

In February, regional meeting for policy makers and HIV prevention service providers from governmental agencies and civil society organizations was organized in Lithuania. The participants exchanged information on national response to HIV towards IDUs, identified gaps and priority areas to be supported by UNODC project. MOH representatives from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania took part in the technical consultation on HIV prevention and care, which was organized by UNODC in Vienna in March 2007. The project supported participation of two Lithuanian civil society organizations in the EU-Presidency conference "Responsibility and Partnership - together against HIV/AIDS" which took place in Bremen in March 2007. One representative from the Prison Administration took part in the meeting on health in prisons which was organized within the framework of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-Being. Ministry of Justice representatives from all 3 Baltic states took part in the 18th International Conference on Reduction of Drug Related Harm. The project also supported participation of drug dependence treatment specialists in the 1st World Conference on Medication Assisted Treatment of Opiate Addiction and representatives of the Prison Administration and Ministry of Justice in the international conference on health in prisons that took place in Varna, Bulgaria.