



ANNUAL PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT FOR 2008 (draft)

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. In Estonia, the main findings and recommendations of the evaluation of national response to HIV and AIDS were presented to the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice. Awareness of the Ministries of Justice and the Prison Administrations on HIV prevention has increased considerably since the beginning of the project. In all three countries, the Prison Administrations participate more actively in political and technical discussions on HIV prevention and care in prisons. In Estonia, the Ministry of Justice has decided to start methadone maintenance therapy in one prison. With the financial support provided through the small grants scheme, new needle and syringe and methadone maintenance programmes have been opened in community settings and new HIV prevention activities have been started in prisons. Evaluation of training activities shows that professional capacity of the service providers has increased, and the knowledge and skills obtained are practical and will 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, and it is used in policy planning.

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) convened one meeting to discuss and approve project work plan for 2008. In Latvia, the Technical Work Group on prisons had one meeting to discuss initial findings of the rapid assessment of drug use in prisons. Three NGOs presented their experience on drug and HIV prevention activities in prisons. Mechanisms for improvement of collaboration between prisons and NGOs were discussed and presented to Prison Administration and the Ministry of Justice. In May, the PSC had a meeting to review the progress with project implementation. It was concluded that most of the activities have been implemented according to the

agreed work plan. Assistance of PSC was requested to speed up approval of legal amendments required for scaling-up of methadone therapy. In Estonia, a workshop for the major stakeholders was organized to review project achievements in 2007 and to discuss implementation of the work plan for 2008. Interruption of methadone maintenance therapy in arrest houses and prisons was identified as a major gap in the national response to HIV and as a priority area for further UNODC support.

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 cooperation with WHO, assessment of national response to HIV in prison settings and towards IDUs was conducted in Estonia in January 2008. It was concluded that the coverage of needle and syringe programmes is good, but coverage of methadone maintenance programmes is very low. The main findings and recommendations were presented in a national conference in April. The conference was opened by the Minister of Social Affairs and it was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs, National Institute for Health Development, health care experts and non-governmental organizations. Reference to the WHO/UNODC evaluation of national response to AIDS was made in the statement of the Estonian Minister of Social Affairs to the UNGASS High-Level Meeting on AIDS which took place in June in New York. In April, a workshop was organized for policy makers, prison staff and NGOs to discuss responses to HIV and AIDS in prisons. In the workshop the Ministry of Justice informed about the decision to introduce pharmacotherapy for treatment of opioid dependence in prisons. Some participants raised concerns about decreased funding for NGO work in prisons and requested UNODC support in further negotiations with the Ministry of Justice.

In cooperation with the Prison Administrations in Latvia and Lithuania, seminars were organized to present results of the rapid assessment and response (RAR) on drug use and response in Valmiera and Marijampole prisons. Both meetings were attended by prison governors, chiefs of health care units, representatives from the Ministry of Justice and NGOs. RAR concluded that drug injection is widely spread in the prisons and risks of HIV infection are high. Overview on evidence-informed HIV prevention including needle and syringe programmes and methadone maintenance therapy was provided and possibilities to introduce them in Latvia and Lithuania were discussed. Latvian Ministry of Justice confirmed support for introduction of harm reduction programmes in prisons. While some of the participants remain very negative about harm reduction in prisons, there is an increasing number of prison doctors and governors who acknowledge the need of syringe exchange and methadone maintenance therapy.

In cooperation with Lithuanian AIDS Centre, preparations have been completed for a study on availability of sterile injecting equipment through pharmacies. National experts have been recruited and questionnaires for pharmacists and drug users have been developed and tested. Data collection will be started in July, 2008.

Assessment of quality and availability of ARV therapy in Latvia has been endorsed by high level officials of the Ministry of Health and the National Commission for Coordination of Limitation of spread of HIV and STIs. Agreement has been reached with WHO on collaboration in conducting the assessment.

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 response to critical findings of the previous studies, evaluation of the quality of opioid substitution therapy was started in Estonia and Latvia. Experts from Trimbos Institute advised on evaluation methodology and assisted in conducting interviews with the key decision makers. National experts collected data through interviews with staff and clients of the treatment centres. Expert meeting to analyze the initial findings is scheduled for August. In Latvia, with the support of the Project Steering committee amendments to the Regulation on provision of substitution therapy have been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers but have not been approved yet. Expert from Vilnius Centre

for Addiction Disorders has reviewed the draft of Estonian Guidelines on Substitution Therapy, and specific recommendations to improve the Guidelines have been submitted to the National Institute for Health Development.

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.

Regular meetings were conducted with the Latvian Ministry of Health and the Public Health Agency to monitor final stages of the preparation of the National HIV/AIDS programme and to advise on interventions targeting IDUs and prisoners.

UNODC provided comments on the draft National Program for Control of Drugs and Prevention of Drug Addiction in Lithuania for 2009-2016. It was recommended to include in the operation plan specific and measurable activities for drug dependence treatment and harm reduction in prisons. Official letter has been sent to the Ministry of Health highlighting the need to include interventions targeting the main risk groups - drug injectors and prisoners in the National HIV programme for 2009-2012. The Ministry of Health has agreed to submit the HIV programme for peer review through the UNAIDS AIDS Strategy and Action Plan Service (ASAP).

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

Assessment of training needs was completed in 2007.

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.

Experts from Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders conducted training at national and regional levels (Activity 2.1.4.) and provided comments on the guidelines for treatment of opioid dependence drafted by Estonian Union of Psychiatrists.

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

Publication in Lithuanian about health and social services for drug users and ex-prisoners has been prepared and disseminated through UNODC meetings and seminars to the key stakeholders such as the Prison Department, Drug Control Department, general practitioners and governmental and non-governmental organizations providing services to drug users. The information material is also available on UNODC website. In Latvia, adaptation of the manual "Risk reduction for drug users in prisons" has been completed and the draft manual has been submitted for comments to the Prison Administration. Information material on legal aspects possession and use of drugs has been prepared and disseminated to harm reduction programmes in Latvia.

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

In March, training on opioid substitution therapy was conducted for Estonian prison nurses and doctors. Most of the participants acknowledged that they have acquired new knowledge and skills, resulting in better preparedness to provide methadone maintenance therapy. Following the training, preparations have been started for introduction of methadone maintenance therapy in Tartu prison.

In cooperation with Lithuanian Drug Control Department three training seminars were organized for members of municipal drug control commissions. Participants received detailed and updated information about drug prevention, drug dependence treatment and harm reduction services available in Lithuania. UNODC small grants scheme was presented and local governments were encouraged to use UNODC project support for introduction of new services and scaling-up of the existing programmes. A seminar on HIV prevention among injecting drug users was organized in the City of Visaginas, Lithuania. Visaginas has one of the highest IDU prevalence rates in the country, but until now no harm reduction services are available. During the seminar, it was decided to start needle and syringe programme and methadone maintenance therapy.

In Lithuania, training seminar on opioid substitution therapy was organized for psychiatrists and nurses. The participants received information about the goals, principles and history of opioid

substitution therapy (OST), as well as knowledge and skills on medical and social evaluation of patient, principles of organizing team work, HIV prevention and ARV therapy during OST. Training was based on the module „Diagnostics, medical treatment and health care of persons with opioid dependence" which was developed by Vilnius Centre for Addiction Disorders in 2007. Six persons representing drug coordination commissions of local governments in Visaginas, Klaipeda and Vilnius, Drug Control Department at the Government of Lithuania and Vilnius Centre of Addiction Disorders took part in the study tour to Barcelona on HIV prevention among injecting drug users. The main objective was to present the Catalonian drug and HIV policy and a comprehensive package of services provided to drug users. All participants acknowledged that they have received a lot of new and practical information which will be used in planning of HIV prevention and drug dependence treatment in their municipalities. Following the study tour, development of a concept on mobile methadone programme in Vilnius has been started.

Three training seminars on risk reduction have been conducted by NGO "Papardes Ziedis" for the prison staff in Latvia. According to the evaluation, trainings provided new knowledge and skills and helped to develop new initiatives, which was later proved by a high number of project proposals submitted to the UNODC grant scheme.

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

In Estonia, two grants were provided to NGOs: one for scaling-up outreach work and peer driven intervention in North-Eastern Estonia, and another one for improvement of HIV prevention and care in prisons. In Latvia and Lithuania, implementation of projects started in 2007 was continued. Last year grants were awarded to 10 organizations in Latvia and 13 in Lithuania. The small grants scheme has resulted in opening of new services: needle and syringe programme in the Latvian State Agency of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases, two methadone programmes in Lithuania and five projects on HIV prevention in prisons. Call for new grants were announced in Latvia and Lithuania. In both countries workshops were organized to advise on preparation of project proposals. 8 applications have been received from the organizations in Lithuania and 25 from Latvia. The projects aim to open new methadone provision sites, to scale-up outreach work among IDUs as well as to provide education and counseling to prisoners. Grants Committees comprising key stakeholders have been established and will meet in July to assess the submitted proposals.

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

Consultations on securing funds for NGO work in prisons were conducted with the Ministry of Justice and the National Institute for Health Development. Ministry of Justice has confirmed commitment to provide funds for NGO activities as of September 2008. In Lithuania, consultations were held with the Ministry of Health and Drug Control Department on funding of methadone therapy from the national budget.

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

In Latvia, evaluation of the small grants programme was conducted by independent expert from the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network. The main findings of the evaluation were presented and discussed during a workshop with service providers and representatives of the Public Health Agency. The evaluation concluded that with the support of UNODC grants outreach work has been scaled-up, new initiatives like peer approach have been introduced and the number of clients reached has increased. In co-operation with the key collaborating institutions like Prison Administration, Drug Control Department and Vilnius Centre for Addiction Disorders monitoring visits were organized to the services supported by UNODC small grants scheme. During the visits also the feedback from the clients was requested. During the interviews, drug users expressed appreciation of the new services, especially availability of methadone therapy and education seminars in prisons. Preparations have been started for the mid-term evaluation of the project: methodology has been discussed with the Evaluation Unit at UNODC HQ and TOR has been drafted.

In addition to semi-annual and annual reports, quarterly project progress reports are submitted to the donor of the project.

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.

On UNODC website, a separate section for the project has been developed: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/baltics/index.html>. Information about project activities, project reports and other technical information is posted on regular basis. In Tallinn, a regional workshop was conducted to exchange NGO experience with HIV prevention and care in prisons. The workshop was attended by civil society organizations from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as experts from the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network. It was agreed to compile good practice of NGOs on HIV prevention in prisons and to prepare a publication for dissemination in the Baltic region.

Representative from the Estonian Ministry of Justice participated in a seminar on training of criminal justice professionals on harm reduction. The workshop was organized by the Scientific Institute of the German Medical Association within a framework of EC-funded project. The participants exchanged information on current practices in training of criminal justice system professionals and discussed development of a training module for criminal justice professionals. Three police officers took part in a training workshop „Are we tackling drug use and criminality effectively? Improving skills and exchanging experiences on working with drug users under arrest in European countries" which took place in Bulgaria. The participants were acquainted with the Italian and the UK experience of arrest referral and discussed experience of other European countries. It was agreed to develop pilot initiatives within the on-going UNODC project on cooperation between law enforcement and the health and social authorities in all three Baltic States. UNODC supported participation of a representative of the Estonian Network of People Living with HIV in the UNGASS High-Level Meeting on AIDS. A representative from the Latvian NGO “Papardes zieds” took part in the 19th International Harm Reduction Conference in Barcelona.

In co-operation with Drug Control Department an international conference "Harm Reduction Programs in Europe: practice, problems and perspectives" was organized in Vilnius. The conference was opened by the Chancellor of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Minister of Health, and it was attended by more than 250 policy makers, public health experts and members of civil society organizations from different European countries. The participants received information about UN and EU policy on harm reduction and exchanged experience in provision of HIV prevention services for drug users.

Two prison doctors from Latvia attended a seminar in Moscow to present results of RAR on drug use in Valmiera prison. Representatives from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior participated in the informal technical consultation on HIV prevention among IDUs and in prisons which took place in February in Vienna. During the meeting the Latvian HIV programme developed with UNODC support was presented. UNODC experience in supporting development of national HIV strategy for Latvia was also presented in a side-event during the UNGASS High-Level Meeting on AIDS which took place in June 2008 in New York.

IV. MAJOR PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND STEPS TAKEN TO SOLVE THEM

No major problems have been encountered during the reporting period.

V. FINDINGS / RECOMMENDATIONS OF EVALUATIONS, TRIPARTITE REVIEW MEETINGS OR MISSIONS

N/A