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Press Release
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HIV rates to decrease in Eastern Europe only if access to harm reduction services among women who use drugs is scaled-up

On the eve of the World AIDS Day, [Eurasian Harm Reduction Network \(EHRN\)](#) calls for the urgent need to scale-up harm reduction services in Eastern Europe for women who use drugs. HIV prevalence among women drug users continues to rapidly increase, and if access to harm reduction services including opioid substitution treatment and needle and syringe programs is not dramatically scaled-up during the next 12 months, Eastern Europe won't be able to reach the Millennium Development Goals on HIV and will remain the only region in the world where HIV incidence rates continue to grow.

"The number of women who inject drugs in Eastern Europe is grossly underestimated, and only a small proportion of them are reached by HIV prevention services. For example, in methadone treatment, which is a vital element of HIV prevention, no more than 10% of all recipients of services are women. We attribute this to widespread discrimination of women drug users in medical settings and unpreparedness of service providers to ensure gender-sensitive approach," says Dasha Ocheret, Deputy Director for Policy and Advocacy, EHRN.

The number of women who use drugs in Eastern European countries newly diagnosed with HIV in 2012 was 27000¹, therefore in 2013 EHRN members put high emphasis on health and social needs of women who use drugs. In a joint regional program EHRN partner organizations in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine offered high quality harm reduction services to over 2500 women drug users between June and November, 2013. This helped preventing new HIV infections among women, their partners and children, and enabled access to HIV treatment to those who already live with HIV.

At the same time, the unmet need in harm reduction services among women is much higher than among men and requires dramatic increase of funding from public resources.

On average, only 3 out of 1000 women who use drugs have access to opioid substitution treatment².

Access to opioid substitution treatment among women who use drugs per 1000 / per country:

Azerbaijan	9
Georgia	5
Moldova	12
Russia	0
Ukraine	19
WHO target	200 – 400

EHRN is now in the process of finalizing the report *Access of Women Who Use Drugs to Harm Reduction Services in Eastern Europe*. The report will be issued on January 25, 2014 and made public on EHRN website for

¹ European Center for Disease Prevention and Control / WHO Regional Office for Europe (2013) *HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2012*. Available online from <http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/hiv-aids-surveillance-report-2012-20131127.pdf>

² *Access of Women Who Use Drugs to Harm Reduction Services in Eastern Europe.* EHRN Report to be available from January 2014.

review and discussions on how to address these issues and achieve tangible results.

About EHRN:

EHRN is a regional network of harm reduction programs and their allies from across 29 countries in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA). The Network works to advocate for the universal human rights of people who use drugs, and to protect their lives and health. It unites over 450 institutional and individual members, tapping into a wealth of regional best practices, expertise and resources in harm reduction, drug policy reform, HIV/AIDS, TB, HCV, and overdose prevention. As a regional network, EHRN plays a key role as a liaison between local, national and international organizations.

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