

HIV, sexual and reproductive health care, and youth rights in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

## CHAMPIONING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF STIGMATISED YOUNG PEOPLE



**IPPF EUROPEAN NETWORK CHAMPIONS FREE, SAFE AND DIGNIFIED LIVES FOR ALL PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE NEGLECTED BY THEIR GOVERNMENTS AND THE SOCIETIES THEY LIVE IN.**

In many countries throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia, young people from marginalised groups most vulnerable to HIV are being harmed by high levels of violence, discrimination and stigma, and it is enormously difficult for them to access the care they need. Many governments are failing to tackle the rising HIV epidemic because of prejudice, gender inequality, homophobia and racism, exacerbating the vulnerability of young people who bear the brunt of the epidemic.

IPPF EN believes that all young people have the right to be able to look after their health, develop crucial life skills through sex and relationships education, and fulfil their aspirations. They must be able to live their lives without fear of attacks, legal sanctions or stigma. We are empowering marginalised young communities in this region to fight for their human rights, and making sure that they have access to information, sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health care, including HIV services. We also focus on reducing multiple forms of discrimination, stigma and harmful gender norms, to help prevent damage to their health and well-being.



## DOUBLY MARGINALISED: YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK

People who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers and prisoners - these communities are the “key populations” most vulnerable to HIV. The same groups face very high levels of violence, discrimination and stigma, which lead to social marginalisation, self-stigma and in some cases precarious legal status. This makes it a struggle for them to be recognised in society and to access any kind of service. When it comes to their health, it is extremely difficult for them seek and receive care.

Young people in general are also particularly at risk from HIV for reasons including denial of sexuality education, difficulty accessing the condoms and lubricant that provide protection, and sexual violence.

All of this makes young people from key populations (YKP) extremely vulnerable to harm, which is why we focus on supporting these particular communities.

### PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV IN EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



Only **63%** know their status

Just **28%** of these are on antiretroviral therapy

Source: UNAIDS 2017

## CONTEXT

### AT THE CROSSROADS: LIVES IN DANGER AS HIV NUMBERS RISE AND FUNDING IS CUT

Eastern Europe and Central Asia is the only region in the world where the HIV epidemic continues to rise rapidly. National governments are failing to invest adequately in HIV prevention, and the Global Fund has withdrawn from the region, leaving a major funding shortfall. **Just 63% of people living with HIV know their status and only 28% of these are on antiretroviral therapy, both figures far below the global average (see graphic).** This is a devastating situation which highlights that the region is failing to meet the 90-90-90 UNAIDS targets to help end the global AIDS epidemic by 2020. Governments around Eastern Europe and Central Asia are reneging on the commitments they each made in 2015 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals to fight HIV and leave no one behind.

Young people from key populations are at greatest risk of slipping through the cracks because there are so many obstacles that prevent them from seeking and receiving sexual and reproductive health care, including HIV counselling and testing. **A major barrier is the failure to integrate all of these services and provide respectful, youth-friendly health care on a ‘one stop shop’ basis. Others include parental consent requirements, poor access to sex and relationships education, an absence of trained care providers and a lack of information on where to find services, as well as social and economic obstacles.**

Stigmatised young people are also seriously under-represented in political and other decision-making mechanisms that could help to meet their needs and concerns. In particular, they miss out on community group support, since neither mainstream youth groups nor groups for adults from key populations are set up to work for and with them.

**New retrogressive legislation is attacking the rights of LGBTIQ people, sex workers and drug users, potentially undermining stigmatised young people’s health and well-being even further.**

# IPPF EN CARES:

In response to this mistreatment of young people from key populations (YKP), IPPF EN is working to empower them and improve care in countries across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. **Here is a snapshot of what our members do:**



Macedonia - **HERA** and its partner Stronger Together have led a coalition of 16 NGOs in securing long-term government funding and **sustainability for all HIV programmes for marginalised groups, including YKP**. This is an incredible success, creating a very encouraging situation that is unique in the region. Political support from Macedonia's incoming socialist government was achieved through a combination of advocacy, research and campaigning.



Bosnia and Herzegovina - **Association XY** has taken an innovative approach to HIV prevention and empowerment by running **interactive educational sessions with prisoners** that helped to challenge harmful social and gender norms. They focused on topics like emotions, norms, relationships, HIV, sexually transmitted infections and healthy lifestyles.



Albania - **ACPD** has developed a package of materials to train primary health care providers to ensure **gender-sensitive and stigma-free HIV care for young key populations**. This allows them to use public health services. ACPD also put in place networks and training that enabled hundreds of YKP to develop knowledge and life skills to support their health and well-being.



Kyrgyzstan - **RHAK** has enabled young people to educate their peers about sexuality and relationships, including subjects that are difficult to talk about in conservative societies, such as pleasure and sexual orientation. Crucially, they have **built the skills of young LGBTIQ people** to carry out this vital work in their community.



Serbia - **SRH Serbia** runs **drop-in centres for YKP and other vulnerable groups, offering safe spaces** that support their needs. They also provide care to young men who have sex with men in migrant and refugee camps, where they run sexuality education workshops and give out condoms and lubricants.



At the regional level, in 2017 IPPF EN and UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia published **"Health, Rights and Well-Being", a practical tool** based on the experience of YKP themselves that builds on existing guidance and good practices from the region to guide all those working to develop rights- and evidence-based programmes for HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health for YKP. This is available at [www.ippfen.org](http://www.ippfen.org).

“ I'd rather go to an NGO. They don't usually have much capacity to provide services, especially now that there are no free condoms for distribution. But at least they treat us as equal human beings, without prejudice. ”

- Young gay man from Serbia



“

After being physically attacked several times, I filed a complaint with the Ombudsman's office. They promised they would follow up, but nothing ever happened.

”

- Young sex worker from Albania

Ensuring that stigmatised young people have a voice and are empowered to speak for themselves in decision-making spaces is essential to securing better care and support for their needs in the long-term.

Communities, care providers, civil society and decision-makers each have a role to play in listening to and supporting these young people, helping to ensure that brighter futures become a reality for them.

IPPF EN and our partners will continue to ensure free, safe and dignified lives for all, especially those facing the greatest challenges.



IPPF European Network cares. We are working in 40 countries across Europe and Central Asia so that all women, men, children and young people can lead safe and dignified sexual and reproductive lives, free from harm and discrimination.  
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