

Newsletter of the project

# «Gender and HIV: from paternalism to active involvement»

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1

The All-Ukrainian Union of Women Infected and Affected by HIV was created in Ukraine

2

Working Meeting on gender aspects of HIV

3

The Network continues delivering education to promote women's leadership and financial independence

4

Second study tour within the framework of the project

5

NEWS FROM REGIONS



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All-Ukrainian Network of PLWH



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

1  
**The All-Ukrainian Union of Women Infected and Affected by HIV was created in Ukraine**

On 16 May 2011 All Ukrainian Union of Women Infected and Affected by HIV was created in Ukraine. This is a remarkable event not only for the development of the civil society in Ukraine but also for the establishment of gender equality in our society.

«Today, almost 50,000 women live with HIV in Ukraine. But there are tens times more women affected by

the epidemics», said Iryna Borushek, Chairman of the Steering Committee of the All Ukrainian Union of Women Infected and Affected by HIV.

«That is why the creation of such organization in Ukraine is a historical decision, since it is for the first time when not just women but women with tough lives who faced a lot of problems due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic have decided to unite for the protection of their rights and interests. We hope that the development of our organization will enable Ukrainian women to be involved more actively in the social life and participate in the decision-making process directly related to their lives».

The principal body of the organization is the Steering Committee comprised of 5 women. The main goals of the newly established organization will be increasing access of HIV+ women to high-quality prevention, care and treatment services and involving HIV+ women in actions aimed to respond to the HIV epidemic in Ukraine. The Union will operate as a sub-network of the All-Ukrainian Network of PLWH and will have consulting and advisory functions (in particular, it will act as a facilitator in the course of implementation of gender aspects within the Network's activities) at central and regional levels.

day of the Meeting, the results of the gender research were presented and discussed. The said research was conducted within the framework of the «Gender and HIV: from Paternalism to Active Involvement» project which is implemented by the Network with support of UN Women. The UNAIDS operational plan on women, girls, gender equality and HIV was also presented, and a representative of Gestos (Brazil) told about the experience of implementation of the said plan in 15 countries worldwide.

On the second day of the Meeting, a regular meeting of the All Ukrainian Union of Women Infected and Affected by HIV was held. Participants of the Working Meeting – women leaders from Ukrainian regions discussed future plans and strategic planning ideas and worked on the creation of their 'face' – the logo of the Union.

Also, the final membership of the Steering Committee of the All Ukrainian Union of Women Infected and Affected by HIV determined; new members were admitted to the Union; and, the supreme management body of the Union was established – the Council of Founders comprised of 22 women. The action plan of the Union for the following three months was also developed.

2  
**Working Meeting on gender aspects of HIV**

On 30 June – 01 July 2011, the All-Ukrainian Network of PLWH and the All-Ukrainian Union of Women Infected and Affected by HIV held a Working Meeting dedicated to issues related to the influence of gender aspects on the spread of HIV and to the methods of involvement of women in the fight against the epidemic. During the first





### 3 The Network continues delivering education to promote women's leadership and financial independence

The All-Ukrainian Network of PLWH continues a series of trainings aimed at the development of leadership qualities and capabilities of women affected by HIV. Trainings are held as part of the «Gender and HIV: from Paternalism to Active Involvement» project with financial support of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

On 04-08 April, 20 women from Ukrainian regions participated in the training for trainers on women's leadership issues. The goal of the training was to increase the capabilities of women leaders in the area of HIV/AIDS, to urge the community to satisfy their living needs and form an active living position.

During the training, participants studied the methods and techniques used to organize and conduct learning events, the ways to develop women's leadership abilities, and discussed whether such actions were needed in their regions.

An important component of the training was planning of further actions

to be taken by participants – it is expected that this training and other measures implemented within the project will enable the Network to initiate the process of uniting women leaders of local communities for influencing the decision making process and strengthening the role of women at regional level.

On 12-15 April, 19 women participated in the business training «Start Your Business». The training was aimed at the development of business skills and intended to urge participants to advance themselves in the area of entrepreneurship and to facilitate gradual understanding of business basics.

Informational and methodological support for the training was provided by the «Equality of Women and Men at Work» project implemented by the International Labour Office.

During 4 days, participants had a possibility to get acquainted with all stages of entrepreneurial activities: choosing a business idea, developing a marketing plan, selecting an optimal organizational and legal form of business, studying bookkeeping and tax accounting, financial analysis, management issues.

On the basis of the training results, participants worked out a business plan for starting or improving an own business.

### 4 Second study tour within the framework of the project

On 21-27 March 2011, the All-Ukrainian Network of PLWH arranged and carried out the second study tour to Great Britain. The goal of the visit was to educate Ukrainian women leaders about best practices of providing services, care and support to people living with HIV/AIDS. The tour was held within the framework of the «Gender and HIV: from Paternalism to Active Involvement» project with financial support of United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of

Women (UN Women).

During the tour, participants visited nongovernmental organizations, health care institutions, community centres and a self-help group held by an HIV+ community activist at her home.

During the visits, participants shared their experiences, various aspects of work with people living with HIV/AIDS were discussed, contacts for further cooperation between Ukrainian and British NGOs were established. Participants from Ukraine mentioned that HIV services in the UK were at a rather high level and that many practices were worth adapting and implementing both at national and local levels.





In the course of meetings and negotiations, Ukrainian participants told about activities carried out by the Network and other nongovernmental organizations of Ukraine in the area of counteracting HIV/AIDS. British colleagues noted that the civil society in Ukraine was at a high level and maintained a rather active position. The Ukrainian delegation expressed interest in the work of the clinic treating HIV+ people with brain damage and dysfunction associated with HIV infection. Patients in the clinic are taught the simplest skills from the very beginning – to walk, to watch over their health, to cook for themselves, to go shopping. In addition to 34 beds in the inpatient department, there is also a daycare unit on the basis of the clinic where patients

complete the adaptation process and, staying already at home, can continue not only to receive high-quality specific medical care but also to communicate with community representatives. The first patron of this clinic was Princess Diana.

«A leader is a very wide and multifaceted concept», shared her impressions Olena Gazizova, a participant of the tour, «we have made sure that one individual can really change the situation, circumstances and life: his or her own life and the lives of other people. This is really impressive!»

The study tour urged new ideas and initiatives. A practical result of the visit to Britain will be the implementation of small-scale projects aimed at supporting and protecting women affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ukraine.

## Feedback of the First study tour participants

### Anastasiya Tymofeyeva, the Crimea

The study tour to London was very useful for me. I could see in practice how HIV-service organizations in Great Britain worked. It was useful to see how different organizations applied diverse approaches, and all of them worked; this allows us to work more flexibly with different people.

Due to the visit to London, a project of the women's club «Haven +» («Gavan'») was started in the city of

Sevastopol, which has already been operating for more than half a year. Also, I participate in the work of the «Haven +» community center; now we are actively involving female clients for the purpose of providing services to them, as well as identifying and organizing the initiative group of women for the development of this work in the region. To this effect, it is planned to conduct a school for volunteers, organize several recreational events, and to continue the work of the club.

One of the important aspects in the work of British organizations was a possibility to pay for clients' travel to and from the location of the organization. There is a great need to find ways to finance travel expenses for female clients of our community centre in Ukraine.

### Iryna Chirodzki, Donetsk

During the study tour to London, I and other participants visited several nongovernmental organizations and health care institutions which provide social, medical, rehabilitation, legal and other services to PLWH. In particular, one of the days was dedicated to the Children with AIDS Charity (CWAC). The goal of this foundation is to help those affected by HIV maintain a good quality of life. The main part of the work in this organization is carried out by women volunteers. Children who reached a certain age and level of HIV/AIDS knowledge are also volunteering. This organization is supported not only by grants but also by the funds raised at charity auctions and concerts and from sales of a magazine issued by children themselves.

I was very inspired by the idea to start a magazine which would be created by children; today, this idea is being put into practice at our organization as part of the «Happy Together» project. Our children aware of their HIV status thought up the name for this magazine; they also prepare articles and illustrations to be published in it.

### Alla Khodak, Odessa

Using the experience obtained during the visit to Great Britain, I held an informational lesson on burnout prevention, engaged specialists to conduct trainings on counteracting xenophobia, delivered trainings on women's leadership.

### Olena Bayeva, Kharkiv

The idea to create a women's club appeared during the visit to the Hillingdon Women's Centre and was put into practice in February 2011. A club may be regarded not only as a place for an enjoyable pastime but also as a psychotherapeutic group. This is a certain kind of therapy; this method improves emotional state, which increases self-esteem, thus allowing to identify and develop one's best qualities. In addition to this, vital issues are raised for discussion, which would be rather hard to settle on one's own, where the conversation is led in a smooth and professional way by a woman psychotherapist who is also a client of the organization.

After the visit to our organization, the following events took place: the personal development training which resulted in a leadership project «Bring the Happiness» that consists in organizing a party for children brought up in an orphanage, including a visit to a dolphinarium and gifts; the «Art of Living - 1» training, during which techniques aimed at improving the quality of our clients' lives were practiced with the help of the trainer Nataliya Shulman.

As a result of the above events, a team of women leaders was formed which is working towards the development of women's leadership in Kharkiv region. The work includes organization and conducting of events which help improve psycho-emotional state: forming of a new stereotype of thinking to increase the potential of success; relations management; development of skills and abilities necessary for attaining financial independence – this includes yoga practices, psychotherapeutic work, participation in personal development trainings and programs, work of the «Hand-Made» club, learning computer skills.

5

## NEWS FROM REGIONS

### Training «Gender and HIV»

At the beginning of June 2011, the «Gender and HIV» training was held at the community centre of CO Club Svitank. 13 representatives of CO Club Svitank and initiative groups of Donetsk region participated in the training. The training was conducted as part of the gender-oriented project «Woman» which has been implemented by CO Club Svitank since April 2011. The aim of this project is to improve the quality of life of HIV-positive people by strengthening organizational capacity of Donetsk regional affiliates and applying gender-based approach in the provision of services.

During the training, participants considered the concept of gender, discussed examples of gender stereotypes, studied different working approaches to overcoming gender-related factors of HIV/AIDS. Theoretical knowledge was supported by practical studies and group work. The problems of gender inequality can be traced in all areas of the society; they underlie a number of social, economic and political conditions which, in turn, cause the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

«We talked a lot during the training about the facts from all over the world which prove that the deeper the gender inequality in the society, the faster the spread and the graver the consequences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic», says Iryna Chirozidi, coordinator of the «Woman» project, «the humankind would not face such challenges today due to the epidemic if women would have more access to political and economic opportunities and resources and if as many women as possible could decide on issues related to their reproductive and sexual health on their own».

### Training «Gender-based approach in the provision of services to PLWH» held in Lviv.

On 27-28 July 2011, the Lviv oblast branch of the All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS held a training for clients on the topic of «Gender-based approach in the provision of services to PLWH». The training took place at Lviv regional AIDS prevention and control centre.

The training covered the following issues: gender policy of the Network of PLWH; HIV/AIDS vulnerability factors in terms of gender; strategic ways to overcome problems caused by gender stereotypes. Participants also

discussed the measures to be taken to overcome gender-related factors of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. One of the highlights of the training was the concept of gender violence; the causes, conditions and consequences of domestic violence towards women were considered. The working group tried to model the ways to overcome different types of violence.

To sum it up: the training participants raised their awareness of a gender-based approach in the area of HIV/AIDS, gained skills in violence prevention. Also, they gained knowledge and skills in forming self-help and peer-support groups for victims of violence.

**How nongovernmental organizations can help HIV+, homeless or drug-addicted pregnant women obtain high-quality medical services.**

«Medical personnel at antenatal clinics in Ukraine are not always aware of how to help pregnant women from vulnerable groups who are HIV-positive, drug-dependent or homeless», state the leaders of nongovernmental organizations, in particular, from the Kyiv branch of the All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, ICF Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health, HealthRight International. A round table and a press





conference on overcoming this problem were held in Kyiv. Community activists prepared an open letter addressed to the Minister of Health of Ukraine concerning the need of additional measures for providing access to medical services for women from vulnerable population groups.

«Here is a paradox – if a woman is successful and financially capable, then she is a patient welcomed at our health care institutions. But if a woman has no home (or even registration), suffers from drug addiction or just lacks family support and financial assistance from her relatives, then she is a patient whose life is worth nothing for most doctors; such patient is «trouble and headaches» for our medical workers and health care institutions», says Lada Bulakh, Executive Director of the Kyiv branch of the All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS. «One of our organization's objectives is to provide social and medical support to HIV-positive women. Obviously, there are drug abusers among them. In the slang of social workers, those are dead-end (most hard-to-manage) clients, since it is extremely hard to help such women, especially those pregnant, without assistance of medical and state social security institutions. A social worker has to constantly break through the wall of censure, scorn, misunderstanding and stigmatized attitude towards drug-ad-

dicted HIV-positive women. But everyone is equal before the law, and we must provide all our women from risk groups with an opportunity to receive timely medical assistance, medical support during pregnancy, and just a chance to survive».

Homeless pregnant girls are refused registration in antenatal clinics and are demanded to pay for health care services. The current legislation complicates the possibility to use medical services for people who don't have documents and, therefore, don't have residential registration. Medical services are often provided on a paid-for basis (in whole or in part), and medicines, tests and medical materials are rather costly. As for drug-addicted women, as a rule, they do not go to antenatal clinics at all, and the reasons for this are stigma in the society and fear of censure on the part of medical staff.



Halyna Skipalska, Executive Director of ICF Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health, HealthRight International, says that pregnancy in homeless or drug-using women sometimes become an effective stimulus to change their lifestyle, to get rid of bad habits and to begin a new life. «In such situation, a doctor is the first one who can support a pregnant woman in this desire. The fate of the patient and her child depends on how the doctor talks to her, how the doctor treats such patient and, therefore, where she will be directed – to the street, to nongovernmental organizations, or to other health care specialists. For this reason, we call on doctors to be tolerant and to treat women with care and attentions».

For the past years, the situation in Ukraine has changed for the better in many aspects; however, negative attitudes of medical personnel towards women from vulnerable groups still do exist. According to the results of the research conducted in 2009-2010 by HealthRight International, health care workers do not always understand the boundaries of confidentiality of information on HIV-positive status; treat drug-addicted or HIV+ women disparagingly; advise them to make an abortion; are not educated about the ways to treat drug addiction, including substitution therapy; have no knowl-



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edge of nongovernmental organizations working in the region; and, do not provide all necessary information during pre- and post-test counseling for HIV. First of all, this endangers a future child...

As of today, the abovementioned problems are being solved with the assistance of nongovernmental organizations that work with women from vulnerable population groups. Owing to their work, a number of initiatives on simplifying access to health care services for Ukrainians from vulnerable groups have already been successfully

implemented; schemes for social support to clients and for a comprehensive approach to solving problems faced by women from vulnerable population categories have been developed and approved. Nongovernmental organizations expect that the Ministry of Health will support their initiative on cooperation for facilitating the reformation process to improve health care services and to strengthen public health. Nongovernmental organizations are ready to provide comprehensive expert and organizational support.

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