

SURVIVING GLOBAL FUND TRANSITION TO SAFEGUARD THE HIV RESPONSE

UKRAINE



THE CHALLENGE



Introduction

As Ukraine transitions towards domestic funding and leadership of its HIV response, the voice and influence of key populations, communities and civil society is as vital as ever.

Not only through meaningful involvement in decision making at all levels, but also funding for their grassroots programmes.

They must be the conscience of the transition process. Community-led advocacy and monitoring of the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of nationally-funded HIV services is key to success. PITCH partners have been at the heart of advocacy efforts to ensure this.

Ukraine has the second-largest HIV epidemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, with 250,000 people living with HIV. There has been a huge increase in the use of antiretroviral treatment (ARVs) in recent years but the high rate of new infection threatens to outpace these gains.¹

Ukraine's transition from international donor funding to domestically funded HIV and AIDS prevention, care and support programmes since 2018² is largely seen as a positive step. But there have also been many challenges.

Anton Basenko is the Country Focal Point for PITCH – which in Ukraine has been hosted by national NGO the Alliance for Public Health – and a member of the Community Delegation to the Board of the Global Fund. He describes the transition as “the opening of a Pandora’s Box”.



“This is a change in funding from Global Fund³ to local sources, but it is also a changing of policies, of the legal framework and of practices.”

Anton cites the procurement and quality of ARVs, opioid substitution therapy (OST) and the provision of a full package of high-quality support services across Ukraine as significant challenges emerging from the transition.

Another is ensuring the continued funding, meaningful involvement and a voice for civil society organisations as the Government takes on full leadership of the HIV and AIDS response. These organisations – representing key populations and communities – have played a pivotal role in tackling HIV in Ukraine throughout the era of Global Fund support.

Public funding is a progressive innovation, but there are challenges

Andrii Chernyshev is the Head of Advocacy and External Communications for Alliance Global, an NGO working in the HIV field and representing men who have sex with men (MSM). “The transition from donor funding to public funding should be the most progressive innovation in recent years,” says Andrii. “However, existing problems and challenges that accompany this transition make it very difficult to obtain funding for organisations of key communities, including MSM. For example, there is currently only one lesbian, gay, bisexual and

transgender (LGBT) organisation providing HIV prevention services among MSM with public funding.”

Evgenia Kuvshinova is the Executive Director of Convictus Ukraine, another of the five PITCH partners in Ukraine. Convictus is one of Ukraine's biggest service providers for key populations. She adds: “The transition plan is one of the biggest issues in Ukraine. It has two sides. First, it is the best story in our region that Ukraine is using national funds. But we see another side – it is a very big issue to CSOs which provided services supported by the Global Fund.

“CSOs which provided Global Fund-funded services are now financed by the Government. We need to change our registration and pay a 20% tax. We have to change our organisations and must start being business organisations, but we are not business organisations.

“The transition plan is only about a basic package of services, but if we want to give key populations the package they need, we need to combine the support of international donors, Government support and local support.”



“PITCH leaves an army of well-educated, prepared, trained, community activists included in all these bodies to deal with these changes in the next three years.”

¹ AVERT

² These articles provide background on the transition: <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/funding-model/throughout-the-cycle/transition/>
http://curatiofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/UKRAINE-TS-CASE-STUDY_Final_Jan25-2016.pdf

³ Since 2003, Ukraine has received US\$682 million from the Global Fund to fight HIV and TB. A significant focus of those grants has been to build up strong communities as advocates for sustainable, evidence-informed and rights-based responses.

THE CHANGES

This huge shift in the ways and means of funding HIV programmes in Ukraine has brought a significant repositioning of organisations working in the sector.

The advocacy focus has moved to the national level, with lobbying of the Public Health Centre, the Government body coordinating HIV budgets and responses and the principal recipient of the reducing Global Fund contributions.

“All key population networks, CSOs and partners of PITCH are doing advocacy at different levels,” says Anton Basenko. “We have different working groups under the Ministry of Health – we use these groups to advocate for quality drugs.

“We are advocating for extended lists of services, not just the basic. We are forcing them to deal properly within the transition period.”

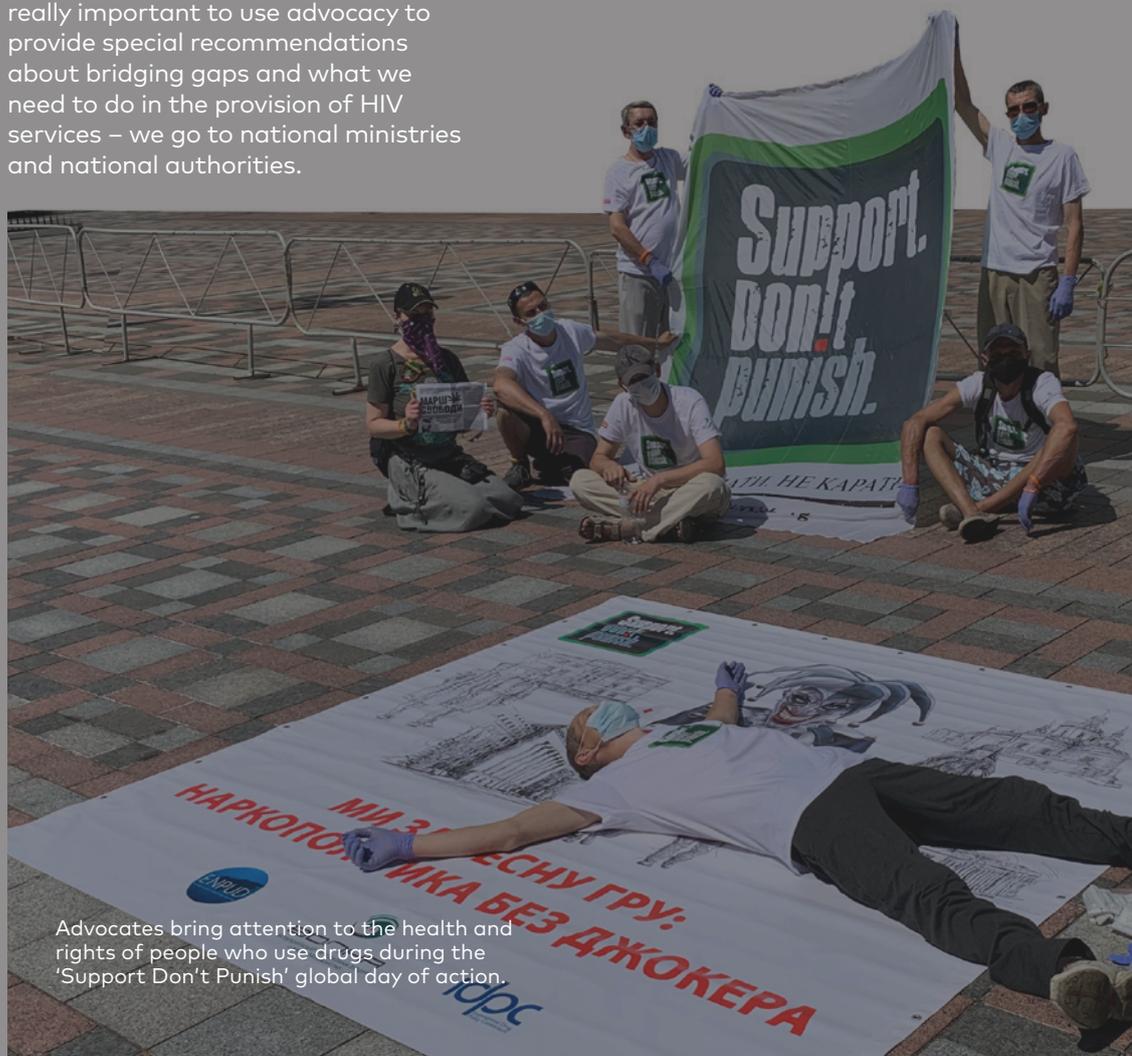
Evgenia Kuvshinova adds: “For us it’s really important to use advocacy to provide special recommendations about bridging gaps and what we need to do in the provision of HIV services – we go to national ministries and national authorities.

Key populations represented on CCM

PITCH has also been central in advocacy asks and campaigns to the Global Fund at the secretariat level, explains Anton. Vital to this has been increased CSO representation on the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM).

In Ukraine, the National Council on HIV and TB doubles as the CCM. It is a national consultative committee under the cabinet of ministers that submits funding applications to and oversees grants from the Global Fund and coordinates other initiatives to combat HIV and TB.

A number of advocates now sit in the group, representing the rights of MSM, PWUD, and SWs from their respective networks.



Advocates bring attention to the health and rights of people who use drugs during the ‘Support Don’t Punish’ global day of action.



Representatives of churches and faith based organisations joined a meeting with PITCH partners on the now approved National Strategy on counteraction of HIV of Churches and Religious organizations till 2030.



Source:
UNAIDS
Data 2020

"We all understand the Global Fund has powers of influence and can put political pressure on governments in the countries it is funding," says Anton.

"The first success of PITCH was ensuring representatives of three key populations joined CCM – only people living with HIV had been there before."

Significantly, PITCH also has a representative on the independent oversight committee, which monitors the work and actions of the CCM. Anton adds: "This

is very much a success – it's very valuable. We are there. Government representatives have to acknowledge us and discuss with us all these decisions. You have got to include key populations in decision making."

Andrii adds: "It is crucial to take into account the interests and needs of key groups when planning advocacy activities to increase community access to quality HIV health services and to involve their leaders as much as possible in working groups and coordination mechanisms."

"The work of all advisory bodies needs to be made more transparent, especially to attract budget funding for the provision of services for MSM and other groups."

Evgenia says her role on the CCM is "very important", giving CSOs unprecedented high-level access to cabinet ministers. "Two years ago, all positions on the CCM were held by Government people," she says.

"Behind our inclusion in this process during the transition period is the PITCH programme, supporting CSOs representing key populations to have a stronger voice."

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"If we have local funding, we have stability."
Evgenia

Local advocacy and funding are increasingly important

As well as securing representation on the national CCM, there has been a focus on the 25 sub-CCMs in different regions of Ukraine – to ensure the voices of key populations are heard at local level, but also to lobby regional governments for vital funds for HIV services.

"We should be present in these local bodies, have this opportunity to participate at the local level. We are advocating for local budgets," says Anton.

"PITCH invested in training to help representatives of different key populations be more effective: how to work properly in these coordination councils, how to work with bureaucrats, how to formulate your expectations, to go for decisions."

Evgenia explains: "Through the PITCH programme we started working very closely with local authorities. We are trying to develop our relationship and take some local funding. We have some results – Convictus opened a centre funded by domestic finance."

The visibility of the MSM/LGBT community at the local level has also increased. "Thanks to successful work with local authorities and local deputies, it was possible to obtain preferential premises for the provision of services for MSM which ensured the continuity of the provision of HIV services for MSM," says Andrii.

"PITCH has permitted us to establish strategic partnerships at local level with allies, such as human rights organisations, HIV service NGOs, organisations of other key communities, health facilities and other entities."

A meeting of the National Council on HIV/TB of the Cabinet of Ministers, included representatives of key population networks and PITCH partners.



The result

It is clear the visibility of key populations and communities of people living with HIV, their influence and meaningful involvement in decision making at all levels has greatly increased with the support of PITCH.

PITCH has been one of the main sponsors of the annual National

LGBTI Conference, the largest event for Ukraine's LGBTI+ community.

It has also supported national advocacy to amend the Criminal Code to prevent crimes motivated by intolerance, including on sexual orientation and gender identity, and responsibly regulate laws around drug possession and use.

The programme has also backed a 'leadership school', helping develop the skills and knowledge of youth leaders around HIV, so they can better participate in national discussions. PITCH has encouraged close cooperation between its partners and national media in Ukraine, an important step in changing prevailing public opinions about HIV and key populations.



PITCH partners use learnings from a communications for advocacy training to target key stakeholders.

LESSONS LEARNT

"In the next three years, we will definitely see improvement"

In this critical transition phase, Anton says, PITCH has been "a flexible and complementary" programme, providing training and capacity building in monitoring and evaluation for all its partners on the ground and nurturing trust between CSOs, communities, government bodies and funders.

"There's still much to do to win the fight against HIV, but PITCH has done really fantastic things, helped us form great partnerships to get funding. With more time, in the next three years, we will definitely see improvement – it wouldn't be possible without PITCH.

When the Ukrainian Government recently put pen to paper on its latest country agreement with the Global Fund for a grant of \$136 million, Anton Basenko was in the room. His was one of only four signatures on the documents. It was truly a landmark moment for community representation in the battle against HIV in Ukraine.

"With this agreement we are signing, we are involved in this process. It means we know what is there and we are helping to deliver this grant proposal together," says Anton. "Our insight will be there. We will be able to put our stamp.

"The Global Fund must be as proactive as they can with the Government and be very clear

in addressing the role of civil society during transition. Global Fund programmes always aim for high quality standards and those standards must be very strictly controlled in the transition.

"We all realise even if Government starts covering all services and treatment formerly-funded by the Global Fund, it definitely won't pay for advocacy – what is considered as 'opposition' to them. The Global Fund has to leave specific funding streams for civil society, especially community organisations, during and after transition."



"Sex workers, MSM – each key population discusses and delivers their own processes. But now we are dealing as one army, one constituency – that was the work of PITCH"

Anton



The Partnership to Inspire, Transform and Connect the HIV response (PITCH) strengthens community-based organisations' capacity to uphold the rights of populations most affected by HIV by engaging in effective advocacy, generating robust evidence and developing meaningful policy solutions.

PITCH is a strategic partnership between Aidsfonds, Frontline AIDS and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

aidsfonds.org frontlineaids.org



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