

Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)

Strategic Framework

2018-2019

What is the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)?	2
The mission, vision and role of EHRA	2
The current context of harm reduction	3
The purpose of the EHRA strategic framework	4
Strategic objectives, activities and indicators	4

What is the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)?

EHRA is a not-for-profit public membership-based organization, registered in 2017 by the initiative of harm reduction activists and organizations from the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA) region, continuing the tradition begun in 1997 of networking by regional harm reduction activists. EHRA strives for a progressive human rights-based drug policy, sustainable funding advocacy, and efficiency of harm reduction services oriented to the needs of people who use drugs. EHRA now unites 161 organizational and individual members in 7 sub-regions of the CEECA including: the Baltics, Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe, European Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia.

The mission, vision and role of EHRA

EHRA's **mission** is the creation within the CEECA region of a favorable environment for the delivery of sustainable harm reduction programs and for people who use drugs to have decent lives.

EHRA's **vision** is of a society where human rights are safeguarded for every individual. We strive for a strong community of people who use drugs supported by civil society to achieve progressive human rights-based drug policies, sustainable funding, and efficiency of harm reduction services based on the needs of people who use drugs in each country of the CEECA region.

EHRA's **role** is to make available international resources and knowledge to equip the CEECA region with expertise and effective practices; we set the regional and national agenda of drug policy and harm reduction with the meaningful involvement of drug user communities in national and local stakeholder dialogue. EHRA also attracts the region's attention to the voice of the community and the needs of people who use drugs to advocate for action and to change the trends in international drug policy.

The current context of harm reduction

EHRA recognizes individual life choices and allows everyone to maintain their health along with the use of psychoactive substances. The foundation of the harm reduction philosophy is the respect for the dignity of people, and services based on the needs of the individual in real-life circumstances.

Harm reduction refers to a set of policies, programs, and practices that aim to reduce the harms associated with the use of psychoactive drugs among people who use them. The focus of harm reduction programs is on the prevention of harm rather than on the prevention of drug use itself. Harm reduction programs also provide access to various kinds of drug treatment – if such a request comes from the person who uses drugs.

EHRA strives to make harm reduction interventions more accessible to all people in need in the CEECA region and to advocate for humane drug policies in each and every country.

The current development of harm reduction in the CEECA region is underpinned by several interrelated processes:

- During the last decade, there has been a continuous reduction of **HIV-related funding**. The national governments of CEECA countries still fail to allocate sufficient financial resources to scale-up HIV and harm reduction programs. At present, the investments to HIV treatment and prevention are inconsistent with the burden of HIV among people who use drugs in these countries.
- Although harm reduction is becoming increasingly accepted in the global community, **repressive drug policies** remain firmly in place, undermining access for people who use drugs to life-saving programs. Repressive drug policies represent a key obstacle to health and well-being of individual drug users and their communities.
- There is a growing international body of evidence, guidelines, and mechanisms supporting a need to focus on **human rights**. With regard to harm reduction, it is crucial to collaborate with law enforcement agencies and judicial systems, establish dialogue with legal experts and organizations, and encourage them to provide legal support to people who use drugs. Systematic documentation of violations of human rights of people who use drugs - women in particular - is a necessary step in establishing partnerships with human rights organizations and joint advocacy at the national level.
- In the current environment, **the role of communities of people who use drugs** is becoming increasingly important and is also driving harm reduction activities including advocacy for justice and equal access to care at the local, national, and international levels. The community sees harm reduction not only as a health issue but as the main component of evidence-based and humane drug policies.
- During the last decade, there has been growing concern about **new psychoactive substances (NPS)**. The current situation with NPS has become truly alarming in the CEECA and presents one of the major challenges to the national public health systems, local NGOs, communities and people who use drugs.

The purpose of the EHRA strategic framework

Strategic directions of work were suggested and developed by the EHRA Secretariat and the Steering Committee based on previous experience of harm reduction advocacy and the current context of harm reduction programs in the CEECA region.

This strategic document was first discussed by the Steering Committee, then discussed and approved by members of the EHRA General Assembly between 13-27 November 2017. Following approval, the EHRA strategic framework was published on the official EHRA website www.harmreductioneurasia.org.

The EHRA Strategic Framework is the background for the operational planning of the EHRA Secretariat as well as for political and advocacy actions and fundraising efforts of the Association and its members.

To monitor and evaluate implementation of the Strategic Framework, EHRA will use a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to build a transparent environment for all

CEECA organizations to benefit from joint learning and knowledge sharing based on results. A basic project and process monitoring system will be established to ensure the proper documenting of events and activities. It will be used by the Secretariat staff for reporting purposes and for analysis of the organization's progress, as well as to review the effectiveness of the operational approach and procedures.

To ensure effective learning within the Association, organizational web-pages and social media outlets have been developed. The sharing process will include announcements and reports on key documents, processes, discussions, and events with reflection and feedback from participants and experts.

Implementation of the Strategic Framework will be evaluated at the end of 2019. The final process will include an analysis of achievements and lessons learned by all EHRA members at the community and policy level resulting from the Association's strategy implementation using the following measurements:

- Changes in funding sources and amounts of financing of harm reduction programs in countries of the region;
- Changes in the drug policy environment at national and regional levels;
- Changes in harm reduction service regulations and access to services;
- Changes in civil society and community advocacy capacity; and,
- Changes in community involvement in national or local decision-making processes concerning drug policy, sustainability of harm reduction programs, service efficiency, and access to services for people who use drugs.

Key indicators for the evaluation of the Strategic Framework implementation are defined for each of the strategic objectives. The evaluation will be conducted by a strategic working group assigned by the EHRA Steering Committee and with support from external experts using qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Findings of the evaluation will feed into the reform of approaches to advocacy and capacity building and will influence the development of the EHRA Strategy for the next period.

Strategic objectives, activities and indicators

Strategic Objective 1: To ensure sustainability and efficiency of harm reduction services in the CEECA region.

To ensure sustainability and efficiency of HIV prevention and other priority services, it is crucial that municipal governments provide sustainable harm reduction programs. EHRA is focused on providing technical support to civil society and community representatives and organizations together with their meaningful involvement at the municipal, national, regional and global level in transition-focused advocacy and decision-making processes. Communities should become one of the key actors in the process of effective transition from international support to domestic funding.

Activities under Strategic Objective 1:

- *Strengthening of regional and national-level advocacy for sustainable funding of quality harm reduction services from national sources;*

- *Ensuring the meaningful involvement of civil society and community representatives of people who use drugs from the CEECA in the processes to transition from international support to national funding at the municipal, country, regional and global levels;*
- *Strengthening of EHRA's advocacy towards funders and technical agencies as the key supporters of harm reduction in the CEECA;*
- *Provision of technical support to, and building the capacities of, NGO's and community-based organizations focused on harm reduction to advocate for sustainable financing and related issues through the development of relevant mechanisms at the national and municipal level; and,*
- *Conceptualization and development of regional systems to ensure the efficiency of harm reduction services corresponding to the best international practices that comprehensively address the needs of people who use drugs.*

Indicators for Strategic Objective 1:

- *Increase in the number of countries with approved and implemented mechanisms for domestic funding for harm reduction;*
- *Development and piloting of a regional system for harm reduction efficiency assessments with the participation of communities of people who use drugs; and,*
- *Increase in the number of countries that introduce flexible regulations for harm reduction services that respond to the changes in the needs of people who use drugs and changes in the drug scene.*

Strategic Objective 2: To advocate for non-punitive drug policies in the CEECA region based on public health and human rights.

Representing different political, cultural and socio-economist contexts, CEECA countries continue to apply a prohibition approach and punitive sanctions for drug possession for personal use. The region has a long way to go to reorient its drug policies to a more humanistic and rights-based approach. There are significant differences in the factors that explain the extremely high stigmatization around drug-related issues and the low access to, and limited efficiency in, using human rights instruments. In this context, the central role in documenting human rights violations, and in analyzing them through the prism of international and national legislation, has to be given to people who use drugs, their 'traditional allies' – harm reduction programs - and any human rights movements, organizations and other partners who can help in documenting such violations and in advocating for non-punitive drug-policies.

Activities under Strategic Objective 2:

- *Provision of technical support and capacity building for effective advocacy actions aimed at the decriminalization of drug use and possession;*
- *Provision of technical support in advocating for the diversion from arrest and case management as alternatives to punitive sanctions;*

- *Cooperation between international, regional and national partners to advocate for effective drug policies in the changing context of drug use trends and emerging new psychoactive substances;*
- *Implementation of evidence-based advocacy campaigns to ensure the respect of human rights of women who use drugs at the national and regional levels with the focus on parental rights and protection from violence; and,*
- *Engagement of civil society, medical service providers, research institutions, academia and like-minded policy makers across the region in the analysis of current national drug policies to examine their effectiveness, costs and their impact on health and social wellbeing.*

Indicators for Strategic Objective 2:

- *Development of a drug policy index and data collected and analyzed at the national and regional level and presented to regional and international stakeholders;*
- *Collection and analysis from a legal perspective of typical cases of human rights violations against people who use drugs with findings made public;*
- *Drug policy reform and health- and rights-based non-punitive approaches to drugs are high on the national and regional agenda;*
- *Decriminalization of drug use/possession for personal use is seen as an important precondition of effective drug policies;*
- *Community and harm reduction advocates are involved in national drug policy reform; and,*
- *Increase in the number of countries with existing programs providing diversion at the point of arrest, and case management, as alternatives to punitive sanctions.*

Strategic Objective 3: To develop leadership and expertise of civil society and people who use drugs in the monitoring of drug policies, financing, access and quality of harm reduction services in the CEECA region.

Increased capacity, skills and knowledge of civil society and people who use drugs will enable them to become experts and take leadership to participate in decision-making or policy making bodies at municipal, national, regional and global levels. Comprehensive capacity building support to EHRA members and initiative groups of people who use drugs helps to achieve real positive changes at the local and national level. Its strategic partnership with ENPUD, and with local community leaders, helps EHRA to be well-targeted and effective in its implementation of this strategic objective.

Activities under Strategic Objective 3:

- *Increasing capacity, awareness, skills and leadership of civil society and people who use drugs to monitor national drug policies and harm reduction programs (access, efficiency and funding);*
- *Increasing capacity, awareness, skills and leadership of civil society and people who use drugs in community-led monitoring of harm reduction service access and quality;*
- *Development and sharing with members and community leaders of technical support tools and approaches for better engagement in governmental relations and decision-making processes in countries of the CEECA region; and,*

- *Facilitation of cooperation and communication between international, regional and national level civil society leaders and organizations, community groups and policy makers to support the exchange of knowledge and practices for joint action.*

Indicators for Strategic Objective 3:

- *Regional approaches for community-led monitoring of harm reduction services are developed, disseminated and used by community groups of people who use drugs;*
- *Increase in the number of community leaders involved in national, regional and global advocacy;*
- *National and regional partnerships (alliances) of community leaders and stakeholders are built; and,*
- *Increase in the number of countries where community leaders and harm reduction advocates are actively involved in decision-making at local and national levels.*

Strategic Objective 4: To strengthen organizational governance and operational systems, program efficiency and financial sustainability of EHRA.

As a newly established organization, EHRA is accumulating expert knowledge and experience, improving the functions of its Secretariat, and uniting harm reduction activists from across the region. However, EHRA still needs to overcome the challenges of its launch, to ensure internal security, and to build a sustainable regional network. For that, it is important to ensure effective governance and operational systems for decision making and oversight processes. In addition, fundraising for the sustainability of a functioning EHRA, and transparency of management procedures within the Secretariat, are important tasks.

Activities under Strategic Objective 4:

- *Conduct regular General Assemblies, regional meetings and Steering Committee meetings for open and transparent decision-making processes concerning strategic matters;*
- *Development of communication and knowledge sharing systems with members from the different sub-regions supported by EHRA;*
- *Development and implementation of operational procedures and effective management approaches;*
- *Ensuring financial sustainability of the EHRA advocacy work in the CEECA through fundraising and transparency of reporting; and,*
- *Creation of an internal audit body for the Association that is independent of the Steering Committee to conduct independent reviews of external claims and inter-organizational disputes.*

Indicators for Strategic Objective 4:

- *Members of the Association are fully involved in knowledge sharing and the development of key strategic and advocacy approaches of EHRA;*
- *Governance, operational and reporting procedures are developed;*
- *Effectively functioning of the Secretariat is in place; and,*
- *The Secretariat is securing its sustainability through the funds raised.*