

To Whom It May Concern:

A letter of motivation

I'm Irma Kirtadze, graduated from the State Medical Academy of Georgia and obtained state certificate in psychiatry in 2007. Currently working for an addiction research center Alternative Georgia as a senior researcher and at the same time, finishing the work on PhD thesis *"Economic evaluation of HIV/AIDS and HCV prevention programs for PWIDs in Georgia and their impact on epidemiological indicators"*.

I bring over 10 years of experience in leading teams and managing HIV prevention service and research projects, including strong communication/collaboration with community representatives. I worked as a Program Director of the Georgian Harm Reduction Network and managed a program portfolio worth of several USD million and coordinated an HIV/AIDS prevention program among PWIDs in Georgia. As a co-founder of the women self-organization (women who use drugs) Aceso International (in 2012) I supported the organization's capacity building through conducting trainings for outreach workers and empowering women's groups in service delivery and advocacy.

Since 2010 I became professionally active in economic evaluation of HIV prevention and treatment programs among key populations in Georgia and other post-Soviet countries. I have implemented a number of economic analyses such as costing, expenditure tracking, funding gap analysis, cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis in HIV prevention (needle and syringe national program and opiate substitution national program) and other treatment programs and collaborated with EHRN, GFATM, UNAIDS, USAID, PEPFAR and CDC supported initiatives.

Last year I developed National Standard Guidelines in Harm Reduction and Protocols of outreach work including peer driven intervention, needle and syringe program, voluntary counselling and testing, and opioid overdose prevention among people who use drugs in Georgia with relevant costing component of standards of HIV prevention service packages. Recently I have conducted an evaluation of countrywide Needle-Syringe program (efficiency study with cost optimization component) for Georgian Harm Reduction Network.

I have been successful in presenting the results of my research to the international academic audience – scientific manuscripts developed by my colleagues and me have been systematically published in highly rated peer-reviewed international journals and have been regularly presented at major scientific conferences. My scientific publications include topics such as: drug use patterns and risky behaviours, development of gender sensitive services, emerging new psychoactive drugs, stigma-discrimination of PWIDs, drug policy and others.

Many countries in the EECA region, including Georgia, are in a process of transition from GFATM funding to national. Funding for harm reduction programs, in particular for needle and syringe programs in many cases, comes from GFATM exclusively. Experience accumulated in relation to sustainability of donor funded programs (PEPFAR, GAVI, AVAHAN cases), and the results of Global Fund withdrawal from Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia and Serbia suggests that this will be a very challenging process and there are considerable risks to the sustainability of HIV programs in the region. I emphasise sustainable provision of harm reduction services and diversification/adjustment of service delivery models according to the needs of the local community. Therefore, I prioritise my involvement in implementation research, that includes collecting evidence of piloting the work of syringe vending machines in Georgia.

New psychoactive substances (NPS) are a rapidly developing phenomenon, but empirical data is currently scarce and patchy. There is growing evidence that NPS are responsible for a large share of health problems and drug-related deaths, this goes to show that new strategies and approaches are needed to enable better harm reduction in the EEACA region.

At the end of this motivation letter I do confirm that I'm a member of EHRA from the Alternative Georgia and will be honoured to take any opportunity to support the work of a Steering Committee; I believe that the combination of my research expertise, diverse experience, substantial knowledge of healthcare programs and the ability of quantitative and qualitative data analyses, puts me in an excellent position to become the member of EHRA Steering Committee.

Sincerely,
Irma Kirtadze