

Help impossible to ignore: how to ensure shelter, social, psychological, and legal help for women who use drugs in case of gender-based violence

Online workshop

Date (TBD): 29th of March 2022

10.00-13.30 (EET, Vilnius time)

Background information

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one-in-three women experiences intimate partner violence¹. Women who use drugs are three-to-five times more likely to experience gender-based violence than women in general².

Women who use drugs and/or are involved in drug trafficking face multiple, mainly gender-based, stigma and discrimination in society. They tend to have lower social and economic status within the community of people who use drugs which means that they face multiple health risks and barriers when trying to access services intended for survivors of gender-based violence.

Such barriers may include punitive and discriminatory practices by police and health care professionals; increased stigma associated with negative attitudes in society towards women who use drugs; harm reduction services and drug treatment programs that do not meet the needs of women; lack of sexual and reproductive health services for people who use drugs; and limited access to harm reduction programs³.

Unfortunately, existing in CEECA countries social care services, shelters for survivors of gender-based violence, and child protection institutions are not always open and supportive towards women using drugs. There are multiple legal barriers in access to social and psychological help if woman is a client of opioid substitutional treatment or actively using drugs. The main problems faced by women who use drugs and who are subject to violence in the region are following:

¹ Violence against women. Strengthening the health response in times of crisis. Geneva; World Health Organization, 23 November 2018. <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/feature-stories/detail/violence-against-women>

² El-Bassel N, Gilbert L, Witte S, Wu E, Chang M. Intimate Partner Violence and HIV Among Drug-Involved Women: Contexts Linking These Two Epidemics—Challenges and Implications for Prevention and Treatment. *Substance Use & Misuse*, Vol. 46, Issue 2-3, 2011, pp295-306. <https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2011.523296>

³ Pinkham S, Malinowska-Sempruch K. Women, Harm Reduction, and HIV. New York; International Harm Reduction Development Program, Open Society Institute, 2007. https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/c47ab575-6642-423c-8f40-dd33f16b5271/women_20070920.pdf

- Criminalisation of drug use often means that when faced with gender-based violence, women who use drugs suffer structural abuse at the hands of police officers, health and social services, instead of being given protection;
- Difficulty in finding a place in a shelter, refuge or social lodging because the rules and/or procedures explicitly prohibit accommodation for women who use drugs, including those receiving OST as prescribed by a doctor due to legal barriers, stigma, lack of capacity and understanding of how to work with this group;
- Women who use drugs often suffer multiple discrimination on the basis of chronic illnesses (HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis), which forces them to hide the fact that they receive, for example, ART;
- Family, social services and society, in general, stigmatize the issue of female drug dependence;
- Women who use drugs often face loss of parental rights and separation from their children.

In response to the problem based on the key principles and approaches of existing international documents, such as *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence* (also known as the Istanbul Convention)⁴, the *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW)⁵ and the *Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence* (UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP and UNODC)⁶, EHRA in cooperation with EWNA recently developed “*Help impossible to ignore! A guide to ensure shelter, psychosocial and legal services for women who use drugs and experience violence*” and supported national partners in building systems of comprehensive help to women in case of violence in Ukraine, Serbia, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan and Russia.

The aim of the online workshop

The objective of the online workshop is to discuss with harm reduction and social care professionals best international and regional practices and working models of comprehensive social care services for women who use drugs survivors of gender-based violence.

The workshop is organized by EHRA in the framework of the project “[Access to comprehensive care for women who use drugs in case of violence](#)”, as part of the multicountry project “Sustainability of Services for Key Populations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia” lead by the Alliance for Public Health, in a consortium with the 100% Life (All-Ukrainian Network of PLWH), the Central Asian HIV’ Association and the Eurasian Key Populations Health Network with the aid from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in the C19RM framework.

Countries: Central, Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Invited participants:

- Specialists and management of Shelters and other centers providing support to women and children in case of gender-based violence;
- Specialists and managers of social care services for families and children;

⁴ Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 210. Istanbul, 11 May 2011. <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

⁵ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/cedaw.pdf>

⁶ Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence: *Core Elements and Quality Guidelines*. <https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/EN-Modules-AllInOne.pdf>

⁷ <https://harmreductioneurasia.org/guide-help-impossible-to-ignore/>

- Social workers, experts and activists focusing on issues related to gender-based violence and human rights in CEECA countries;

Duration: 3 hours

Languages: Russian and English (with simultaneous translation)

Preliminary agenda of the webinar

1. *Dr. Gabriela Alvarez Minte (Regional Gender Advisor UNFPA)* Review how the Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence need to be applied to women using drugs in case of violence.
2. *Maria Plotko EHRA* A brief overview of challenges faced by women who use drugs in CEECA countries. Presentation of the recommended social care models of the “Help impossible to ignore! A guide to ensure shelter, psychosocial and legal services for women who use drugs and experience violence”
3. *Olena Strizhak* Mapping of friendly crisis centers for HIV positive and drug dependent women in EECA
4. *Irina Galochenko* Access to support services and shelters for women who use drugs in cases of violence in Moldova
5. *Irena Molnar ReGeneration* Access to support services and shelters for women who use drugs in cases of violence in Serbia
6. *Milka Spirovska HOPS* Access to support services and shelters for women who use drugs in cases of violence in North Macedonia
7. *Aura Ruig* Dedicated social support model: safe space for womxn who use drugs in Barcelona, Metzineres
8. *Natalia Reshetova Convictus* Access to support services and shelters for women who use drugs in cases of violence and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine