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Strengthening Community Leadership for Decentralized Access to HIV and HCV Self-testing Project (Co-Lead)

Qualitative research among Key Informants in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Slovenia and Russian Federation

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Presentation Plan

1 - Research goal
2 - Research methods
3 - Research limitations
4 - Results and recommendations
1- Research Goal
Investigate the country-specific policies, guidelines and other factors that may currently affect access to HIV and/or HCV diagnostic with rapid self-tests in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Slovenia, and the Russian Federation at the community level.
2 - Research Methods
✓ **Self-testing is** "A process in which a person collects his or her own specimen (oral fluid or blood) and then performs a test and interprets the result, often in a private setting, either alone or with someone he or she trusts"

*WHO Self-testing Guidelines: “HIV Self-testing and Partner Notification” and “Recommendations and Guidance on Hepatitis C Virus Self-testing*
Methods

✓ **WHEN:** October-November 2021

✓ **WHERE:** among key informants in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Slovenia, and the Russian Federation (purposeful sampling of qualitative research)

✓ **HOW:** online semi-structured interviews in Russian and English with the use of the developed guide

*All interviews were analyzed anonymously*

*All participants provided their informed consent*
Toolbox and method development

Data collection
- 7 countries
- 18 interviews
- 60 minutes

Analysis
- Interviewer’s card
- Atlas.ti
- Deductive thematic coding analysis of interviews
3 - Research Limitations
Limitations

- COVID-19 context
- Online format of the survey
- All respondents were representatives of community organizations
- Sampling was not sufficiently diverse
- Participants could provide socially acceptable responses
- Participants could miss important details (*recall bias*)
- Time limitations: saturation point was not achieved
- Simplified methodology of thematic coding analysis
- Results of qualitative research cannot be representative
4 - Results and Recommendations
Results:

- Lack of a legal framework for HIV/HCV self-testing and/or implementation of existing laws in practice.

**Key barriers to HIV/HCV self-testing on the national, institutional and individual levels for all Region:**

- Information
  - Digital tools
- Stigma and confidentiality
- Funds
- Other factors:
  - Impact of SARS-COV-2 pandemic
  - Social and political situation in the country
  - Migration
Results:

Key barriers to HIV/HCV self-testing on the national, institutional and individual levels for all Region.

➢ Provision of information:

• Inaccurate interpretation of "self-testing" results by respondents.
• Lack of promotion of self-testing for HIV/HCV among key populations.
• Mistrust and lack of knowledge on the part of local authorities and medical staff.
• Low level of knowledge about HIV/HCV and sexual health among the general population.

➢ Digital tools (websites, hotlines, QR-codes with links to the video).
Results:

➢ Stigma and confidentiality

• High level of stigmatization in the society in general and among health workers in particular.
• Division of stigma related to HIV and HCV. HIV-related stigma is more complicated, dominating and sustainable.
  ❖ ‘Normalization’ trends in the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe.
• Different levels of stigma towards representatives of different key populations.
• Sexual behavior and sexual relations, including sexual health issues are stigmatized.
  ❖ Self-testing as a method to overcome stigma.
Results:

➢ Funding

“It is complicated because poverty is everywhere. I think this economic component strongly affects the results” KG-3

• Governmental level: introduction of self-testing, free therapy.
• Community organizations: funding of the programs.
• Health care facilities and pharmacies: availability of test kits for HIV/HCV self-testing and their prices.
Results:

➢ Other factors:

✓ Dual impact of SARS-COV-2 pandemic

“The Covid-19 situation showed that this can be possible... 
...we used the Covid-19 to implement this project” [HIVST in April 2022]

✓ Social and political situation in the country
  • Influence of political philosophy, religion and propaganda...

✓ Migration
Recommendations:

➢ Development and implementation of policies that regulate self-testing for HIV/HCV (dialogue between experts from civil society organizations and officials). *Policy gap analysis.*

➢ Integration of self-testing into the governmental strategies (with governmental funding).

➢ Ensuring availability and access to the test kits for HIV/HCV self-testing (dialogue with the manufacturers, suppliers, pharmacy workers and officials). Price reduction.
**Recommendations:**

➢ Raising awareness about HIV/HCV self-testing among key populations, officials, health care providers, representatives of civil society organizations. Increasing public awareness about HIV/HCV and sexual health.

➢ Reduction of the level of stigma and discrimination (training for health workers, pharmacy workers; special courses at medical educational institutions).

➢ Introduction of digital innovations.

➢ Learning and advocacy use of best practices in the introduction of digital health technologies and remote services.
Thank you for your attention!

Your feedback and comments are welcome

Acknowledgements

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This Project is a collaborative effort between EATG, Germany, and FIND, the global alliance for diagnostics of Geneva, Switzerland.
According to our results in the majority of studied countries, HIVST and HCVST policies are either not developed or are developed, but not introduced properly. This is in line with to the recent WHO's reporting in the European region: only 20% of countries have HIVST policy and implementation in place; 14% have no HIVST policy; and 5% have no HIVST policy in development (reference). Thus, lack of or insufficient implementation on the ground HIVST and HCVST policies might be the fundamental barrier to the availability of self-testing.