



European
AIDS Treatment
Group



To:

Mr. Talat Xhaferi, President of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia
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Mr. Stevo Pendarovski, President of the Republic of North Macedonia, (contact@president.mk;
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Mr. Dimitar Kovachevski, President of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia
(cabinet@primeminister.gov.mk; info@vlada.gov.mk;)

Subject: National response to HIV in North Macedonia threatened by major budget cuts

Brussels, 29 March 2022

Dear Prime Minister Kovachevski,

The European AIDS treatment Group (EATG) a patient-led European NGOs and AIDS Action Europe (AAE) a European network of HIV-service organisations are writing to you regarding the drastic reduction of the state budget allocation for HIV Prevention in the Republic of North Macedonia and in support of the HIV Platform consisting of 14 civil society and community-based organisations working in the field of HIV prevention and support among key affected populations throughout North Macedonia.

We are very concerned about reports that HIV prevention programmes in North Macedonia are facing possible closure, as a result of the 40% reduction of the budget for HIV prevention that is allocated to civil society organisations to deliver essential services to key affected populations, including people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, sex workers, as well as the people living with HIV.

These programmes have been at the core of North Macedonia's response to the HIV epidemic for almost 20 years. Thanks to the early introduction of harm reduction and other programme, including outreach HIV testing, North Macedonia has been able to avert the HIV epidemic among key populations.

Now they face closure. The cuts put into jeopardy the entire infrastructure and capacities that were developed between 2005 and 2017 with the financial support of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which invested more than 25 million USD for HIV alone in the country.

We underline the fact that for many of the 10.000 direct beneficiaries, these programmes provide the only access to basic healthcare. Therefore, the real risk of closure of the programmes is detrimental to their fundamental right to health.

We are also concerned about reports that the decision to cut budgets for HIV programmes targeting key affected populations was taken without due expert consultation and examination of evidence.

We urge you take all necessary actions within your power (1) to make Ministry of Health reverse the decision to cut the 2022 annual budget for HIV prevention services, (2) to accelerate the adoption of proposed changes in the Law on health protection which will ensure sustainability and standardization of HIV prevention services, and (3) with interventional funding, to have the expenses of the civil organizations for the first three months in 2022 covered, considering that those expenses were incurred as a result of the committed maintenance of the programmes by the organisations, while funding was being delayed by the Ministry of Health. With this, you as key decision makers will show that North Macedonia is still on the track to achieve the UN global targets towards ending the HIV epidemic.

Yours sincerely,



Ricardo Fernandes

Chair of the Board of Directors

EATG



Christos Krasidis

Chair of Steering Committee

AAE