



Secure the Future: Civil Society and Human Rights Imperative for Public Health and HIV Response in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

A Communique Initiated by Rise & Decriminalize Movement of Community-led Networks in CEECA



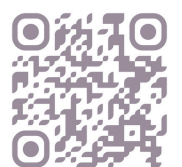
Over the last years an increasing number of governments in Central Eastern Europe & Central Asia (CEECA) are adopting new laws and practices that constrain civic space (restricting rights and liberties of civil society), thereby exerting additional pressures and burden on already criminalized populations (LGBTQI+, people living with HIV, people who use drugs, sex workers). Russia's war against Ukraine has intensified the negative human rights trends of previous years, leading to increased insecurity. It caused disruption of access to treatment and basic medical and social services, increased vulnerabilities to HIV in Ukraine, and in countries affected by the refugee crisis, and throughout the region, where economic and social upheaval and changing patterns of migration are felt.

The confluence of geopolitical turmoil, rising authoritarianism and the resulting shrinking spaces for civil society, criminalization of key populations and donors' narrow view and scope in addressing HIV brought us to this boiling point where, more than ever the robust and pragmatic approaches in addressing interconnected issues of HIV, public health, gender equality, civil and human rights are needed.

The purpose of the Communique is to acknowledge and coordinate efforts among communities, civil society, politicians, experts and professionals, and other national and international stakeholders to address the shrinking space for civil society and communities to act in the spheres related to public health (including HIV), sustainability and security in the CEECA region.



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Recognizing that:

- ✓ Community and community-led organizations are key in addressing issues of public health, including HIV, sustainability and security responses; and that
- ✓ Civil society and community groups play an essential role in pushing for evidence-based and human rights-based policies and practices, and can mobilize to provide services when state services fall short of it or alienate stigmatized, discriminated-against and criminalized people.

We **urge** the international community, development agencies, donor governments and private donors to:

- 1 Acknowledge the issue of shrinking space for the civil society** in the CEECA region as a key challenge in public health and social care interventions and the **need for action to safeguard civic spaces**.
- 2 Ensure sustainability of low threshold, comprehensive community-led responses through flexible funding** in order to adequately respond to current complex and intertwined issues in the CEECA region. In reaction to the new reality of repressions against particular communities and civil society at large (e.g. laws against so-called “gay propaganda”, “drug propaganda”, “foreign agents”, “undesirable organizations”), special attention should be paid to ensuring the safety and security of civil society and community workers and activists.
- 3 Acknowledging that HIV or any other disease response does not occur in a vacuum** and is exacerbated by other interrelated issues, **ensure that advocacy and funding approaches are focused on inclusion of a broad range of stakeholders** for a coordinated, intersectional and holistic response.
- 4 Support communities in addressing issues of criminalization** – communities of people living with HIV, people using drugs, LGBTQI+, and sex workers face discrimination and criminalization of different aspects of their lives in CEECA countries.
- 5 Take leadership and coordinate efforts among the international community, development agencies, donor governments and private philanthropies** to ensure meaningful dialogue in CEECA countries around the importance of sustainability of services, community leadership in all areas concerning their lives and livelihoods, decriminalization as a pivotal aspect of human rights and ensuring space for civil society.



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