After the highly successful two-day EECA INTERACT 2019 workshop held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, the recent virtual EECA INTERACT 2021 Workshop marked the continuation of EECA INTERACT’s vision of ‘Science to Action’. It addressed the unique issues facing the region and highlighted paths forward to solutions for improvement.

Both innovative, interdisciplinary workshops brought together clinicians, policymakers, researchers, and civil society representatives from the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region to share knowledge about the epidemiology, treatment, pathogenesis, and prevention of HIV, tuberculosis, and hepatitis C virus (HCV).

The virtual EECA INTERACT 2021 workshop focused on service integration, surveillance, and the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on HIV, TB, and HCV services, including innovative adaptations to service delivery. It consisted of three one-hour panels:

1. Integration of HIV, TB, and overdose prevention services
2. Surveillance focused on data collection, validation, and analysis
3. Impact of COVID-19 on health care services

The virtual panel discussions were facilitated by Prof. MD Catherine (Cate) Hankins and Prof. MD Michel Kazatchkine, the Scientific Co-Chairs of the EECA INTERACT workshop.

Among panellists, there were regional experts, young investigators, epidemiologists, and members of civil society. In addition to presentations, the programme featured a moderated discussion engaging panel speakers and the audience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen the EECA INTERACT workshop postponed several times. Plans for EECA INTERACT 2022 are for a face-to-face or a hybrid workshop in 2022, depending on the pandemic situation. It will continue to mobilize the new generation of experts to discuss health crises and build capacity in the EECA region to prevent and manage the spread of HIV, TB, and HCV.
128 participants from 27 different countries including:
Kazakhstan
Ukraine
Russia
Tajikistan
Kyrgyzstan
Belarus
Uzbekistan
Georgia
Armenia

The post-event survey revealed that:
54% were very satisfied and 38% were satisfied with the event while
48% gained some valuable new knowledge or heard new ideas & perspectives while
32% noted that the event significantly increased their knowledge and exposed them to fresh, new ideas and perspectives

66% of the speakers came from the Eastern Europe and Central Asia
34% from Europe and Africa
Programme of the event

PANEL 1

Session on the integration of HIV, TB, and overdose prevention services

Integrated and people-centred care is a key element of the ongoing strategic planning for the prevention and treatment of HIV, TB and hepatitis in Eastern Europe and Central Asia for the next few years.

Session 1 discussed preliminary findings and experience gained in several areas (diagnosis, treatment and care) where integration is effectively being implemented in the region.

Format:

• 4 speakers
• conclusions remarks by chairs throughout the session
• discussion

Co-chairs:

o Raminta Stuikyte, Senior Associate: Special Advisor to the WHO Regional Office for Europe on Communicable Diseases

o Irina Petrenko, Deputy Director of the Kazakh Scientific Center of Dermatology and Infectious Diseases

Topics and speakers:

1. Integration of screening for HIV, TB, and hepatitis C –
   o Maka Danelia, MD, PhD, Manager of Global Fund Tuberculosis Project at National Center for Disease Control and Public Health Georgia

2. Integration of TB and HIV services –
   o Lilit Gevorgyan, MD, Doctor-Phthisiatrian, Department of Drug Resistant Tuberculosis, National Center of Pulmonology, Armenia

3. Integration of HIV care in primary care –
   o Anna Deryabina, MD, DrPH, MScIH, Regional Director Central Asia at ICAP at Columbia University

4. Integrating approaches and services for people who use drugs –
   o Ala Iatco, Deputy Director of the NGO Youth for the Right to Life & Union of Organizations Working in the Field of HIV Prevention and Harm Reduction in Moldova
Session on surveillance focused on data collection, validation, and analysis

The process of collecting accurate data regarding HIV amongst vulnerable populations (PWID, MSM, Sex Workers) is a key element to ongoing strategic planning for HIV, TB, and hepatitis services in Eastern Europe and Central Asia for the next few years. All countries in the region have limited epidemiological training amongst medical professionals. New approaches are needed to better understand the real distribution of behavioural risks and epidemiological threats within key populations and to provide independent scientific information for policy-makers and professionals.

Session 2 discussed new methods of collecting data (epidemiological studies, integrated bio-behavioral surveillance, triangulation studies, etc) in the EECA region and Western Europe.

Format:

- 4 speakers
- conclusions/remarks by chairs throughout the session
- discussion

Co-chairs:

- Sergii Dvoriak, MD, PhD, D. Med. Sci, Senior Researcher at the Ukrainian Institute on Public Health Policy (UIPHP), Executive Director of the Eurasian Professional Association of Addiction Medicine (EPAAM), consultant for the WHO and UNODC

- David Ottashvili, MD, PhD, Director of the Addiction Research Centre at Alternative Georgia and Associate Professor of Healthcare at the School of Natural Sciences and Medicine at Ilia State University in Tbilisi, Georgia

Topics and speakers:

1. HIV surveillance and strategic information in the WHO European region –
   - Giorgi Kuchukidze, MD, MPH, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Department of Communicable Diseases

2. Behavioral and epidemiological control in hard-to-reach groups: example of Ukraine –
   - Tetyana Salyuk, Research and Evaluation Manager, the Alliance for Public Health in Ukraine

3. Data collection in the EECA region: how to design cohort studies, collect good quality data, conduct data analyses, and ensure their application in programmes and policy of scientific data –
   - Daria Podlekareva, MD, PhD, Centre of Excellence for Health, Immunity and Infections, CHIP, Rigshospitalet - University of Copenhagen

4. Data collection techniques on MSM in the EECA region –
   - Nikolay Lunchenkov, MD, LGBTIQ+ Health Consultant at ECOM (Eurasian Coalition on Male Health)
Session on the impact of COVID-19 on services

The COVID-19 pandemic is straining HIV, TB, hepatitis, and harm reduction service delivery across the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region, as it is globally. Restrictions on movement and shelter-in-place orders have resulted in declines in access to services and their uptake.

Panel 3 explored how the region has been affected by SARS-CoV-2 and will spotlight innovative adaptations to service delivery that are having positive effects and can be retained going forward.

Format:

- 3 speakers
- conclusions/remarks by chairs and the civil society discussant throughout the session
- discussion

Co-chairs:

- Indira Aitmagambetova, MD, PhD, Associate Director for the HIV/AIDS and TB Program for Kazakhstan, Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Veronica Cretu, Consultant in Open Government & Data for Development, NGO Positive Initiative (Moldova)

Topics and speakers:

1. Disruption in HIV and hepatitis services during COVID-19 pandemic in the WHO European Region –
   - Nicole Seguy, MD, MPH, HIV, STI and Viral Hepatitis Unit Lead, WHO Regional Office for Europe

2. Pandemic-driven positive developments addressing HIV/TB in the EECA region, such as increased use of telemedicine, social media, and virtual community supports –
   - Justyna Kowalska, MD, PhD, Senior Consultant, Hospital for Infectious Diseases in Warsaw; Professor of Medicine, Department of Adults’ Infectious Diseases, Medical University of Warsaw, Poland

3. Innovations across the EECA region in the delivery of harm reduction services in a pandemic: What is working and why? –
   - Igor Gordon, Program Team Lead at the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRA)

Civil Society Discussant: Olg Belyaeva, Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs, Program Coordinator
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Virtual Meeting
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