

Why we need Harm Reduction in the Programme of AIDS2018 Conference



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The 22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS2018) that will be held in Amsterdam 23 - 27 July 2018 will have special attention for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA*). EECA is the one of the two regions in the world where HIV epidemic continues to rise. AIDS2018 will be an ideal opportunity to put the needs of the EECA region in the spotlight, those needs are very much related to harm reduction activities and drugs policy changes.

“During the conference in Amsterdam, we would like to draw more attention to harm reduction. Harm reduction and themes related to drugs and drugs policies were hardly present in the programme of the AIDS conference 2016 in Durban, South Africa. At the other previous conferences this topic was hardly addressed as well,” *AFEW International’s* executive director Anke van Dam recalls. “HIV response should be viewed through the rights of people who use drugs and how they should have access to harm reduction services. The barriers in accessing those services should be removed in the EECA region and beyond.”

People who use drugs and people living with HIV became more active in Eastern Europe and Central Asia over the past years, and now harm reduction is better linked with the affected communities. Challenges in the region and in the rest of the world still remain, for instance repressive drug policies; stigma and discrimination of injecting drug users, people who live with HIV, sex workers and inmates; poor access to prevention and treatment of HIV, TB and viral hepatitis; adequate coverage of treatment and affordable medicaments. Besides, international donor funding for harm reduction programs is decreasing.

“A new environment for harm reduction should emerge in the world and in the EECA region in specific, and we at *AFEW International* along with our colleagues from the other organisations are advocating for the fulfilment of the rights of people who use drugs. We are submitting themes, workgroups, sessions related to harm reduction to the conference,” Anke van Dam is saying. “The voice from people who use drugs has to be heard at AIDS2018! People who use drugs deserve a healthy future!”

*EECA region in which we operate includes the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.