

Sex Workers and HIV/AIDS in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Facts:

- ✓ Estimates of populations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia:
 - Up to 5.5. Million injecting drug users
 - Up to 800,000 sex workers [UNDP report published in 2004]
- ✓ Both these groups form the vast majority of estimated 1.6 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the region. [2005 AIDS Update, Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS and World Health Organization]
- ✓ Prevention programs reach up to 10% of sex workers and injecting drug users. [UNAIDS report, July 2005]
- ✓ This 10%-coverage should be viewed with caution however, since a person is „reached“ through prevention interventions if he/she has got the service once or more times.

Context

- ✓ Although sex work has a long history in nearly every culture and society, sex workers have been rarely, if ever, free from *persecution, stigma, and violence*. In some countries, notably in Western Europe, government officials and policymakers have worked with sex workers and their representatives in an effort to *ease discrimination and improve access to health care and other social services*. Such efforts have at times been slow and inconsistent; they are, however, major accomplishments compared with most nations elsewhere in the world.
- ✓ In Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, for example, sex workers remain among *the most marginalized members of society*. Policymakers and authorities view them as nuisances to be ignored or immoral lawbreakers rather than as *individuals who can and should be protected from violence and receive social and economic assistance and support*.
- ✓ At the same time, the surging HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region places *sex workers at increasingly greater risk of infection not only from HIV*, but also from other potentially debilitating conditions related to sex work and drug use.

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The Central and Eastern European Harm Reduction Network (CEEHRN) is a regional network with a mission to support, develop, and advocate for harm reduction approaches in the field of drugs, HIV/AIDS, public health, and social exclusion by following the principles of humanism, tolerance, partnership, and respect for human rights and freedoms. In 2005 the organization was granted a consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.