

7. NGO Engagement in HIV Prevention, Drug Treatment, and Support for Vulnerable Populations in Uzbekistan

Introduction

Over the last 24 years, Uzbekistan has witnessed a growing emphasis on the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in addressing critical issues such as HIV prevention, drug treatment, and support for vulnerable populations. Despite significant challenges, NGOs play a vital role in advocating for policy reforms, providing essential services, and fostering community empowerment to combat HIV/AIDS and support those in need, advancing HIV prevention and support initiatives in Uzbekistan.

Navigating Legal Reforms for NGO Engagement

Recent resolutions and regulations aimed at facilitating NGO engagement have shown promise in improving the operating environment for NGOs. However, advocacy efforts by NGOs, such as collective appeals to amend or repeal restrictive legislation, highlight the ongoing need for legal reforms and policy changes to enhance NGO effectiveness. Despite challenges, NGOs continue to make a tangible impact through their HIV prevention, drug treatment, and support programmes, reaching thousands of individuals and communities across Uzbekistan.

A crucial decree entitled “On measures to radically enhance the role of civil society institutions in the process of democratic renewal

of the country”¹ was issued by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in May 2018. This directive made clear how critical it is to increase civil society organisations’ participation in furthering the nation’s democratic reforms. The recognition that public funding was insufficient to sufficiently support the ambitious undertakings carried out by civil society organisations was at the heart of the decree. Therefore, the decree sought to create particular public funds that would be financed locally in order to increase support for NGOs and other civil society organisations, starting in 2019. Even though these public funds are officially recognised and established throughout the nation, they face substantial operating challenges. Interestingly, the allotted money is still not being used as of July 2024.

Despite the laws on NGOs, which state that the introduction of new proposals and innovations in public administration can be achieved through joint decisions, the final decision-making remains the prerogative of the government. Citizens, NGOs, and other organisations are not sufficiently involved in this process.

As per the legislation encompassing “On NGOs” and “On public associations”,² NGOs are legally entitled to obtain grants and financial support from foreign donors. However, due to the constrained financial resources allocated by the state, various restrictions persist concerning the utilisation of foreign funding for NGO activities. Previously, 2013 press release from the Uzbekistan Ministry of Justice highlighted that the utilisation of funds and assets acquired by NGOs from foreign states and international and foreign organisations is permitted without hindrance, provided these receipts of funds and assets are reported to the registration authority before funds are transferred to the NGO.³ Even though this commission was not officially documented, it functioned in practice.

1 Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 4.5.2018. No. UP-5430, “On measures to radically enhance the role of civil society institutions in the process of democratic renewal of the country.” www.lex.uz/docs/3721651

2 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 4.10.2023. No. 527, “Nodavlat notijorat tashkilotlari tomonidan ijtimoiy foydali dasturlar va loyihalar amalga oshirilishida ijtimoiy sheriklik xamda xalqaro hamkorlikni yanada qo’llab-quvvatlash chora-tadbirlari to’g’risida”. www.lex.uz/ru/pdfs/6627539

3 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “On measures to implement the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbek-

Both of these following resolutions, the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers (No. 858)⁴ of 9th October 2019 “On approval of the regulations on the procedure for approval of receipt by Non-Governmental Non-Profit organisations with the registering authority from foreign states, international and foreign organizations, citizens of foreign states or by their receiving funds and property from other persons” and the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers (No. 328)⁵ of 13th June 2022 “On the procedure for the interaction of NGOs with government agencies when implementing international grant projects” have become invalid on 5th October 2023. Before the cancellation of the latest resolution No. 328 of 13th June 2022 the initiative group of NGOs (activists and leaders) made a collective appeal to cancel Resolution No. 328 of 13th June 2022 due to the fact that it contradicts national legislation and international standards ensuring the freedom of activity of NGOs. Following a meeting between the initiative group and the leadership of the Ministry of Justice, a mutual decision was made to finalise this resolution, taking into account the proposals of representatives of civil society. On 4th October 2023, the Government of Uzbekistan adopted a resolution (No. 527)⁶ regarding the social partnership of NGOs with government agencies as part of the implementation of projects financed by international grants: “On measures to further strengthen social

istan”, dated 12.12.2013. No. PP-2085 “On additional measures to assist the development of civil society institutions”. www.lex.uz/docs/2468216

- 4 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 9.10.2019. No. 858 “On approval of the regulations on the procedure for approval of receipt by Non-Governmental Non-Profit organisations with the registering authority from foreign states, international and foreign organizations, citizens of foreign states or by their receiving funds and property from other persons.” www.lex.uz/ru/docs/4546607
- 5 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 13.06.2022. No. 328, “On the procedure for the interaction of NGOs with government agencies when implementing international grant projects”. www.lex.uz/ru/docs/6063168#:text=328%2Dсон%2013.06.2022.,при%20реализации%20международных%20грантовых%20проектов
- 6 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 4.10.2023. No. 527, “On measures to further support social partnership and international cooperation in the implementation by non-governmental non-profit organizations of socially useful programs and projects”. www.lex.uz/ru/pdfs/6627539

partnership and international cooperation in the implementation of socially significant programs and projects or non-governmental non-profit organizations.” No. 527 of October 4, 2023. However, an analysis of comments from representatives of NGOs on the portal for discussing draft regulatory legal acts shows that the draft resolution requires improvement. Experts from the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) came to a similar conclusion, identifying a number of conceptual problems that raise reasonable concerns about Uzbekistan’s compliance with international standards and national legislation. We hope that the Ministry of Justice will take into account these constructive proposals and recommendations when further editing the draft resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers.⁷

To this resolution, Appendix No. 527 dated 4th October 2023⁸ was approved, the “Regulations on the procedure for coordinating the receipt of funds and property by non-state commercial organizations from external sources and the procedure for implementing projects in the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan financed from external sources.”

The new procedure to some extent simplifies the procedure for receiving funds and property from external sources and cooperation between NGOs and government agencies when implementing international grant projects.

The ICNL welcomed the adoption of the resolution, noting that it was the result of a successful advocacy campaign by Uzbek NGOs and “the first success of its kind in the last 25 years in the history of Uzbekistan”. The expert organisation noted that the government and the Ministry of Justice held active consultations with NGOs.

7 Yusupov, Dilmurad (2023): Has the procedure for NGOs working with international grants become simpler? www.gazeta.uz/ru/2023/10/27/ngos/

8 Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 4.10.2023. No. 527, “On measures to further support social partnership and international cooperation in the implementation by non-governmental non-profit organizations of socially useful programs and projects”, Appendix 1 to the resolution Cabinet of Ministers, dated 4.10.2023. No. 527, “Regulations on the procedure for coordinating the receipt of funds and property by non-state commercial organizations from external sources and the procedure for implementing projects on the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan financed from external sources”. www.lex.uz/ru/pdfs/6627539

The draft resolution was published for public discussion, and the Ministry of Justice organised several meetings with representatives of NGOs. As a result of these consultations, a number of important recommendations from civil society were reflected in the resolution.⁹

HIV Statistics in Uzbekistan

Based on the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)¹⁰ data for 2023, about 59,000 people with HIV live in Uzbekistan.

Various news channels in Uzbekistan report other figures: 48,000 people with HIV according to the Republican HIV Center; only 45,000 know their status, 55 % are men and 45 % are women.¹¹ Thus, in the author's opinion, figures in news channels that are from official sources are underestimated or data from UNAIDS sources are underestimated.

Mainly among key populations at higher risk of HIV infection – 29 %, among labour migrants – 28 %. Age is between 25 and 49 years. (75 %). More than 70 % of all are on antiretroviral therapy. The rate of sexual transmission of HIV has been increasing in recent years.

According to operative data of the Republican AIDS Center for 2021, 3,289 (2,817) new cases of HIV infection were detected in the country. Thus, in 2021, compared to 2020 (the number is given in brackets), 472 more HIV- infected people were identified, of which 71 (87) or 2.6 % (3.1 %) were among injecting drug users. A total of 45,296 (43,606) people living with HIV were registered, of whom 7.26 % (6.46 %) were HIV positive drug users.¹²

9 Yusupov, Dilmurad (2023): Has the procedure for NGOs working with international grants become simpler? www.gazeta.uz/ru/2023/10/27/ngos/

10 UNAIDS (2023): Country Uzbekistan. www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/uzbekistan

11 V Uzbekistane u boleye chem 48 tysyach chtelovek diagnostirovan VICH (2023). www.kun.uz/ru/news/2023/06/08/v-uzbekistane-u-boleye-chem-48-tysyach-chelovek-diagnostirovan-vich

12 Information bulletin on the drug-related situation for 2021. The Central Asian region. The national-analytical center on drug control under the cabinet of

NGO Initiatives and Outreach

Since its establishment in 2003, the NGO “Ishonch va Hayot” has rendered assistance and support to over 35,000 people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Uzbekistan. Its aid encompasses crisis counselling, social support, and guidance on navigating life with HIV infection. Additionally, efforts by the “Istiqbolli Avlod” Information and Educational Center, alongside several regional NGOs, focus on mitigating HIV risk, particularly among vulnerable communities, by bolstering outreach initiatives. Outreach workers have disseminated information to 16,920 individuals from key vulnerable groups, such as sex workers and men who have sex with men (MSM), covering topics such as HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as well as promoting healthy lifestyles and behavioural changes to reduce risks. Moreover, 115 individuals from these key vulnerable groups received HIV testing, diagnosis, and registration in 2022.

The Republican NGO Ishonch va Hayot has sufficient potential to carry out activities in the field of social support and non-medical care for HIV infection, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis, and chemical dependency. This NGO has implemented a number of socially significant projects of UNAIDS, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) in Uzbekistan, the Public Fund for the Support of NGOs and other civil society institutions under the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and many other international organisations and donors.

Ishonch va Hayot has implemented projects aimed at increasing access for people living with HIV to treatment, care, and support services through a system of multidisciplinary approach and social support, with the financial support of the GFATM in 2004–2014, as well as through the project of the Public Fund for the Support of Non-Governmental Non-Commercial Organizations and Other Civil Society Institutions under the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan “Dialogue, in the name of Mercy!” Ishonch va Hayot held events aimed at raising awareness of the district

ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. UNODC. [www.ncdc.uz/uploads/image/07102022-093616_014-Drug%20situation%20NCDC%20\(EN+RU\)_20.06.22.pdf](http://www.ncdc.uz/uploads/image/07102022-093616_014-Drug%20situation%20NCDC%20(EN+RU)_20.06.22.pdf)

“khokimiyat”¹³ of Tashkent city on issues of prevention and raising the level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS, overcoming stigma and discrimination. Based on the results of the events/meetings of Ishonch va Hayot, a Resolution with proposals was prepared in the “khokimiyat” of Tashkent city. In 2018, with the support of the AIDS Foundation East and West (AFEW) International Foundation, Ishonch va Hayot formed the initiative group “Women Living with HIV” and launched the registration process for NGOs focused on women.

Ishonch va Hayot has implemented the project: “Strengthening the capacity of the community of PLHIV and PLHIV with tuberculosis (TB) to support and expand anti-tuberculosis care for patients, focused on human needs and awareness regarding Covid-19 in the city of Tashkent.” (2019–2021). They organised a programme whose goal is to draw public attention to problems caused by discrimination against women and girls, including women living with HIV (2020), developed a tolerant attitude and support for activities aimed at eliminating cases of discrimination against women and girls living with HIV, which is expressed in the form of legal and economic barriers that prevent women from equal access to health services, social security, education, the labour market, and employment.

Ishonch va Hayot with the support of the AFEW (2020) developed the National Guidelines for Assisted Rapid Testing with the aim of developing and improving the quality of rapid testing and HIV prevention services among key groups and supporting people already affected by HIV. In the same year, the organisation, with the support of the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), implemented the project: “Providing legal support to PLHIV accused of using Article 113 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan: “Knowingly becoming infected or being exposed to the risk of becoming infected with HIV.””¹⁴

13 “khokimiyat” (uzbek language) – mayor’s office in city or in district.

14 Article 113. Spread of sexually transmitted disease or HIV/AIDS infection. (name of Article 113 as amended by the *Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan of May 24, 2010 № ZRU-248 – SZ RU, 2010, № 21, Art. 161*). www.lex.uz/docs/111457

NGOs Working with PLHIV in Uzbekistan

There are currently 11,303 registered NGOs in Uzbekistan.¹⁵ Of these, the following NGOs work with vulnerable segments of the population such as HIV-infected people: Ishonch va Hayot (since 2003), Istiqbolli Avlod (since 2001), the Republican Information and Educational Center “Intilish” (since 2001), and the Anti-Cancer Society of Uzbekistan.

Republican NGO in the Form of a Public Association in Support of People Living with HIV/AIDS and Their Loved Ones Ishonch va Hayot (“Faith and Life”)¹⁶

The mission of the organisation is to provide unifying and comprehensive support to PLHIV, especially affected population groups (SPA) and their loved ones, improving the quality and dignity of their lives, fighting against stigma and discrimination, and actively participating in overcoming the development and spread of HIV/AIDS. The NGO Ishonch va Hayot was registered 20 years ago and has since provided assistance and support to more than 35,000 PLHIV and their loved ones in Uzbekistan, in the form of crisis counselling, social support, and support on issues related to living with HIV infection, such as when they are adapting to the diagnosis; when it comes to complying with the antiretroviral therapy (ART) regimen; by providing care and support at home during the terminal stages of HIV infection (the AIDS stage); by expanding the access for PLHIV (including women have given birth to children) to treatment, to prevention and care; by providing support through peer counselling; by finding healthcare specialists who can help; by offering referrals to specialised institutions; and by providing social support and support in all areas of life.

The Republican NGO Ishonch va Hayot annually organises and hosts events dedicated to International AIDS Day (1st December),

15 Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Portal of non-profit non-governmental organizations of the Republic of Uzbekistan. www.e-ngo.uz/?lang=ru, 29.11.2023.

16 Ishonch va Hayot: PLWH. www.plwh.uz, 29.11.2023.

World Tuberculosis Day (24th March), World AIDS Day of Remembrance (the third Sunday of May), and International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drugs drug trafficking (26th June).

The Republican Social Information Center Istiqbolli Avlod¹⁷ (Established in 2001)

The Istiqbolli Avlod Information and Educational Center, along with several regional NGOs, is working to diminish the risk of HIV infection among vulnerable populations in Uzbekistan by bolstering outreach efforts. It receives financial support from the Office of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, as well as the Republican Center for the Fight against AIDS, to achieve the 95-95-95 goal and enhance the Stop-TB partnership in the country. These 95-95-95 goals are: 95 % of PLHIV will know their HIV status; 95 % of people who know their status will be on treatment; 95 % of people on treatment will have suppressed viral loads.

The objectives of Istiqbolli Avlod include objectives include amplifying and broadening outreach initiatives targeting vulnerable groups to mitigate the risk of HIV infection. The Global Fund Sub-Project focuses on introducing innovative approaches and services for HIV/AIDS and STI prevention among key populations through outreach programmes. These efforts also include promoting healthy lifestyles and altering risky behaviours by offering free counselling, testing for HIV/STIs, and TB screening across eleven regions of Uzbekistan.

Beneficiaries of these initiatives primarily include key vulnerable population groups such as sex workers and MSM. In 2022, the outcomes included providing information to 16,920 individuals from these groups, conducting testing and diagnosis for 115 individuals, distributing 16,906 informational materials, conducting 79,834 mini sessions on various topics, and facilitating tuberculosis screening for 5,760 members of vulnerable groups.

17 Istiqbolli Avlod. Republican Social and Information Center. www.istiqbolli-avlod.uz/project#aids

The Republican Information and Educational Center Intilish¹⁸ (Established in 2001)

The organisation promotes the following: the implementation of government programmes; the implementation of the programmes of NGOs and associations (both foreign and international) that focus on improving the cultural and educational level of the population and certain key groups, preventing drug addiction, and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis; the social adaptation of people who have stopped using drugs; and psychosocial support for PLHIV in prisons, released PLHIV, and other key groups.

The Republican Information and Educational Center Intilish is an NGO operating in all 14 administrative territories of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the field of public health and social protection. The NGO Intilish provides support with the implementation of programmes on twelve topics. The NGO has an educational programme for executive leaders, outreach workers, and volunteers, which is conducted in the form of monthly webinars in two languages (Russian and Uzbek). It also leads the work within harm reduction programme, preparing methodological materials on topics such as ART, voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), outreach to key populations (mainly people who inject drugs (PWID), overdose, safe injections, STIs, hepatitis, and tuberculosis.)

The NGO Intilish project has been working with PWID for a long time and has successfully integrated this work into medical institutions. However, the majority of clients are regular participants in the programme; only 1.9 % seek help once during the year. Research shows that current coverage of PWID mainly depends on old programme clients, including former prisoners who were previously registered with drug treatment services.¹⁹

18 Intilish. www.intilish.uz.

19 World Health Organization. Regional office for Europe (2023): Comprehensive review of the HIV program in Uzbekistan. Mission report.

The Stigmatisation and Discrimination of PLHIV and MSM

48 countries still have travel restrictions for people living with HIV.²⁰ In 25 of the 36 countries with current data, more than 50 % of people aged 15 to 49 years have discriminatory attitudes towards people living with HIV.²¹ 40 % of people living with HIV report being forced to undergo certain medical procedures. Representatives of key populations face high levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence.²²

People perceive HIV-infected people as a threat to their personal safety, treat them with hostility, and seek to protect themselves in a variety of ways, including through outright discrimination and even isolation.

Vulnerable segments of society include those infected with HIV and those who engage in risky behaviour, such as sex workers who use injecting drugs, as well as men who have sex with men.

Article 113 of the Criminal Code²³ in Uzbekistan penalises the intentional transmission of HIV/AIDS with up to eight years in prison. This article would constitute a serious barrier for HIV prevention if HIV/AIDS was to be criminalised in Uzbekistan. This law has been used to target and prosecute people living with HIV, even when there is no evidence of intentional transmission. Sexual work is subject to administrative sanctions.

Sex between men may remain illegal in Uzbekistan, despite past promises by authorities to repeal the discriminatory law. This follows from the draft of the new Criminal Code of the Republic, published by the Prosecutor General's Office for public discussion. In Uzbekistan, consensual sex between men is currently punishable by one to three years in prison under Article 120 of the Criminal Code. Over five years (2016–2020), 44 people were prosecuted in Uzbek-

20 Ibid.

21 UNAIDS DATA (2020): www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2020_aids-data-book_en.pdf

22 UNAIDS (2020): Global AIDS epidemic report. “Ne upustit’ moment”. www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2020_global-aids-report_ru.pdf

23 Criminal code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Article 113. Spread of sexually transmitted diseases or HIV infection / AIDS. www.lex.uz/acts/111457

istan on charges of sodomy, according to Qalampir.uz. Harassment of men who have sex with men makes it difficult to provide care to people living with HIV.

Each year, the NGO Ishonch va Hayot celebrates the “Zero Discrimination day” on 1st March, adopted in the United Nations (UN) calendar at the initiative of UNAIDS. The NGO’s message for 2020 was “End discrimination against women and girls”. In order to combat stigma and against people affected by HIV and increase public awareness of HIV prevention and treatment, Ishonch va Hayot developed the Zero Discrimination Information Campaign, designed to promote tolerant attitudes towards people living with HIV and the progressive experience of Uzbekistan. The objectives of the campaign were: developing a tolerant attitude towards PLHIV, reducing cases of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV; raising awareness among the general population, with an emphasis on young people, about HIV infection and medical advances in the prevention and treatment of HIV infection; informing people about services to support PLHIV and help families have healthy children in Uzbekistan; and establishing sustainable social partnerships and cooperations with key ministries and departments in matters of protecting the health of women living with HIV in Uzbekistan, in order to identify and understand the key needs of women and girls affected by socially significant diseases, including HIV.²⁴

Collaborative Partnerships and Future Directions

Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on social partnership was adopted by the Legislative Chamber on 18th June 2014. The purpose of this law is to regulate social relations, which indicate cooperation and partnership between NGOs, government agencies, international organisations, and local communities.²⁵

24 ZERO DISCRIMINATION. PLWH – Ishonch va Hayot. [www.google.com / url ? sa = i & url = https % 3A % 2F % 2Fplwh . uz % 2Fen % 2F & psig = AOvVaw1mkk3H6gVG8Ln0xTrl8YTO & ust = 1711173089912000 & source = images & cd = vfe & opi = 89978449 & ved = 0CAcQrpoMahcKEwiwOym4eFAXUAAAAAHQAAAAAQBA](http://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fplwh.uz%2Fen%2F&psig=AOvVaw1mkk3H6gVG8Ln0xTrl8YTO&ust=1711173089912000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CAcQrpoMahcKEwiwOym4eFAXUAAAAAHQAAAAAQBA)

25 LRU-376-СОИ (2014): On social partnership. [www.google.com / url ? sa = i & url = https % 3A % 2F % 2Flex . uz % 2Fru % 2Fdocs % 2F6819510 % 3FON-](http://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Flex.uz%2Fru%2Fdocs%2F6819510%3FON-)

In order to promote the further development of democratic transformations in the country and the participation in this of non-governmental, non-profit organisations and other civil society institutions, a public fund is being created under the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan to support non-governmental, non-profit organisations and other civil society institutions (hereinafter referred to as the Public Fund under the Oliy Majlis).

The Public Fund under the Oliy Majlis accumulates funds received from the State Budget of the Republic of Uzbekistan and other sources not prohibited by law and organises their distribution for the implementation of programmes aimed at stimulating the development and supporting the activities of non-governmental, non-profit organisations and other civil society institutions and their participation in solving social, economic, and humanitarian issues. By fostering dialogue, sharing best practices, and leveraging resources, stakeholders can amplify the impact of HIV prevention, drug treatment, and support programmes in Uzbekistan.²⁶

The national economy of Uzbekistan plays a crucial role in funding the HIV response, covering approximately 72 % of the AIDS budget in 2018. A projected investment of USD 36.6 million was outlined for the period spanning 2019–2022, as per Presidential Decree PP-3800.²⁷ While these funds predominantly support medical care, treatment, and programme management initiatives, significant attention is also directed towards holistic development efforts, including enhancing hospital infrastructures and broadening laboratory networks.

In Uzbekistan, various international organisations and government initiatives collaborate to combat HIV/AIDS, with significant contributions from the Global Fund. The Global Fund's core grant focuses on the HIV and Tuberculosis (TB) Joint Grant, a joint initia-

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26 Ibid.

27 Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 22.06.2018. No. PP-3800, "On additional measures to counter the spread of the disease caused by the human immunodeficiency virus and the prevention of nosocomial infections". www.lex.uz/docs/3791786, 29.11.2023.

tive aimed at strengthening the country's HIV response, improving TB treatment, and addressing drug-resistant tuberculosis.²⁸ This grant, totalling up to USD 44.1 million throughout 2021 to 2024, supports Uzbekistan's efforts to deliver an impactful, efficient, and sustainable HIV and TB response. Aligned with the national HIV strategy, the grant primarily focuses on providing prevention services to key populations, as well as quality antiretroviral therapy, care, and support for HIV. For TB, the grant emphasises diagnostics and treatment of drug-resistant TB, counselling, psychosocial support, treatment monitoring, and strengthening laboratory systems.²⁹

Additionally, UNAIDS, a coalition of ten UN organisations, plays a vital role in the fight against HIV/AIDS globally. UNAIDS has established a country office in Uzbekistan and is supporting a programme of additional measures to combat the spread of HIV infection for 2018–2022, with an estimated budget of about USD 50 million.³⁰

The UNAIDS Secretariat supports activities for the implementation of the Program of Assistance to Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) Countries, focusing on prevention, control, and surveillance of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. Global surveillance of HIV/AIDS and STIs is a joint effort of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNAIDS, along with other international institutions and partners.³¹

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provides crucial support to the Government of Uzbekistan by promot-

28 The Global Fund (2022). www.data.theglobalfund.org/location/UZB/overview

29 Ibid.

30 Sputnik Uzbekistan. Fighting HIV: UNAIDS office opened in Uzbekistan. www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fuz.sputniknews.ru%2F20191206%2FBorba-s-VICH-V-Uzbekistane-otkrylos-predstavitelstvo-YuNEYDS-12954539.html&psig=AOvVaw3QQpsJu0VoqHVXnU3I_8It&ust=1711340751696000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CAcQrp0MahcKEwiInOWeh4yFAxUAAAAAHQAAAAAQBAA

31 WHO/UNAIDS: The pre-surveillance assessment Guidelines for planning sero-surveillance of HIV, prevalence of sexually transmitted infections and the behavioral components of second-generation surveillance of HIV. www.iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/43364/9241593741_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

ing modern international approaches and standards in HIV prevention and treatment. UNODC ensures access to necessary medical care for people who use drugs through evidence-based programmes, respecting human rights, and reducing stigma and discrimination. The Ministry of Health of Uzbekistan hosted a national conference entitled “Modern Approaches to HIV Diagnosis, Prevention, and Treatment”, with technical support from UNODC and other UN agencies. Approximately two hundred specialists, experts, and representatives from government bodies, NGOs, and international organisations attended the conference. Its objective was to exchange experiences and contemporary methods regarding HIV diagnosis, prevention, and treatment, aligning with the UN’s strategy to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030.³²

UNODC’s Regional Office for Central Asia presented global approaches and standards for HIV prevention, treatment, and care for PWID, emphasising comprehensive, evidence-based programmes, human rights, and the reduction of stigma and discrimination. Additionally, UNODC facilitated a session on the role of NGOs in implementing HIV prevention programmes, including harm reduction initiatives for PWID. Participants from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Tajikistan examined HIV, drug use, gender, and human rights issues, addressing challenges and priorities. The session underscored the necessity for enhanced coordination and cooperation among service providers, NGOs, and international organisations to deliver higher-quality services for PWID in the country.³³

United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), another international organisation, focuses on strengthening the capacity of the health system in Uzbekistan to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) and provide pedi-

32 UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia. UNODC Supports Implementation of Modern Approaches to HIV Diagnosis, Prevention and Treatment. www.unodc.org/roca/en/news/unodc-supports-implementation-of-modern-approaches-to-hiv-diagnosis-prevention-and-treatment.html

33 UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia (2024). www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.unodc.org/centralasia/en/news/unodc-supports-implementation-of-modern-approaches-to-hiv-diagnosis-prevention-and-treatment.html&ved=2ahUKEwjV9e3Bs7WGAXVvLRAIHS8uIasQFnoECBAQAQ&usq=A0vVaw30Haq4zVMIIQYmGqLgljz5

atric and psychosocial care to HIV-positive children. Moreover, Doctors Without Borders (DWB) collaborates closely with the Ministry of Health at the Tashkent City AIDS Center, providing technical assistance for specific HIV treatments. DWB operates a mobile laboratory in partnership with the Republican AIDS Center in Tashkent and its neighbouring areas. This laboratory, housed in a custom-equipped bus, offers quick testing for HIV, hepatitis C, and syphilis. The team also provides crucial information on treatment options and facilitates specialist referrals for individuals facing barriers to accessing diagnosis and care. Additionally, DWB collaborates with the Tashkent AIDS Center to provide diagnosis and treatment for individuals living in vulnerable situations who are affected by HIV and coinfections.³⁴

In Uzbekistan, a new strategy is being developed and approved by the country's president, which emphasises the importance of ensuring access to prevention measures, treatment services, and support for people living with HIV. In addition, a network of HIV/AIDS centres across the country provides widespread access to care and resources to treat the disease. With centres located in both major cities and rural areas, people in every part of the country can access health services. Coordination between AIDS centres and primary healthcare facilities facilitates drug dispensing and increases access to care.

The NGO Ishonch va Hayot, in collaboration with the AIDS centre in Uzbekistan, gave a series of speeches and lectures about people living with HIV from a first-person perspective. Directly infected members of NGOs spoke about problems relating to discrimination and stigma among the population and even among doctors. The NGO is currently working in this direction; there are multidisciplinary teams that, in addition to treatment, provide psychosocial support. There are also self-help and support groups available.³⁵

34 Doctors Without Borders, Uzbekistan (2020). www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/uzbekistan

35 Kollazh: "YA zhivu s VICH uzhe 16 let v Uzbekistane". www.life4me.plus/ru/blog/vich-5015/

Challenge in NGO Operation and Advocacy

Despite the country's best efforts, stigma and discrimination persist in many healthcare settings, including in the criminalisation of affected communities. Outreach efforts are critical to increasing demand for services in communities and ensuring access for the most vulnerable populations. Through the joint efforts of international organisations, government initiatives, and local communities, Uzbekistan continues to fight HIV/AIDS, striving for a healthier future for all its citizens.

NGO face numerous obstacles in their operation and advocacy efforts, including limited funding, legal constraints, and societal stigma. Despite legislative provisions, accessing financial support from foreign donors remains challenging, hindering the scale and effectiveness of NGO-led initiatives. Additionally, legal barriers and discriminatory attitudes towards vulnerable populations, such as PLHIV and MSM, pose significant challenges to HIV prevention and support efforts.

The challenges faced by HIV-infected individuals often revolve around stigma during employment placement. In cases involving sexual minorities, issues arise due to laws that persecute same-sex relationships. Frequently, infected individuals delay testing and starting therapy due to fear of legal repercussions, further complicating matters. These issues pose a challenge for outreach and social workers who engage with newly identified HIV-positive individuals. Additionally, the work conducted by outreach workers contributes to HIV testing among vulnerable populations, such as sex workers and sexual minorities.

People dependent on psychoactive substances are not always able to get help from public organisations or NGOs. This is due to stigmatisation and condemnation in society. Often, individuals with HIV can join a support group for drug addicts at NGOs supporting HIV-infected people. There are challenges regarding harm reduction programmes.³⁶ Substitution therapy is not endorsed in the

36 Latypov, A./Otiashvili, D./Aizberg, O./Boltaev, A. (2010): Opioid substitution therapy in Central Asia: towards harm reduction. www.leahn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/%D0%9E%D0%BF%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%B8%D0%

country, and the distribution of syringes to individuals who inject drugs is insufficient.

Conclusion

A comprehensive examination of Uzbekistan's legal framework and social landscape surrounding NGOs, social partnership, and the fight against HIV/AIDS provides a multifaceted picture of both progress and challenges. The legal structures governing NGOs and social partnership show a clear intention to promote cooperation between civil society and the government to address socio-economic issues, including HIV prevention. However, practical implementation faces hurdles, as illustrated by bureaucratic obstacles to NGO registration and the complex process of obtaining grants, particularly from foreign donors.

The chapter presents the critical views of experts and activists, highlighting key concerns. Issues such as a lack of funding and limitations in government support schemes hamper the effectiveness of NGOs and affect their ability to provide comprehensive services to vulnerable populations, including those affected by HIV/AIDS. Stigma remains a major barrier, affecting marginalised groups such as men who have sex with men and sex workers, preventing them from accessing essential treatment and prevention services. The legal environment, including laws that criminalise certain behaviours, contributes to a climate of fear and discrimination that hampers efforts to respond effectively to HIV/AIDS.

Despite these challenges, NGOs remain key actors in HIV prevention efforts, playing a pivotal role in advocacy, programme development, and support services. Their collaboration with government agencies demonstrates promising advances in intersectoral partnerships for HIV prevention and support. Overall, this

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chapter provides a nuanced understanding of the complex landscape surrounding NGOs, social partnership, and the fight against HIV/AIDS in Uzbekistan. It highlights the need for streamlined bureaucratic processes, increased financial support, legal reforms to combat stigma, and an enabling environment for NGOs to operate effectively and drive impactful change in HIV prevention and care.

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