

Date 14 January 2020

OPEN LETTER

Subject: Disruption of services to key population in Albania

To: Ogerta Manastirliu
Minister of Health and Social Protection of Republic of Albania
Chair of Albanian CCM

To: Mark Eldon-Edington
Division Head
Grant Management, GFATM

To: Olga Avdeeva
Portfolio Manager of GFAMT for Albania
GFATM Secretariat

CC: CCM Secretariat
UN agencies as partner implementers (WHO, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF)
PMU office for GF grant

Dear Mrs. Manastirliu

Dear Mr. Eldon-Edington

Dear Mrs. Avdeeva,

As representatives of NGO-s working with most vulnerable groups of HIV, we are writing to you requesting your attention and awareness for immediate actions needed on a context of service provision to key population in Albania. Whilst, we are grateful to the support our NGOs have

received during the last two years, we would like to raise the huge difficulties posed by the delay of the beginning of Transition Grant 2020-2022 for Albania.

The 2020 started with disruption of services for 1800 People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) and 380 Methadone clients, 1200 Men Having Sex with Men (MSM), 290 Sex Workers (SW), 30 prisoners and 150 to 200 People Living with HIV (PLWH). NGOs are required to shut down services, cut human resources and return all assets to PMU office: computers, printers, minivan, tables and shelves and also including remaining rapid tests.

By 1st of January, all NGOs providing services to key population during 2018-2019, run out of any kind of support. There is a total lack of information from all institutions, including CCM, how the project will continue, what will be the role of each actor and how the sustainability of services will be ensured, if it will be. Individual meetings were held between PMU and NGOs during December but no official communication is accessible, no email circulated among CCM members or among SRs regarding the future steps.

The summary below reflects the situation of NGOs which provide services to PWID, MSM, SW, PLWH and prisoners. If you have the intention to explore the picture of all NGOs that served as SR during the 2018-2019 grant, more issues may rise.

- Lost human resources – From 1st of January all NGOs were not able to sign contract with their respective staff providing dedicated services to key population. If no reaction is taken on time, there is a possibility to lose all the human resources trained as part of the module on capacity building implemented during 2018-2019. Already people started to look for new jobs.
- Office displacement in region and in Tirana – harm reduction services for PWID and MSM in other regions are closing down. Even, in best of scenarios they reopen, displacement will require new set up costs and process, which in turn, will impact the confidence of clients to the services, reputation of NGOs and will damage the sustainability of services.
- Mobile Units (Minivans) and remaining rapid test kits from 2018-2019 grants are requested to be placed back at the PMU office within this month. The NGOs are not permitted to use them even if they find alternative resources for staff to perform harm reduction and testing services.
- Most importantly two methadone centers (Elbasan and Durrës) will run out of methadone this week. PMU is not distributing methadone to Aksion Plus anymore. Other centers will run out of methadone soon also. The head of the Action Plus NGO is continuously communicating with MoHSP for solutions.

NGOs got the information that there is a bridge fund agreed by GF secretariat and MoHSP but there are no certainties on how it will be distributed and no mechanism is in place to ensure continuation of services and activities.

Apparently CCM is not active and it's not playing its leadership and coordination role. The last meeting was held in April 2019 and since then no other formal or informal meetings had been carried out. Furthermore, the final draft of the Transition Plan 2020-2022 and other approved documents are not known by NGOs at CCM or by SR or other NGOs and civil society actors working on prevention of HIV and TB in Albania.

Therefore, we kindly ask for special and urgent attention to the matter as the situation may escalate soon and people already started to lack services which can put them at increased risk for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and other Sexually Transmitted Infections.

In the context of human rights and responsibilities of each actor involved in this process, we urge action by Ministry of Health and Social Protection and GFATM as donor in this case to properly and in fast manner find the solution which best work for NGOs and bring services to key population as part of commitment toward key affected population on grand agreement signed.

We would like to get attention of UN agencies in country as CCM members, which accompanied this process during the past years, to stand up for the rights of key population, provide their support and play an active role in facilitating and ensuring services to the ones in need.

We remain at your disposal for any potential cooperation or assistance as part of this difficult process and we are open to discuss any solution.

Let us thank in advance for your personal and institutional commitment as well as for the upcoming cooperation and collaboration in the name of our communities.

Sincerely,

People Living with HIV association

Stop AIDS Association

Alliance Against LGBTI Discrimination

ALGA – Albanian Gay and Lesbian Association

Aksion Plus

Open Doors Center

Lezbeer Xhaxhiu

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