



Eurasian Harm Reduction Association

**Review of EECA regional civil society experience
with the C19RM process in 2021**

December 2021

The Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) is a not-for-profit public membership-based organisation uniting 324 harm reduction activists and organisations from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA) with its mission to actively unite and support communities and civil societies to ensure the rights and freedoms, health and well-being of people who use psychoactive substances in the CEECA region.

More information is available on the website <https://harmreductioneurasia.org>.

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The opinions and viewpoints of the author presented in this publication may not correspond with the opinions and viewpoints of EHRA and/or the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
C19RM	The Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism
CAP	Committee of Affected Populations
CC	Coordinating Committee
CCM	Country Coordinating Mechanism
CEECA	Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia
CLM	Community-Led Monitoring
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CRG	Community, Rights and Gender
CRG SI	Community, Rights and Gender Strategic Initiative
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECOM	Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity
EECA	Eastern Europe and Central Asia
EHRA	Eurasian Harm Reduction Association
FPM	Fund Portfolio Manager
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
Global Fund, GF	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
INPUD	International Network of People who Use Drugs
KAP	Key Affected Population
KP	Key Population
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSWP	Global Network of Sex Work Projects
NTP	National Tuberculosis Programme Manager
PAAC	Policy and Advocacy Advisory Council
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PR	Principal Recipient
PTF	Prevention Task Force
SI	Strategic Initiative
TA	Technical Assistance
TB	Tuberculosis
TBEC	TB Europe Coalition
TEG	Technical Expert Group
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization

Background

The Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism (known as C19RM) supports countries to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on programmes to fight HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria and initiates urgent improvements in health and community systems¹. In early April 2021, the Global Fund Secretariat sent allocation letters to Country Coordination Mechanisms (CCMs) in which the amount allocated for C19RM was indicated along with the conditions that the respective country had to follow for obtaining this funding. Among these conditions was support for community-led services, human-rights based approaches and the meaningful engagement of community representatives in the development of the C19RM funding request.

Applicants were able to request funding through a Full Funding Request during the six submission windows as well as to make a Fast-track Funding Request on a rolling basis. All EECA countries submitted their C19RM applications within the first 5 windows.

14 May 2021	31 May 2021	15 June 2021	30 June 2021	16 July 2021	17 September 2021
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In April 2021, the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA), being the host of the EECA Regional Platform for Communication and Coordination, received additional funding within Component 3 of the Global Fund's CRG Strategic Initiative (SI) for the period from 13 April to 30 September 2021 with the purpose to strengthen the engagement of civil society and community groups in the EECA region into C19RM-related processes. In particular, the aim of the EECA Platform was to:

- Ensure access by civil society and community groups to all available C19RM-related information, including translation and dissemination of C19RM-related materials as well as the generation of new C19RM-related resources such as webinars, toolkits and information notes, etc.; and,
- Provide virtual technical as well as financial assistance (in the format of sub-grants or direct consultancy agreements) to support civil society and community groups in EECA countries to convene and identify priorities for C19RM funding requests in coordination with other key and vulnerable populations.

In addition to the support available through the Regional Platform, civil society and communities in the EECA region were able to receive other C19RM-related Global Fund support through the following channels:

- Technical assistance (TA) available through the Global Fund's CRG TA Programme (Component 1 of the CRG SI) between April and June 2021 to support civil society engagement in relation to C19RM funding request development; and,
- Support available through the regional and global key populations networks – partners of the Global Fund within Component 2 of the CRG SI.

Purpose and scope of this review

This review is aimed at understanding the experience of civil society and communities in EECA countries with the C19RM process, including the support available through different Global Fund CRG SI channels in particular and to collect specific lessons learnt and provide recommendations on what could be improved or sustained by the Global Fund next time in terms of ensuring the meaningful engagement of community representatives in the C19RM funding request development.

This review covers the following topics:

1. Organisation of the C19RM 2021 process at Global Fund and national levels;
2. Experience of civil society meaningful engagement in the C19RM process at the national level;

¹ <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/covid-19/response-mechanism/>

3. Support available from the EECA Regional Platform;
4. Support available from key and vulnerable population networks (partially);
5. Support available within the Global Fund's CRG TA Programme; and,
6. Lessons learnt.

The review was conducted during August-October 2021 by an EHRA consultant in a format of semi-structured interviews with the communities' and civil society representatives from EECA countries involved in the national C19RM process, including those from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Ukraine, as well as with the representatives of the CRG TA provider, the Global Fund Secretariat, and of the global and regional key populations networks. In particular, the key informant interviews were conducted with 19 experts representing the following categories of respondents:

- Individual experts, subcontracted by EHRA for C19RM-related TA provision;
- NGO recipients of C19RM-related CRG TA;
- Representative of the CRG Department at the Global Fund Secretariat;
- Key population networks providing C19RM support in EECA countries, including Kyrgyzstan in particular (INPUD, NSWP, TBEC);
- Representatives of organisations that received C19RM-focused grants from EHRA;
- Representatives of organisations that received C19RM-focused grants from KP Networks;
- Organisations that were in receipt of both CRG TA and C19RM-focused grants from EHRA;
- NGOs which did not receive/request any C19RM-related support; and,
- Providers of C19RM-related TA available through the CRG TA Programme in the EECA region.

All interviews were conducted during August-September 2021.

The below findings represent the summary of the review results are to be shared with the Community, Rights and Gender team at the Global Fund Secretariat and to be made available to civil society representatives in the region through the EECA CRG platform listserv and web². It is expected that the results of this review will be used by civil society representatives for advocacy purposes towards the Global Fund Board and Secretariat to ensure that key lessons are learnt concerning the challenges identified with regard to the meaningful engagement of civil society and community groups in C19RM-related processes in 2022.

Limitations

The review was mainly focused on the experience of civil society and communities in EECA countries with the C19RM-related support available through different Global Fund CRG SI channels.

The data collection within this review was limited to the interviews with key respondents representing different categories. Due to the resource and time limitations, some categories of key respondents were represented by one, or a maximum of two, respondents which could be considered as an unrepresentative sample. In particular, this review was unable to fully assess the experience of civil society with C19RM-related TA available for communities in the EECA region through the CRG SI Component 2 partners,

² <https://eecaplatfom.org>

Summary of key findings

- Overall, respondents expressed their gratitude to the Global Fund, its CRG team and organisers and providers of the technical assistance process for the opportunity to ensure the meaningful engagement of civil society and community representatives in the process of C19RM application development;
- The EECA Regional Platform was unanimously recognised as an effective and quality mechanism in TA organisation and management by all respondents having experience in working with it;
- The Global Fund's articulation of the importance of civil society and community engagement in the Global Fund-related processes helped to ensure the inclusion of civil society and community proposals into the application in those countries where before such participation was rejected and to support already established mechanisms of community engagement in others;
- Thanks to the technical assistance and quality expertise in some countries, the inclusion of certain interventions and application components for previously underserved populations (women living with HIV, prisoners and other incarcerated people) became possible. Due to quality expertise and effective partnerships, communities and civil society organisations were able to properly formulate their needs and ideas, justify them and advocate for their inclusion in the respective application;
- Experience obtained by certain communities and organisations from some countries within the C19RM 2021 process has been immediately and successfully shared with communities and civil society organisations in few other EECA countries;
- At the same time, 100% of respondents noted the very tight timeline in which technical assistance was to be provided which, in turn, influenced the workload of consultants; the intensity of process communications; the rush in taking decisions; and work during weekends, all of which might eventually influence the quality of the results achieved. The Global Fund should consider providing countries with more time to develop and submit C19RM applications. Taking into account the 2021 experience, it would make sense to give countries 6 windows and at least 5-month period from the beginning to complete the process;
- Though the information on availability of TA was disseminated widely through a variety of communication channels and was actually seen by many potential TA beneficiaries, it was not properly understood and, in many cases, only targeted and direct communications made potential applicants aware of the TA options available, including the opportunities and benefits;
- There was not enough time for the CRG partners in the EECA region to properly organise the translation of relevant C19RM-related documents into Russian. That is why communities in those countries which submitted their application within Window 1 (such as Kyrgyzstan) were not able to access important documents and C19RM-related information in Russian;
- Previous experience related to difficulties in applying for TA, including complicated language; the length of time from application until contracting a TA provider and receiving the TA might have prevented certain potential beneficiaries from submitting an application;
- While certain community groups and civil society organisations in a number of EECA countries have experience and understanding of the Global Fund processes and procedures, others (such as the transgender community) are quite new and require additional learning and education to be provided by TA providers and organisers;
- CRG partners in the EECA region did not manage to adequately engage non-HIV/TB-affected communities most severely affected by COVID-19 into C19RM-related processes;
- Though national application processes and country mechanisms for the engagement of civil society seem quite established in the region, they still require some improvements and revisions regarding civil society engagement mechanisms to avoid competition for resources; a unified approach to the review of interventions and estimations; the following of Global Fund guidelines; and the overall time-effective process of organisation; and,
- In future, more efforts by the Global Fund and its CRG partners in the region should be also focused on supporting community-led monitoring to ensure that all such activities being proposed by communities and included by countries into their C19RM proposals are actually being implemented, and implemented in a manner required by communities.

General observations and recommendations

Topic 1. Organisation of the C19RM application development process at Global Fund and national levels

“The process is very transparent; under the CCM, we have a working group – the Policy and Advocacy Advisory Council (PAAC) - which is the main recommendation body to the CCM. It has a ToR, with one responsibility of the PAAC being participation in the development of applications. There are representatives of government, civil society and communities. We organised extended meetings and invited all community populations who want to attend. A consultant worked to present an outline of the application; we had meetings and got feedback from the PAAC which then sent its recommendations to the CCM where it was discussed. The CCM also includes representatives of key populations. Application development was preceded by a National Dialogue.” [consultant subcontracted by EHRA to support the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“I felt the strong hand of the Ministry and the use of this opportunity to strengthen the health care system, to purchase equipment, and this opportunity was used by the State. People are not vaccinated - you need to conduct a communication campaign. I talked to some of my colleagues and we all felt that the Ministry wants to use this opportunity.” [representative of a NGO which did not receive any C19RM-related support]

“There was not enough time to delve into the rest of the application. But I remember times when the meetings didn’t finish until each intervention had been examined carefully and understood by every process participant.” [expert subcontracted by EHRA to support the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“The process itself was very nervous and very urgent and chaotic - for example, in Ukraine they (the Technical Expert Group) requested to send a cost calculation of interventions in their form in three hours; it is not clear why it was impossible to send this form at the beginning, we would have filled it out right away.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“I don’t know how the composition of the Technical Expert Group (TEG) was approved, probably by the CCM, but there was a conflict of interests; there were biased representatives of the principal recipients and it would be hard to prevent them from not representing the interests of their organisations. It is important to consider the extent to which the independent review is being followed. There was criticism; it was clear that a scientific justification was expected, but there were issues when it was clear that people wanted to take advantage.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“We proposed intervention to create isolation rooms for people who are released from prisons and who are in the social adaptation centres. People live there in rooms of 20-30 people and during COVID-19 it is impossible to create for them conditions for isolation. We proposed to equip separate rooms for people who have a suspicion of COVID-19, or a confirmed diagnosis, otherwise these people end up on the street, they are simply kicked out, they have nowhere to go, as there is a certain percentage of prisoners who have no relatives. The cost of this intervention was USD30,000. I do not know, unfortunately, who ruled out this intervention and at what stage, although we wrote a serious justification for this. But yesterday I saw in the final application regulatory support for the implementation of remote consulting rooms which costs USD46,000, it’s principal recipients’ intervention. What can be developed for such a sum? Well, the development of a regulatory document cannot be so expensive. This is the result, in my opinion, of such a very fast process of writing an application and not a unified approach. And although we were told that construction is not supported, we explained that we were not going to build anything, there are premises, they just needed to be equipped and, at the same time, in the final application I later saw shelters for other communities and I just did not understand the logic.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“The country should submit an application where the penitentiary system should be a separate unit. It has its own health care system, security system and national strategy, so national interventions do not fit, so a separate block is needed.” [Representative of an organization that is both a recipient of CRG TA and a C19RM focused grant from EHRA]

Though the process of national application development to the Global Fund is more or less established in EECA countries, with national dialogues conducted, Global Fund procedures followed and civil society and community engagement is ensured, still some adjustments can be made to improve the process, to ensure compliance with Global Fund guidelines and the overall organisation of transparent, fair and equal participation of all stakeholders in the process.

Recommendations for improvement

To CCMs:

- Ensure that C19RM and/or national grants are not used by national governments/ministries to strengthen public health systems in general rather than to organise a response to impact the COVID-19 pandemic to fight HIV and TB or the response to HIV and TB itself;
- Ensure the reasonable representation of the Principal Recipient, or any other organisation/stakeholder, in the application development process to avoid a shift of focus in the interests of more represented organisations;
- Organise the application development process with consideration of the time available for all involved parties to become familiar with all application components and to get a better understanding of the synergies and potential partnerships and avoid overlapping and duplication of efforts;
- Ensure that all participants of the process have the necessary documentation and forms to be filled in well in advance of the start of compiling of their respective interventions and components;
- Clearly explain to all interested parties, including civil society and communities, the approach to prioritisation of the interventions to be included into the C19RM proposal;
- Identify funding priorities strictly in correlation with the Global Fund’s COVID-19 Response Mechanism Guidelines and Funding Request Instructions;
- Prioritise the inclusion into the national C19RM proposal the relevant activities under the following areas of great importance for civil society and communities:
 - Gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and care;
 - Institutional capacity building, planning and leadership development;
 - Social mobilisation, building community linkages and coordination;
 - Community-led advocacy and research; and,
 - Community-led monitoring.
- Improve the analysis, documentation and description in the national proposal of the impact of COVID-19 on gender-based violence and human rights; and,
- A prison component should be included in applications in a separate block as UNAIDS considers prisoners and other incarcerated people as one of the main key population groups that are particularly vulnerable to HIV and frequently lack adequate access to services.

Topic 2. Experience of the meaningful engagement of civil society in the C19RM process at the national level

“The country has recently got used to engaging civil society organisations through the Committee of Affected Populations (CAP); they (the CCM Secretariat and Principal Recipient) see it as a tool, it is an informal platform for community leaders. They always make a request to the CAP and expect the united opinion from it. This was the case with the C19RM application as well. With one call to one structure, all communities are involved at once.” [Representative of a NGO which did not receive any C19RM-related support]

“The community of ex-prisoners applied for TA to develop interventions. They had 2 consultants - regional and local. They reviewed all COVID-19 documents in prisons throughout the EECA region and Europe and made 43 interventions that could be implemented. More than half of them (23) were included in the application; then, of course, there was a revision. They received \$2.8 million - 7% of the total grant. This is what the medical services of the prisons themselves will do and what will be done by the community (prevention, care and support). It turned out to be a very successful case.” [Representative of ECOM, CRG TA Provider in the EECA region]

“The side effect is positive. I forwarded documents with activities developed for the community of women living with HIV in Ukraine to Uzbekistan which were included in the application of Uzbekistan - that is, what I managed to do for Ukraine was useful for Uzbekistan.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“In reality, probably out of communities of people who use drugs in 4 countries to whom INPUD provided TA, only in Ukraine was the process more or less somehow all right. Moldova, Kazakhstan and Belarus had a mad confusion, and a really very strong struggle was going on between the communities, inside, and for their priorities to be included on an equal basis with the priorities of other key population groups.” [Representative of INPUD, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

“WHO surprised me very much and frankly annoyed me when they said that support to pregnant women was irrelevant. We showed them research on access to medical care conducted in November 2020 jointly by UNICEF and the NGO “Positive Women”, provided clear evidence, then they calmed down. This is WHO, which is promoting the validation and elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, which is interested and should support us in the first place; they say that this intervention is irrelevant for a COVID-19 proposal!” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“I always doubt whether to get involved with the Global Fund or not. Now in the new multicountry grant call, 8% of the grant is for salaries - this means to leave the accountant and transfer the rest from staff to consultants. I understand that it is necessary to work according to the procedures, to undergo an audit. But if the Global Fund continues such a policy, community organisations will cease to be what they intended, they will not differ from HIV service or donor organisations, because the main strength and energy will be directed to adherence to anti-corruption procedures, then we will cease to be activists. Because it is difficult for me to be in two positions, there is no time and energy left for activism. The Global Fund should think about preventive measures, how not to miss out on activism, protection of rights, advocacy. Without activism, there will be no protection of human rights.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“This should go through preparatory work with CSOs, it is desirable that all documents are already available so that civil society organisations can familiarise themselves with them. When we held webinars in 4 countries on C19RM, the civil society organisations just had such round eyes because they heard nothing on that, they did not get communication from the CCM yet. These are people who hold a certain position; they have, as it were, great influence in the country. And if even at their level they did not know about what was happening, what the Global Fund was demanding, then this suggests that communication should be strengthened, both on the part of the Global Fund in the transmission of information for the CCM, that they should communicate with CSOs specifically. The same is for the CCM. That is, they did not send any information letter from the Global Fund to communities because not everyone reads English.” [Representative of TBEC, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

“There was also a very indicative case with the trans community when they were attacked at the TEG by questions and why and where the evidence is, although this was clear even to me, although I do not belong to this community, but they did not conduct a sociological study or could not justify it in scientific language, but they talked about real needs. They said that they would not participate in this begging, they would work with the GF directly, although, in my opinion, they did not succeed in it either. But the very fact that driving a

community leader to despair looked like harassment. There were also many questions to us, but we were more prepared, supported our proposals with research.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“The EECA Regional Platform was involved into communication with UNAIDS, CCM Secretariat, FPM and community representatives in Kazakhstan regarding the possibility to provide C19RM-related technical and financial support to the representatives of the sex workers community in-country to help them to formulate and submit their priorities for inclusion into the national C19RM application. But, despite the clear intention of the sex workers community to be meaningfully involved in the C19RM process in-country, it was decided by the national key stakeholders that activities targeted on this community should not be included into the proposal as this group is also not covered by the activities within the main Global Fund grant” [EECA Regional Platform report to the CRG department on C19RM-related activities]

Positive aspects

- In some countries (like Georgia or Kyrgyzstan), it seems there are well-established mechanisms for civil society engagement in the grant application development process where C19RM was not an exception, or the creation of new formats of civil society engagement which also worked well in the current circumstances;
- The importance of civil society engagement articulated by the Global Fund helped to ensure their inclusion in proposals in those countries where before such participation was rejected;
- In some countries, there exists a well-functioning partnership and communication between the grant implementation group and civil society;
- The very idea of C19RM TA - which should ensure the meaningful engagement of community into the C19RM application development process and the fact that this engagement is supported by quality expertise to help communities to properly formulate their needs and ideas, to justify those needs and ideas and to advocate for their inclusion in the application – is very important, much needed and is a successful initiative of the Global Fund’s CRG Department which should be sustained for the next round of C19RM;
- Thanks to the availability of C19RM TA opportunities, the communities in a number of EECA countries were able to get expert support for:
 - conducting of desk research and needs assessment;
 - the collection of intervention priorities from community groups and organisations;
 - the development of a list of interventions with proper justifications based on research and data;
 - conducting of interviews and focus-groups;
 - ensuring their meaningful involvement in the national dialogue processes;
 - the calculation of intervention costs; and,
 - advocacy for the developed priority interventions with the CCM.
- Due to C19RM TA, communities have been able to achieve certain goals, or to include certain interventions, for the first time ever and many respondents noted that probably without C19RM-related TA they would not have been able to achieve the inclusion of community priority interventions into the final application at all, or not at the volume achieved;
- Experience obtained by certain communities and organisations within the C19RM has been already shared with communities and civil society organisations in other countries and used by them;
- The C19RM process has helped to focus more attention in a number of EECA countries on the needs of the imprisoned people and those recently released from detention as a separate key population group and to see the necessity for their representatives to be included in the CCM.
- Even those interventions which were not included into final applications were justified and calculated thanks to TA and expert support and might become good instruments for further advocacy at national level for possible inclusion in other applications and/or to other donors.

Recommendations for improvement

General recommendations to the Global Fund CRG team, the EECA Regional Platform, TA providers and CCMs:

- Agree on the way the information on TA availability is presented to the target audience considering it should be simple and clear;
- Agree on information dissemination channels which definitely reach out to the target audience;
- Conduct a series of educational events (webinars) on lessons learnt from the 2021 C19RM process, difficulties that civil society faced in not getting/reading the information correctly and not applying for TA; and,
- Pay special attention to providing education to communities not covered with TA (such as the transgender community in Ukraine) to ensure the community has an understanding of the Global Fund-related processes and benefits of TA applications.

To the Global Fund:

- Ensure that the process does not have such a limited timeline as in 2021 which eventually may influence the quality of applications and limit the ability of the communities to be meaningfully involved;
- Collect and provide systemic information and research on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the HIV response and on specific communities;
- Revisit the approach to conduct a needs assessment and let the country identify methods for a needs assessment itself;
- In future, ensure that all new Global Fund C19RM guidance and technical notes are produced/updated and made publicly available in all officially required languages (including Russian) before the countries receive the allocation letters;
- Conduct a global assessment of community engagement into the C19RM process in 2021 to better understand the challenges faced and the unmet needs and to take that into account when planning the new phase of the C19RM-related TA in 2022; and,
- For FPMs to support the meaningful engagement of community and civil society into the application development process beyond making declarations but with actual words and deeds, supporting them when they are struggling with advocating their voice to be heard by the CCM and Principal Recipient.

To CCMs:

- Revisit established mechanisms to ensure the meaningful engagement of civil society into the national dialogue processes in general and into the development of Global Fund grant applications in particular, especially in those countries where their status is not ensured (according to the opinion of the community representatives);
- Ensure the information translated by the CCM on the coming application opportunities and related processes to its members and all relevant stakeholders reaches its target audience and that the CCM Secretariat is ready to answer clarifying questions, provide any additional information on TA, or to readdress questions to relevant entities;
- Avoid biased attitudes towards community interventions that are presented or their complete rejection despite the provision of justifications for such interventions;
- Ensure the proper organisation of the national dialogue to discuss civil society priorities; and,
- Make criteria for the selection of implementing organisations that are clear and transparent and ensure the process takes into consideration the efforts of civil society and community organisations in the application development process.

To civil society and community organisations:

- Be proactive as an organization and participate in the process; ask questions, request clarifications and educational and learning events and tools; and,

- Share and exchange experience and learnings with other communities.

Topic 3. Support available from the EECA Regional Platform

“This was the fastest application we wrote and received help. Ivan, the EECA Regional Platform Coordinator - we were in touch by the Messenger app., we could request any information very quickly. This is the first time I have come across such an adequate attitude towards grantees based on direct human contact. All my gratitude - if it were not for such efficiency - the deadlines were tight - we would not have had time for anything.” [Representative of a NGO in one of the EECA countries which implemented the grant received from EHRA to support the meaningful engagement of communities in the national C19RM process]

“If it were not for TA, there would be no such work; I would be responsible only for my usual duties, I would not delve into the needs of communities. But since I was an EECA Platform consultant, I was responsible. There are representatives from the men who have sex with men and people who use drugs community in the CCM, but they probably would not have been able to develop such an application.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“It was a good example of national consultants’ work with national communities - it is necessary to include a local consultant in such a process so that s/he knows local organisations and communities. If it were an external person, it would be difficult, especially without knowing the national language.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“I would like it to be broader assistance, preparation of communities for implementation, strengthening the potential of the community - the consultant did the job and left, but it is necessary to strengthen the potential of the community to implement the grant itself; sometimes community capacity building is not included in the grant itself.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“We started asking how we should organise the process of collecting community needs. And then we were told by the CCM Secretariat that we can get TA. We wanted to get an expert to moderate the process. I could arrange focus groups, offline meetings, conduct in-depth interviews, within the situation that COVID-19 allowed. I wrote to Ivan whether we can submit an application; Ivan called and wrote to the grant implementation group, the CCM, and he was told that no, we cannot. Nevertheless, I still had to make a meeting where we discussed what we can do if sex workers are not included in any application. That we can do trainings on prevention and invite both outreach workers and sex workers there. And without TA, we were able to discuss and describe what can be done for each of the 4 components, I did it myself. We described educational trainings for NGO staff, capacity building, joint online and offline meetings so that there is a doctor and a consultant together. Submitted to the TB application, since I am the project coordinator. In the HIV application, they included only PPE for sex workers.” [Representative of a NGO which did not receive C19RM TA]

“There were some attempts to develop an application for TA, but there was no person who would moderate this process, unite everyone and make everyone happy. We decided that we will spend more energy than we will get in return – that is why we didn’t apply” [Representative of a NGO which did not request C19RM TA]

Positive aspects

- The EECA Regional Platform was a key source of information on the availability of the C19RM-related TA for civil society and community representatives in the region;
- Some communities across the EECA region were able to submit their interventions of adequate quality and local experts had resources and time to provide effective support only thanks to the available support from the Platform;
- A CRG TA provider noted the effectiveness of coordination by the EECA Regional Platform of joint efforts within TA provision;

- Subcontracting local/national consultants to provide TA was the right thing to do considering the necessity of knowing local content, national language and very tight terms; and,
- The EECA Regional Platform ensured effective communications and quick turnover with addressing the requests for support from communities, responding to the questions, problem solving and work with documentation related to TA provision.

Recommendations for improvement

To the EECA Regional Platform:

- Simplify the communication language on TA available for communities to help them to clearly understand what TA is, and how they can apply for it;
- Provide examples/successful cases of TA provided and results achieved;
- Work with the Global Fund CRG team to ensure the application revision process does not take much time and is conducted in the most efficient way;
- Educate the community in the EECA region to communicate with donor organisations and to defend their interests; and,
- In the future, consider playing a better role in coordination of the C19RM-related TA activities being planned for support in EECA countries by different CRG SI partners.

To the Global Fund CRG team:

- Revisit the criteria for TA provision and ensure it can be provided for community capacity building for the expertise to stay within the community;
- Ensure the timely review of TA applications;
- Platforms and other CRG SI partners could be mobilised to provide support to civil society in countries much earlier than a few weeks before the first submission window as, for example, conducting the proper assessment of the communities' COVID-related needs requires much more time; and,
- The involvement of the Platforms in the C19RM process could be planned in advance and properly reflected in their workplans for the following year so they have enough time to adjust their activities and properly reallocate required resources before the start of the new C19RM round.

To civil society and community organisations:

- Internally discuss lessons learnt from previous experience of submission of the TA requests and identify representatives able to communicate with the EECA Regional Platform and the Global Fund and take leadership in the development of such requests.

Topic 4. Support available through CRG SI from key and vulnerable population networks

“This experience with technical support was positive for our organisation. Despite the fact that we were not able to achieve that, some of the necessary activities were included into the grant application and such experience helped us to build the capacity of experts from the community. We began to be involved in writing the application, thanks to NSWP hired experts in our regions, for each city - one expert. The hired experts were all from the community. And thanks to this experience, the potential of experts from the community has grown. At the meeting with the people who were engaged in the C19RM proposal development, we noticed that people began to participate much more actively in the discussions than in the consultations on the country proposal. And we believe that this is the main achievement for our organisation precisely thanks to the COVID-19 application - we had a good deal of mobilising of the community of sex workers. And we managed to attract more people from the community. People began to understand and show more interest in the processes of the Global Fund.” [Representative of a NGO recipient of C19RM-related TA]

“They wrote to us, but what they suggested - they will find an international consultant who does not read Ukrainian. We were pleased that we were offered help, but the consultant speaks neither Russian nor Ukrainian, this is irrelevant, it would require explanations, translation, it would take a lot of effort and time. There were attempts to support us, but we refused.” [EHRA consultant subcontracted to support the community’s involvement in the C19RM process in one of the EECA countries]

“They all now understand how important preparation is in terms of some webinars, some trainings for capacity building and how to advocate for their interests. It could be the role of community networks. For example, in Kazakhstan, they wrote that they did not have enough time to hire a consultant. Belarus turned out to be in such a situation that they also wanted to hire an expert, but all the experts were already employed and assigned.” [Representative of INPUD, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

“I would prefer to avoid receiving such huge amounts of work on such a short notice because the whole team was under incredible stress.” [Representative of TBEC, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

“It is very good that these calls were organised by the Global Fund between technical providers and that this online table with information on all TA assignments was made. Thanks to this table I saw which provider worked in which country and with which community, even if I skipped the call – partners downloaded all information there. Besides the table included the information on partners with whom you coordinate your efforts in the country. Though it was sometimes impossible to discuss everything during the call, we inserted all information in the table and it was useful. Despite the fact that in that process, and in that meat grinder that was taking place, it was still difficult to control everything there, but at least there was some kind of coordination and that was great. That at least it was clear who was doing what.” [Representative of TBEC, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

“It was too intense. And all the effort that not just we, as NSWP, but more importantly, our members, and Tais Plus and Lega-life Ukraine, all the effort they put in to engage with the process is simply not sustainable. It's not sustainable over a longer period even with the additional technical assistance available - with the assistance from us, the effort from them, it's just not sustainable over a long period. So that's the strongest message to the Global Fund really, is that the CRG did a fantastic job. The idea of pandemic response and, certainly, specifically C19RM...this is not going to go away anytime soon. And if we are fully committed, if the Global Fund is fully committed to communities being engaged and involved, we need to work out a better system. There was pressure to ensure consolidated proposals. NGO politics comes into that and it's not always easy to get all the key populations to work together. Some of the country teams, in particular Ukraine, were not helpful and dismissed some of the priorities submitted by the key populations - sex workers in particular. The country CCM was told to not include those things like this. I think that made engagement problematic.” [Representative of NSWP, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

Positive aspects

- The involvement of the global and regional KAP networks into the C19RM-related TA provision in the region allowed the increase in capacity of community representatives by taking part in the country dialogue and grant application development processes; and,
- Colleagues from the CRG Department introduced a great practice of weekly calls between all CRG partners involved into TA provision in the regions to share their best practices and challenges being experienced. The shared online directory was constantly updated with the list of the C19RM-related activities being supported / implemented by CRG partners in each region and was also considered by a number of respondents within this review as a very useful practice which should be sustained in future as well.

Recommendations for development

To community networks:

- Conduct preliminary work with communities on preparation for justification and advocacy of priorities, as well as identification in certain countries of experts available for the work with communities;
- Make the process of selection of beneficiaries of the C19RM-related TA in countries more open and transparent;
- Ensure Russian-speaking consultants are chosen to provide TA in the EECA region. The priority also can be given to a consultant with knowledge of a national language; and,
- Better coordinate the planned activities in countries with other CRG partners being involved in the C19RM-related processes in the region, including the Regional Platform.

To the Global Fund:

- Consider the sustainability of TA provision in the long-term to ensure the resources and efforts spent are not used just once but utilised for the benefit of future projects, activities and community capacity building;
- In 2021, the Global Fund made the C19RM-related support for civil society available through 3 different channels:
 - Support available from the Regional Platforms;
 - Support available from key and vulnerable population networks; and,
 - Support available within the Global Fund's CRG TA Programme.

But both for the CRG partners in the region and for civil society it was a somewhat difficult to understand the difference between these channels; to whom it is better to approach for support; or whether it is possible to request/receive support from all three channels at the same time. The Global Fund should ensure better coordination of the C19RM-related TA being provided through different channels to avoid misunderstandings between the partners and the potential duplication of efforts.

Topic 5. Support available within the Global Fund's CRG TA Programme

"No, I haven't seen the information about this TA opportunity, maybe my colleagues knew about it, but not me" [Representative of a NGO recipient of C19RM-related TA]

"We were ready to be engaged in 6 short-term TA assignments: 3 related to situational analysis and needs assessment and another 3 related to the engagement of civil society into C19RM country dialogue processes. But eventually we were engaged only in 2 cases of TA. But as far as I know, there were much more needs. I do not really understand how else to explain to people that they have such an opportunity and that they need to use it or they will miss it. I had a strong sense of presence of TA availability from everywhere. But at the same time, I heard a lot of complaints from community representatives that they have difficulties, this is a real case example of Ukraine and the transgender community. The transgender community were on their own, they came with proposals without being able to receive any support, while the prisoners' community requested TA. As a result, 23 interventions of the prisoners' community were accepted but not a single proposal was accepted from the transgender community. The CCM said that all their suggestions are not related to COVID-19. And in the end, the transgender community left, slammed the door and when the application was sent to the Global Fund, they signed against it. Because no one could explain to them what to do, no one provided TA or acted as a liaison between them and the CCM. I learned about this as a 'fait accompli', although it is not difficult to write a 3-page application to the CRG Programme in Russian. They didn't apply because they didn't know, they didn't get it, although the announcement was very widespread. Maybe it is necessary to make targeted mailing to the members of the CCM, individually to everyone, because the members of the CCM are responsible for their communities. One and the same CCM, two communities - and such a different result."
[Representative of ECOM, a CRG TA Provider in the EECA region]

“CRG gathered a great team. The Global Fund and the CRG team created maximum conditions to somehow smooth-out the situation that had arisen. They themselves understood that what was happening was not very good. And therefore, as much as possible, with all their actions and activities they tried to smooth it out. They were constantly in contact, both formally and informally. They reacted very quickly to everything, took any problematic moments, including those taking place at the national level, very seriously. And immediately, formally or informally, they tried to somehow clarify them and give us feedback. The communication was very fast. There was no such thing that you had to wait there for a week. Well, this is a maximum of two days.” [Representative of TBEC, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

“If there is this neglect on the part of the Global Fund, then it’s difficult to continue promoting at the level of negotiations with the CCM that the civil society role is important; even the portfolio manager ignores the civil society meetings. If the portfolio manager is involved in country processes, it would be good for him/her to devote time to civil society, if civil society is a priority for the Global Fund. Civil society could ask the questions that they have, s/he could answer, this could give them strength.” [Representative of TBEC, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

“We sent the complaint to the Global Fund on the C19RM application development process, which was very low, that none of the interventions proposed by us were accepted, though they all were justified. During the CCM meeting, the portfolio manager said that, “some civil society organisations wrote to the Global Fund, complained about some of the processes there”. And he asked, “because we don't have time, we can't devote time to such things, so try to solve this inside the country”, which sounded to us like ‘don't waste time from the representative of the Global Fund to some non-significant issues.” [Representative of a NGO recipient of CRG TA]

“It was required to collect aggregated information from each of the supported countries and communities, analyse it during quite a limited time, but quality report preparation required much more time for development.” [Representative of INPUD, Global Fund’s partner within Component 2 of the CRG SI]

Positive aspects

- The flexibility of the CRG Department allowed the establishment of an additional source of short-term peer-to-peer technical assistance within the CRG TA Programme in order to strengthen the engagement of civil society and communities during the C19RM funding cycle and this should be acknowledged;
- Thanks to the Global Fund CRG team and well-established relations with TA providers, the TA providers had a certain level of freedom and flexibility during the process of C19RM-related TA provision which, in turn, helped them to take decisions and effectively respond to the needs of applicants; and,
- The Global Fund CRG team was prompt in its communications with TA providers and other CRG Partners in the region even in urgent and stressful situations.

Recommendations for development

To the EECA Regional Platform:

- As it appeared that the C19RM-related TA being available within the Global Fund CRG TA Programme was least in demand in the region (only 2 TA requests were received and supported out of a possible 6), more attention in the future should be paid to the promotion of this TA opportunity, although broad dissemination of the information through the regional thematic listservs and accounts in social networks is not enough, more interpersonal approaches should be applied.

To the Global Fund CRG team:

- In the event of a further round of C19RM, conduct communications with countries and civil society on the availability of CRG TA well in advance of the announcement both with CCMs and CSOs;
- Clearly define the role of partners in the process of TA organisation and provision;

- Ensure that FPMs do not neglect to respond to CSO-written complaints on the C19RM process and do not avoid meetings and communications with civil society and community organisations and representatives aside from CCM meetings;
- Provide clarification for TA providers on the roles and responsibilities of relevant departments and staff within the Global Fund Secretariat for more effective communications; and,
- Provide the CRG SI partners more time for preparation and submission of the reports on the results of C19RM TA to the Global Fund.

Lessons learnt

“What is next? How do we ensure that the community-led monitoring of the supported C19RM activities happens? How do we ensure that all of these elements that have been added in order for the community priorities to be reflected are implemented and implemented the way communities want them? How can we have consistent dialogue with a Principal Recipient, or maybe there should be some oversight mechanism at the CCM level which considers separately the implementation of C19RM funding? It seems that we do not speak about this stage, which is an important one, because after all C19RM funds will be incorporated into the grants and they will be around for the next 2.5 years. Civil society should start the dialogue with the Global Fund on those issues. The initiative must come 100% from civil society.” [Representative of the Global Fund’s Secretariat CRG Department]

1. Within C19RM 1.0 (2020), the Global Fund did not provide TA for the special involvement of communities. In 2021, it was the first time the emergency support for community engagement was organised. The initiative showed itself in great demand and needed. The process was difficult at first and the Global Fund CRG team and its partners in the region tried to use all available communication channels and approaches to inform civil society and communities about the available TA opportunities and to motivate them to use it. Though still not every community who might have applied saw the information, understood it and used the information for their benefit;
2. The aspect of timing is very important and how quickly information reaches communities. The Global Fund should provide countries with more time to develop and submit their C19RM proposals as this highly impacts the quality of the submitted proposals as well as the quality of the meaningful involvement of communities and civil society representatives in the C19RM national dialogue processes;
3. The role of the CCM Secretariat is to better organise the process of involving communities; community participation in the C19RM-related consultation processes should be ensured from day one, once the allocation letter has been received;
4. The more coordinated the technical assistance has been, the more likely it has been to be successful;
5. The Global Fund should ensure better coordination of the C19RM-related TA being provided through different channels to avoid misunderstandings between the partners and the duplication of efforts;
6. The quality of community inputs that received technical support was much higher than the quality of the inputs of those communities where there was no such technical support;
7. The earlier technical support can be provided, the better the engagement process and the greater the likelihood that priorities are taken into account; technical assistance needs to be deployed as early as possible;
8. Activists representing the interests of the imprisoned and recently released from detention made a breakthrough in terms of ensuring their interests are taken into account and properly reflected within national C19RM applications in several EECA countries. But other communities were not so active or not involved at all;
9. The process proved that the community must be able to voice its demand, voice it correctly, voice it in time and voice it in good quality, with the use of evidence-based arguments and research data. In some community proposals, it was unclear how exactly the proposed activities would influence the course of the development of the COVID-19 epidemic and that is why they were not included in C19RM requests; and,
10. Better coordination is needed to understand who is doing what in the countries and to have ‘live’ documents to which information can be entered and to which the country team and the CCM Secretariat have access; such a coordination role in each region could be taken by the Regional Platforms.