Eurasian Harm Reduction Association

Assessment Report Communities and Civil Society Learning Needs for Strengthened Engagement in Global Fund and Related Process in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

EECA Regional Learning Hub

September 2024

This learning needs assessment was carried out by the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) Regional Learning Hub, with support from the GC7 Community Engagement Strategic Initiative (CE SI) of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Similar assessments were conducted by other Regional Learning Hubs, including those in Anglophone Africa; Asia Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; Francophone Africa; and the Middle East and North Africa. The primary goal of these assessment was to identify the learning needs and gaps among communities and civil society who are living with, affected by, or vulnerable to HIV, TB, and malaria in terms of their effective engagement in national Global Fund and related processes. Addressing these gaps will help facilitate stronger and more effective engagement of communities and civil society in Global Fund processes and related initiatives.

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Abbreviations

CCM	Country Coordinating Mechanism
CLO	Community-led organization
CSO	Civil society organization
ECOM	Eurasian Coalition for Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity
EECA	Eastern Europe and Central Asia
EECA Regional Platform / EECA Learning Hub	EECA Regional Platform for Community and Civil Society Coordination and Communication, starting in 2024, is mainly known as the EECA Learning Hub
EHRA	Eurasian Harm Reduction Association
ENPUD	Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs
GC7	Grant cycle 2023-2025 of the Global Fund
LFA	Local fund agent
PAAR	Priority above allocation request (the list of costed items in funding requests that is above the allocation set by the Global Fund for the applicant)
PR	Primary recipient (of the Global Fund grant)
SEE-RCN	South-Eastern Europe Regional HIV and TB Community Network
SR	Sub-recipient (of a Global Fund grant from a primary recipient)
SSR	Sub-sub-recipient (of a Global Fund grant from a sub-recipient)
SWAN	Sex Workers Rights' Advocacy Network
TB	tuberculosis
TBEC	TB Europe Coalition
UHC	Universal health coverage
UQD	Unfunded quality demand (the approved items from PAAR that are available in an online register of the Global Fund)

Acknowledgments

1. Context, purpose and scope

Since 2014, the Global Fund has supported the regional community and civil society platforms for communication and coordination under the Community Engagement Strategic Initiative (CE SI). The Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) hosts the EECA Regional Platform for Communication and Coordination (or EECA Regional Platform in short) since 2017.

Every three years, the Global Fund evaluates the progress and results of Strategic Initiatives and updates their objectives and design. As a result of such an update, starting **in 2024**, the regional communication and coordination platforms were re-branded as Regional Learning Hubs due to their expanded focus on regional learning and experience sharing. To ensure the recognizability of the EECA Regional Learning Hub across the region, it continues to use its branding as EECA Regional Platform, including in this report.

For the three-year cycle from 2024-2026, the EECA Regional **Learning Hub's objective** is to facilitate timely access to information and relevant peer learning and exchange among communities and civil society to strengthen the leadership and engagement of communities most affected by HIV and TB in Global Fund and related national processes, throughout the grant cycle.

In particular, the EECA Learning Hub is expected to contribute to the last two outcomes of the Global Fund's Community Engagement Strategic Initiative:

- Communities generate and use data to inform advocacy and decision-making.
- Communities have the capacity to mobilize and hold their representatives and decision-makers accountable.
- **Communities access timely and relevant Global Fund-related information.**
- **Communities drive program quality based on adopting global guidance and sharing best practices.**

In March 2024, the EECA Learning Hub commissioned a needs assessment to understand better the **Global Fund-specific learning needs of HIV and TB communities, key and vulnerable populations, and civil society partners** in the EECA region. This report summarizes the assessment results so that the EECA Learning Hub can use them to refine its plans for 2024-2026.

The assessment answers the following main **questions**:

1. What are priority **learning needs** (thematic areas and ways of learning) for better engagement of HIV and TB communities, key populations, and civil society in the Global Fund and related processes throughout the grant cycle?
2. What improvements in the EECA **Learning Hub's operations and plans** could enhance the learning experience among its different target groups and across the various countries served?
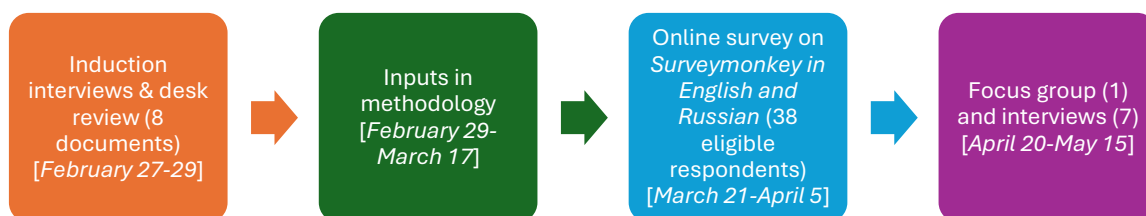
As part of the second question, the EECA Learning Hub's team requested operational feedback on their existing **communication means and approaches**.

2. Methodology

The needs assessment used inputs collected through the following four methods:

- a desk review of the EECA Learning Hub and other documents,
- an online survey of individual and organizational needs from a broad range of community and civil society stakeholders in the region,
- virtual focus group and key informant interviews with community and civil society organizations and CCM members/officials.

Ahead of the assessment, the consultant interviewed staff of the EECA Learning Hub and the Global Fund Community, Rights and Gender Department. The last stages of inputs - the focus groups and the interviews - complemented the online survey's results (its report is included as a separate document to the report) by adding deeper qualitative information or even, in some cases, contradicting the survey results with a strong justification why the survey underestimated or overestimated some topic's importance.

Induction interviews & desk review (8 documents) [*February 27-29*] → Inputs in methodology [*February 29-March 17*] → Online survey on *Surveymonkey in English and Russian* (38 eligible respondents) [*March 21-April 5*] → Focus group (1) and interviews (7) [*April 20-May 15*]

Below is the distribution of the assessment's coverage of the four primary overlapping **target audiences** of the EECA Regional Platform from HIV and TB communities, key populations, and civil society groups:

Number of respondents by groups	Survey	Focus groups & interviews
CCM members, alternates, or coordinators	15	5
Civil society principal recipients, sub-recipients, and sub-sub-recipients of Global Fund country or regional grants	22	6
Regional networks and initiatives	2	7
Community watchdog groups	4	

The consultant and the EECA Learning Hub team selected key informants for interviews and the focus group, prioritizing groups and countries with a lower reach in the survey (CCM members, a set of the regional networks representing TB, migrants, sex workers, gay and other men who have sex with men, transgender people; representatives from the Balkans). The representation of populations either represented or served by the respondents is provided in the graph below. Additionally, 72% of all respondents work in the HIV field, 25% in the TB field and the remaining 3% work on both HIV and TB or other linked areas.
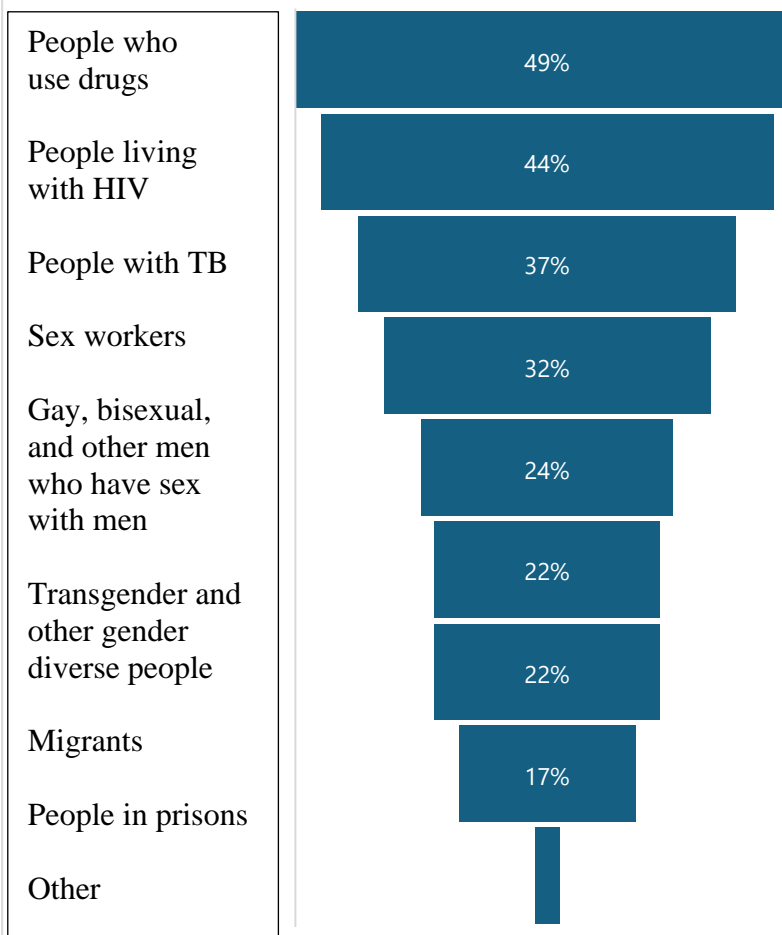
The **geographical scope** of the needs assessment was defined by the Global Fund's list of eligible countries and territories in EECA, including the Western Balkan states.[1]. Below is the geographical distribution of the respondents from the survey, the focus group and the interviews.

Geographical distribution of respondents	
Regional level	15
Ukraine	6
Georgia	3
Moldova	3
Russian Federation	3
Kyrgyzstan	2
Uzbekistan	2
Belarus	2
Kazakhstan	2
Armenia	1
Kosovo	1
Tajikistan	1
Azerbaijan	1
Montenegro	1

No respondents from Albania, Serbia and Turkmenistan
Two respondents were marked as representing both a regional level and a specific country because their interview provided inputs on both levels.

Populations represented and/or served (n=41, presented as a percentage among all respondents; multiple options possible)

People who use drugs	49%
People living with HIV	44%
People with TB	37%
Sex workers	32%
Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men	24%
Transgender and other gender diverse people	22%
Migrants	22%
People in prisons	17%
Other	

Other = homeless people

Limitations.

The assessment faced challenges in getting more specific needs for learning, peer exchanges or mentoring. The respondents were clear that learning should be linked to major challenges in the regions and not stand on their own. Often, they articulated problems but not always were able to suggest effective solutions and learning associated with those solutions, for example, how community leaders could be more effective in bringing up their observations from the ground that the number of people belonging to key populations does not correspond the population size estimates used. In some cases, the solutions might require structural changes and learning on its own might not suffice. For example, a number of respondents spoke of the need to ensure adequate funding for the civil society and community priorities. However, the Global Fund's country allocations reduce for many countries

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[1] Countries with at least one eligible component are taken from the Global Fund's Eligibility List 2023: https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/12505/core_eligiblecountries2023_list_en.pdf. It was cross-checked with active grants. Therefore, the geographical scope covers Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

in the region and offer limited space for either additional services for underserved populations or greater investments in human rights and gender programming. Therefore, while the respondents encouraged to prioritize the area in plans for the Learning Hub and the overall Regional Platform's work, it is not clear if additional knowledge or exchange will make a major shift to ensure more budgets move to the areas that communities and civil society prioritize. Some shared what was needed for the last national dialogue of developing a funding request or what helped in the process in 2023-2024. It is hard to project if the same needs will be relevant in the next grant cycle of the Global Fund. Last, the region is increasingly fragmented and the capacities of the groups and their leaders are diverse, therefore the needs are more segmented based on countries and populations or civil society organization, fewer strong regional cross-cutting trends can be pulled out, as several respondents highlighted. Some even spoke about the increasing gap in the knowledge and expertise among the leadership of civil society communities. Because of those challenges, the report was not always able to come to more specific recommendations how to support the areas of all the challenges highlighted by respondents.

The survey has not reached a representative number of respondents. Therefore, it gave an indicative-only tendency verified through the interviews and the focus group. The consultant produced the online survey form through helpful consultations with the Global Fund and EHRA teams. However, the form became long and required at least 20 minutes to fill the questionnaire. The length and complexity of the form are likely reasons for the high number of incomplete responses to the survey: 17 (30%) of 57 responses did not respond to any questions about their needs and, therefore, were excluded from the analysis. The survey analysis included incomplete responses if they answered at least one question on learning needs. The *SurveyMonkey* platform used for the survey was inaccessible in Belarus and Russia; therefore, we accepted offline responses via email from the respondents from these 2 countries. Similar surveys should be more focused in the future, or the methodology should be based on focus groups and interviews only.

Desk review was limited to the documents provided by the EECA Learning Hub and the informants. The Global Fund or CCM Secretariats might have additional data about the learning needs and opportunities for learning (e.g., from the ongoing survey on GC7 funding request development or CCM monitoring and evaluation systems) to complement this assessment's results.

Some respondents invited for interviews or focus groups were unavailable at the time. South-Eastern European Regional HIV and TB Community Network (SEE RCN) recommended interviewing one person instead of organizing a focus group. As a result, the overall number of key informants and focus group participants is relatively small. The focus group with CCM members (also implementers of country grants) was beneficial for hearing similar challenges and recommendations across different contexts.

As the EECA Regional Platform set its plan and budget in early 2024, the assessment focused on inputs into existing plans and tools to be updated (e.g., the website and online webinar sessions).

Box: Identifying and aligning divergent priority needs. The assessment used a pre-existing list of topics in four thematic areas, asking the survey respondents to choose their top two priorities for each area. The survey results were summarized disaggregating answers for the organizational and individual respondents (CCM members and other officials), with additional analysis for HIV-affiliated respondents, TB-affiliated respondents, and sub-sets of respondents that were less represented, i.e., groups and individuals working or representing sex workers, transgender people, gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, people in prisons, and migrants. Interviewees and focus group discussion members were asked to provide commentary on the results in their expertise areas (e.g., the interview asked the regional TB network, TBEC, to comment on the results for TB-affiliated respondents). At all stages – in the survey, the interviews, and the FGD – the respondents were allowed to add new topics or comments. If the survey did not prioritize a certain topic but interviews and/or the focus group did mention it more than once, it is added. Global Fund's grant reprogramming and the donor's guidance were two illustrative examples of the topics prioritized by the interviews and the focus group but not the survey. During the focus group, it became clear that few were aware of the importance and opportunities for meaningful involvement at this stage. The EECA Regional Platform, in cooperation with the regional networks, translated the Global Fund materials into Russian and organized induction webinars ahead of Grant Cycle 7 (GC7). Therefore, several respondents considered well-covered no longer a priority, but the interviews explained that this would be a priority ahead of Grant Cycle 8, building on the success of GC7. Hence, it was added to the priority needs list.

3. Findings and recommendations highlighted by respondents

3.1. Thematic areas of priority learning needs

The assessment captured the learning needs in the four broad interlinked areas where community and civil society needs to further improve its engagement and impact:

(1) funding request development and grant-making;
(2) program implementation and oversight;
(3) Global Fund's policies and structures; and
(4) sustainability of Global Fund-supported programs.

The following sections of the findings feature a deeper analysis of each of the four areas. They are followed by Table 1 that summarizes the thematic overview of the findings and additional considerations.

3.1.1. Country's funding request and grant-making

Many respondents highlighted that civil society and community groups are better engaged in funding request development and national dialogue in Grant Cycle (GC7) in comparison with the previous cycles. This improvement is because of the better understanding of the process and expertise, in addition to the general supportive requirements of the Global Fund and more established processes from the Global Fund cycle to cycle.

Still, there is a continued concern from the civil society and community groups that their priorities are not fully reflected in the grants from the Global Fund and that some groups have less influence than others, in part because of gaps in knowledge, information or experience. Based on interviews, several

comments from survey respondents, and the GC7 four application-related analysis by TBEC[2], on average, communities and civil society are best involved in the stages before the funding requests is finalized by the writing team and submitted to the Global Fund, i.e. before the finalization of funding requests and grant-making stages. The first stages of the funding request development, before it is finalized for submission, and negotiated with the Global Fund, are also the stages where the information and learning needs are clearest, and more guidance and technical support are available. Examples that helped varied and included the EHRA workshop, information sessions and Russian translation of materials on GC7, processes related to the alignment of community and civil society priorities facilitated by the new GC7 Annex, a justification proposal of the need for serving migrants facilitated by the Regional Working Group on Health and Migration and ECOM assistance for community consultations among underrepresented groups like transgender community in Belarus. The SoS-2 Project disseminated their analytical and guiding documents related to sustainability, rights violation reporting and response system ReACT, innovative HIV services like self-testing and PrEP and business continuity directly to civil society representatives, CCM Secretariats and the portfolio managers during the national consultations. Still, in those stages, budgeting and understanding the priorities and operational guidance of the Global Fund, like getting the Russian version and knowledge of the modular framework, require additional support, as the survey and interviews show. Similarly, timely access to information and communication for civil society and community groups is uneven and need improvement across the stages, with the critical roles of the CCM Secretariats and the representatives of civil society and communities that play, as also shown in the TBEC lessons learned in the four countries where they provided TA[3]. Several interviews highlighted lower capacities and influence of groups like sex workers, transgender and gender diverse people, people with prison experience, migrant people. Additionally, there are frictions and stigmatizing views among key population representatives and therefore, for example, three interviews emphasized the importance of having separate consultation and learning spaces, for example, for transgender community representatives.

In GC7, most funding requests from EECA, except for Georgia HIV/TB, Kazakhstan TB and Serbia HIV, have been developed and moved to grant-making or even grant implementation. Therefore, this area is not a top priority area for learning in 2024 for most respondents, however, due to the cyclic nature of the Global Fund support, learning needs will be relevant again ahead and during GC8. Out of the remaining three EECA funding requests for GC7, at least some Georgian representatives requested knowledge and assistance with budgeting community and civil society HIV/TB priorities.

Respondents offered reflections of the potential additional learning opportunities needed to address challenges and gaps that remain in place despite the knowledge, instruments, experience exchange and TA received during GC7:

Some community and civil society promoted priorities drop during the final stage of consolidating funding request or from the grant agreements during the grant-making phase, undermining the major investment in agreeing on community and civil society priorities as part of the funding request development. The assessor found that even the regional technical support providers interviewed faced difficulties to fully understand grant-making and opportunities at this stage for community and civil society groups including CCM members to preserve their identified priorities. The survey respondents and interviewees requested more clarity from the Global Fund about the roles, and responsibilities in the process including clarity on the CCM member rights, LFA role and respect to the country ownership and how specifically civil society and community groups can ensure that their

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[2] TBEC (2023). CSOs and community insights: Lessons Learned from GC7 Proposal Development in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan
[3] TBEC (2023). CSOs and community insights: Lessons Learned from GC7 Proposal Development in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan

priorities are not deprioritized during the negotiations in country and with the Global Fund, and budgets are not cut, or if some technical support or monitoring opportunities are available.

More difficulties for the engagement and influence were among the community groups that have had received less investment in the past in comparison with other groups or where the HIV and TB epidemics are seen as better 'controlled' or less visible (for example, transgender people, people in prisons, even sex worker groups in most countries especially in countries with lower HIV prevalence). In some cases, this capacity and influence challenge is worsened by rotation of leaders in CCM (e.g. in Russia, some transgender representatives quit their membership in CCM before their term ended). HIV and TB services in prisons often receive inadequate support for ensuring more equal access to relatively large prison populations with high-risk environment for both HIV and TB, governed by ministries of interior or justice and restricted access for NGOs to provide similar services to those that are available in the civic sector due to prison regime rules. In addition to general information sessions with simplified language and prioritization additional technical support to the groups together with the regional networks, there is a need for concerted and longer-term effort of investing in leadership building of these groups. For underrepresented populations and needs, informational and facilitation support would help promoting their needs among representatives of other community and civil society to ensure more solidarity and power symmetry in tough prioritization of various agendas of civil society and communities for advancing HIV and TB responses. Documentation to justify the needs based on epidemiology, normative guidance and good practices, along with intervention and budgeting proposals, ready for integration, could give a practical boost to the integration of these needs in funding request development (e.g. in Kazakhstan the Global Fund grants has discontinued funding HIV services for sex workers because of low HIV incidence however with the increased migration patterns linked to the Russia's invasion to Ukraine and criminalization of LGBTI in countries like Russia, the risks for HIV and linked infection spread the services need to expand, however, the community groups had limited understand how best to re-visit this gap in grants). Exchange on low-resource practices for smaller communities could help to replicate practical tools and processes related to the funding request development processes (e.g., a Kazakhstan CCM member uses a WhatsApp group for concise and targeted updates and consultations with sex workers from across the country).

Understanding how to ensure more direct funding for community-led work, including justifying, prioritizing and costing the community-led approaches and if the Global Fund's policy enables prioritizing community-led service delivery in line with the UNAIDS Strategy and the Global Fund's Strategy. This challenge is not linked to the funding request development per se but cuts across the four thematic areas analyzed. Interviews gave at least two examples from Kyrgyzstan where community-led organizations reduce their service delivery within the Global Fund grants explaining this to be related with high targets not matched by costing and the general lack of national grant management to prioritize and support community-led efforts. The interviews reported of tensions between communities and civil society groups, some questioned that sometimes civil society groups position themselves as communities but in some settings, like Azerbaijan, some criminalized and stigmatized communities like gay and other men who have sex with other men might position themselves as civil society to avoid unwanted stigmatization. The Global Fund need to clarify their expectations how the priority of community-led service delivery is operationalized in their communication to applicants including CCMs, principal recipients, civil society and community representatives ahead of the national dialogues and already during grant implementation. Separate information sessions would help to discuss the tensions existing on this priority in the national dialogues and CCMs and practical ways forward. Countries like Kyrgyzstan might require additional technical support and mediation for finding common understanding and solutions.

Timeliness of community inputs for impact of funding requests, often not because of the lack of knowledge of the final deadlines but because of limited planning and not full view of the stages, a lack of clear calendar and support to meet the deadlines at least in some national dialogue processes (with the accommodation of translations needed). Each CCM should have a clearly defined detailed timeline and expected inputs from civil society and community consultations for the funding request development. These timelines should be socialized and facilitate more specific workplans for community consultations. Cross-country exchange among the coordinators of civil society and community consultations could help to get access to existing community-friendly tools and processes for more timely and therefore more impactful inputs.

Other concern from at least two different settings for three different populations was adjusting population size estimates (PSE) to more realistic (either under-estimated or overestimated) given their importance in setting realistic targets for programming. The interviews were less specific how to address this challenge effectively given that it is highly technical and indicated that a dialogue with PSE experts and tailored support would be needed to find practical steps forward. The SOS-2 Project has experience of supporting this area with technical support for the PSE of people who use drugs in Kyrgyzstan that learning activities and various partners could build on.

3.1.2. Grant implementation and oversight

The grant implementation and oversight have multiple aspects related to programmatic work where more learning is needed. It is also the area where much of technical capacity building and information sharing already exist, though uneven across the countries and somewhat reducing with bilateral and private donor support reducing. The top learning topics indicated by respondent organizations – approaches to overcoming human rights and gender-related barriers to services, better linkages with policymakers for acceptance and recognition of community- and CSO-led services, and community-led monitoring and piloting of new services are already prioritized by the regional project SoS 2.0 or other regional HIV and TB partners. Still, since this has been prioritized by the respondents, the gaps remain.

The area of balancing service quality with reporting requirements, funding levels, and payment modalities came out as a challenge faced by civil society service providers serving HIV and TB populations. Linked to the concerns related to the need for more accurate population size estimates, according to the survey and focus group, high targets and detailed reporting set for civil society services translate into high targets and low payments for staff, especially outreach workers. The payment modality based on result-based financing is increasingly used in the region, promoted by the Global Fund. It has unintended consequences of seeking to find missing people with HIV and TB (and celebrating it with the rewards) instead of focusing on prevention. A high portion of payments to outreach workers could be tied to finding missing people with HIV or TB. The value of preventing people getting HIV or TB, i.e. the traditional prevention, is less understood and incentivized. Some spoke of misunderstanding HIV and TB prevention among government officials who are used to working with clinics and personalizing care instead of population-based programming and finding the right balance between people-centeredness, efficiency, and accountability. Because of the result-based financing fixed budgets and short-term contracts, civil society organizations employ their staff, especially outreach workers, using service contracts without employment and social guarantees. This can lead to a high rotation of staff and a loss of investments in their training. In a practical way forward, it would help to have clearer regional evidence and position and exchange how to find a better balance between the perspectives of driving towards high coverage, efficiency, and local service provision management in the organization and funding of services both in the Global Fund grants and the public (social) contracting. The focus group helped to exchange details of the payment levels and schemes and hear that some principal recipients in other countries are taking slightly different approaches in

their grant contracting of sub-recipients. The focus group members were also keen to have a dialogue to revisit the approach to high targets and see the payment levels for their service per client served. It would help service providers exchange their experience on mitigating unintended consequences, which the Global Fund requires contractual requirements for and which might be negotiated. Therefore, the learning is needed to show the importance of prevention and alternative contracting and hiring methods. One respondent highlighted the alternative approach to social contracting that is based on input-based financing instead of payment-for-results in HIV prevention used by one of the graduate countries of the Global Fund support, Estonia. The practice of Estonia could be promoted wider in the region, as this country tested different payment modalities and has strong government and civil society commitment to HIV prevention and civil society and is fluent in English and Russian, the two languages of cross-border communication in the region.

Several interviews highlighted the underdevelopment of community-based HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and services for the increasing influx of migrants from Ukraine and Russia. There is a need for a more practical peer and organizational exchange to promote and support the implementation of these practices from the service providers that already implement good practices (for example, community-based PrEP in Moldova). While the Global Fund grants are expected to cover technical support and technical knowledge for ensuring program quality, the respondents highlighted major gaps that exist and often the grants do not have much space for prioritizing the quality assurance of work with HIV and TB key populations. In the past the Open Society Foundations helped to promote community-led approaches and innovative services with various workshops, mentorship opportunities and even financial grants, however, their support has been discontinued. The availability of technical and information support for program implementation, like upgrading services with innovations – from internet-based and social media outreach to more traditional approaches with the continued staff rotation -- is extremely restricted in some regions, like the Western Balkans.

Both HIV and TB respondents of the survey prioritized the need for more learning linked to addressing the human rights and gender barriers to HIV and TB. This area is seen as critical for improved service access and quality. However, the interviews did not clarify specific learning needs beyond the continuous exchange needed on tools and good practices across HIV and TB on how this could be included in the grants and services.

Interviews highlighted increasing security and safety concerns in several countries; but the respondents offered conflicting views if security and safety receive adequate attention beyond helping with safety and security protocols established by the organizations. In addition to the aspects related to the need to exchange tools for service providers and communities and lessons from dynamic political contexts, some spoke that learning is not enough; it should be accompanied with support on how to generate greater investment in shelters and evacuation of the LGBTIQ community from countries with increasingly repressive legislation and environment. Respondents were not clear if/how the Global Fund linked processes and limited funding envelopes could support this. From the learning perspective, it would help to promote the Global Fund emphasis on security and safety and good practices how to plan, budget and incorporate this into grants, with a higher priority on the countries with increased criminalization and closing spaces, like Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia.

Most interviews and focus groups highlighted three aspects related to grant oversight and independent watchdog function where the community and civil society roles require strengthening through knowledge and peer learning. These three aspects were a practical understanding of oversight among CCM members, independent community-led monitoring, and reprogramming of grants, with more details below.

First, some observe the unused potential of CCM members in the oversight function because of the conceptual (mis)understanding and the practical aspects of the role of oversight and how to effectively use it. In a practical sense, this area should be highlighted and contextualized to community and civil society's role in the CCM member induction and continued peer exchange.

Secondly, the region groups emphasized the learning needs to promote and increase the use of community-led, low-cost monitoring with an emphasis on watchdog function that community groups can play. As the region shifts towards moving institutionalized, high-threshold monitoring approaches using systemic instruments like ReACT and engaging the ethics committee approvals before their assessments, some saw the importance of balancing it with more flexible and dynamic community-led watchdog approaches. The watchdog function is more complex in the evolving context of the region – shrinking civil society space, changing security concerns, shifting civil society groups towards more institutionalized and sustainable approaches seeking public funding, and reducing overall independent funding. This learning and peer exchange topic could cover the need to find a model of community-led monitoring in prison settings, which are challenged by security concerns.

Thirdly and probably most urgently, influencing reprogramming is a major gap requiring urgent attention – community members need to increase awareness on how to engage in reprogramming with CCMs and PRs. Civil society and community representatives have limited understanding and engagement in revisions of grants and reusing of savings. One example from Grant Cycle 6 highlighted that the country has not managed to reprogram despite savings achieved of 1 million euros, and therefore, the grant was reduced while the country has unfunded quality demand registered and approved by the Global Fund; some of that unfunded quality demand were reflective of the community and civil society priorities that could not find space in the allocation. In their case, the CCM did not discuss the issue until too late; the principal recipient tried to find areas requiring funding but engaged only with the Ministry of Health and government institutions. Given that savings come up early, annually, and reprogramming requires time, this topic is time-sensitive and would be worth prioritizing in 2024.

3.1.3. Global Fund structures, policies, and developments, including CCM member continuous induction

'Continuous-induction' of CCM members, tailored to specific refreshing knowledge on the Global Fund-related structures at the national and global levels, policies, good practices to influence CCM agenda and decisions and ensure accountability to their constituencies, is the core learning need. CCM Secretariats often takes the function of the initial induction to walk through the CCM structure and responsibilities. However, the respondents indicated that nevertheless newer and other members require deepening and prolonged induction and peer exchange to discuss successes and challenges in their roles. It takes time to absorb the initial induction from the CCM Secretariats, given the complexities of the Global Fund policies and structures, especially when CCM members start implementing their roles and have additional questions and challenges. More systemic resources in simplified language linked to CCM functions are missing. It is unclear if the current iLearn functions of the Global Fund online learning platform have the Russian or civil society/community-focused version of the CCM member induction. Some suggested not waiting for the Global Fund to develop the learning system and instead holding a series of workshop sessions and making their recordings available to the new members or others who want to refresh their knowledge on specific functions of CCM members and alternates, also producing a package of simplified information materials for induction. In addition to information sessions and materials, new members and alternates would benefit from mentorship and peer learning, potentially even seeing practices of meetings and working groups of other CCMs (Moldova and Kazakhstan were mentioned as good practices). The CCM budgets normally have no space for such activities.

The survey prioritized the need for more learning on both national and global structures, policies and processes of the Global Fund. Understanding the Global Fund's priorities and staying in touch with changes affecting the region remains relevant. The Balkan groups might be an exception, as they have the first-hand access to global changes in the Global Fund policies due to a direct engagement in the EECA Delegation to the Board of the Global Fund (for example, its Board member, alternative and community focal point are from the Balkan region, closely linked to the SEE Regional HIV and TB Community Network), therefore they have access to information and are actively engaged in the shaping of the Global Fund's policies.

The further feedback on the learning needs for the Global Fund structures, policies, and developments highlighted some pain points groups face in specific settings rather than learning needs. The interviews and the focus group observed a number of community leaders misunderstanding the roles of the Global Fund Secretariat and the principal recipient, the Global Fund's priorities, and what is realistic to advocate for. As one person put it, this places the community activists sometimes focusing on demanding things that are unrealistic to change at the country level. The gaps in understanding the Global Fund model and priorities were seen as not limited to the communities that received fewer investments, according to interviews. One of the specific examples that came up from the survey and some interviews was the misalignment between the global goals of putting communities at the center and the Global Fund grant practice in countries. Several respondents voiced the need for the Global Fund and national implementation to prioritize community-led approaches and even direct funding for communities from the regional and country grants. Others were questioning why principal recipients do not treat it as a priority and move funding to community-led organizations from civil society service providers and why the requirements for funding and reporting from national grants are not simplified to become more sensible to lower administrative capacities of communities but great work on the ground. Some were also pointing out that stronger civil society groups have become focused on becoming part of the government system and that some approaches, like institutionalized monitoring, are losing their original speed, independence, and qualitative insights from the ground of community-led monitoring. This tension of values vs. pragmatic approach and understanding of and working with the system to make influence comes across the four thematic areas.

These inputs highlighted the importance of continued awareness raising on the Global Fund model and the practical implementation of its priorities while respecting the national ownership. One of the approaches to address these learning needs would be ad-hoc information sessions to clarify the policies, practical decisions on specific countries and CCMs from the Global Fund and 'division of labor' of PRs, LFAs, CCMs and portfolio managers, good practices to build on building relationships and consultations between civil society, community and portfolio management. For example, the Global Fund's policy towards funding community-led groups, relationships between PRs and community groups, and the need for some portfolio managers to have more regular interaction with community and civil society groups for better understanding the context, concerns and bringing more transparency to decisions taken including more proactive role of LFAs during the funding request development and grant making, concerns over access to information from and the dialogue with some government or international PRs, explaining some decisions from the Global Fund's Secretariat side, etc. Nevertheless, they point to the potential for the Learning Hub to facilitate relationships and provide a platform for dialogue on unresolved issues and a better understanding of the Global Fund's policies in problematic situations and on pain points. More comprehensive updates on the Global Fund priorities are needed ahead of the funding request development process, as indicated in the section dedicated to that thematic area.

The OIG mechanisms for complaints received less interest among the learning needs. However, based on interviews, few have a clear idea of their role. Therefore, it is hard to interpret the results if the

low priority is because of the lack of need or because of the limited understanding of the opportunities linked to this mechanism.

3.1.4. Sustainability

The Global Fund and other donors transit out of the EECA region. For example, Albania is no longer eligible, Kosovo receives transition grants for both HIV and TB in GC7. In the previous cycle, Armenia (HIV component) and Turkmenistan (TB component) received transition grants but in this GC7 cycle they are fully eligible. The amounts of allocation envelopes are reducing for countries as their economies are classified as upper-middle income by the World Bank (for example, Georgia and Moldova changed their classification upwards in the last 5 years). Currently, 10 countries receiving Global Fund's grants are classified as upper-middle income countries[4]. PEPFAR operates only in Central Asian countries and Ukraine. Few countries have national UNAIDS offices. WHO country offices are small with HIV and TB being one of several health areas covered by one staff.

Therefore, sustainability of the HIV and TB responses and services implemented by communities and civil society is at the heart of the concerns and work of communities and civil society. Nearly all aspects of sustainability –mobilization of national funding, service standards, public (social) contracting, and funding of civil society services – received a very high priority score for learning and exchanges. Many have already urged to give it priority in 2024. The examples of the learning needs would be how to influence the national health budgets for allocation of funding for HIV and TB especially where HIV and TB has a lower public health priority, good practices in standards and processes to adopt the national guidelines regulating services traditionally delivered by civil society and communities (e.g. HIV and TB treatment support and prevention), social contracting mechanisms, costing and how to influence state budget processes for ensuring allocation for community and civil society services, as well as how to collaborate with other health groups for pushing for more consistent regulations and laws used for contracting (for example, a number of countries use the Law on Public Procurement for contracting all state-funded services which is not adapted to the particularities of civil society, e.g. requires bank guarantees, pre-payment for services). Reportedly, progress on social contracting is more advanced in the areas of HIV treatment support, harm reduction services, and somewhat TB support, but not for services for other key populations. In the case of prisons, all the aspects of sustainability have a separate layer as normally, prison health is funded from the budgets of ministries of justice and governed by the regulations of this ministry rather than the ministry of health. Therefore, even the medicine and diagnostic procurement are organized separately. The exchange on the various aspects of sustainability, especially for community and civil society services, might be useful across services for different HIV and TB key populations and in the HIV/TB field for greater solidarity and inspiration. Equally, it is important to have space for exchanges based on specific population needs due to great differences in progress. Peer exchanges are increasingly important in how national procurement and funding systems of CSO services operate and how to find solutions, likely through broader partnerships beyond HIV and TB. For example, in Azerbaijan, bank guarantees are required to get public contracts based on the State Procurement Law, but these guarantees are nearly impossible for CSOs to obtain. Revisiting this requirement of public contracts would require legislative changes. Moldova's contracting and invoicing are also creating significant challenges for CSOs. In Kazakhstan, allocating national funding comes with major challenges for CSOs. These are urgent and ongoing developments where service providers and advocates must work together, often outside the narrow HIV and TB field, to create new partnerships and solutions. In this dynamic areas, regular exchanges on successes and practices, engaging UNAIDS, WHO, the Global Fund and other partners could reinforce the arguments and engagement of various groups.

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[4] https://archive.theglobalfund.org/media/9017/core_projectedtransitionsby2028_list_en.pdf

Some CCM members highlighted their need to be activated and supported in understanding how to support the efforts in transition planning and building programmatic, financial, and other sustainability. There were other ideas about the need to link sustainability work with universal health coverage-related reforms, such as including HIV, TB, and linked services – including treatment support-into the essential packages of services. Some respondents are interested in social entrepreneurship and other civil society and community income-generation models. Community and civil society groups need to increase their knowledge and exchange practical examples of successes and challenges on how to influence and use universal health coverage-related reforms, often supported by WHO, social entrepreneurship and how CCM members can practically use transition planning. For example, basic knowledge of understanding the practical side of the universal health coverage reforms, its processes and opportunities to influence the definitions of essential packages, state-supported populations, and integration of HIV and TB in primary care would be needed for communities and civil society to engage. There is already great practice in some countries in the field, for example, in Moldova and Ukraine, that could help inspire other countries.

There is significant ongoing work on sustainability by existing different initiatives, making it harder for the respondents and the assessor to extract learning gaps in the information sharing and peer exchange. The regional HIV project SoS 2.0 focuses on several aspects of sustainability across most Eastern European, Central Asian, and Western Balkan countries. Its partner, the regional network in Western Balkans, SEE-RCN, facilitates comprehensive work on HIV sustainability in five selected countries. With the support of the SoS 2.0 Project, the regional budget advocacy hub specializes in public contracting civil society services and plans to continue its role after 2024; its focus is mainly on HIV. Different regional HIV and TB networks work on at least some aspect of sustainability. For example, the Regional Expert Group on HIV and Migration works with UNAIDS on developing standards. The Regional Platform's work on transition readiness assessments is appreciated to keep the issue on the agenda. However, more HIV-related needs might emerge after the regional HIV project SoS 2.0 finishes at the end of 2024. Still, the enthusiasm to this area shows that the current initiatives might not cover all the groups working on sustainability in diverse settings – from Kosovo to Azerbaijan – already in 2024 and these needs will become a higher priority after the SoS 2.0 finishes.

3.1.5. Summary of thematic learning needs

Table 1: Organizational and CCM member learning needs that received the highest priority

Area: Funding request development	
Organizational	*CCM members*
Effective participation in writing and budgeting of a funding request (for example, Georgia in GC7, needs for GC8 to be clarified)	
Influencing CCM to advance community and civil society needs (particularly the leadership skills, negotiation skillset and examples of justification of proposals of underrepresented groups to articulate, present and negotiate their needs with other civil society groups and CCM)	
Engagement in grant-making (general understanding of its process, roles and responsibilities of the different structures involved and potential to influence, ability to monitor the changes to the agreements and finalized budgets)	
*Global Fund technical guidance for applicants [including their Russian translation and better understanding of the Global Fund's priorities and what is realistic to get funded, the translation of the modular framework with different learning opportunities ahead of GC8]	
Engagement in country dialogue to identify community and civil society priorities (translating the timelines into effective planning of the process, potentially	

consultation and alignment processes across different groups)	
Articulating the rationale and promoting the use of community-led approaches and underdeveloped areas of HIV and TB responses (understanding the practical translation the Global Fund's strategy's principles on prioritization of community-led service delivery; understanding how communities can influence the population size estimates)	

Area: HIV/TB program implementation & oversight	
Organizational	CCM members
Approaches to overcoming human rights and gender-related barriers to services (general exchange of good practices across different communities and civil society, including TB, safety and security concerns)	Improving CCM's oversight of the program implementation (general understanding of roles, responsibilities and good practices of conducting these functions across the countries
Building linkages and collaboration with broader in-country stakeholders (e.g., the police, social protection agencies, and UN agencies) (exchange of good practices)	*Influencing reprogramming, including utilization of PAAR/UQD (understanding the significance, timeline and opportunities to influence reprogramming)*
Conducting community-led monitoring and ensuring data use (particular interesting in good practices, tools and funding opportunities and increasing influence of low-cost, dynamic approaches led by communities)	*Civil society-centered costing of CSO services, including revisiting pay-for-results modalities and payments for CSO staff (understanding the costing and modality practices from the region including Estonia practice and options to mitigate unintended consequences on outreach salaries and rights)*
Piloting/adding new services and modalities (for example, peer exchange to promote experience of PrEP services for trans*people and other people through community-based approaches)	

Area: Global Fund policies, procedures, and structures	
Organizations	CCM members
Understanding the *national*-level structures, policies, and practices of the Global Fund (clarifying the practical roles, responsibilities and processes at national level and interaction with the PRs, Global Fund Secretariat, LFA, translation of priorities of the Global Fund into the national grants)	
Building relationships with the Global Fund Secretariat (particularly interested in ad hoc more contentious situations to understand the decision-making process, general opportunities for inputs to share context and perspectives from communities to the Global Fund staff)	
	Understanding the *global*-level structures, policies, and practices of the Global Fund (understanding long- and mid-term priorities, the ongoing discussions at the Board and Secretariat levels and opportunities to influence the decisions effecting the region and communities, in the future understanding the impacts of new developments like upcoming TB vaccine on the Global Fund policies)
	CCM member induction (potential additional induction and refresher for newer CCM members

	and alternates in a more consistent and mentoring approach, opportunities for CCM members to experience and learn from other CCM discussions)
Area: Sustainability	
Organizational	*CCM members*
Mobilization of and advocacy for increased national funding (domestic resources mobilization) for HIV, TB, drug dependence treatment, and health in general (understanding the domestic budget processes, good practices of influencing the budgets including in low prevalence countries)	
Developing national 'standards' of TB and HIV support and prevention services (exchange of national materials and processes to develop and approach such standards)	
Social (public) contracting mechanisms and modalities for contracting CLO/CSO services (*also relevant for Balkan CCMs, exchange on mechanisms and progress to develop such mechanisms, revisit modalities of payments, allocate funding, mitigation of impact on services)*	*Different aspects of civil society access to funding, especially legal regulations for both national and Global Fund's grants (exchange and developing partnerships for influencing legal regulations)*
	Role of CCM in sustainability building (update on the opportunities for CCM members to advance sustainability issues, building on the Global Fund policies and the national processes)

Italic marks the themes highlighted from interviews and the focus group.

3.1.6. Additional considerations

Less developed communities of (ex-)prisoners, sex workers, and trans people, as well as gay and other men who have sex with men (MSM) representatives in criminalized settings, require intensified and comprehensive learning support across the different stages of the Global Fund grant cycle. Groups like sex workers, trans people, and (ex)-prisoners community have had less investment over time, are in earlier stages of leadership mobilization and development, and/or have higher stigma and self-stigma; therefore, they often have less knowledge. As a result of all these factors, in comparison with the communities and leaders of people living with HIV and people who use drugs, their representatives have less influence in the processes of funding requests and budget development, reprogramming, or other decisions of CCMs. The EECA Regional Learning Hub and other stakeholders should consider this vicious circle and asymmetry. Moreover, (ex-)prisoners have a particularly limited representation in CCMs (except for Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, where they might have a separate or shared seat), and they might require additional support for even getting a vote or other ways to channel their interests and gain access to information. There is less direct involvement of sex workers because of their high stigma and discrimination. Their representation often depends on one or two leaders, and the broader consultation process with the communities requires more contextual learning or very targeted questions for practical feedback. In addition to getting feedback from community consultations, their representatives must learn how to insist on the represented community agenda to influence the outcomes of the CCM and other grant-related processes. Representatives of sex workers and trans communities highlighted gaps in evidence for the national programs to fund services (e.g., in Kazakhstan, currently, the country grant no longer funds services for sex workers and has more limited insights on epidemiological developments) or what intervention packages to develop given intersectionalities among groups like transgender people, sex workers and users of psychoactive substances. In some countries like Azerbaijan or Uzbekistan, where sex between men is particularly stigmatized or even criminalized, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) cannot identify themselves as community representatives and, therefore, are representing themselves

through civil society seats. Three sources confirmed tensions among different populations, for example, people who use drugs and trans people, and preferences that some learning activities would not lump all the key population groups together.

HIV regional networks and initiatives deliver significant learning opportunities, as highlighted above, but expect reduced funding in the future, and therefore, the region needs greater synchronicity and value for money across those fewer opportunities. The Global Fund's regional HIV grants SoS 2019-2021 and SoS 2.0 2022-2024 have been critical in monitoring learning needs, providing technical support, investments, knowledge building, and practice exchange among communities and civil society, including sustainability solutions, innovative services, community-led monitoring and generating evidence. These grants, the Robert Carr Fund for the regional HIV networks, and other HIV funding that carry out work to support more meaningful roles of various communities of people living with HIV, people who use drugs, sex workers, people in prisons, and ex-prisoners, gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, and trans people and addressing emerging issues of increased migration. Additionally, the ongoing Global Fund regional grant supports other underserved thematic or geographic aspects, like the South-Eastern Europe Regional HIV and TB Community Network (SEE-RCN), Regional HIV Expert Group on HIV and Migration, EECA regional coordination working group on budget advocacy, transitioning and service sustainability. For example, because of the existing funding, the Regional Expert Group on Migration and Health has been able to generate evidence on the subject and support it with background materials for the inclusion of migrant-related services during funding request development in 2023-2024. Funding for TB civil society and communities is more limited; the Global Fund no longer supports regional grants for TB.

CCM Secretariats are critical facilitators of access to information, timely engagement, and induction providers for CCM members. Several stakeholders indicated that their CCM Secretariats organize onboarding new CCM members following the general elections of the community and civil society constituencies, helping with access to information on the CCM process. However, there are gaps when CCM members discontinue participation and new representatives are coming to replace them (for example, that is a significant rotation of transgender representatives in some CCMs). Moreover, the induction is one-time-off in most cases. The Russian NGO CCM Secretariat indicated their limited capacity and need for the EECA Learning Hub's support for the induction and update of 40% of their CCM members. Additionally, the levels of development and support from CCMs and CCM Secretariats are uneven in different countries; the EECA Regional Platform and the Global Fund Secretariat could promote good practices from Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Ukraine among other CCM Secretariats. As highlighted above, the focus group participants recommended a series of induction training or e-learning courses made available in an easy-to-understand approach, especially for new CCM members and alternates with less experience.

Existing structural barriers to engagement, access to information, and gaps in full realization of the Global Fund's model and roles of different structures involved, especially for HIV and TB key population community groups. The interviews, focus group, and the recent paper by TBEC[5] Identified several structural challenges that limited engagement and access to information. The voiced challenges range from uneven access to timely budget data for reprogramming to a lack of a clear overall timeline and expectations in various stages during the funding request development and particularly during grant-making.

Some additional topics were mentioned where more learning either through information newsletters or translated articles from Aidspan or information sessions would help. These include: funding opportunities for civil society and community groups, understanding private donor priorities and

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[5] TBEC (2023). CSOs and community insights: Lessons Learned from GC7 Proposal Development in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan

outlook for the future, awareness about the Pandemic Fund and opportunities for engagement in national pandemic responses, updates on the TB vaccine development and how that will affect the TB responses and the Global Fund support (e.g. only Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are eligible for Gavi). The respondents were asked about the climate change as one of potential topics, however, there was no support for this topic, as the respondents were not aware of a close link between HIV and TB responses and climate.

Last, the respondents emphasized that there could be additional learning needs highlighted in some documents that this needs assessment did not review. Analyzing the Community and Civil Society Annexes could provide a more comprehensive picture of the community and civil society priorities in grant implementation. Therefore, the Learning Hub could work with the Global Fund to collect and analyze them if further identification and prioritization of the needs are needed, particularly for the grant implementation area.

3.2. EECA Regional Learning Hub's role

Despite improvements, gaps in visibility and understanding of the role of the Regional Learning Hub persist among its main beneficiary groups. The 2022 Assessment of the EECA Regional Platform[6] recommended improving the Platform's visibility and reaching beneficiaries outside the key active stakeholders at the regional level. Based on interviews for this 2024 Assessment, the Learning Hub has improved its visibility. Its role in linkage to Community Engagement and CCM technical support, the regional coordination calls, and its webinars are best known, according to the interviews and the survey (the regional calls are less known among the national and local stakeholders). The launch of its EECA Regional Platform newsletter helped to advance its position as a source of information, as one respondent indicated that the expansion of the Regional Platform's team with Marija Skerte is felt. However, the survey (and interviews) shows gaps in awareness of some communication means and full understanding of the purpose, target groups, and activities of the EECA Regional Platform (e.g. both local and regional stakeholders urged the Platform to perform an advocacy function towards the Global Fund, though the Learning Hub has no advocacy mandate; some thought that the Regional Platform is working only with the HIV and TB key populations and people with HIV and TB and some were confused how the Regional Platform interrelates with its host organization, Eurasian Harm Reduction Association). The best understanding of nuances of the Regional Platform came from the technical support leads of the regional networks and the SoS 2.0 project, as well as those national stakeholders who have benefited from its Learning Hub's direct communication or support. Much of the visibility of the Learning Hub is linked to Ivan Varentsov (sometimes, the consultant used his name to help respondents identify the Learning Hub and its communications and activities). Some regional networks were unaware that the Learning Hub organized the regional coordination calls and not its host organization, where the Director chairs the calls. The changes to the name/functions of the learning hubs from the EECA Regional Platform are not fully clear to partners. In terms of the way forward, one interviewee pointed to unused opportunities for the Learning Hub's staff to promote the Regional Platform's communication means (e.g., add its web link, other means in their email signature or presentations) and find more simplified approaches and terms to explain the complex work that the regional platform does (e.g., use quotes from beneficiaries on its website and place core information about the Regional Learning Hub on its main page of the website and in its presentations). Therefore, the Learning Hub's description needs to be further refined for external communication, clarifying its purpose, outcomes, beneficiaries, and limitations, simplifying its messages, potentially using quotes from its beneficiaries, and delineating communication between EHRA and the Learning

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[6] REPORT on the results of the EECA Regional Civil Society Survey on the work of the EECA Regional Platform, 2022.

Hub. It might consider keeping one name better known among the stakeholders and adding the 'learning hub' as its function rather than the name for continuity purposes.

The Regional Platform could tap into the potential of broader, more specific cooperation with all the regional networks and projects, building on its practice with TBEC. All the interviewed regional HIV and TB networks saw major benefits and added value to the Learning Hub. TBEC indicated close collaboration and division of labor, but with most other regional networks and regional partnerships like the SoS 2.0 Project funded by the Global Fund, there was room for expansion for cooperation. One-on-one conversations with each network and regional partnership could discuss the parameters of that expanded cooperation and practical opportunities in plans and communications. This cooperation should help to promote and explain the Regional Learning Hub's role to the groups and activists reached by the regional networks (e.g., one good practice to replicate is that TBEC has already presented the Platform in its training to CCM members). The regional networks might know of good practices of meaningful community engagement that facilitate exchange (e.g., SWAN highlighted an interesting approach to community consultation mechanism used by the representative of sex workers in Kazakhstan that might be relevant for various communities).

Furthermore, the regional networks and Projects could support monitoring potential needs and opportunities for learning and technical assistance in various formats or help navigate sensitivities in the local context. For example, the South-Eastern Europe Regional HIV and TB Community Network (SEE-RCN) regularly gathers partners from various sub-regions. The Network would gladly share the meeting report and recommendations for more specific learning needs and opportunities from the national partners.

Current users of the Learning Hub's communication means are generally happy with them. The assessment did not assess the Learning Hub's reach of its potential beneficiaries, e.g., what portion of CCM members from communities and civil society or sub-recipients know and use any of its means. The previous assessment of the Regional Platform was conducted in 2022[7]. It was done before the mailing lists and contacts were updated. Therefore, its data might be outdated; the current update was ongoing during this assessment. The survey on the Learning Hub's communications was mainly answered by users of at least one communication means. Those who attended the webinars, knew the website, received newsletters, etc., were generally satisfied based on the survey feedback. There were very few who explicitly recommended significant improvements required for the regional coordination calls, website, or newsletter. There were a series of recommendations for the webinars. The comments and suggestions are integrated further in this section under specific means.

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[7] REPORT on the results of the EECA Regional Civil Society Survey on the work of the EECA Regional Platform, 2022.

Degree of satifaction with the Learning Hub's communication activities (survey, n=29)
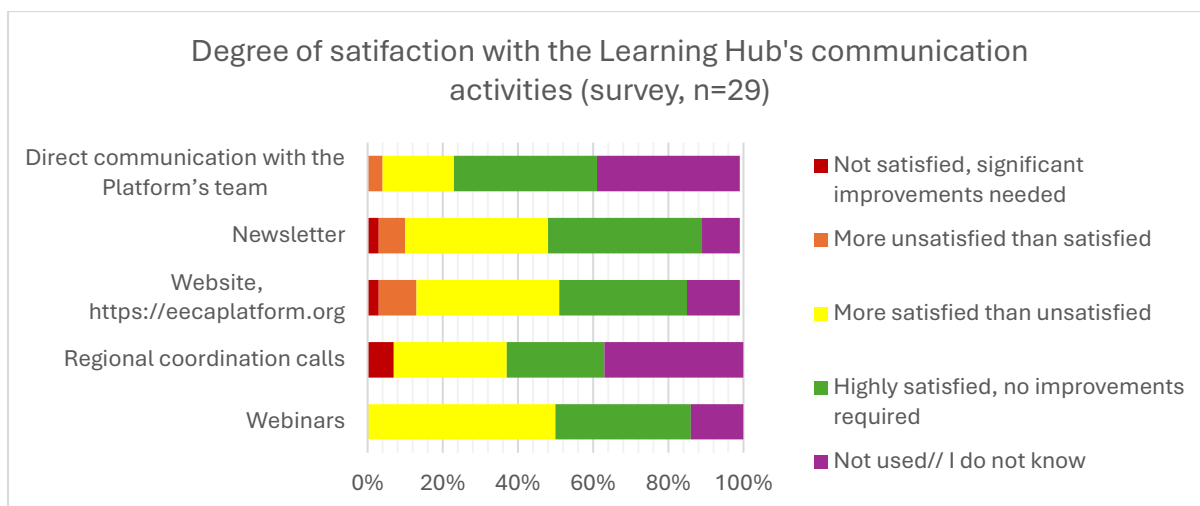
Respondents recommended a greater differentiation of communication channels to better tailor them to their purpose and audience. The current uneven level of use and knowledge of various communication means reflects the tendency of people to be more selective about their preferred communication channels. Therefore, the Regional Platform should preserve all the channels based on the feedback. National leaders and the regional partners live in the general high intensity of the number of emails, webinars, and social media posts; therefore, the EECA Regional Learning Hub has to navigate through those being considerate of its additional value and different groups that should benefit from their services based on their roles of engagement with the Global Fund related processes. This busy communication environment also means that some messages need to be pushed through different means. The insights received from a couple of interviews and the survey are summarized below and inform the following indicative approach to differentiating the communication means:

	Key comments on the utilization and purpose	*Potential changes and other considerations*
Newsletter (monthly)	The newsletter was introduced at the end of 2023. It has already created good visibility for the Platform and includes a selection of Global Fund-related and fundraising opportunities.	• Maintain the approach to its content (a limited number of news, including fundraising opportunities in addition to the Global Fund) • Add a quarterly thematic newsletter featuring different topics if resources allow • Monitor the most read/clicked information to understand which information to develop. • Seek to structure longer articles with the essence on top for quick readers. • Regularly update the recipient list to include CCM members, CCM Secretariat, and at least.
Two listservs (in addition to the mailing list through champ-based service)	All respondents but two had major difficulties recognizing the availability or use of the Regional Platform's listservs. Most, if not all, the regional networks have their own listservs and noted duplication of the same information from different sources. Two regional networks used the listservs to	• Use the listserv only for time-sensitive matters, allowing regional networks to disseminate information or offer their champ mailing list. Then, fully move from listserv-based dissemination. • Update the email addresses (including private addresses in addition to the organizational) regularly, potentially annually; if feasible, reach out to CCM members in all EECA countries and recommend that they join the newsletter and the champ-based service.

	disseminate their information. Given the wider use of cham-based services, it would be sensible to merge the listservs.	
Website	The website should be used as a reference point for finding materials, contacts, and information about how the Platform could support, with limited space for news updates.	• Restructure the website, emphasizing the role of the Regional Platform and more fundamental sources instead of news. • Use quotes, simplified communication, and less formal and shorter texts as much as possible. • Add a section for the CCM member learning. • Explore a chatbot function for answering questions about the Global Fund if resources allow or • Ensure that the website links to other communication means and contacts • Use analytical tools for monitoring the readability of articles and use that to prioritize this information • Improve structuring of the Global Fund-related analytical articles, their translations (e.g., from Aidspan), and materials for easier navigation • Be mindful of using updated sources and not favor one regional network (e.g., currently, the migration-related link is for one source /organization only)
Regional coordination calls	Regional coordination calls are particularly useful for the regional networks that are less exposed to the SoS 2.0 project; however, the project will end at the end of 2024. Some manage to see opportunities for direct follow-up afterward, especially with the SoS 2.0 project. The calls might have less value for others, such as the SoS 2.0 Project team. The EECA Regional Platform is expected to provide a platform for common issues and meetings with external stakeholders (who would benefit from more than one network communication); therefore, this meeting. The main audience of the regional coordination calls should	• Consider reduced periodicity (every six weeks, instead of monthly calls) and shorter duration. • Organize thematic segments that would be of interest across HIV, TB, and key populations, providing a platform for a dialogue with important stakeholders (e.g., inputs and synergies with UNAIDS and WHO plans in the region; key HIV donors like EJAF; Pandemic Fund opportunities) • Limit the regular item of sharing updates from the regional networks. Potentially, most updates on upcoming events could be collected and summarized in written or even calendar format (for those networks and projects that already have that written information) and shared ahead of meetings or even on the website. • Reach out to those who attend fewer meetings to understand the topics that might interest them.

	remain the regional community and civil society stakeholders.	
Webinars	Webinars serve now as one—to two-hour information-sharing sessions (in the last eight months, those were presentations of the results of the Global Fund Board meetings to lessons from TA under the Community Engagement Strategic Initiative). There is a potential for expanding the range of topics and revisiting the format for experience exchange related to the learning topics identified as priorities.	• Organize quarterly webinars for specific audiences or on topics for experience exchange and learning in addition to the current set of themes. One of the regular audiences targeted should be CCM members, who should facilitate their experience exchange in a regular series. Other audiences would be sub-recipients of grants and potentially community-led watchdog organizations and networks. Information sessions would be a priority ahead of GC8 and at its beginning. • Test a more interactive format in all the sessions, with less time for presentations and more time for discussions (e.g., test a format used for the focus group discussion with some preparation for this assessment and a possibility for a continued chat as part of the follow up in case the session is practical and requires doing 'homework' like on reprogramming). • Engage the EECA Board Delegation in sharing updates (this might require simultaneous translation) • Explore simultaneous translation for the sessions relevant to the Western Balkan region and feature their participation.
Social media	There was limited input from the assessment since only one respondent used it. It was the least preferred communication means for knowledge exchange. Still, it is an important channel for social media users with short messages.	• Promote social media channels better - in the email signature, website, presentation materials, newsletter, etc. - and use linkage functions and tags to simplify the links among various media, especially social media. • Note: Some other regional networks use Telegram for sharing news and reposting in community chats; this assessment did not explore if that would be a good value for effort for the Regional Platform.
Other communication and branding		• For the Regional Platform's team, include the Platform's full name and contact information in their signatures and communications. • Resolve the name change and usability with updated terminology of knowledge that would be easy to understand among Russian and other speakers. • Maintain an updated contact list of CCM members, FPMs, and CCM Secretariats that the regional networks could utilize as needed.

The assessment's insights into modalities of learning were limited besides the continued preference for in-person engagement and emphasis on careful choice and more interactive exchange in online sessions. The assessment failed to determine preferred modalities of learning – there was a too high divergence between the survey and interviews/focus group, and some approaches to learning through a discussion were not understood well. Generally, traveling and in-person communication is seen as part of motivation and will increase motivation for those with fewer possibilities to travel. Additional insight from the assessment is the limits of webinars and online meetings – there is a major overload and fatigue of various online meetings. Therefore, revisiting the format of meetings that would enable vivid exchange, even with fewer but highly motivated members, and carefully choosing topics is key.

Additional ideas for the Platform or promotion of these needs among other regional partners included:
1) A virtual induction and refresher courses or sessions for incoming or new CCM members, including the specific request for training some 40% of the Russian CCM members (potentially with TBEC, given their extensive CCM-related TA)
2) together with the regional networks, testing a low-cost peer TA approach for innovative programming and experience exchange (a similar practice has been employed in the past by the Open Society Foundations to facilitate the pilots and capacity of the first needle exchange, sex workers, and opioid agonist therapy programs engaging peer local consultants from good practice services to visit and mentor services in other countries)
3) organizing an in-person meeting for CCM Secretariats and CCM members to enhance their support for community engagement

The EECA Regional Platform's exchange and information work on GC7 preparations were particularly appreciated and should be continued, as indicated in its plans.

4. Summary recommendations to the EECA Learning Hub

Based on the assessment findings, below is the extract of the summary recommendations for the learning hub function in 2024-2026 and its communications of the EECA Regional Platform. The priority learning needs that cannot be met due to limited human and financial resources but are highly important for the EECA community and civil society constituencies might require fundraising or facilitating the engagement of the regional partners and the Global Fund Secretariat.

EECA Regional Platform communications:
- Sharpen its visibility and awareness of its functions using practical examples and improve differentiation of the use and integration of the existing communication tools (practical examples are highlighted in the findings section, including maintaining the updated databases). This would require clarifying its learning hub name, positioning its relevance in the Western Balkan region more clearly, and clarifying its priority target audiences.
- Organize quarterly one-on-one partnership sessions with each regional network, project, and the Global Fund CRG/grant management teams, building on TBEC's positive experience to further sharpen its niche and facilitate synchronization of work with anticipated fewer resources in the future.

Learning sessions by the Regional Platform
- Upgrade its webinar (learning session) format and potentially prioritize the following topics already in 2024 or early 2025, considering organizing a series of events engaging CCM members, especially from the underserved communities:
  - Reprogramming of grants,

- o meeting with the Global Fund grant management team for a GF Secretariat-community dialogue, using collected questions from the region (if there are more thematic questions, it might require more than one session),
- o select an aspect of sustainability, for example, challenges with procurement laws, and highlight the CCM roles in addressing sustainability or UHC-related opportunities,
- o a dialogue with CCM Secretariats on their role and support for the meaningful engagement of communities and civil society in CCMs,
- o payment schemes for community-based civil society services for HIV and TB, including the outreach guarantees and levels of payment balanced with the coverage targets,
- o community-led monitoring and programming through the lens of key populations and low-threshold approaches.
- Organize ad hoc sessions to address pain points and facilitate a dialogue between civil society, communities, the Global Fund FPMs and PRs in specific countries (e.g. two respondents gave an example of Kyrgyzstan CCM developments and the Global Fund's position in supporting the government decisions on changes of the CCM and requested more information from the Global Fund Secretariat on this).
- If human and financial resources allowed,
  - o Collect and analyze the regional Community Annexes to identify the cross-country priorities during grant implementation and use that information for a regional dialogue on how best to address the technical and programmatic needs for supporting service quality, innovation, safety, and security.
  - o Together with the regional networks, test a low-cost peer TA /mentoring approach for innovative programming and experience exchange.
  - o Organize an in-person meeting for CCM Secretariats and CCM members to enhance their support for community engagement.

CCM members
- Work with TBEC and the Global Fund's CCM Hub, develop and conduct virtual induction and refresher courses or sessions for incoming or new CCM members, including the specific request for training some 40% of the Russian CCM members (potentially with TBEC given their extensive CCM-related TA), with a particular emphasis to groups representing sex workers, transgender people, gay and other men who have sex in criminalized settings, people serving in or with incarceration experience. These sessions could emphasize the effective representation of interests at large (leadership skillset), effective community consultations, understanding of the Global Fund model and opportunities and limitations of changes at the country level, and the CCM member role in reprogramming oversight and sustainability.

Funding request development and grant-making for GC8 and for the three remaining funding requests in GC7
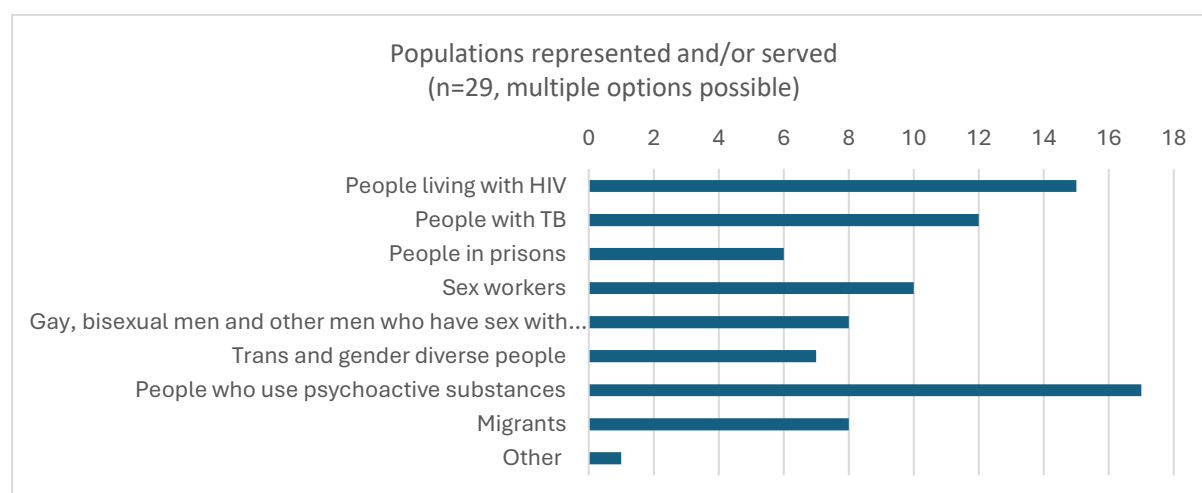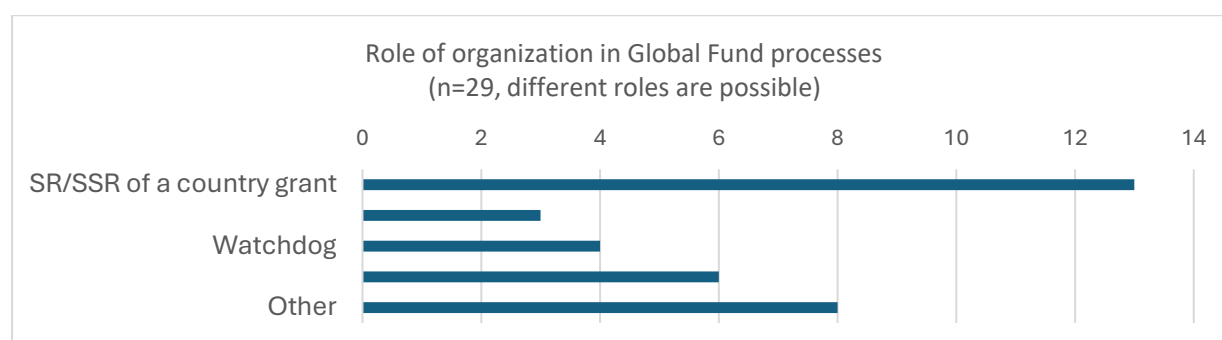- Coordinate the translation of the key materials of the Global Fund GC7 guidance, including the modular framework, into Russian.
- As planned, organize a workshop or a series of information workshops ahead of GC8. It is important to engage the regional and national networks and TA providers involved in supporting local organizations to ensure the ripple effect of the learning events.
- Work with the regional networks, the Global Fund team and the CCM Secretariat to collect comprehensive needs, prioritize them, and coordinate the division of labor of support for population-based consultations, with more attention to people in prisons, transgender people and gay men, and migration elements.

- Continue to promote TA for community consultations on the priorities ahead of the funding request development and suggest that the TA should continue to follow up during the grant-making phase;
- Together with TBEC and the Global Fund Secretariat, clarify the opportunities for community and civil society engagement during grant-making, including further policy clarification. Based on that, organize an online workshop to debrief broader community and technical support providers.
- Prioritize two thematic areas—community-led service delivery and the population size estimate — for improved technical advice/justification, clearer global guidance, and support for community leaders ahead of the next grant cycle.
- Provide community and civil society CCM members and alternates, CCM Secretariats, and FPMs with key regional network information materials that could inform the development of the funding request.

Annex 1: Respondents

Profile of survey respondents

- 29 organization representatives engaged in GF-related processes
- 15 individuals engaged in CCM as a member or in other CCM functions like Secretariat or Platform, including:
  - o Six engaged 'without' an organization involved in the GF-related processes
  - o 9 indicated both organizational and CCM function-related needs
- Three respondents neither represented a GF-linked organization nor engaged in CCM but benefited from the Platform's work and were able to provide feedback on its operations.

Role of organization in Global Fund processes
(n=29, different roles are possible)

- SR/SSR of a country grant
- Watchdog
- Other

Populations represented and/or served
(n=29, multiple options possible)

- People living with HIV
- People with TB
- People in prisons
- Sex workers
- Gay, bisexual men and other men who have sex with...
- Trans and gender diverse people
- People who use psychoactive substances
- Migrants
- Other

List of interviewed key informants

- Anna Koshikova, Eurasian Movement for the Right to Health in Prisons (EMRHP)
- Diana Aliyeva, Trans Coalition and member of the Russian CCM
- Kristina Makhnicheva, SWAN, implementer of SoS 2.0
- Sergii Filippovich & Inna Gavrilova, SoS 2.0 Project's Principal recipient, Alliance for Public Health
- Vitaly Djuma, ECOM, implementer of SoS 2.0
- Vlada Rabinova, TB Europe Coalition (TBEC), technical support provider to the Global Fund
- Vladan Golubovic, South Eastern Europe Regional HIV and TB Community Network (SEE-RCN), which serves as a sub-recipient of the SoS 2.0 Project & CCM Secretariat in Montenegro
- Zinaida Abrosimova, Regional Expert Group on Migration and Health, implementer of SoS 2.0

List of focus group participants

- Natalia Zholnerova, member of CCM Kazakhstan (on behalf of key populations like sex workers) and country's grant implementer (NGO Ameliya)
- Anjelika Volkonskaya, member of CCM Belarus on behalf of transgender people and country's grant implementer (Help TG Belarus)
- Oxana RUCSINEANU, member of CCM Moldova representing TB and country's grant implementer (Society of Moldova Against Tuberculosis SMIT)
- Nofal Sharifov, member of CCM Azerbaijan and country's grant implementer (Fighting AIDS)