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*HIV and Drug Use in Georgia*

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## HIV/AIDS Country Context

- Georgia faces low level HIV epidemic with concentration of HIV cases among KAP groups (PWIDs, FSWs and MSM).
- The national level HIV prevalence among adult population was 0.4 in 2016.
- By May 14, 2018 a total of 7012 HIV/AIDS cases have been registered- including 5248 men and 1764 women
- Annual number of newly registered cases during the last five years was varying between 500 and 719
- Estimated number of PLHIV in GEO for 2016-12 000
- On ART –over 4000
- The majority of patients are within the age group of 29-40
- 1440 patients have died of AIDS-late detention



## HIV/AIDS Country Context

- If during 1990-2010 the main route of HIV transmission was injecting use of drugs, from 2011 the number and share of the cases attributed to sexual transmission of HIV has been increased in Georgia.
- In 2016 among newly registered HIV cases 51% was attributed to unprotected heterosexual contacts and 17% to homosexual contacts.



## HIV/AIDS Country Context

- Georgia one of the first in the region started implementation of WHO “Treat ALL” strategy from December 2015. However the detection rate of new HIV infection cases remains a main challenge for the National HIV Program.
- There is the need to integrated screening of HIV, TB and hepatitis C, implementing mobile outreach services.
- Still the gaps in ART literacy / adherence remain with some subgroups of drug users, transgender, sex workers, people in rural areas;
- Stigma and discrimination (being associated to PWID, MSM, SWs)-(police, service providers)
- Children living with HIV (MTCT)- over 80, already reaching teenage years number of them not knowing their status



## Estimated number of IDUs in Georgia

- Estimated number of IDUs in Georgia equals 52,500 (50,000 – 56,000)
- National prevalence estimates for the injection drug use - 2,24% (2,13% - 2,39%), per 18-64 years old population and 1,41% (1,34% - 1,51%) per general population



## HIV prevalence in PWID

- HIV prevalence among PWID - 2.3% (95% CI 1.63-3.12), with no change since 2015 when HIV prevalence was 2.2% (95% CI 1.53-2.99).



## Hepatitis C prevalence, testing and treatment among PWID

- The prevalence of anti HCV antibodies remains high across all cities with the prevalence ranges between 65%-75%.
- Out of the total PWID sample, 27% had never been tested for HCV mainly because they considered themselves to be at low risk for contracting infection.
- 72% of PWID who knew that they were HCV infected did not undertake any treatment.
- The reasons why includes: being on the waiting list; treatment not being recommended by doctors; fear of potential side effects; and financial barriers associated with treatment.





## Coverage by low-threshold services (NSP)

- Number of PWID covered through needle exchange programming per year (last three years) - over 30 000 by at least one service
- NSP standards developed and are being considered by MoLSHA.



## Methadone Substitution Programs:

- 19 sites are operating through Georgia, including 2 in penitentiary system and 7 out of them in Tbilisi.
- According to experts' estimates, there are over 16000 opiat dependant people in Georgia
- By 30.11.2017 the number of state beneficiaries of OST is 5337,
- There is anticipated 25-30% increase in the number of new beneficiaries. (OST is free of charge on state funding since July 2017)
- Overall less than 1% of MST and less than 7% of NSP beneficiaries are women. NSP is not available in prisons while OST is only accessible to only 2 prisons for male.



## Drug Policy in Georgia

- Georgian parliament postponing consideration of an amendments package aimed at improving “drug policy legislation”. (According to Portuguese Model)
- The need for change stems from the decriminalisation of the personal use of marijuana by Georgia’s Constitutional Court in November 2017.



## **Recommendations :**

- Supporting social adherence programs through PLHIV Peer support of all ages;
- Supporting comprehensive, long term programs for PLHIV children and their parents with the involvement of multidisciplinary professionals.
- Decriminalizing drug use.
- Supporting programs de-stigmatizing of MSM, FSW, PLHIV in the Georgian society and in the health care system.



## Recommendations :

- Supporting programs decreasing the violence and improper attitude of policy towards KAP
- Addressing the burden and impact of TB/HIV/HCV co-infection in the country that is underestimated and needs to be properly addressed through a set of strengthened collaborative activities between the three national programs, including more active involvement of civil society, especially in addressing the needs of KAP
- Reinforcing monitoring of implementation of CEDAW and Istanbul convention of violence against drug user women and female sex workers
- Supporting programs reducing the negative impact of discrimination and stigma, including in healthcare settings through educational programming and awareness raising campaigns



**Reference:**

<http://www.ncdc.ge/Handlers/GetFile.ashx?ID=a455faaa-4c83-43c0-ab75-d39069d0cdde>

<http://curatiofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/PWID-PSE-Report-2017-GEO.pdf>

<http://curatiofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/PWID-IBBS-Report-2017-GEO.pdf>

[http://aidscenter.ge/index\\_eng.html](http://aidscenter.ge/index_eng.html)

**TSP Georgia Final Report**

**“Fast-track TB/HIV responses for key populations in EECA cities” Project Assessment Report**