

**Georgia Country Coordinating Mechanism
Oversight Committee**

Site visit to LGBT Resource Centre

12 October 2016

Participants:

Tamar Bortsvadze – Chair of the Oversight Committee, CCM member, Médecins du Monde (Mdm), Senior Advocacy Officer

Tamar Kashibadze – Member of the Oversight Committee, Ministry of Corrections of Georgia, Medical Department, Regulatory Division, Chief Specialist

Giorgi Soselia – NCDC, GFATM PIU

Paata Sabelashvili - CCM member, representative of MSM Community

Tato Edilashvili – LGBT Georgia, Finance Manager/Accountant

Mariam Kvaratskhelia – LGBT Georgia, Ex Project Manager

Davit Kakhaberi – LGBT Georgia, Project Manager, Alternate CCM member

Nikolo Gviniashvili – LGBT Georgia – Resource Center Manager

Levan Berianidze – LGBT Georgia, Executive Director

Natia Kharatishvili – Identoba

Gega Gabrichidze – LGBT Georgia

Two beneficiaries of the program

Irina Grdzeldze – CCM Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM Administrative Assistant

Purpose of the visit:

The purpose of the visit was to discuss the current status of the implementation of the programme funded by GFATM (GEO-H-NCDC) and the interventions implemented by the LGBT community within the MSM population in Georgia. Although the coverage of MSM by HIV prevention services has increased noticeably in recent reporting periods, the target in this direction has yet to be met according to the P2 dashboard data covering the period from 1 April to 30 June 2016. It stands at 2,376 achieved against 2,975 targeted.

The community level interventions provided by the organisation as well as the challenges that serve as barriers to including more MSMs in the HIV defined package of services were discussed during the meeting. The PR and SR are intensively working on developing better strategies and methodologies to strengthening intervention linkages for epidemic control among this population.

The objectives of the visit:

1. Review the activities implemented by the LGBT Resource Centre.
2. Identify any challenges in the process of the grant implementation.

Methodology:

- Discussion with LGBT Georgia and Identoba staff regarding the existing challenges in the process of the grant implementation, as well as ways and mechanisms for improving the implementation of programmes.
- Interviews with service receiver-patients.

Issues addressed:

The meeting was attended by more than 14 persons from the LGBT Resource Centre and Tanadgoma, as well as beneficiaries. The project manager Mariam Kvaratskeli briefly presented the organisation, its activities and projects that have been implemented in the direction of providing HIV preventive services and ensuring the accessibility of healthcare services to MSM.

The following issues were discussed and underlined by representatives of LGBT Georgia:

- On the programmatic level, there is smooth cooperation with the PR. However, the LGBT Resource Centre representatives raised the issue of the funding mechanism of the PR of the Global Fund to purchase necessary services for the implementation of the project. Some funds are required by the NCDC from organisations when participating in a tender. Due to the fact that the LGBT Resource Centre has limited capacity and financial resources, it is a burden to participate in NCDC tenders. To address the problem, the organisation tries to use modern means of raising funds, such as crowdfunding. However, the resources mobilised via crowdfunding was not enough for the bank advance for tenders.
- The highly stigmatised and discriminative environment existing in the country is a hindrance for the organisation when hiring an office space for the implementation of its activities. They are currently sharing their space with another organisation, but, in line of extension of the organisation's activities, this will not be sufficient to adequately implement the project. However, the representatives of LGBT Resource Centre remain hopeful that they will be able to solve the issue of the office space in the upcoming months by cooperating other community organisations to hire one large office together.

- Geographic accessibility to HIV preventive services for MSM in the regions remains problematic, especially considering the highly stigmatised environment in the country. Although the organisation has offices in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi, these are not sufficient to reach a large number of the at-risk population and adequately meet their needs. Opening of two more resource centres are planned for the upcoming year. Gori and Zugdidi are being considered as the locations.
- The issue of attracting qualified staff was underlined. Because the organisation implemented a pilot project as a SR of organisation Tanadgoma, most of the staff were hired on a part-time basis. This kind of arrangement is generally not suitable for attracting qualified staff and thus for making the organisation fully functioning and available for the beneficiaries.
- The importance of identification of the needs of beneficiaries to better address them and increase coverage was also noted during the meeting. A new model of HIV prevention service provision, preexposure prophylaxis (PrEP), is underway and the organisation intends to start implementation of the programme from 2017. In addition, from November 2016 new HIV tests that use oral fluid to detect HIV infection will be implemented. A total of 4,000 such tests have already been purchased by the PR and these will be transferred to the resource centre in the nearest future. This method is more convenient than rapid HIV tests.
- The organisation tries to adopt more creative ways to disseminate preventive messages and information about HIV, STIs, etc. among the target audience. In particular, they are using visual media and creating a space for beneficiaries to encourage their interaction and information sharing.

During the field visit, the OC also met two beneficiaries of the LGBT Resource Centre. They expressed their satisfaction with the services received as well as with the qualifications and professionalism of the staff. They had an opportunity to participate in the training sessions, to receive the informational package, free condoms and psychological counselling. One of the beneficiaries expressed her willingness to attend further training focused on building capacity and disseminating adequate information to their peers. It was also mentioned that it would be good to have psychosocial support and counselling services offered as a part of the preventive services.

Tamar Bortsvadze

Chair of the Oversight Committee