



HIV in Europe

Working Together for Optimal
Testing and Earlier Care

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Outcomes of the HIV in Europe Initiative

Annual Report 2016

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Activities and status of projects and results in 2016.....	4
OptTEST	4
Linkage to care.....	4
Indicator condition guided HIV testing.....	4
Cost-effectiveness of HIV testing.....	5
Stigma, legal and regulatory barriers	5
OptTEST Shell project	6
Consensus definition for late presentation of viral hepatitis.....	6
European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week	7
HIV testing guidance in the EU/EEA	8
Joint Action on integrating prevention, testing and link to care strategies across HIV, viral hepatitis, TB and STIs in Europe (INTEGRATE).....	8
An examination of the role of counselling	8
The HIV & HCV Testing Resource Centre.....	9
Status document on the monitoring and evaluation of HIV testing efforts in Europe	9
Policy and advocacy status and results in 2016	10
Promoting political commitment to achieve universal access to prevention, testing, treatment and care for HIV/AIDS.....	10
Developing support for targeted and more effective testing strategies for key populations	11
List of HIV in Europe presentations, publications and press in 2016	12
Journal articles.....	12
Presentations and posters.....	12
Reports	12
Next steps.....	14



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Financial statement	15
HIV in Europe Steering Committee	15
Partners of OptTEST by HiE	16



Introduction

For almost ten years the HIV in Europe Initiative, established in June 2007, has worked towards improving earlier diagnosis and linkage to care. In 2016 the fourth European Testing Week took place and 519 participants across Europe carried out activities to increase HIV and viral hepatitis testing. The evidence and practice of HIV counselling project was finalised in 2016 resulting in five reports and three published articles. The evaluation of the ECDC HIV testing guidance was finalised and the report was published ahead of World AIDS Day 2016. Results from the three year EU-funded project OptTEST in 2016 included publication of journal articles, presentation of results, finalisation of tools, more incoming data, publication of the new database *Barring The Way To Health*, as well as the second annual meeting and other country meetings (specified below). The HIV and HCV Testing Online Resource Centre was launched in 2016, providing an online body of resources for HIV and viral hepatitis stakeholders across Europe.

Activities and status of projects and results in 2016

The policy Secretariat of the HIV in Europe Initiative is based with the European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG). CHIP is overseeing the day-to-day running of HIV in Europe and its various projects.

OptTEST

In mid-2016 the large consortium three year project OptTEST (<http://www.opttest.eu/>) entered its final year with milestones and deliverables progressing well with lots of results in 2016 from the different work packages:

Linkage to care

OptTEST's work on linkage to care was presented during the meeting of the ECDC STI and HIV networks with focus on the analysis made on the feasibility of using the HIV TESSy dataset (case-based reporting of all new diagnoses made in the WHO European Region) to monitor linkage to care in Europe. The meeting report can be found [here](#).

Two country meetings were co-hosted by OptTEST with focus on linkage to care. One took place in Athens, Greece, in September 2016 and was co-organized and hosted by Positive Voices and the Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. The meeting provided an opportunity to bring together key HIV stakeholders such as experts and people from the community to openly communicate in an effort to improve linkage to care and to also diminish lost to follow up cases in Greece in future. The other meeting was the 1st Polish Workshop on the Continuum of Care for HIV, held 14-15 October 2016 in Warsaw. The aim was to create a platform for discussion on how to further strengthen the HIV Continuum of Care in Poland, engaging national and international HIV clinicians, surveillance people and community organizations. Several key action points were agreed upon during the meeting including estimating the number of people living with HIV, expanding new testing options, settings and strategies, including indicator condition guided testing, and to estimate number on cART and continue to fight stigma and discrimination through the means of social education and counselling. A publication on the meeting and the agreed next steps has been submitted for publication.

Indicator condition guided HIV testing

OptTEST's work on how to apply indicator condition-guided HIV testing in health care settings is conducted in close collaboration with 22 sites in seven pilot countries that have reported information on HIV testing on site level (audit), filled in staff questionnaires on knowledge of and

attitude on HIV testing and are reporting weekly testing data on the following indicators: number of patients attending service (with the indicator condition), number of patients offered an HIV test, number of patients accepting a test and number of patients with reactive/positive test.

The group finalized two tools in 2016, a slide set with data on IC guided testing (<http://www.opttest.eu/Tools>) and online resources on the website with guidelines, information on epidemiology, training tools and other HIV testing resources listed per country (see map at <http://www.opttest.eu/>).

Results on the work on IC-guided HIV testing were presented at the Expert meeting: Evaluation of ECDC HIV Testing Guidance in the EU/EEA, Stockholm 28-29 January 2016. In particular how the group is developing tools and implementing quality interventions to increase the offer of HIV testing to patients diagnosed with ICs.

A review of specialty guidelines has been done to look at HIV testing recommendations in the management of HIV indicator conditions. [The article](#) was published in 2016 in HIV Medicine.

Cost-effectiveness of HIV testing

During the autumn of 2016, preliminary data on the cost-effectiveness analysis of testing strategies were presented at national stakeholder meetings in Estonia, France and Spain.

In October in France a multi-stakeholder meeting convened by the Haute Autorité de la Santé (HAS) as part of the French testing guidelines review process. Participants to the meeting included patients and civil society organisations, epidemiologists and health economists. The analysis for France indicates the cost-effectiveness of testing groups at risk every 3 to 6 months and once in a lifetime for the general population. The revised testing recommendation should be published in December.

Also in October, a similar meeting was held in Spain, and finally in December in Estonia. Here the meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Social Affairs. A discussion took place about what should be changed in HIV testing in Estonia based on the results. The invited participants were from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health Insurance, Health Board, Estonian Society for Infectious Diseases and other professional societies, WHO Estonia, universities, and patient and vulnerable group representatives (PLHIV, sex workers, PWID and MSM).

Stigma, legal and regulatory barriers

Stemming from OptTEST's work on Stigma, legal and regulatory barriers, a [searchable database](#) was launched in 2016 showing the most common legal and regulatory barriers to HIV testing, linkage

to care and treatment access across Europe and in each individual European country, including how they affect particular key populations. The data stems from an online survey answered by 78 respondents covering 2/3 of the 53 WHO European countries. The data have been quality checked and triangulated with other sources, and the database will be updated and coverage improved based on feedback from the users.

Twelve tip sheets and ten case studies have also been developed and published on the OptTEST website (<http://www.opttest.eu/Tools>), with a 'pick and mix' approach these can be used by anyone who would want to dismantle barriers for HIV testing in their own country.

During 2016, the work and results on legal and regulatory barriers were presented in 2016, at AIDS2016 Conference in Durban, South Africa, at the Civil Society Forum in Luxembourg in October, at the European HIV Prevention Summit hosted by AVAC and EATG in Brussels, at the [ILGA annual conference](#) in Nicosia, Cyprus, and at the 2016 HIV conference in Glasgow.

OptTEST Shell project

One important strategy of the HIV in Europe Initiative has been to maintain focus on Eastern Europe, therefore an OptTEST Shell project has been running in tandem with the OptTEST project. Three non-EU member states in Eastern Europe have been selected, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine. Nine sites in total (one in Belarus, two in Georgia and six in Ukraine) have implemented indicator condition guided testing and are reporting data. Tools are also adjusted so that they apply to these contexts and can be useful there.

Moreover, PLHIV organisations in Belarus and Ukraine are also engaged in OptTEST's work on stigma by developing local demonstration projects on how to address barriers to early uptake of HIV testing and treatment. The most common legal and regulatory barriers to HIV testing, linkage to care and treatment are also shown for these countries (and other Eastern and Central European countries) in the database *Barring The Way To Health*.

Consensus definition for late presentation of viral hepatitis

In 2016 a manuscript on the consensus definitions of late presentation for viral hepatitis was submitted to BMC Medicine and it is currently under review. The aim is to encourage policy makers, health professionals, public health institutions and civil society organisations to implement the definitions to improve the European surveillance of and response to the viral hepatitis epidemic.

The consensus definition is the outcome of a long process that began at the HIV in Europe conference: *HIV and Viral Hepatitis: Challenges of Timely Testing and Care* held in Barcelona, Spain 5-7 October 2014, where a working group of viral hepatitis experts within the HIV Europe initiative was formed to develop a consensus definition for viral hepatitis.

After discussions, meetings and several reviews two definitions were agreed upon and approved by the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) Governing Board in early October 2015. The consensus definitions of late presentation for viral hepatitis were announced by EASL and HIV in Europe on 22 October 2015 in Barcelona, coinciding with the EACS Conference.

European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week

The fourth European Testing Week (ETW) was launched and took place during the last week of November 2016 (18 - 25 November). This was the second time where viral hepatitis was included. The aim of ETW is to offer partners across Europe the opportunity to unite for one week to increase awareness regarding the benefits of HIV and hepatitis testing, and encourage provider-initiated testing, so that more people become knowledgeable about their risks, understand that there is effective treatment available and are aware of their HIV and/ or hepatitis status.

In 2016, 519 participants across 47 countries signed up to participate representing a large diversity of participants. The ETW working group in collaboration with the two HIV in Europe secretariats ensured support and input from a broad range of stakeholders for the ETW 2016 by reaching out to community organisations, agencies, government agencies and international organisations for their support and involvement.

A variety of different activities took place which were formulated and driven by the participants. Of the 134 participants who submitted the evaluation survey (25.8%), the majority reported doing HIV activities (97.0%), and 46.3% and 31.3% reported doing hepatitis C and hepatitis B activities, respectively. An evaluation of the 2016 ETW is available on [the website](#).

The project website is central in the communication with interested parties to help kick-start and support ideas and activities for the ETW. ETW also uses [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) as platforms where participants can share posts, “like” ETW or tweet with the hashtag #Eurotestweek. Many stakeholders post photos, describe their testing activities and stay updated on news and activities from the coordination secretariat and other participants.

In 2016, the [European Test Finder](#) was updated to include hepatitis C and STI (including hepatitis B) testing sites throughout the WHO European region. Again this year, three of the most popular dating apps for men who have sex with men in Europe (Grindr, Hornet and Planet Romeo) provided free advertising to promote the [European Test Finder](#) to millions of European users, this year also outside the EU.

Outreach was also done to community networks representing key populations to discuss the relevance of testing week to their situation and how to address their needs. As a result two new Factsheets (#9 and #10) were reviewed and commented on by these groups and distributed widely through their networks. Ministries were also contacted to encourage them to endorse and show their support by signing up for Testing Week, and Austria, Bulgaria, Poland, Slovenia and Spain signed up.

HIV testing guidance in the EU/EEA

In 2015, the HIV in Europe Initiative was commissioned by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their 2010 HIV testing guidance. The evaluation report was published in November 2016 (<http://hiveurope.eu/Finalised-Projects/Evaluation-of-the-ECDC-HIV-Testing-Guidance>) and results were presented at EISCAIDE in Stockholm, Sweden. In 2017, the HIV in Europe Initiative will help develop a new HIV testing guidance (2017-2020).

Joint Action on integrating prevention, testing and link to care strategies across HIV, viral hepatitis, TB and STIs in Europe (INTEGRATE)

The European Commission has recently approved funding for a Joint Action to be carried out by 33 partners from Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, that focuses on reducing new infections and expanding access to treatment and care for HIV, viral hepatitis, TB and STIs. Led by CHIP, in charge of the HIV in Europe secretariat, the joint action will build upon the experience of projects that have proven successful in the past, notably those from the European response to HIV, including European Testing Week, OptTEST and Euro HIV EDAT.

An examination of the role of counselling

The study examining the role of counselling for HIV testing was finalised in 2016 and resulted in five reports and three published articles that are available on the HIV in Europe website. The

overall objective of the study was to support the development and implementation of best practice service models that contribute to increasing the uptake and frequency of HIV testing.

The HIV & HCV Testing Resource Centre

In 2016 the online resource centre of peer-reviewed scientific articles on HIV and HCV testing and national HIV and HCV testing guidelines in the WHO European Region was launched as part of the [HIV in Europe website](#). This is continuously updated and maintained to provide up to date and relevant information and resources to those interested in testing and linkage to care.

Status document on the monitoring and evaluation of HIV testing efforts in Europe

In order to direct future activities of the HIV in Europe initiative a call for tender for a status document on monitoring and evaluation of HIV testing efforts was issued in early 2016. A small working group within the initiative has been reviewing the work and an internal working document is being finalised.



Policy and advocacy status and results in 2016

The Advocacy Secretariat of the HIV in Europe Initiative is based with the European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG). EATG advocates for optimal testing and care for the HIV in Europe Initiative and promotes its projects and achievements.

Promoting political commitment to achieve universal access to prevention, testing, treatment and care for HIV/AIDS

Advocacy for increased political attention to HIV and co-infections in the last year aimed at securing the adoption of a pan-European ministerial declaration setting targets with clear indicators and an EU policy framework and action plan to improve the European response to HIV/AIDS, as well as viral hepatitis and tuberculosis co-infections across the continent. Through the Civil Society Forum there was active engagement during 2016 with the European Commission services, EU Presidencies and European parliament to advance the development of a new and updated policy framework integrating the response the HIV, TB and viral hepatitis epidemics.

Late February, a brief was submitted to the European Commission Directorate General for Health on behalf of the co-Chairs of EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum on a European Commission strategic approach to HIV, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis and actions in the years to come. In the first half of 2016, input was provided to the discussion at the UN high level meeting on HIV/AIDS in New York in June 2016. Meetings were also held with representatives of the forthcoming Maltese EU Presidency on the inclusion of HIV and viral hepatitis on the Presidency agenda.

In September, a letter was sent from the community, civil society and clinical society to the European Commission on a new Commission policy framework for HIV, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis. And work was carried out with local partners to reach out to their respective ministries to ensure a consensus on a new integrated policy framework for the EU Health Ministers meeting in October. In parallel, and in collaboration with partners, members of the European Parliament Committee responsible for Public Health was engaged to organise for discussion on the European Union support to address the HIV epidemic. The exchange of view took place on 12 October. Finally, by end of November a meeting was held with the EU Civil Society Forum and the European Commissioner for Public Health to discuss further Commission action.

While the efforts of the collective advocacy did not reach the goal of a new EU policy framework, some results were achieved, including:

- Increased collaboration between groups representing HIV, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis at political level;
- Recorded consensus by EU member states on a new integrated policy framework on HIV, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis at the EU Health Council discussion on multi-drug resistant tuberculosis;
- The Commission launched a call for a new Joint Action addressing the four epidemics HIV, hepatitis, STIs and TB; the actions work plan is currently being drafted and will be launched in mid-2017;
- The Commission tendered a study on the cost of the three epidemics and the socio-economic impact of EU action;
- The expansion of the EU Civil Society Forum on HIV to viral hepatitis and tuberculosis;
- A commitment to update and expand European Commission work on its November policy documents to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals;
- HIV on the agenda of the Maltese Presidency in 2017.

Developing support for targeted and more effective testing strategies for key populations

In December, input was provided through the EU Civil Society Forum, to the draft declaration for the January 2017 Malta Presidency meeting. Language and messages around key populations, de-medicalised and decentralised testing were included and strengthened.

Community knowledge and skills on testing strategies have been advanced through training modules designed for community workers from different backgrounds. In April, [STEP -UP](#), addressed training and in May, the [ITACA](#) training addressed the testing and linkage to care components in the treatment cascades in Central and South East Europe. In November, the [M-Care](#) training organised with the European African Treatment activist's network addressed the barriers to testing and linkage to care for migrants.

The work of HIV in Europe, including ETW and OptTEST, was presented at the European Community Advisory Board meeting on diagnostics, which was attended by EATG members involved in community services and diagnostics manufacturers.

In January 2016, the [EATG-AVAC Community Prevention Summit](#) in Brussels addressed testing as part of prevention strategies, in particular PrEP. It included a presentation from OptTEST amongst others.

List of HIV in Europe presentations, publications and press in 2016

Journal articles

- Mauss S, et al. Late presentation of chronic viral hepatitis for medical care: a consensus definition. BMC Medicine (under review).
- Lord E, et al. Evaluation of HIV testing recommendations in specialty guidelines for the management of HIV indicator conditions. HIV Medicine (2016)
- Lazarus JV et al. Are the testing needs of key European populations affected by hepatitis B and hepatitis C being addressed? A scoping review of testing studies in Europe. Croatian Medical Journal 2016 Oct 31; 57(5):442-456.
- Bell S, et al. (2016) HIV pre-test information, discussion or counselling? A review of guidance relevant to the WHO European Region. International Journal of STD & AIDS 27(2): 97-104.
- Bell S, et al. HIV post-test practices: an online survey examining perceived delivery of HIV test results, post-test discussion and referral in healthcare settings across the WHO European Region. Sex Health. 2016 Jun;13(3):205-12.
- Bell S, et al. HIV pre-test practices: an online survey examining perceptions of informed consent and pre-test information delivery in health care settings across the WHO European Region. Int J STD AIDS. 2016 Feb 27

Presentations and posters

- Sullivan A, et al (2016): HIV testing in Europe: Evaluating impact, added value, relevance and usability of ECDC's 2010 HIV testing guidance [Presentation]
- Sperle I, on behalf of the Testing Week Working group. (2016) Increase in HIV testing during European testing week and type of tests used [Poster presentation].
- Power L, et al. (2016): Ways in which Legal and regulatory barriers hinder the HIV care continuum and the 90/90/90 goals across Europe [Poster presentations], HIV Drug Therapy, Glasgow, October 2016
- Lemsalu L, et al. (2016): Changes in quality of life of PLHIV in Estonia from 2003 to 2015 [Poster presentation], IAS, Durban July 2016.
- Power L (2016): Testing in Europe. What's hindering and what's helping? [Presentation], EATG/AVAC 2nd HIV Prevention Summit, Brussels, January 2016

Reports

- Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Australia with funding from the HIV in Europe initiative and supported by the HIV in Europe Steering Committee. (2016) HIV Testing

Services: Analysis of guidelines and perceptions of practice across the WHO European Region Summary Report.

- Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Australia with funding from the HIV in Europe initiative and supported by the HIV in Europe Steering Committee. (2016) HIV pre-test practices: An online survey examining perceptions of informed consent and pre-test information delivery in health care settings across the WHO European Region.
- Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Australia with funding from the HIV in Europe initiative and supported by the HIV in Europe Steering Committee. (2016) HIV post-test practices: An online survey examining perceived delivery of HIV test results, post-test discussion and referral in healthcare settings across the WHO European Region.
- Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Australia with funding from the HIV in Europe initiative and supported by the HIV in Europe Steering Committee. (2016) Delivery of HIV test results, post-test discussion and referral in health care settings: A review of guidance for European countries.
- Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Australia with funding from the HIV in Europe initiative and supported by the HIV in Europe Steering Committee. (2016) Delivery of HIV pre-test information: A review of guidance relevant to the WHO European Region.
- European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week 2015 evaluation report (2016).

Next steps

Fundraising remains key to the Initiative and it has been made a priority to continue to seek funding from supporting companies to accompany the funding received from the European Commission. The work of the Initiative is based on the voluntary engagement of the steering committee members and limited funding for the two secretariats (at CHIP in Copenhagen and EATG in Brussels). The steering committee decides how funding is allocated to the different projects and HIV in Europe remains committed to remain as an ‘initiative’ (not an organisation), which initiates new research and influences processes.

Table 1. On-going and approved projects for 2017-2018

Project	Description	Expected outcome	Period
Coordination, communication, fundraising and political advocacy	Secretariat (coordination and political), support for steering committee members, travel, website, fundraising, communication, advocacy, planning and development.	Efficient coordination of the initiative’s projects and advocacy activities. HIV in Europe agenda widely known.	2017-2018
European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week 2017 and 2018	Testing Week offers partners across Europe the opportunity to unite for one week to focus on testing	Increased awareness regarding the benefits of HIV and hepatitis testing.	Q1 2017-Q4 2018
INTEGRATE	The new Joint Action, INTEGRATE, will work on integrating prevention, testing and link-to-care strategies across HIV, viral hepatitis, TB and STIs	Improved response and transfer of lessons learned from the HIV area to viral hepatitis, TB and STIs	2017-2020
Updated ECDC HIV Testing Guidance	To update the ECDC HIV Testing Guidance	Updated EU Level guidance on HIV testing	2017-2020
Pilot of the New	To collaborate with ECDC	Implementation of	2017

consensus definition of late presentation for viral hepatitis.	on piloting new consensus definition of late presentation for viral hepatitis.	surveillance of late presentation for viral hepatitis.	
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Financial statement

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HIV in Europe Steering Committee

Co-Chairs: **Brian West**, Board of Directors, European AIDS Treatment Group, (EATG), Scotland and **Jürgen Rockstroh**, Professor of Medicine University of Bonn and Head of an HIV outpatient clinic, Germany.

Members: Jens Lundgren, Professor & Chief Physician, University of Copenhagen & Rigshospitalet, Director, Copenhagen HIV Programme, Denmark, Jordi Casabona, Scientific Director, Center for HIV/STI Epidemiological Studies of Catalonia, (CEEISCAT), Nikos Dedes, European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG), Greece, Valerie Delpech, Public Health England, London, United Kingdom, José Gatell, Head, Infectious Diseases & AIDS Units, Clinical Institute of Medicine & Dermatology, Hospital Clinic, Professor of Medicine, University of Barcelona, Spain, Brian Gazzard, Professor of Medicine, Imperial College School of Medicine, HIV Research Director, Chelsea & Westminster Hospital, UK, Igor Karpov, Professor, Department of Infectious Diseases, Belarus State Medical University, Stefan Mauss, Center for HIV and Hepatogastroenterology, Germany, Jeff Lazarus, Professor of International Health Systems, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, Anders Sönnernborg, MD, PhD, Professor, Department of Medicine Karolinska University Hospital, Sweden, Stanislas Pol, Professor of Hepatology and Gastroenterology, Université Paris Descartes, Paris, France, Nino Tsereteli, Executive Director of “Center for Information and Counseling on Reproductive Health – Tanadgoma”, Georgia, John de Wit, Professor and Director, Centre for Social Research in Health, The University of New South Wales, and Visiting Professor of Social Psychology of Health and Sexuality, Utrecht University. Ludmila Maistat, Senior Programme Manager in Alliance for Public Health, Ukraine, International Alliance Center for HIV, Hepatitis C and Drug Use, Tom Platteau, mental health scientist and sexologist at the HIV/STI clinic of the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp. Mojca Maticic, Professor in Infectious Diseases and

Epidemiology at the Medical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and head of the Viral Hepatitis Unit at the Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Illnesses, University Medical Centre Ljubljana, and Head of the Outpatient STI Service at the same University Medical Centre.

Observers: Public Health England (PHE), Represented by Kevin Fenton, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Communicable Disease Unit, Represented by Masoud Dara, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), represented by Andrew Amato, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Represented by Lucas Wiessing, epidemiologist, principal scientist, UNAIDS Regional Support Team ECA, Represented by Jean-Elie Malkin.

Partners of OptTEST by HiE

CHIP, Rigshospitalet, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; AIDS Fonds, Netherlands; European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG), Belgium; Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale (Inserm), France; Instituto de Salud Carlos III, Spain; Medical Foundation for HIV & Sexual Health (MEDFASH – withdraw November 2016), UK; Public Health England (PHE), UK; Saint Stephen's AIDS Trust (SSAT), UK; Tervise Arengu Instituut (National Institute for Health Development), Estonia; The Global Network of PLHIV (GNP+), Netherlands.

