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Alliance for Public Health

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Policy Brief

December, 2024

EU's Levers to End HIV/AIDS in Ukraine

Ukraine has long faced significant challenges in addressing its HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is one of the largest in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. Prior to the war, the country made notable strides in HIV prevention, treatment, and support for key populations, largely through a collaborative approach involving the government, civil society, and international donors like the Global Fund and PEPFAR. However, the ongoing conflict has severely disrupted the healthcare system, creating new barriers to treatment and exacerbating the vulnerabilities of people living with HIV.

Ukraine's path to EU membership offers a unique opportunity to reform its HIV/AIDS policies, enhance human rights protections, and integrate international best practices into its healthcare system.

1

Drug policy reform

Laws that treat personal drug possession without intent to distribute should be repealed. Drug policy reform in Ukraine must be systematic, with the adoption of a new evidence-based strategy informed by community, civil society, and human rights perspectives. This approach should ensure access to treatment and justice in a transparent, inclusive, and rights-oriented manner.

2

Drug treatment regulation

Drug treatment regulation should be aligned with EU standards and integrated into the health chapter of the accession negotiations. It is essential to remove all legal and regulatory barriers, restrictive inclusion criteria, and other obstacles to make OAT widely available in primary care facilities, regularise take-home doses of methadone for stable patients, and introduce methadone into custodial settings.

3

Decriminalisation of sex work

Decriminalise sex work and recognise it as legitimate work to enable better health and social protections for sex workers.

4

Acceleration of reforms to ensure and protect LGBTIQ+ rights

- Protection against hate crimes: Adopt Draft Law 5488 to criminalise hate crimes, explicitly including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected grounds.
- Anti-discrimination: Expand anti-discrimination laws to include explicit protections for LGBTIQ+ individuals in areas such as education, healthcare, housing, and access to services, in line with EU Directive 2000/78/EC and the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2020–2025, ensuring comprehensive legal safeguards across all aspects of life.
- Removing barriers for transgender people: Implement ICD-11 to depathologise transgender identities and update legislation to enable quick, transparent, and accessible legal gender recognition based on self-determination.
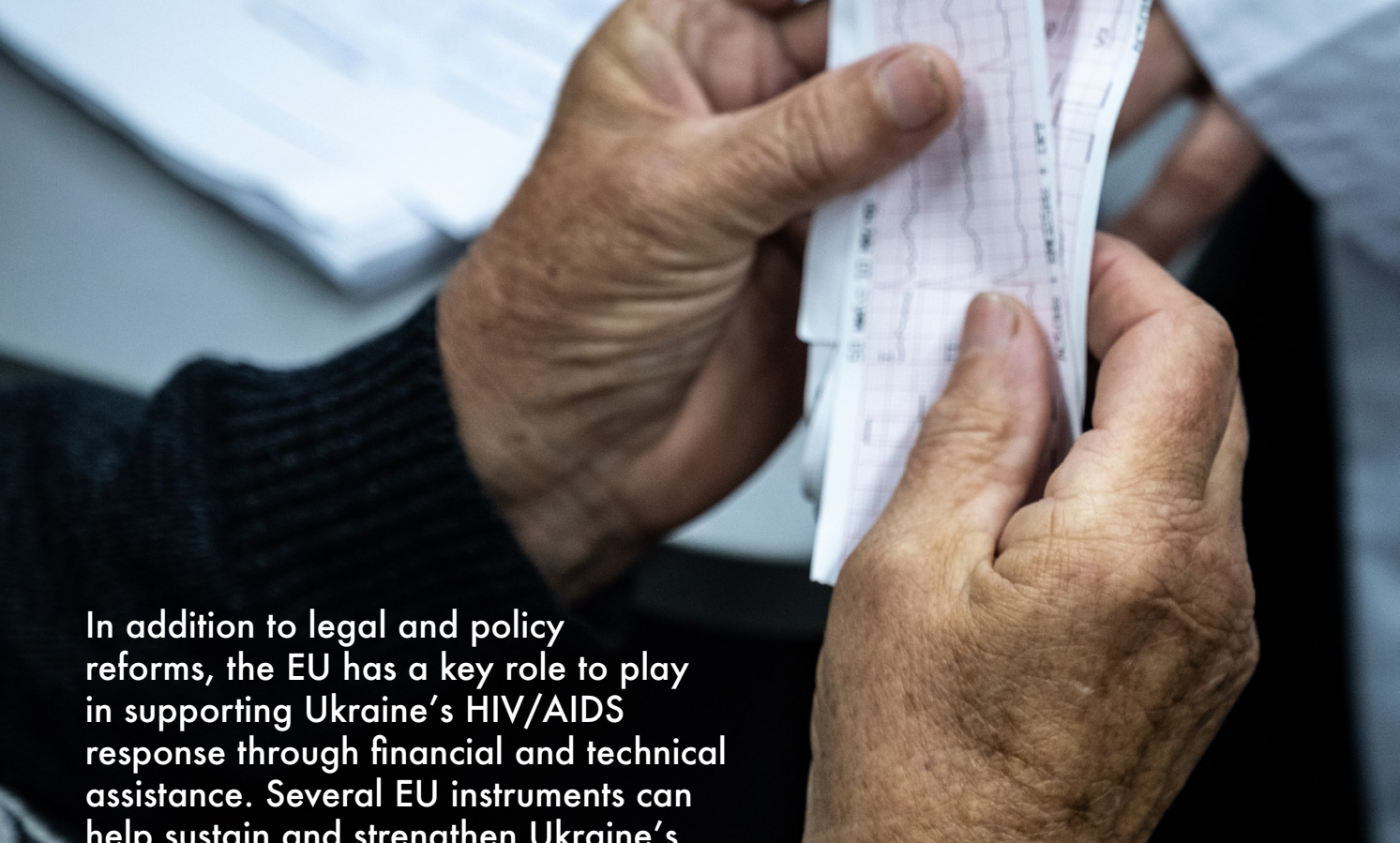
5

Penitentiary healthcare reform

Healthcare responsibilities should be transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Health. This transfer should encompass all levels of care, including primary, secondary, and emergency medical services, as well as the procurement of medicines and supplies. Key political decisions have already been made, and the necessary normative documents have been developed. Ukraine would greatly benefit from further EU support to advance the practical implementation of penitentiary healthcare reform.

6

The decriminalisation of HIV exposure and transmission

Repeal Article 130 of the Criminal Code and the criminalisation of HIV transmission.

In addition to legal and policy reforms, the EU has a key role to play in supporting Ukraine's HIV/AIDS response through financial and technical assistance. Several EU instruments can help sustain and strengthen Ukraine's healthcare system in the face of ongoing challenges.

Health

Programming of the current EU4Health programme:

- Ensure that Ukraine receives treatment equal to other beneficiary countries, addressing challenges stemming from the conflict and other context-specific issues.
- Include operating grants in the remaining EU4Health Work Programme. Such grants would provide vital support to Ukrainian NGOs and community-led or community-based organisations.
- Issue targeted calls to support the prevention, testing, and linkage to care for communicable diseases, with a focus on vulnerable groups and dedicated funding for community-led and community-based organisations and services.
- Ensure that each call remains inclusive of the health needs of migrants from Ukraine.
- Allocate at least 20% of the budget to Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, as set out in the EU4Health framework regulation.
- Further support cross-border collaboration between Ukrainian and other European public health institutions and stakeholders, including clinical exchange, data exchange, and peer learning.

Future health programme:

- Maintain health as a core EU priority in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).
- Increase the programme's budget in the next MFF to account for its expansion to new countries.
- Ensure equal involvement of Ukrainian health stakeholders in consultations on the new programme's design, allowing for the consideration of conflict-related and local challenges.
- Given the burden of infectious diseases in these countries and rising population mobility, allocate specific funding for communicable diseases alongside horizontal calls.
- Boost funding for community-led and community-based service delivery and monitoring, which are essential for strengthening health system resilience.
- Facilitate Ukraine's integration into the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA).

Research and innovation

Horizon Europe

- Enhance support for the Ukrainian research and innovation community by increasing funding, simplifying application processes, and fostering collaborations with EU research institutions.
- Strengthen partnerships through collaborative projects, knowledge exchange, and joint training programmes, while ensuring ongoing support and monitoring to sustain increased participation and integration into the broader European research ecosystem.
- Invest in capacity-building initiatives by funding training programmes and fellowships to equip Ukrainian researchers and healthcare providers with cutting-edge knowledge and skills in HIV and TB care.
- Foster partnerships between biomedical research, public health, and social sciences to address systemic barriers to the prevention, treatment, and care of HIV and TB.
- Issue calls for proposals targeting infectious diseases, including HIV and tuberculosis, to support the development of innovative prevention, treatment, and cure tools, along with implementation research, interdisciplinary studies, and effective community-based interventions.

- Support digital health innovations such as telemedicine and AI-driven tools to improve diagnostics, treatment accessibility, and adherence, particularly in remote and conflict-affected regions.
- Facilitate partnerships to accelerate the development of advanced treatments and ensure affordable access to HIV and TB medications in Ukraine.

FP10

On top of the recommendations above, which remain valid for FP10, we recommend to:

- Increase the Framework Programme budget to €200 billion, allocating 10% to a dedicated health cluster.
- Evaluate the participation of Ukrainian researchers in EU-funded programs, to identify barriers such as administrative, financial, or technical challenges. Develop tailored strategies to address these bottlenecks, including capacity-building initiatives, streamlined application processes, and targeted funding opportunities.

Global partnerships instrument

- Scale EU Official Development Assistance to at least €200 billion, maintaining a dedicated instrument for development cooperation and preserving the target of allocating at least 20% to human development.
- Ensure adequate funding for the future Global Challenges Programme, grounded in a comprehensive assessment of the funding needs of global health initiatives and other multilateral organisations.
- In 2025, play a full role in the success of the 8th Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria replenishment, by pledging at least €715 million. Actively participate in Global Fund governance, including the Board and committees, to support continued investments in challenging operating environments, emergency settings, and multi-country grants for community-led programmes targeting key populations (incl. in ineligible countries). Additionally, support the sustainable transition from Global Fund funding for countries accessing the European Union.

The Ukraine Facility

- Increase transparency and information sharing regarding the Ukraine Facility's goals, processes, and funding mechanisms. Clear and accessible communication is essential to ensure that stakeholders, including Ukrainian authorities, civil society, and international partners, can effectively engage and align their efforts. Regular updates, stakeholder consultations, and publicly available information should be prioritised to build trust and facilitate coordinated implementation.
- Provide financial support for the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and modernisation of the health sector, including health reforms, regulatory frameworks, community health systems, infrastructure, medical equipment, and innovative health technologies, in alignment with Ukraine's national plans.
- Mobilise additional funding to address rehabilitation and reconstruction needs (from EU member states and external actors) and promote donor coordination.
- Ensure adequate funding post-2027.

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