Alliance for Public Health

5 Dilova st., building 10A, 9th floor
03680 Kyiv, Ukraine
Tel.: (+380 44) 490-5485
Fax: (+380 44) 490-5489
info@aph.org.ua | www.aph.org.ua

Situation Report

on the status of OST as well as HIV/TB/HCV prevention and treatment programs in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Review of 2015 activities. (as of 27 January 2016)

From the first days of aggravation of the situation in Ukraine, annexation of Crimea and launch of the anti-terrorist operation in the East of Ukraine, ICF "Alliance for Public Health" (hereinafter – Alliance), defined that one of its priorities was support of HIV, tuberculosis, and viral hepatitis prevention and treatment programs, as well as support of the patients of opioid substitution therapy (hereinafter – OST). The goals of Alliance are of pure humanitarian nature – despite any political factors, to provide maximum support to those who have already been receiving treatment or prevention services, if possible to ensure uninterrupted delivery of such services, and also to support those clients who are in need of assistance. Such approach is unique both for Alliance and for its main donor – the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (hereinafter – Global Fund), as Eastern Ukraine is the only hot spot in Europe, where military operations are going on for almost two years, people are dying, but nevertheless large-scale HIV/TB prevention and treatment programs are supported.

The situation with implementation of comprehensive HIV, TB and hepatitis activities in the Eastern Ukraine (in the areas of military conflict) has been tense throughout 2015 and remains tense in the beginning of 2016.

Key results:

- Through **11** local partner NGOs, Alliance continues to support HIV/STI prevention projects for vulnerable populations in **19** locations in the areas temporarily out of control of Ukraine in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (Donetsk, Horlivka, Debaltseve, Ienakieve, Makiyivka, Zuyivka, Kyrovske, Myronivka, Svitlodarsk, Khartsyzsk, Luhansk, Rubizhne, Alchevsk, Brianka, Perevalsk, Stakhanov, Antratsyt, Chervonyi Luch, and Krasnodon) and in **21** locations in the areas controlled by Ukraine (Mariupol, Sloviansk, Chervonyi Lyman, Mykolaivka, Kostiantynivka, Druzhkivka, Dymytrov, Krasnoarmiisk, Rodynske, Selidove, Artemivsk, Dzerzhynsk, Avdiivka, Kramatorsk, Dobropillia, Severodonetsk, Kreminna, Lysychansk, Novoaidar, Rubizhne, and Svatovo). Within the said projects in the areas out of control of Ukraine, over **33 thousand** clients from among the most vulnerable populations received HIV/STI prevention services. According to the preliminary data, in 2015 there were **495** new HIV-positive clients detected in Donbas during screening testing with rapid tests.

- In 2015, Alliance ensured procurement and effected **7** deliveries of humanitarian aid to the areas of Donbas temporarily out of control of Ukraine: over **8.3 million** test kits, condoms, syringes, etc. as well as 48,182 packs of drugs for uninterrupted treatment of **773** patients with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis. Such large-scale deliveries were made thanks to support of the donor – the Global Fund – and effective cooperation with partners and governmental authorities: the Ukrainian Center of Socially Dangerous Disease Control at the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, the World Health Organization (WHO), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine.

- As of 27 January 2016, activities within the Alliance project to support OST patients from among internally displaced persons from the armed conflict areas and the Crimea, reached **215** persons in **8** oblasts of Ukraine, including 120 patients from the armed conflict areas of Luhansk oblast, 85 – from the armed conflict areas of Donetsk oblast and 10 – from the Crimea. The project involved **14 cities or towns**/17 OST sites. Using the services provided, 94% of project participants became registered with appropriate authorities as forced migrants, 42% found regular or temporary jobs, 19% became recipients of disability benefits, 5% became recipients of government child support payments, their children enrolled in preschool and school institutions, etc. Nearly 150 patients now continue to access OST without project support at the new places of residence, and, if required, receive services related to HIV/TB treatment, or returned to their homes after active hostilities had ceased.

Central tendencies of 2015 in the delivery of prevention and treatment services in the areas out of control of Ukraine:

- Big challenges in the delivery of HIV/TB drugs have more than once put under threat the lives of almost 8,000 HIV-positive patients.
- Over 500 OST patients had to terminate their treatment in 2015 (the total number of such patients who terminated therapy since the beginning of the war in May 2014 is over 900) due to the decision of the "LPR" authorities to stop programs, depletion of the stock of drugs at the territories controlled by the "DPR" authorities and bureaucratic security restrictions launched by the Ukrainian Government. Currently, only 92 patients are still receiving OST in Donetsk with minimum doses of methadone.
- Most international humanitarian organizations, including the UN agencies, cooperation with which allowed Alliance to deliver medical drugs and consumables to the territories out of control of Ukraine, had to leave the areas controlled by "LPR" and "DPR" authorities due to the ultimatum ban on their activities. Only in December 2015 the deliveries of drugs for TB treatment were resumed to the areas of Donetsk oblast not controlled by Ukraine. HIV/STI prevention programs supported by Alliance continue to be implemented in the areas out of control of the Ukrainian Government, where over 25 thousand clients from among most vulnerable populations receive relevant services.
- In 2015, Alliance initiated cooperation with the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, in particular in terms of testing for hepatitis C and distribution of prevention-related information among the military servants. The results of testing and studies indicate high levels of risky behavior among the military and big number of positive HCV test results among those soldiers who receive treatment after being wounded in the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine.

Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST)

In August 2015, over 90 OST patients in Horlivka, which is controlled by the "DPR" authorities, had to interrupt their treatment as the site ran out of drugs, with 54 more OST patients interrupting their therapy in Makiyivka in October 2015 due to the same reason. Back in the end of May, OST was terminated in the uncontrolled areas of the Luhansk oblast as it was "contrary to the LPR laws".

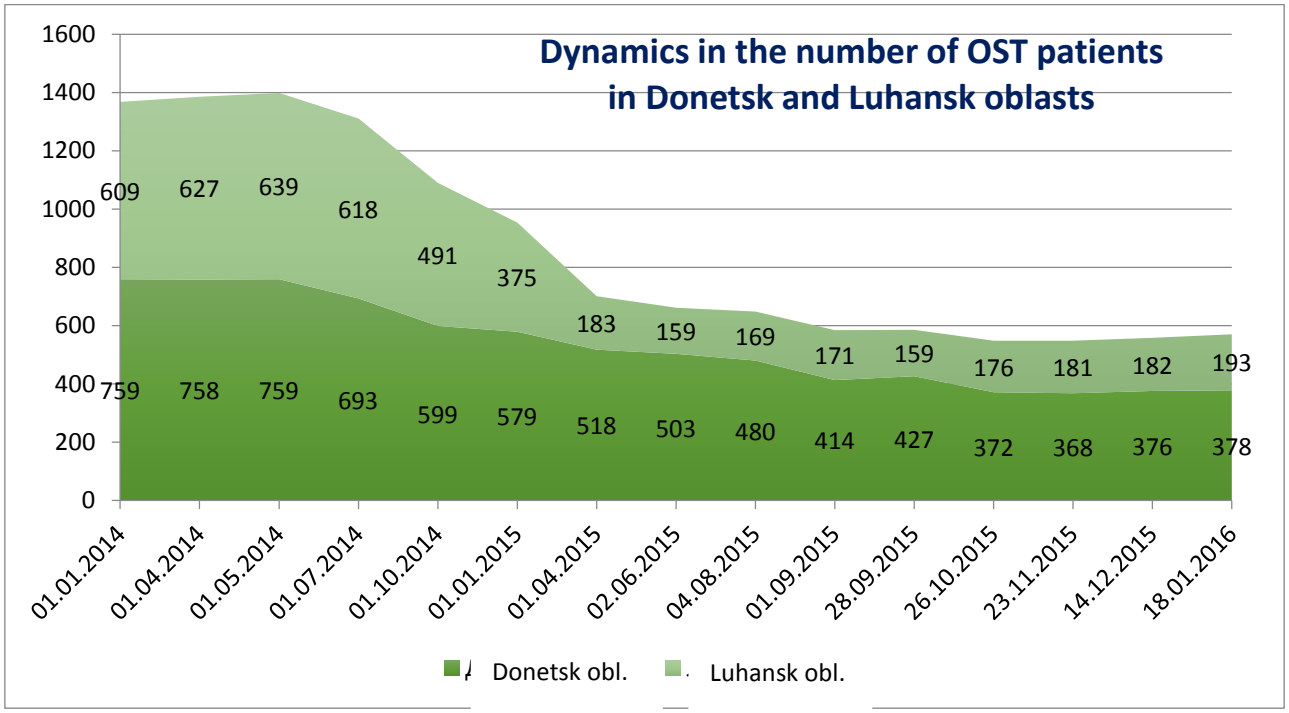
Only one OST site, in Donetsk, continues to operate in the occupied areas of Donetsk oblast, where 92 patients receive their drugs in minimum average daily dosage of 25 mg. In fact, those patients are receiving long-term detoxification treatment with a progressive reduction of dosage. The available stock of drugs will last for 1 month.

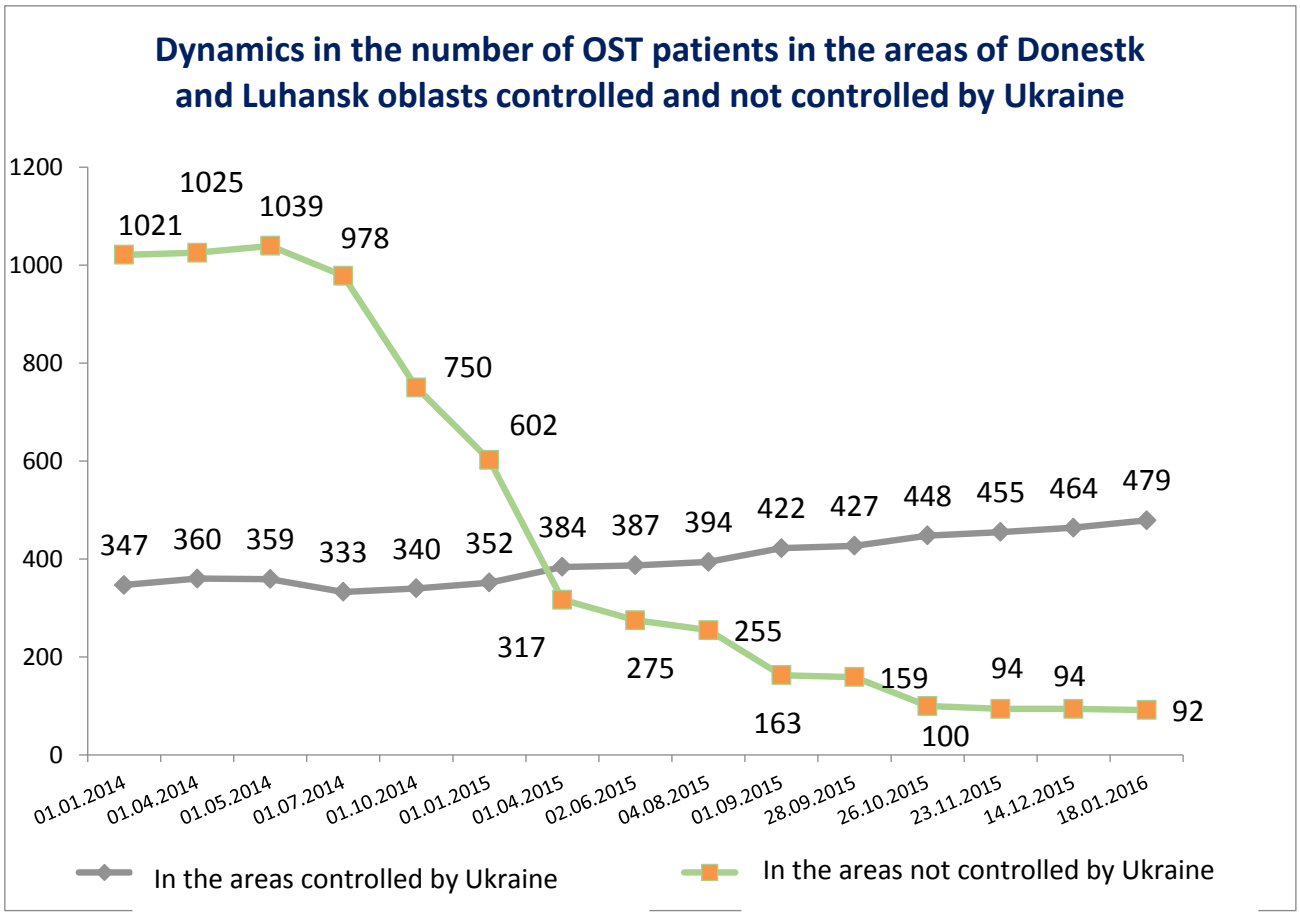
Due to security restrictions and regulatory controls established by the Ukrainian Government in December 2014 in the areas of military conflict and failure to issue approvals for the delivery OST drugs to such areas, the delivery of OST drugs to the areas of Donetsk region not controlled by

Ukraine was suspended. Since the beginning of military operations, over 900 patients lost access to OST primarily through the depletion of the stocks of drugs. The inventory of buprenorphine in the occupied areas was completely exhausted as far back as in February 2015.

Information on access to OST in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts
(as of 27 January 2016)

	Donetsk oblast	Luhansk oblast	Total	Change since 28 September 2015
Total number of patients as of 1 May 2014	759	639	1,398	
Actual number of patients as of 27 January 2016	378	193	571	**-15**
Number of patients, including*:*				
Those on the territory controlled by Ukraine	286	193	479	**+52**
Those on the territory not controlled by Ukraine	92	**0**	92	**- 67**
Number of OST sites:				
Those on the territory controlled by Ukraine	4	2	6	0
Those on the territory not controlled by Ukraine	1	**0**	1	**-1**





Police Interventions into the OST Program and Violation of the Rights of Patients in Sloviansk

On 22 January 2016, over 60 OST patients were arrested by national policemen and forced to go to a local police station from the drug treatment center in Sloviansk (territory controlled by Ukraine), where they were detained for 2 to 5 hours in violation of the legal procedures. The patients were put under physical and psychological pressure. The alleged purpose of such insolent and illegal actions was to check if anyone from the "possible suspects" was part of an unresolved severe crime.

After the involvement of local activists, the National OST Hotline, Alliance and filing relevant complaints, the patients were released. Alliance initiated an inspection to hold the liable policemen responsible and to prevent such violations in future.

Humanitarian Projects of Alliance to Support Internally Displaced OST Patients from Crimea and the Military Conflict Areas

Starting from May 2014, thanks to the support from a number of donor organizations (the International Renaissance Foundation, the Elton John AIDS Foundation, the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe and the Global Fund), Alliance has been implementing a project to support OST patients coming from the annexed Crimea and the areas of military conflict (in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts). The services provided by the project include facilitation to enable patients to promptly access OST programs and HIV/TB testing, if required, as well as other medical assistance. In addition, project participants are provided with social support/individual case management on a 24-hour basis to assist them with social adaptation and integration into the new environment, as well as support for housing (with rent covered), food packages, and personal hygiene kits, assistance with employment opportunities, and issuance of new identity documents, if needed. **Using the services provided, 94% of project participants became registered with appropriate authorities as forced migrants, 42% found regular or temporary jobs, 19% became recipients of disability benefits, 5% became recipients of government child support payments, their children enrolled in preschool and school institutions, etc.**

Nearly 150 patients now continue to access OST without project support at the new places of residence, and, if required, receive services related to HIV/TB treatment, or returned to their homes after active hostilities had ceased.

Starting from June 2015, the project has been financed by the Global Fund, geographically expanding to 14 towns and cities/17 OST sites in 8 regions. The project now includes 7 OST sites located in the Ukrainian Government-controlled areas of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts (including the new site in the town of Rubizhne in Luhansk oblast, which will start its operations after renovation and equipment of the premises are completed). Those sites are of the biggest demand among internal migrants; they account for 46% of all project clients. Based on the interaction with the Departments of Health of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, arrangements have been put in place to accommodate additional numbers of patients arriving from the areas of military conflict, with orders issued to redistribute OST drugs among the sites located in the oblasts which receive regular deliveries of such drugs. In Luhansk oblast, OST sites offer handing out 7-10-day supply of OST drugs to patients based on prescriptions or at the site. In Donetsk oblast, this issue is still being settled.

As of 27 January 2016, project activities covered 215 people in 8 oblasts of Ukraine, including 120 clients from the areas of military conflict in Luhansk oblast, 85 – from the areas of military conflict in Donetsk oblast, and 10 – from Crimea.



"We are from Horlivka, and we became participants of the substitution therapy program just before the war broke out. We were very happy, our lives became better organized, we found jobs, started saving some money, our parents felt glad that the things were working out for us – and then the war started and the shelling and it was all over. First we managed to cope, while the drugs were available, but when the stock was depleted – we had no idea what to do. We decided to move to Ukraine-controlled territory. It's a separate story how we were leaving, on our own, having no permits, it was all very long, but now everything is fine. Before the war, there were 350 OST patients in Horlivka, and now the program is closed, several people have already died – their bodies just started failing them or they had overdoses".

(Volodymyr and Olena, OST patients, now live in Sloviansk).

For the first time, the Global Fund project stipulates technical support for the renovation and equipment of OST sites functioning in the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts controlled by Ukraine. So far, equipment has been purchased and renovations have been made in Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Mariupol, with preparatory works completed and renovations to be started in Lysychansk and Rubizhne.



Personal experience, Ruslan's story: *I come from Luhansk and have been on substitution treatment since 2009. Before, everything was bad, I had many criminal records and detentions. When I started the therapy, my life got better, everything was fine – I had a job, a family, I started doing business. But when all this started, at once we understood what was going to follow. Those who were wiser started leaving, and we had our doses decreased. Then there was the blockade, with no drugs delivered into the city, many people left then, but my mother was sick and I had to help her, so I stayed. The site was still operating, but there were a lot of problems. When the doses were brought down to the minimum, I realized that I had to leave. That is how I found myself in Dnipropetrovsk.*

For six months I was unemployed, and only had small jobs to earn my living. Then I met the director of a local civil society organization. At first, I helped them as a volunteer – to make their web-site, to support their pages in social networks, to make photos. Then they had a vacancy of a social worker at the site, so now I work with them and enjoy helping others.

I would like to stay here. There, in the LPR, I don't have a life. My family is there, my mother and my sister, but there is no place for me… The social worker's salary is not very big, but still it is a job. That is why I plan on staying here. The life goes on.

HIV Prevention: Harm Reduction Programs

Alliance continues to support HIV/STI prevention projects being implemented in most vulnerable populations by 11 partner NGOs in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, five out of which carry out their activities both in occupied and Ukraine-controlled areas, and two – only in the occupied areas. Contractual arrangements are in place with all partner NGOs, while the bank accounts of the organizations still working in the occupied zone have been moved to Ukraine-controlled territories. Funds to cover staff salaries and project consultant fees are transferred to such accounts in due time and course.

Joint efforts by Alliance and its partners enable HIV-service organizations in the region to feel confident that the work they are doing is of value and importance, while the challenges and problems they are faced with can be effectively addressed even under the conditions of an armed conflict.

Workers of HIV-service NGOs provide services in challenging environment, often putting their health and lives under threat. Thus, in 2014 a mobile clinic purchased by Alliance came under shelling in Luhansk and was seriously damaged (over 11 hits caused by shelling) and is out of operation. Since, there has been a bigger workload for social workers.



The minimum package of HIV/STI prevention services is provided to project clients by all sites of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Indicators related to the coverage of PWID, CSW, and MSM with minimum package of services are fully achieved. In 2015, coverage indicators were overachieved for all vulnerable populations (see the table below). This may be explained by the fact that clients come to projects to receive services more often due to the material aggravation of their financial situation in the time of current military conflict in the country, high unemployment rates, significant increase in the prices of syringes, condoms and other consumables in pharmacies.

Coverage of Populations Vulnerable to HIV by Harm Reduction Projects in 2015*

Oblast	PWID			CSW			MSM		
	Plan	Actual	%	Plan	Actual	%	Plan	Actual	%
Donetsk oblast	27,799	29,901	108%	1,474	1,806	123%	1,084	1,143	105%
incl. areas not controlled by Ukraine		23,807			1,129			320	
Luhansk oblast	8,009	9,481	118%	704	857	122%	-	-	-
incl. areas not controlled by Ukraine		7,299			857				
TOTAL*		**39,230**			**2,663**			**1,143**	
incl. areas not controlled by Ukraine*		**31,025**			**1,986**			**320**	

** The total figures demonstrate the number of persons (not visits), who receive prevention services in different organizations/regions.*

The projects provide rapid testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Based on preliminary estimates for the period of 1 January through 31 December 2015, from among key populations, the projects conducting rapid tests and operating in the Donetsk oblast have tested **26,483** persons (the test results for 312 (1.2%) out of them came back positive), whereas in the Luhansk oblast the number of clients tested for HIV was **7,727** (the test results for 183 (2.4%) out of them coming back positive.)



Clients are very grateful that they were not turned adrift in the challenging circumstances and can still receive prevention services as there is no one to care about them apart from the workers of HIV-service organizations. That is what clients tell:

"Thank you very much for not letting us down"

"No one cares about us here, apart from the organization"

"If it was not for the NGO workers, we would not know how to survive".

In the indicated period of time, 6,253 tests for STI have been performed in the Donetsk oblast (4,430 for HCV, 414 for HBV, 287 for gonorrhea, 837 for syphilis, and 285 for chlamydia), with 929 (15%) test results coming back positive. In the Luhansk oblast, 1,839 tests for STI have been performed (1,199 for HCV, 191 for HBV, 99 for gonorrhea, 282 for syphilis, and 68 for chlamydia), with 447 (24.3%) test results coming back positive. In addition, in the said timeframe, 1,030,510 condoms were distributed among clients of prevention projects in the Donetsk oblast, 297,084 – in the Luhansk oblast, while 2.6 million syringes and needles were distributed in the Donetsk oblast, and 873 thousand in the Luhansk oblast.

Projects operating in the areas of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts both controlled and not controlled by Ukraine are provided with consumables to deliver services to PWID, CSW, and MSM. Thus, as agreed with the Global Fund and the Health Sub-cluster of the WHO Country Office in Ukraine, in November 2015 Alliance delivered a long-term stock of prevention materials, medical goods, and test kits for the projects delivering services in the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts not controlled by Ukraine. The delivery was made possible, in particular, due to the support of local partner organizations.

Apart from the activities directly aimed at HIV/STI prevention, NGOs in the zone of the armed conflict also provide other social services for clients who are greatly interested in such services – hairdresser's services, support in receiving humanitarian aid, festive events for children of project clients, etc.

High professionalism and commitment of NGO managers resulted in obtaining safe-conduct passes issued according to the new form for nearly all NGO staff working in the occupied territories. Thus, social workers from projects based in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are able to travel without much hindrance between government-controlled and occupied territories.

Project Monitoring

The effective implementation of prevention programs is not possible without efficient monitoring, which may be a challenge in the conditions of active military operations. Nevertheless, Alliance took on a reasonable risk and ran a call for proposals to select consultants to make monitoring visits, which allowed conducting program and financial monitoring of 11 projects operating in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, in particular in the areas not controlled by the Ukrainian Government, in challenging environment of the ongoing military conflict. The activities of all projects, both in the Ukraine-controlled and occupied areas have been confirmed. Experts noted high motivation and qualification of the workers of HIV-service NGOs in performing their obligations. Field monitoring is also accompanied with monitoring through analysis of the online SyrEx database, review of project performance, inspection of primary records and reports, discussions aimed at improving activities in the regions, resolving specific problems, etc.

> *"We appreciate our work. No challenges will stop us. Thank you very much to Alliance for its support! In such challenging times, we did not let down the clients who have been coming to our organization for many years."*
>
> Quotation from a talk with social workers from CSO "Line of Life Horlivka"

Provision with Consumables and Rapid Tests

During the year, in the course of four deliveries effected with support of international humanitarian organizations, Alliance was able to bring over 8 million units of consumable materials to the occupied areas of Donbas. The delivery made in November 2015 was of a particularly large scale. It allowed providing for the program activities of four partner NGOs in Donetsk oblast and two in Luhansk oblast at least until July 2016, and in terms of testing for HIV, hepatitis and STIs – up to the end of 2016.

Each of those deliveries was preceded with meticulous work to obtain all the required permits and agree the delivery with the authorities controlling areas on both sides of the conflict zone. It should be noted that introduction of accreditation and registration for international NGOs by the occupation authorities significantly complicated the existence of previously effective mechanisms to deliver goods to those areas. Thus, in the course of the year Alliance had to change the delivery schemes several times to ensure regular provision of programs with consumables. The procurement team continues analyzing the situation with transportation regimen and monitoring possibilities to make further deliveries.

Tuberculosis Prevention and Treatment

Early Detection of Tuberculosis in Most-At-Risk Populations

Eleven NGOs in the Donetsk oblast and four NGOs in the Luhansk oblast are working with the component "early detection of tuberculosis in most-at-risk populations." Based on preliminary data for the period of 1 January through 31 December 2015, 17,534 NGO clients in the Donetsk oblast have been screened for TB using survey questionnaires, with 1,765 positive results obtained. 1,045 (59.2%) clients sought TB diagnostics services in healthcare facilities, 51 of them being diagnosed with TB. In the Luhansk oblast, 7,548 clients were screened for TB using survey questionnaires, with 964 positive results obtained. The number of clients who sought TB diagnostics services in healthcare facilities was 931 (96.6%), 22 of them confirmed their TB diagnosis. In total, 65 out of 73 patients with confirmed tuberculosis diagnoses started treatment (89%).

Management of Patients with Multidrug Resistant Tuberculosis

In 2015, in the Luhansk oblast, 15 patients with multidrug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) were provided with outpatient care by nursing personnel from the Red Cross Society of Ukraine, which is a sub-recipient of Alliance. All of them are located in the areas controlled by the Ukrainian Government. No MDR-TB treatment or patient management activities are carried out in the occupied areas of the Luhansk oblast as the activities of the Red Cross Society are banned there and there is no data on the treatment of TB patients. In the Donetsk oblast, TB care services are provided to 122 patients with MDR-TB, with 13 of them residing in the occupied areas, services are delivered by the Red Cross Society of Ukraine, with its representatives visiting patients on a daily basis, handing out TB drugs delivered by Alliance. The data on those patients are entered into the national register.

> *I am sick with tuberculosis, and I receive no pension benefits, so there is no money to travel to the TB treatment facility. I am very thankful to the nurses of the Red Cross Society, who come every day and bring the required medications, otherwise I would not be able to continue my treatment.*
>
> *Patient from Donetsk*

Deliveries of TB Drugs to the Temporarily Occupied Territories

At the end of 2015, a significant aggravation was observed in the activities of humanitarian missions of international organizations, which not only supported patients, but were the platform allowing uninterrupted provision of HIV prevention and treatment services. Thus, the international organization, Médecins Sans Frontières, was declined registration in the “DPR”, which rendered impossible for Alliance to deliver medical goods and materials, including disposable syringes and means of protection, to the temporarily occupied territories. At the end of September, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also faced problems and had to suspend deliveries of humanitarian aid, including medications. Such suspension was particularly negative in terms of provision of most vulnerable populations living in such areas with the required aid. Nevertheless, there is some positive news, such as recent deliveries of HIV prevention means and TB drugs by Alliance, deliveries by UNICEF and renewal of the effective work of the International Committee of the Red Cross.



At the end of December, Alliance delivered to Donetsk the second consignment (from the beginning of the year) containing drugs for the treatment of MDR-TB. The consignment included 21.5 thousand packs of seven vital drugs (such as capreomycin, kanamycin, etc.). They allowed providing treatment for 130 patients in Donetsk oblast TB treatment clinic in the city of Donetsk.

The drugs were delivered in specially equipped vehicles to comply with temperature regimen of transporting medical goods in winter period.

The delivery was preceded with continuous negotiations, first of all with the de facto “authorities” of the occupied areas of Donetsk oblast.

Previous consignments of TB drugs were delivered to specialized treatment facilities of Donetsk and Luhansk in July-August 2015. In total, 48,182 packs of medications were delivered to the temporarily occupied areas of Donbas during the year. All those drugs were procured with money received from the Global Fund.

Viral Hepatitis C (HCV) Treatment

As of today, the provision of PEG-interferon therapy in the Donetsk Oblast AIDS Center is completed. In total, five HIV-positive OST patients underwent treatment there.

Actual and Potential Risks

There is an apparent shortage of qualified personnel in the East of Ukraine: many doctors and social workers moved away, some of them died. The existing system of patient registration stipulates diagnostics only in the territory controlled by Ukraine, and the results of testing in Donetsk AIDS Center are not considered valid. Thus, without being registered a patient may not access treatment. Many patients with HIV, TB as well as members of vulnerable populations do not have the required money or even documents to go through the armed conflict border and get tested/receive treatment in the areas controlled by Ukraine. This issue may be resolved through agreeing to acknowledge the results of diagnostics done by treatment facilities in the areas not controlled by Ukraine and prescription of treatment courses to such patients. Such mechanism was for a long time used within the programs supported by Global Fund in Georgia (Abkhazia).

In Donetsk, over 90 OST patients may have to interrupt their treatment due to the depletion of the drug (methadone) before the end of February.

Intensification of risky sexual behavior, in particular among the military on both sides of the armed conflict, activation of sex work, high level of migration, big numbers of internally displaced persons and challenges in organizing medical aid in the military conflict areas pose significant risks in terms of the

potentially big increase in the incidence of HIV/STI/TB both in the conflict areas and in other regions of Ukraine.

There are almost no HIV/STI/TB screening activities for those conscripted or mobilized to the army as well as contract soldiers, and the means to prevent viral infections are almost not available in the armed conflict zone.

Systematic actions are required to cover new vulnerable populations (first of all the military serving in the conflict zone, those mobilized/demobilized) with prevention services, their provision with condoms and access to HIV/STI testing, etc.

Further information on the humanitarian situation in the East of Ukraine as of 19 January 2016 may be found in the bulletin of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), report of the UN Refugee Agency and reports of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.

ICF "Alliance for Public Health"

Contact person: Myroslava Andrushchenko

e-mail: andrushchenko@aph.org.ua

Phone: +38 044 4905485 ext. 229

National HIV/AIDS Hotline: 0-800-500-451

National OST Hotline: 0-800-507-727