

## Equal Rights – Equal Opportunities

### STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

ECOM - Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity [1], Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS (EWNA) [2], and Working Group of Trans People on HIV and Sexual Health in EECA [3] commemorate International Women's Day.

For our organizations, women represent a variety of women's experiences, identities, and socializations, located at the intersections of race, class, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other factors that reflect self-perception and everyone's right to self-identification.

In countries of the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA), women living with HIV, women who use drugs, trans women, sex workers, and homosexual and bisexual women all suffer from marginalization, criminalization, stigma, and discrimination. Violence is a key risk factor for HIV for many women from key populations. Criminalization brings about discrimination and reinforces the perception that criminalized women can be deprived of other rights, including the right to health, freedom from violence and degrading treatment, and the right to justice.

#### Violence

52% of **women living with HIV** in EECA were subjected to violence after being diagnosed with HIV. 71% of women who faced physical violence did not seek help. The main reasons for refusing help included fear of publicity and public condemnation, and not believing that any help would be provided [4].

Initiators of “corrective rapes” of **lesbians and bisexual women**, and sometimes those carrying them out, primarily include family members, male relatives, or acquaintances. Such egregious and cruel crimes go unpunished [5].

Since their profession is prohibited by law, **sex workers** are especially vulnerable to violence, including by law enforcement officials. The illegal status of sex work creates serious legal barriers to seeking protection and justice through law enforcement agencies, even in cases of apparent violence by the client. Acts of violence are widespread and used to subject sex workers to bribes, blackmail, ill-treatment, torture, and humiliation.

#### Criminalization

According to data of the State Judicial Administration, in 2015-2018, only women were convicted under Article 130 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine “Infection with the human immunodeficiency virus or another incurable infectious disease”.

Official judicial and prison statistics from Russia show that **women who use drugs** are much more often criminalized than women from other key populations, and face more serious charges in comparison to men who use drugs, which leads to much more severe sentences [6].

#### Right to health. Sexual, reproductive, and parental rights

In Kazakhstan, the percentage of **women living with HIV** who were forced by health works to terminate their pregnancy (abortion) was 24.2%. Meanwhile, 34% of women living with HIV have never received reproductive counseling [7].

Articles of the Family Code on the deprivation of parental rights on the basis of “chronic alcoholism and drug abuse” and their practical implementation by child protection services and guardianship councils simultaneously take away the opportunity of **women who use drugs** to realize both their right to health and their parental rights. This discriminatory norm is the reason for the refusal of women to turn to existing OST programs and seek other medical services.

[1] - <https://ecom.ngo>

[2] - [www.ewna.org](http://www.ewna.org)

[3] - <https://ecom.ngo/tpwg/>

[4] - “Problems of violence against women living with HIV in the EECA region” [http://www.ewna.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/EWNA\\_Report\\_RUS\\_preview\\_v5.pdf](http://www.ewna.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/EWNA_Report_RUS_preview_v5.pdf)

[5] - “Until you change”: Corrective rape <http://www.labrys.kg/ru/stuff/full/39.html>

[6] - List of issues related to the discrimination and violence against women who use drugs, sex workers, lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people in Russia. 8th periodic report by Russian Federation for the 62d Session of the CEDAW. January, 2015

[7] - [https://capla.asia/images/Kazakhstan\\_Stripma\\_Index\\_Russian\\_Final.pdf](https://capla.asia/images/Kazakhstan_Stripma_Index_Russian_Final.pdf)

Many **LBT mothers** living in countries that prohibit the “propaganda of non-traditional relationships” are forced to teach their children not to tell the truth about their family and to hide the fact that they have two parents of the same gender.

The existing pathologizing approach to transgenderism limits trans people, and trans women in particular, from becoming adoptive parents or guardians of children, even their own born before their transgender transition. **Women living with HIV and drug-dependent women** are also prohibited from adopting children.

One egregious situation faced by trans women relates to medical examinations and treatment in clinics and hospital wards performed based on the gender market in one's passport, if the trans woman did not amend her documents for various reasons (often beyond her control).

### Hatred and pathologization

**Trans\* women** in our countries are still pathologized: until ICD-11 enters into force at the national level in each country, all trans women will have a psychiatric diagnosis.

The number of fatal hate crimes against trans women is quite shocking: several **trans\* women** have been killed in Georgia and Russia over the last 4 years alone.

### Right to association and peaceful assembly

For the second year, a women's march was banned in Kazakhstan. In Kyrgyzstan, a women's march was prohibited under the pretext of preventing the coronavirus.

The **sex worker** association “Silver Rose” of Russia tried to officially register twice, and was refused both times.

A very important element related to preventing violence is the ratification and the implementation of the Istanbul Convention [8]. This is an international agreement of the Council of Europe against violence against women and domestic violence. In February 2020, this treaty was ratified by the parliaments of several countries of the EECA region, including Georgia, Serbia, Romania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, and Poland. Russia does not have a law on domestic violence.

In order to formulate and implement effective educational, preventative, social and medical programs, it is important to collect statistics and take into account data disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, and location, in order to track progress and ensure that no one is left behind. This is stated in the Sustainable Development Goals [9]. At the same time, only 13% of 40 EECA countries have legislation requiring gender research, and only 8% have a regular budget for this purpose [10].

We advocate for the use of feminine versions of words in language. The main reason for this is to ensure that women in certain social roles and professional communities are visible and respected. Feminine versions of words allow women to use gender-sensitive vocabulary in accordance with their position or profession, nationality, descent, religion, beliefs, or the activities they perform. We support the use of feminine versions by those women who wish to do so, thereby making women more visible in their professional field.

We consider holding Feminist Schools to be an important component of education, self-identification, and of strengthening the leadership and activist capacity of the women's movement. Gender inequality, sexism, and stereotypes are the main issues related to overcoming violence, the realization of women in society, and to the free manifestation of a woman's identity. Our experience shows that holding such schools for different women who share a similar experience of discrimination and violence, strengthens their capacity and synergy, and provides tools to recognize oppression, which productively affects their ability and motivation to fight stigma and discrimination and help representatives of their group.

[8] - <https://rm.coe.int/1680464e75>

[9] - [http://www.ewna.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SDG-goals\\_25092015.pdf](http://www.ewna.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SDG-goals_25092015.pdf)

[10] - [https://www.unecsc.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.30/2017/may/Session\\_1\\_Azizova\\_RUS.pdf](https://www.unecsc.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.30/2017/may/Session_1_Azizova_RUS.pdf)

**With this statement, EWNA, ECOM and the Working Group of Trans People on HIV and Sexual Health in EECA urge:**

**National authorities:**

- To ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (“Istanbul Convention”), in order to provide legislative protection against violence and a full range of services for survivors of violence.
- To ensure the collection of gender-disaggregated statistics in the field of public health (HIV prevention and treatment, opioid substitution therapy, etc.), which reflect the true needs of women, depending on their gender.
- To review and amend educational programs, making them gender-sensitive and oriented towards respect for human rights, non-violent treatment, and respect for the individual.
- To remove articles criminalizing the transmission of HIV from the criminal codes of countries, as they are based on a violation of human rights and are ineffective in combating the spread of HIV.
- To review discriminatory legislation based on HIV status, drug use, homosexuality, transgenderism, or sex work.
- To eliminate obstacles to women’s marches and ensure the protection of activists.

**International and donor organizations:**

- To increase funding for women’s organizations, which are self-organizations and represent the voices of vulnerable women; to promote their development and strengthening.
- To expand the introduction of gender-oriented goals and objectives into programs.
- To support the feminist agenda and hold feminist schools for women from various groups.