

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO END INEQUALITIES (CORE) PROJECT: BRIDGING THE GAPS IN HIV, TB AND VIRAL HEPATITIS HEALTHCARE



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Introduction

CORE Project is an EU co-funded project to reduce inequalities by enhancing community responses and addressing gaps in prevention, linkage to care, and access to healthcare services for HIV, TB, and viral hepatitis in the EU Member States, and includes 24 partners from 17 countries. The 14 participating Community-Based organizations (CBOs), all community-led, will implement or scale-up tailored strategies such as capacity building, networking, exchanging good practices, and innovative approaches to promote, strengthen, and integrate community-driven approaches.

Methods

Between February and May 2023, a comprehensive needs assessment questionnaire was formulated and distributed to the 14 Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) partnering with the CORE project. The objective was to gather information, comprising five work areas (organization profile, country's healthcare system, services and data collection and community monitoring, capacity building and training needs) in a systematic manner. This was complemented by individual interviews with CBOs to gain a deeper understanding, address specific needs, and build a collaborative environment for sharing knowledge and experiences.

Results

In most of the partnering countries, national strategies to fight HIV and viral hepatitis have been established, often accompanied by specific programs designed to address them. However, a significant challenge in successfully executing these strategies derives from the need for clear community-based guidelines for testing and linkage to care, which can hamper the efforts of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) seeking to expand their intervention (Figure 1 and 2). These services frequently fall short of targeting the most vulnerable groups due to financial constraints or a lack of clarity in the regulations and of political will.

The CORE project contribution includes the addition of integrated testing for HIV, HBV, HCV, and Syphilis among CBOs not yet providing and additionally introducing innovative approaches, such as offering STI appointments, implementing CHEMESEX initiatives, and establishing Partner Notification Programs (Figure 3).

Country	Regulated	National HIV/STIs/ VH strategy	National Programme					Guidelines CB testing	Laboratory supervision	Perform rapid testing CHW/LP	Data incl. National surveillance system
			HIV	Viral Hep.	STIs	Comb. HIV/VH/STI's	TB				
Bulgaria											
Cyprus											
France											
Germany											
Greece											
Hungary											
Poland											
Portugal											
Romania											
Slovakia											
Slovenia											
Sweden											

Legend: No (Red), Partially implemented (Yellow), Yes (Green)

Figure 1: Legal and regulatory partner's framework

		HWB	ASM	FPR	VIA Berlin	POSITIVE VOICE	PRAKSIS	HATTER SOCIETY	FSE	GAT	CARUSEL	ARAS	ODYSEUS	LEGBITRA	NoaksArk
Community-based Testing	Rapid testing														
	Point of Care														
	Referral														
	Linkage to care														
	Escort to the 1st appoint.														
	Case management														
Condom	Condoms and lubricants distribution														
	PrEP appointment														
STIs	PEP appointment														
	Medical appointment														
Harm Reduction	Harm Reduction supplies														
	Supervised consumption services														
Peer and social services	Peer intervention														
	Peer support group														
	Social Support														
Other	Legal Support														
	Mental Health appointment														

Figure 2: CBO's service offer

	COBATEST		Forsen CORE Project Activity						
	Member	Using online tool	HIV	HBV	HCV	Syphilis	Other STI	TB*	Others Activities
HWB									
ASM									
FPR									
VIA BERLIN									
POSITIVE VOICE									
PRAKSIS									
HATTER									
FSE									
GAT									
CARUSEL									
ARAS									
ODYSEUS									
LEGBITRA*									
NOAKSARK									

*Standard laboratory test

Legend: 2022 (Green), 2023 (Light Green), testing Scale-up (Pink), other services (Purple)

Figure 3: Integration of activities at CORE project

Conclusions

The information gathered has shown opportunities to enhance service provision and integrate tailored interventions for each CORE CBO partner within WP5 implementation and a direct connection to the other CORE project WPs.

