

## Dear participant,

Welcome to the First Regional Harm Reduction Conference for the region of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA) "HARM REDUCTION IN THE NEW ENVIRONMENT"!

We are happy to see you in Vilnius, capital of the Republic of Lithuania and home to the Secretariat of the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN), in the year of our 20th anniversary. We invite you to celebrate the 20 years of networking, partnerships, and the fight for human rights by looking at what we have achieved, where we are now, and how the new environment that harm reduction faces today shapes our path into the future.

By "new environment" we mean, first of all, the new financial context in which harm reduction programs now operate. For the majority of CEECA middle-income states it means a transition from external support to domestic resources, which dictates new approaches to addressing the health and social problems of people who use drugs. Many countries face the need to understand the current donor landscape, and to deal with the consequences of the transition to domestic funding on the availability and sustainability of harm reduction services. For a number of years harm reduction services in CEECA were seen mainly as a means of HIV prevention, but in the new environment they play a role of allowing people who use drugs to access a continuum of services – from prevention to testing and treatment of HIV, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted infections, and viral hepatitis, improving adherence to such treatment, and receiving social support to become active members of their communities.

In this new environment, harm reduction has to rediscover its place in national health and social care systems and to be recognized by governments and local communities as essential for achieving social change, as well as achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including universal health coverage and the more comprehensive health and justice agenda. A shift from repressive to health- and rights-based drug policies becomes critically important in this context, as treating drug use as a public health issue opens up new horizons for developing cooperation between harm reduction programs and law enforcement agencies, instead of the opposition which we continue to see in many CEECA countries.

The primarily goal of the conference is to build a productive regional dialogue among the community of drug users, governmental, social, and health care professionals, donors, and technical partners, to reach a common understanding of the public health and social importance of harm reduction programs

and the possible consequences of transition processes, and to achieve consensus among all stakeholders on their key roles in increasing the quality and ensuring the sustainability of harm reduction programs in the context of transition to domestic funding, new drug policy challenges, and public health needs.

We hope that by the end of the conference we all will be able to say that we are aware of the status and the role of harm reduction in public health, and that we know what challenges and problems we have faced at different stages of the integration of harm reduction programs into health and social care systems, and how to stand up against the repressive drug policies and address these challenges for the benefit of the different communities and society at large.

During the conference each participant will be able to leave a message for another decade of harm reduction networking in a white book in the exhibition area. Please write your thoughts and ideas on what was important in the past, what you've achieved, what you plan to do in the coming 10 years, and what you think the future of harm reduction will look like. We will compile your ideas into a joint document, which we will look at in 10 years, when we celebrate our 30th anniversary, to see what we've managed to achieve and have been able to influence.

We would like to thank all members of the conference's international organizing committee, our long-term partners, for their support and the considerable work done to develop the program. We would like to express our gratitude to: the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS); World Health Organization (WHO); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; the Open Society Foundations (OSF); Harm Reduction International (HRI); AFEW International; Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD); Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania; Coalition "I Can Live"; and EHRN's Steering Committee.

The Regional Harm Reduction Conference 2017 is organized by EHRN in the framework of the Regional Program "Harm Reduction Works – Fund It!", supported by the Global Fund.

Enjoy the event!

*Secretariat of the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network*