



## **BORDERNETwork**

### **SPI On-site Visit in Estonia and Latvia**

**5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

#### **Protocol**

#### **Part II: Latvia**

**Participants:**

**Latvias Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health (Papardez Zieds):** Mrs. Iveta Kelle (IK), Executive Director and Mrs Beata Milgrave (BM), project co-ordinator,

**Infectology Centre of Latvia (LIC):** Mrs Inga Upmace (IU) and Mrs Iveta Skripste (IS)

**SPI Forschung:** Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann (TAN), trans-national coordination, Joyce Dreezens (JD), external free lance expert

**Protocol:** Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann

**Topics Discussed**

**TOP 1: Introduction of Papardes Zieds**

The association's office is situated in the downtown of Riga (old city centre) on the bank of river Daugava. The premises are on the top floor of an outpatient public health care centre for children and adolescents. Various medical practices, from paediatrician to gynaecologist are accommodated in the building. Papardes Zieds rented the premise from the Municipality of Riga and has an ongoing contract till 2014.

The SPI team was very warmly welcomed in the office by the executive manager Ms Iveta Kelle and introduced to other team members. The premise is pretty spacious and light, disposing at several offices, meeting rooms, recently launched library and a separate youth department, where the meetings with volunteers, peer educators and young people take place.

The Association is the official member of IPPF and one of the Collaborating Centres of WHO on Sexual Health. The organisation has conducted several European projects as member organisation of IPPF and was partner to SOA Netherlands in a UNODC project (2001-2002) on harm reduction in prisons, which was the first project addressing special target group different than the general youth.

From the current EU-funded projects in the HIV field; Papardes Zieds is partner in SAFE II.

A short outline of the profile and activities of Papardes Zieds was accompanied also by various target groups tailored education and promotion materials:

["Latvia's Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health "Papardes zieds" was founded on November 26,1994 and became a full member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in 2000. "Papardes zieds" is the leading non governmental organization working](#)

in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) field in Latvia. Every year the Association implements up to 15 national and international projects on variety of sexual and reproductive health and rights issues. Since 2006 projects on development cooperation & education on global SRHR are implemented. One of the main target groups of "Papardes Zieds" always has been young people of Latvia."

## **TOP2: Introduction of participants and objectives of the meeting.**

After a short introduction round of all participants TAN provided update on the stage of progress of the amendment's preparation. SPI had sent to Papardes Zieds all necessary official documents, which had to be filled in and send back per post in original. IK confirmed that preparations have been done on that. As for the budget of the action (Annex II), the proposal of PAPERDES ZIEDS how to adapt the budget and furthermore how to provide the co-financing to the action have not yet been submitted. In the course of the meeting some important points were addressed and it was agreed that IK will submit a draft budget plan for PZ till October 15. SPI team expressed the wish to be ready to submit the amendment request by end of October to EAHC.

Both IU and IS expressed regrets that the decision for LIC withdraw was taken in such an abrupt manner and in such a short note before the project's kick-off meeting. Thus the two of them could not participate in the meeting in Berlin. Nevertheless they assured anew their commitment to the tasks of BORDERNETwork and the support of the LIC, which will remain involved in the project as a collaborating partner. IU will be the contact person for the project, while IS further will have a work contract with PZ and will assist the coordination of the project. That is a very good solution, as far as both IU and IS were involved actively in the phase of proposal's preparation and IS also in one of the expert meetings (WP9 in Vienna)

Following the discussion focused on the project's individual work packages, where after general presentation of background, objectives, lead partner and tasks to be fulfilled the participants clarified the responsibilities of the Latvian partner.

### **Work package 4**

TAN introduced the cross-border model regions of the project and explained the logic of the cooperation: equal-eye-level exchange of experience and planning of joint actions between professionals from different sectors and institutions in the field of HIV/AIDS/STI prevention, diagnostic and therapy.

The Estonian partners, NIHD and AISC were introduced in brief and SPI team informed that the Estonian partners will initiate the first regional meeting visiting Riga, after the amendment gets approved. Besides, the budget foresees also 3 travels for 2 persons from the staff members of PZ to Estonian partners. The average frequency of meetings is expected to be once in 6 to 9 months, exchanging visits to Tallinn and Riga.

At this point IU raised the issue of the importance of the cross-border exchange with Estonia not only for the staff members, but also for the involved in the project service providers ( LTCs (*low threshold centres*), outreach workers etc.). A change was proposed in that regard,

that 3 of the planned regional networking travels to Tallinn will be for a staff member of PZ (E2: Travel costs) and 3 for another professional, non-staff member (E6: Other costs).

SPI team communicated also a question of the Estonian colleague Jury Kalikov from AISC. His organisation has had very good working contacts with the Riga NGO Dialogs, offering services for sex workers. As the contact had been interrupted Jury Kalikov was wondering whether the NGO exists still, considering the pretty harsh situation for Latvian civil society sector as result of the general economic crisis.

IU answered confirming that regardless of the difficulties, the NGO still runs one of the very few centres for sex workers in Riga. With this the discussion turned to the next point.

### **Work package 5**

Latvia participates in the bio-behavioural surveillance among sex workers to be conducted under this work package. TAN introduced briefly the objectives of the survey and the key data preliminary agreed during the kick-off workshop in July in Berlin (i.e. sample size, sample methods, type of sex work scene, duration of field phase, beginning of administration etc.). In addition the agreements with the Estonian partners made during the previous day of the visit to Tallinn were also shared. IU commented that it is very important for Latvia to choose a similar design of the survey as in Estonia for purpose of bilateral comparison. In addition she expressed a high appreciation of the capacity of the Estonian partners in conducting such surveys.

Thus the sample method to be predominantly used in Latvia will also be respondent-driven one (RDS). IU had made already some research and consultations and presented her ideas about the sampling.

According to her there will be a possibility to select 5 “first seeds” (respondents from the groups of female SWs, who will be the gate openers to the group, they will be given each 3 vouchers to enrol three further respondents into the survey) at 5 different services-sites.

Those will be:

1. Dialogs – NGO service centre for sex workers;
2. AIDS Service – 1<sup>st</sup> Clinic, part of LIC
3. LIC, Department of STIs, in- and outpatient treatment department, where STI check-ups for SWs can also take place
4. STI clinic – a traditional old clinic
5. Site for street SWs (Kekava) – majority of them IDUs

Only the first two sites offer free of charge testing and check-ups, the rest three – not.

According to the Latvian prostitution legislation the sex workers are obliged to attend monthly check-ups and testing for HIV, Syphilis and Gonorrhoea in order to obtain their work certificate. So the HIV and STI diagnostic takes place in a context of mandatory check-up, which is quite a rigorous measure towards the group of SWs.

TAN asked about how much does the test cost in the sites, where the sex workers have to pay for it. According to IU in last year for the first time a combined rapid tests have been introduced which are not very expensive.

### **The Latvian system of HIV Testing**

Countrywide 16 low threshold centres exist, which offer HIV VCT and other services to vulnerable groups. According to an agreement, LIC provides the test kits to all centres, which offer also the test anonymously. As mentioned a rapid test is available, if the rapid test turns positive, the blood sample is sent to the national reference lab, which is in LIC.

As for the price, each single test for HIV, Syphilis, Hepatitis B and C costs 1 Lat, ca. 1.5 EUR. The package price for 4 tests is then 6 EUR.

The decision for the second generation surveillance among SWs is to conduct a combined 4-test package of rapid tests.

According to IU a second generation surveillance survey conducted in the frame of another EU project in the Baltic States (project coordinated by IU) confirmed ca. 22% HIV prevalence in IDUs. Due to that it was considered appropriate to use a rapid test as an initial screening of the vulnerable groups.

At this point the consideration was raised whether the amount of money foreseen in Annex II under E4: Consumables and Supplies for diagnostic tests (for both WP5 and WP6) can not be provides as co-financing of PZ to the project.

LIC is in a position to provide the test kits needed for both activities under WP5 and WP6 and IU referred to a practice they have. LIC can provide an invoice to Papardes Zieds that the certain amount xxxxxx of test kits at the price of xxxx have been provided for free to the project BORDERNRETwork. In such a way PZ will cover part of the co-financing needed to the project's budget. However, this can be related only for rapid test kits. In the case if whole blood testing is necessary another mechanism should be established to maintain co-financing by LIC.

Back to the other components of the surveillance survey it was discussed that more time should be planned for presentation and approval of the survey's protocol and instrument by the Ethical Commission. There are 3 different commissions, and none of them will issue the permission for free. According to estimation the amount will equal 70 EUR. This amount can be covered only by "Overheads".

As for the foreseen incentives for the survey respondents, IU confirmed the practice of offering an incentive different than cash. In the IDU surveillance survey mentioned above Cellular phone cards (Telecards) have been offered, but the idea did not work well. The idea to offer gift cards (voucher for a food and/or cosmetic store or drug store such as Rossman, DM) was well accepted. IK added that they can organise some talks to "The Body Shop", which will be involved in another campaign of Papardes Zieds.

Last issue on WP5, which was open to be discussed, was the data entry after the administration phase. Here again SPI referred to the suggestion of NIHD, that they will prefer to enter the data of the filled in questionnaires themselves and will submit the data

set to SPI. After being clarified with the SPI data manager partners will be informed. This is an issue to come in autumn next year after conclusion of data entry.

### **Work package 6**

For the participation of Latvian partner in the assessment study part of WP6 TAN promised to inform the lead partner, Kristi Rüütel from NIHD, Tallinn about their readiness to fill in the questionnaire before the amendment date comes to its effect. PZ will be addressed with the necessary documents. For a more intensive exchange of experience between service providers from Latvia and Estonia from the field of SW and IDUs additional travels have been planned for non-staff members.

TAN informed that the next meeting under WP6 will be hosted by NIHD in Tallinn in May next year.

### **Work package 8**

The meeting in Riga took place just 2 weeks before the first exchange seminar on WP8 was planned to take place in Sofia. The Latvian partners had not been involved so far in the assessment phase by the Bulgarian partner HESED, lead of WP8. Here again their readiness to join in and to collect and compile information of the situation of HIV/STI in ethnic minorities and other vulnerable communities was appreciated.

At same time SPI team proposed to cover the expenses for a Latvian representative at the seminar as an expert, in order to take advantage of this meeting to get to know the other project partners and to gain immediate impressions of their work on WP8.

The proposal was welcomed and due to very rapid confirmation from a colleague of IU it was made possible that Alise Krumina attend the seminar in Sofia from October 18 to 20, 2010.

### **Work package 9**

This is one of the most advanced areas of cooperation so far. Two international meetings took place already, both in Vienna; one of them was satellite seminar to the IAC 2010. IS attended the first meeting and had involved Papardes Zieds during the assessment survey phase (RAR Questionnaire). The second meeting was attended by a Papardes Zieds volunteer and youth peer worker, who presented the experience of counselling parents as part of the sexual education of young people during a panel discussion.

Papardes Zieds is actively involved in the adaptation of the tool QUIET and IK will be contact person for that task to the Austrian partner from AHW, leader of WP9. Next meeting to come under WP9 is planned for December 2010 in Vienna.

### **TOP3: Decisions**

1. Papardes Zieds will prepare all necessary documents in two originals and will send them to SPI not later than October 15.

2. Papardes Zieds will prepare a draft of financial plan (Annex II) and clear proposal for co-financing to the project, not later than October 15.
3. SPI will review the documents and budget draft and return feedback in due course so final version is prepared by October 25.
4. SPI will be responsible for introduction of the changes related in to the project Annex I and Annex II for submission to EAHC.
5. LIC will transform their status of participation in the project and will become a Collaborating partner. Contact person will be Inga Upmace. SPI will introduce the change to inform EAHC of that development.
6. Letter of Invitation will be prepared by SPI for the participation of Alise Krumina in the Exchange Seminar on WP8 in Sofia later in October. According to agreement, SPI will prepay the plane ticket and hotel and will reimburse the subsistence allowance through bank transfer after the meeting.
7. Mrs Beata Milgrave was appointed as coordinator for BORDERNETwork and will be involved in the mailing list of the project and the Google mailing Group.
8. SPI will prepare a short announcement for the project website to welcome the Papardes Zieds partners in the network.

Finally the participants in the meeting expressed satisfaction with the clarified action and time plan of the project.