



# The Role of Government Social Contracting for HIV in Tajikistan

HP+ POLICY *Brief*

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## Introduction

In Tajikistan, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) support the implementation of national health priorities. They play an important role in testing new approaches, expanding coverage, providing services, and meeting health sector needs—a role that is particularly important for HIV prevention and care programs. NGO contributions to the health sector are often funded by donors, as many national governments face legal, regulatory, structural, personnel, financial, and political barriers to contracting with these organizations for provision of services. Social contracting is a regulatory and institutional mechanism that allows governments to use public funding to contract NGOs to carry out functions to support the healthcare system, including provision of services.

As funding for HIV programs from outside donors declines, social contracting as a mechanism for the government to fund services provided by NGOs becomes increasingly important. In Tajikistan, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MOHSP) has experience in government social contracting for the social services sector, which can provide a model for implementing a similar approach in the country's health sector. This brief, developed by the Health Policy Plus (HP+) project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), details the role that social contracting can play in supporting the sustainability of HIV services in Tajikistan.

## HIV Infection in Tajikistan

According to the MOHSP, 10,695 cases of HIV infection have been registered in the country since the appearance of the disease in 1991, among 6,593 men and 3,742 women (Republican AIDS Center, n.d.). In 2018, 1,422 new HIV cases were detected; an additional 694 cases were identified in the first six months of 2019.

## Definition of Social Contracting

"The process by which public resources are used to finance non-state structures (called civil society organizations) to provide health services that are the responsibility of the government to ensure the health of its citizens" (Duric et al., 2019).

Today, there are 7,812 people living with HIV in Tajikistan. According to epidemiological surveillance data from 2017, HIV prevalence among key populations is 12.1 percent among people injecting drugs, 2.9 percent among sex workers, and 2.3 percent among men who have sex with men (UNAIDS, n.d.). Key groups remain the most vulnerable to HIV infection; as such, continuous, focused HIV prevention programs are critical to stemming the epidemic.

## The Role of NGOs in Containing the Spread of HIV

Ensuring that interaction between nongovernmental and state actors is productive and cooperative is key to creating an effective epidemic response. To this end, NGOs have provided the following services to targeted populations in Tajikistan:

- Determining the needs and characteristics of the population affected by HIV
- Involving representatives of key populations in HIV prevention activities
- Gaining access to hard-to-reach populations
- Testing modern technologies and methods to prevent the spread of HIV
- Identifying additional resources, enabling more effective HIV prevention programs, and providing a continuum of services from testing and treatment to supporting adherence to treatment

Government coordination with NGOs ensures efficient use of resources, as NGOs can respond more

effectively and quickly to the needs of key populations and serve individuals who are in need of but not currently receiving public services.

## Introducing Social Contracting

Traditionally, the government of Tajikistan has approached governance objectives by creating state institutions backed by government funding. With the introduction of the concept of social contracting, the state has an opportunity to approach these objectives through the competitive purchase of social services from legal entities (commercial and non-profit organizations) that can provide services to key populations more efficiently and cost-effectively.

Favorable conditions exist for the implementation of social contracting in Tajikistan's health sector. The Government Social Contracting Act (2008) lays the legal and organizational framework for forming, financing, and implementing social contracting through projects and outlines priority areas. Within this context, HP+ supported government and NGO stakeholders to develop a *Roadmap for the Implementation of Sustainable Measures for Combating HIV through Government Funding for Programs Run by NGOs in Tajikistan* in July 2019, based on an analysis of existing legislation.

## Next Steps

The roadmap details the steps that need to be taken in order to support further implementation of social contracting mechanisms for HIV efforts in Tajikistan. By stakeholder group, these are:

- Government:
  - Finalize and approve the roadmap
  - Commit to implement the activities outlined in the roadmap, including revisions to current legislative and normative documents
  - Set aside funding to support social contracting of NGO services for key populations
- Donors
  - Support capacity development of government and NGOs to implement social contracting
  - Provide technical assistance for implementation of the roadmap

"NGOs play a very important role in HIV responses. In many countries, they are the only, or the leading, service providers for key populations...NGOs also provide substantial support to people living with HIV" (UNDP, 2019).

- NGOs
  - Advocate for funding for government social contracting
  - Cooperate with the MOHSP to implement the roadmap and ensure accountability

In the context of Tajikistan's concentrated HIV epidemic, particularly among people who inject drugs, social contracting with NGOs that serve the needs of and have connections with key populations can bridge the gap to identify people living with HIV and connect them to care and treatment programs. The groundwork for social contracting is in place; now it is up to stakeholders to work together to ensure this mechanism is used to support the fight against HIV in Tajikistan.

## References

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