



WESTERN-EASTERN EUROPEAN
PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE
ON HIV, VIRAL HEPATITIS AND TB

The Western-Eastern European Partnership Initiative on HIV, Viral Hepatitis and TB (WEEPI)

Manuel Battegay¹, Annemarie Stengaard², Cæcilie Bom-Kahama², Dorte Raben², Jürgen Rockstroh³, Jens Lundgren²

¹ University Hospital Basel, University of Basel, Switzerland

² CHIP, Rigshospitalet, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

³ University Hospital Bonn, Germany

History and development of WEEPI

- Oct 2018: Foundation established by Jens Lundgren and Manuel Battegay
- Nov 2019: First call for proposal launched at EACS conference in Basel
- Aug 2020: First grants awarded – first stage 1 projects launched
- Oct 2023: A total of 19 projects funded in nine different countries so far

Overall aim:

Improved **quality of care** for people with HIV, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis in the **eastern European region** through support of clinical or implementation **research** projects.

Governance and organisational set up

- **Executive Board:** Manuel Battegay (University Hospital Basel), Jens Lundgren (CHIP, Rigshospitalet, University of Copenhagen)
- **Advisory Board:** Jürgen Rockstroh (chair), Stela Bivol (WHO/Europe), Raminta Stuikyte (Kazatchkine office), Maka Gogia/Aisuluu Bolotbaeva (EATG), Jan Heyckendorf (ERS), Justyna Kowalska (observer), Manuel Battegay, Jens Lundgren
- **Strategic Development Group:** Dorthe Raben (chair), Cary James (WHA), Jürgen Rockstroh (University Hospital Bonn), 1-2 additional members (TBC), Manuel Battegay, Jens Lundgren
- **External review board:** Andrew Amato (former ECDC), Alvaro Borges (SSI), Ivana Bozicevic (WHO CC), Ole Kirk (Rigshospitalet), Daria Podlekareva (University Hospital Copenhagen), George Rutherford (UCSF), Nicole Seguy (former WHO), Anders Sönnernborg (Karolinska University Hospital), Virginie Supervie (former INSERM), Lara Tivoschi (University of Pisa)
- **Scientific + administrative secretariat:** Annemarie Stengaard, Cæcilie Bom-Kahama, Dorthe Raben (CHIP, Rigshopsitalet) + Stefanie Bersacola (University Hospital Basel)

WEEPI aim and scope

Improve quality of life of people living with HIV, viral hepatitis & TB through:

- **Reduction of barriers** to testing, prevention and treatment for HIV, viral hepatitis and TB, including stigmatization and focusing on key population groups
- **Improved quality of care**, including adoption of European guidance (EACS, WHO, ECDC) into national guidelines and standards and implementation of quality control instruments to improve standard of care
- Generating **evidence on new approaches** to improve testing, prevention and care services for HIV, viral hepatitis and TB (including linkage to care)
- **Building partnerships** with other health institutions at national and/or international level
- **Capacity building** at national level, including through advanced training, education and e-learning activities.

Phased project and grant application strategy

Funding 'rounds' with stage 1 and stage 2 projects:

- **Stage 1 projects:** max CHF 30,000 and 12 months. Basis for applying for a later stage 2 project but planned as stand-alone project.
- **Stage 2 projects:** Max CHF 300,000 and 3 years. Should build on outcomes, insights and lessons learnt from the stage 1 pilot project.

Plus one 'extraordinary call for proposals' for **emergency projects** supporting the provision of care for people affected by the war in Ukraine.

Funded projects: first funding round, stage 1 & 2



WESTERN-EASTERN EUROPEAN
PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE
ON HIV, VIRAL HEPATITIS AND TB

Type of project	Country/Applicant	Title	Duration
Stage 1.1 Aug 2020- Nov 2021	Ukraine/Institute of Public Health Policy	Simplified HCV integrated management model in methadone clinics in Ukraine	15 months
	Georgia/IDACIRC	Improving management of non-AIDS comorbidities among people living with HIV in Georgia	15 months
	Lithuania/Vilnius University	Run-up to programmatic management of latent tuberculosis infection in HIV-infected people in Lithuania	14 months
	Estonia/ ECOM	Immigrants in Estonia: a risk assessment to involve the key group into HIV and co-infections services	11 months
	Ukraine/ NGO "Infection Control in Ukraine"	Latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) prevalence in children at household tuberculosis (TB) contact in the city of Kyiv and Kyiv region (oblast)	14 months
	Georgia/ Tanadgoma	Piloting HIV self-testing strategies for partners of the key populations	15 months
Stage 1.2 Aug 2022- Aug 2025	Ukraine/Institute of Public Health Policy	Evaluation of integrated hepatitis C management in methadone clinics in Ukraine	3 years
	Georgia/IDACIRC	Improving management of non-AIDS comorbidities among people living with HIV in Georgia	3 years
	Lithuania/Vilnius University	Implementation of programmatic management of latent tuberculosis infection in HIV-infected people in Lithuania	3 Years

Funded projects: emergency projects and second funding round, stage 1



Type of project	Country/Applicant	Title	Duration
Emergency (Ukraine) Aug 2022- Aug 2023	Czech Republic/Spolenost Podane ruce	Facilitating access to testing and treatment for HIV and hepatitis for Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic	12 months
	Poland/ECEE network	Euroguidelines in Central and Eastern Europe Network Group (ECEE network)	12 months
	Poland/Foundation for Social Education	"Emergency" - support for people living with HIV from Ukraine in Poland	6 months
	Ukraine/Astar Medical Center	AWARE.ID: emergency support for the cascades of care of HIV and related infectious diseases to help internally displaced people in the Lviv region of Ukraine	18 months
Stage 2.1 April 2023- April 2024	Poland/ECEE network	Reviewing Screening Practices and Management of Latent Tuberculosis Infection in HIV patients from Central and Eastern Europe	12 months
	Latvia/Riga University	Introducing HIV self-testing in Latvia – pilot for key groups	12 months
	Czech Republic/Spolenost Podane ruce	DCRs as facilitators for testing, prevention and treatment for HCV for PWID in the Czech Republic	12 months
	Georgia/Health Research Union	Promotion of HBV vaccination among people who inject drugs in Georgia	12 months
	Azerbaijan/Towards TB free Future Public Union	Identify the barriers to HIV and TB testing among key population groups: to improve quality of HIV and TB services in Azerbaijan	12 months

Project examples

Improving management of non-AIDS comorbidities among people living with HIV in Georgia

Grantee: Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center

Project type: Stage 2 (Aug 2022 – Aug 2025)

Study objectives:

- Establish a cohort of PLHIV and assess prevalence and incidence of NACM
- Pilot a new integrated model of HIV/NACM care, seeking to remove barriers for patients and meet complex care needs
- Implement EACS recommendations on NACM prevention and management and assess the quality of service delivery

Evaluation of integrated hepatitis C management in methadone clinics in Ukraine

Grantee: Ukrainian Institute of Public Health Policy

Project type: Stage 2 (Aug 2022 – Aug 2025)

Study objectives:

- Scale up and evaluate effectiveness of a simplified integrated HCV management (SHIM) algorithm in improving HCV testing and treatment outcomes in OAT clinics in Ukraine through a cluster randomized three-arm trial design
- Strengthen SHIM model implementation by an evidence-based ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) intervention – a collaborative telehealth learning intervention to support clinicians in non-specialists settings to develop knowledge and self-efficacy about HCV care
- Examine the client, clinician and organizational factors that contribute to SHIM and ECHO adoption and improved clinical outcomes

Implementation of programmatic management of latent TB infection in people living with HIV in Lithuania

Grantee: Vilnius University, Lithuania

Project type: Stage 2 (March 2023 – March 2026)

Study aim:

- The overall aim is to develop evidence-informed national guidelines for programmatic LTBI management among PLHIV in Lithuania and to initiate their implementation at national level.
- Specific objectives include to:
 - Assess prevalence and associated risk factors for LTBI among PLHIV and HIV uninfected individuals in Lithuania and define the best pathways to enhance linkage to care and treatment
 - Describe and compare different diagnostic algorithms for active TB and different options for LTBI treatment among PLHIV

Emergency project: 'Five Times Ninety'

Grantee: Euroguidelines in Central and Eastern Europe (ECE) Network Group

Project type: Emergency project (Aug 2022 – Aug 2023)

Study objectives:

- Investigate patterns of migration among Ukrainian refugees living with HIV displaced to Poland and its influence on linkage to care and retention in care, including the proportion of patients returning back to HIV care in Ukraine
- Evaluate the practical implementation of the Standardized protocol for clinical management and medical data sharing for PLHIV among refugees from Ukraine developed by WHO, EACS, ECDC, CHIP and partners
- Assess the utility and acceptance of HIV testing and self-testing distributed through medical facilities to war refugees migrating from Ukraine to Poland

How to apply for a WEEPI grant

Call for proposals: Announced on the WEEPI website, via social media and other dissemination channels (newsletters, email lists, conferences etc.). There are currently no open calls.

Eligibility criteria: A combination of core and specific criteria for each call (see also: <https://weepi.org/call-for-proposals/eligibility-requirements>)

Application process: Standardized application form and templates for supporting documents submitted via online platform (link from WEEPI website when calls are open)

Review process: Scoring of applications by three external expert reviewers through online review form with 11 standardised questions

Advisory Board: Makes recommendations to the Executive Board on the selection of proposals based on results of the external review process and other pre-defined criteria

Read more: <https://weepi.org/call-for-proposals/selection-of-projects-and-evaluation-criteria>

Summary

Multiple WEEPI-funded projects have been successfully implemented or are in process in different countries.

The projects have sustainably improved prevention, testing, treatment and care, and reduced barriers for accessing services, for people living with HIV, viral hepatitis and TB in eastern Europe by:

- generating new knowledge and evidence on new approaches to improve services
- facilitating adoption of international recommendations into national guidelines, clinical practice and implementation models
- building research capacity at national and local levels and facilitating new partnerships

Brief project summaries can be found on the website: <https://weepi.org/projects>

Acknowledgements

The Western-Eastern European Partnership Initiative on HIV, Viral Hepatitis and TB (WEEPI) Foundation gratefully acknowledges the valuable support received from:

Expert contributions from external review board members

Advisory Board and Strategic Development Group members

All current and former WEEPI grantees

Generous funding made available by the foundations' donors



WESTERN-EASTERN EUROPEAN
PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE
ON HIV, VIRAL HEPATITIS AND TB

WE ARE NOT HERE FOR THE INFECTION, BUT FOR PEOPLE



WESTERN-EASTERN EUROPEAN
PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE
ON HIV, VIRAL HEPATITIS AND TB

WEEPI is a foundation with the overall goal to improve the quality of care for people with HIV, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis in the Eastern European Region through support of clinical or implementation research projects.

For more information
visit our website:

weepi.org

