Enhancing standardised HIV/STI/VH testing data collection for Community-Based Testing Services: The COBATEST Network

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COBATEST NETWORK

Introduction

Community-Based Voluntary Counselling and Testing (CBVCT) services, recognized as a valuable model, are instrumental in enhancing HIV/STI/VH testing accessibility, especially for key populations. Monitoring and evaluation are essential for assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of testing programs, facilitating continuous improvement and ensuring that strategic information guides the design and implementation of these initiatives.

Description

The COBATEST network, established between 2010 and 2013 under the HIV-COBATEST project of the EU Public Health Programme, is a European and Central Asian network of CBVCT services, initially focused on standardizing the monitoring of CBVCT activities to promote HIV testing and early diagnosis among vulnerable populations, developing standardized tools, procedures, and guidelines for the consistent collection and analysis of HIV testing data. Over time, the network has expanded to include currently 136 organizations from across Europe and Central Asia (Figure 1). Through CORE and BOOST projects, it has adapted its tools to meet diverse community needs, incorporating questions and modules for viral hepatitis, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), drug use, and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). The free, online tool facilitates data collection by community services, which is then analyzed annually by the Centre for Epidemiological Studies of Sexually Transmitted Disease and AIDS in Catalonia (CEEISCAT), contributing to national and European data analyses and reports. See some of the strengths of the COBATEST Network in Figure 2.

Figure 1. Map of the countries with members of the COBATEST Network (currently 136 CBVCTs in 29 European and 2 Central Asian countries)

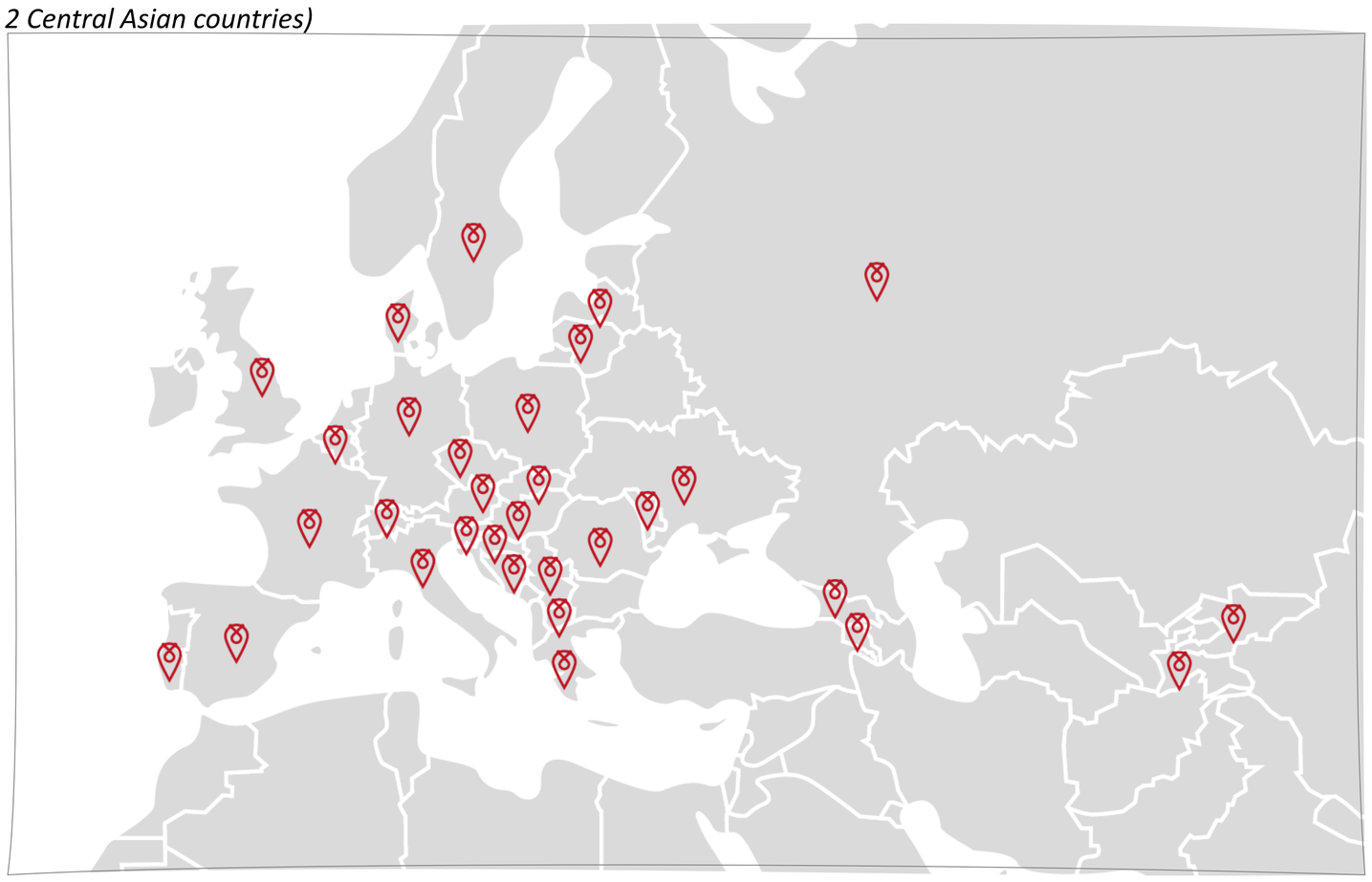

Figure 2. Some of the strengths of the COBATEST network

Strengths of the COBATEST Network

- Standardised data collection and data-sharing tools, including a free online data entry tool.
- Annual Monitoring and Evaluation report using standardised EU-wide indicators.
- Sharing of community-based testing experiences with organisations across Europe and Central Asia.
- Establishing new partnerships.
- Raising awareness of CBVCT organisations' concerns at a European level.
- Contribution to the evidence base for CBVCT programming in Europe.

Lessons learned

- ✓ Standardized data collection from CBVCT services is feasible and reliable across various European countries.
- ✓ The collected data supports quality service planning and management, providing evidence for the expansion of CBVCT services within the EU/EEA.
- ✓ The standardization of information has strengthened the case for integrating community-based models into HIV strategic investments.

Recommendations

To maximize the value of standardized data collection, it is crucial **to increase the representativeness of the data across different countries and key populations**. This will enhance the robustness of the data and support the broader integration of CBVCT services into national and international HIV response strategies.

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