To:

The Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia (pretsedatel@sobranie.mk; g.misovski@sobranie.mk; sekretar@sobranie.mk)

The President of the Republic of North Macedonia (contact@president.mk; mile.boshnjakovski@presidentoffice.mk; biljana.radeva@presidentoffice.mk)

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (cabinet@primeminister.gov.mk; info@vlada.gov.mk)

Subject: National response to HIV in North Macedonia threatened by major budget cuts

Respected Mr. President of the Republic of North Macedonia,

Respected Members of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia

Respected Members of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

We are sending this letter of support for the HIV Platform consisting of 14 civil society and community based organizations working in the field of HIV prevention and support among key affected populations throughout 12 cities in North Macedonia.

We have received the extremely worrisome news from our partners and collaborators that after two decades the HIV prevention programs in North Macedonia are facing possible closure, as a result of 40% reduction of the budget for HIV prevention that is disbursed to civil society organizations for service delivery.

Many of these essential public health programs target key affected populations, including people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, sex workers, as well as the people living with HIV and they have been the core of North Macedonia’s response to the epidemic for almost 20 years. It is irresponsible to throw away the entire infrastructure and capacities that were developed between 2005 and 2017 thanks to the financial support of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which invested 25.7 million USD for HIV alone in the country.
According to our partners from the Platform for Sustainability of HIV Prevention and Support Services, the reduction of the budgets for HIV programs targeting key affected populations has been done in absence of any evidence base or expert consultation, which can also be inferred by the completely arbitrary and disproportionate cuts across different programs.

Thanks to the early introduction of harm reduction and other programming, including outreach HIV testing, North Macedonia has been able to avert the HIV epidemic among key populations.

In addition to the public health benefits of the HIV programs that are now threatened with closure, we would also like to emphasize their human rights aspects, considering that for many of the 10,000 direct beneficiaries, these programs provide the only access to basic healthcare.

We urge you to take all necessary actions within your power (1) to make Ministry of Health change its decision for cutting the 2022 annual budget for HIV prevention services, (2) to accelerate the adoption of proposed changes in the Law on health protection which will ensure sustainability and standardization of HIV prevention services, and (3) with interventional funding, to have the expenses of the civil organizations for the first three months in 2022 covered, considering that those expenses were incurred as a result of the committed maintenance of the programs by the organization, while funding was being delayed by the Ministry of Health. With this, you as key decision makers will show that North Macedonia is still on the track to achieve the UN global targets towards ending the HIV epidemic.

Your sincerely,

Sabrina Sánchez
Coordinator
ESWA, European Sex Workers’ Rights Alliance