



Capacity Building in HIV/Syphilis Prevalence Estimation
using Non-invasive Methods
among MSM in Southern and Eastern Europe

D13

EVALUATION REPORT

Process evaluation, according to process indicators, was included in the “WP3 Evaluation” section of the Final Technical Report.

This report refers to the evaluation of the outcome and the impact of the SIALON project, according to general and specific objectives.

1. Validity of information collected

As specified in the general objective of SIALON: *In some Eastern and Southern European countries information on HIV/STI prevalence is fragmented and varies from country to country, so the overall objective is to obtain reliable and valid information on HIV and Syphilis prevalence, risk behaviour, and cultural factors among MSM, using a non-invasive outreach testing method in countries of Southern and Eastern Europe.*

Revision of protocols by experts

One guarantee of the quality of the study was the fact that the survey protocol was reviewed by international experts (Jonathan Elford¹, Yuri Amirkhanian² and Graham Dunn³). On the basis of their comments, the sampling methodology was modified and protocols amended with respect to the initial version.

Prevalence estimation and quality of serobehavioural data

The survey results gave an estimation of HIV prevalence in the participating countries, bringing relevant data on serological status and behavioural patterns. In terms of prevalence estimation, the sampling methodology adopted seems to give a better estimation than the methodologies previously used in the participating countries where serological surveys on MSM have

¹ City University of London

² Faculty of Sociology, St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia and Center for AIDS Intervention Research (CAIR), Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine, Medical College of Wisconsin

³ Professor of Biomedical Statistics at the University of Manchester, UK

been carried out in the past, using mainly convenience sampling methods. Actually, the TLS sampling method allows a sample with known properties to be constructed, making statistical inference to the larger population of venue visitors and theorising about the introduction of biases that may limit the generalization of results to the target population possible. The experience of the SIALON project also showed that sampling methods have to be adapted to the situation of the gay scene in each country and that TLS is not the most appropriate method in contexts where the gay scene is not well developed and where there are few venues (e.g. Romania, Slovak Republic). This experience was taken into account in the preparation of the SIALON2 project proposal (see below).

Use of standard indicators

Another main outcome in terms of validity of data collected is the use of core indicators (UNGASS and ECDC) as they provide a key measure for basic monitoring of HIV. Data from multiple countries following UNGASS procedures can supply critical information and comparative insights at the regional and the global level. The UNGASS indicators can provide a snapshot as well as trend analysis of the epidemiology of HIV over time, and can easily be adapted to the sets of indicators recommended by ECDC. Annual reporting on UNGASS indicators is very bad in some parts of Europe, precisely where they are most needed. The UNGASS indicators were successfully used by the SIALON project as a tool for measuring the data the SIALON sampling methodology gathered. Indicators related to HIV testing, prevention programmes, condom use, and understanding of how to protect against HIV infection, show that many MSM are unaware of their HIV status and fail to adopt behaviour that could protect them from infection. These results have serious implications for the MSM community and for the community at large.

Making use of SIALON data

SIALON has developed a client-friendly method of gathering biological and social data in MSM communities that can be used by a wide audience range. Moreover, qualitative data on risky and health-seeking behaviour were gathered through in-depth interviews with MSM in all countries. Policy and decision makers can make use of the data to design policies and strategies for building comprehensive approaches to addressing immediate and long-term prevention treatment and care services for MSM. Healthcare services can use

the SIALON method to build local and regional models of the healthcare needs of MSM throughout the health system. Gay organisations and other civil society networks can use SIALON data to accurately target health promotion and prevention campaigns together with the gay community, that are relevant at a very local level. The role stigmatisation and marginalisation plays in reducing the access of MSM to healthcare services should be studied and appropriate action designed to build solidarity amongst the MSM community and the wider community. Finally, SIALON can be used at all levels in promoting both the use and reporting of UNGASS indicators on a regular basis. This will have considerable impact on developing sustainable approaches to supporting MSM and in building the capacity to reduce HIV/AIDS within their community.

2. Creation of a network

The general objective specifies that the project also *aims to create a network of institutions working with the ECDC to implement new tools for STI surveillance and with the DGSANCO, in support of comprehensive, integrated HIV/STI prevention strategies.*

ECDC

From the beginning of the project, SIALON worked with ECDC. Partners of SIALON participated actively in workshops organized by ECDC for the construction of European indicators for HIV surveillance. ECDC also showed interest in SIALON results and participated in the final conference in Brussels. The project leader was also invited to present the SIALON results at the ECDC Annual meeting: STI and HIV surveillance in EU/EEA to be held in Sept 2010 in Berlin.

Public Health and International Institutions

A large number of Public Health institutions and gay NGOs and International Organisations were contacted during the SIALON project through participation in international conferences etc ... (see the dissemination section of the technical annex), and a widespread network was created.

A website on SIALON network is under construction (www.sialon.eu).

As stated in the technical report, contacts were made with UNAIDS and WHO, who invited the SIALON team to take part in a peer review process regarding the MSM manuscript that this Division plans to publish, to collaborate in the review process of the draft Monitoring and Evaluation Operational guidelines for HIV prevention and to be a resource for consultation within the context of the UNGASS reporting Round 2010.

Gay community and LGBT organizations

The gay community has been empowered through an improved networking of LGBT organizations, both in the EU and in non-EU European Countries. Thanks to SIALON linkage, autonomous contacts were made between Arcigay (Italy) and STOP SIDA (Spain) in order to explore further possible ways of collaborating and exchanging best practices. ILGA, ILGA-Europe and the European Parliament Intergroup on LGBT rights have been activated and involved in the final steps of the projects, when the Policy Brief has been shared with all national and international NGOs and stakeholders. ILGA and ILGA-Europe have also had an active role in the SIALON final conference in Brussels. Further contacts have been established with LGBT NGOs in the neighbouring Countries, such as Moldova. Thanks to TLS, the SIALON methodology combining research and prevention activity has been received with great interest in Italy, where Arcigay is also currently exploring the possibility of disseminating the methodology throughout the country with independent and private financial resources. Data have been used at a local level by NGOs for new prevention programmes targeting MSM in their communities.

Strengthening of Network and common actions

Most of the SIALON partners and the above-mentioned institutions are now participating in a new initiative: The SIALON 2 project (see below). It includes the enlargement of the scope of the previous SIALON project action with the inclusion of other eligible E.U. countries and the involvement of neighbouring countries. Thanks to the participation of UNAIDS and WHO it will contribute to building capacity for development and implementation of effective public health strategies and policies in areas of high need.

3. New proposals and projects as outcomes of SIALON

SIALON 2 project

The experience gained from SIALON has led to the presentation of the new SIALON2 project (CAPACITY BUILDING IN COMBINING TARGETED PREVENTION WITH MEANINGFUL HIV SURVEILLANCE AMONG MSM – SIALON II), accepted for funding by the European Commission. The overall objective of this project is to carry out and promote combined and targeted prevention complemented by meaningful surveillance of MSM. In other words, the aim is to develop capacity building and know-how through both training and on-site coaching under the active supervision and in collaboration with UNAIDS and WHO on:

- a) assessment of prevention needs and prevention actions;
- b) innovative surveillance methodologies for hard to reach populations such as MSM (time location sampling, respondent driven sampling, HIV and STI testing).

The project will be carried out in the following countries: Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Slovak Republic, Spain, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Slovenia, Romania. Thanks to the participation of UNAIDS and WHO, it should also be implemented in neighbouring countries (Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Moldova), using the same methodologies (Protocols, UNGASS/ECDC indicators, epidemiological algorithms) and prevention strategies. The project's strategic relevance lies in the fact that it addresses the need for an effective response in priority regions such as the most affected EU Member States, the Russian Federation and the most affected neighbouring countries. A proposal is being prepared for submission in September 2010 for co-funding under the call for proposal of Europaid "Investing in People" Capacity Building for non-state actors in relation to HIV-AIDS prevention, treatment and care for the ENPI EAST partner countries.

National Survey in Italy

In Italy, meetings have been organised by the main SIALON partner with the Italian Ministry of Health, the ISS (Istituto Superiore della Sanità) and the National Institute for infectious diseases (Istituto Nazionale per le Malattie Infettive Lazzaro Spallanzani – Rome). A project called "A multi centre serological and behavioral survey on HIV infection and syphilis among men who have sex with men using non invasive methods and based on time and location sampling" has been presented by the Spallanzani Institute and accepted for

funding by the Italian Ministry of Health. This project proposal aims to achieve the following specific objectives: to obtain valid, reliable and recent epidemiological data on HIV, Syphilis, HBV and HCV spread in 5 Italian cities among MSM; to use non-invasive testing methods associated with TLS method; to adopt the UNGASS indicators; to adopt the SGSS and pilot this UNAIDS system; to estimate Ab-anti-HIV, Syphilis, HBV and HCV seroprevalence; to study sexual behaviour risk patterns and the determinants of VCT access in the MSM population through a survey modeling the relationship between risk behaviour, socio-ecological factors and serology; to develop and disseminate new epidemiological methods based on saliva (oral fluid) samples for in-site epidemiological surveillance by training lab technicians, to perform oral fluid test for HIV, Syphilis, HBV and HCV for epidemiology; to make recommendations for Italian STI prevention policies and strategies targeting MSM on effective strategies and policy options for STI prevention among MSM at national level. The following cities will be involved in data collection: Milan, Bologna, Rome, Naples, Catania.

4. Other impacts of SIALON

Use of tools and protocols in other countries

UNAIDS has asked to use the tools of the project posted on the website, mainly the study protocol as an example, in the communication with UNAIDS, Monitoring & Evaluation country and regional Advisers, contributing to capacity building.

SIALON project materials were used as an example in some MSM related activities by UNAIDS and partners in the Middle East and the North Africa Region, MENA.

The SIALON questionnaire was used to prepare the questionnaire of the EMIS survey, another EU funded project (Internet survey among MSM in Europe).

During the activities of the new SIALON 2 project, a group of consultants involving representatives of laboratories who participated in the SIALON project (Verona, Barcelona, Bratislava) will be created to organise training for oral fluid testing of the new participating laboratories. This will contribute to the objective: "To develop and disseminate new epidemiological methods based on saliva (oral fluid) samples for in-site epidemiological surveillance by training lab technicians, to perform oral fluid test for syphilis and HIV for epidemiology

Consultancy and training

The project leader of the main partner was invited by the UNAIDS, Moscow Office, to provide assistance in the Second Generation Surveillance System and Bio Behavioural survey development in Moldova (15 – 17 June 2010, Chisinau). The main topic was to put research data into policy and the main tool will be the policy brief developed in the framework of the project.

After the SIALON experience, the partner from Barcelona (CEEISCAT) decided to adopt the SIALON methodology for further sero-behavioural surveys among MSM.

Disseminating recommendations

The policy brief, containing the main study results and policy recommendations was widely disseminated during the final conference in Brussels. The document was also circulated for consultation within a wider network of national, European and global stakeholders. During the AIDS 2010 international conference in Vienna, at least 500 copies of this document, along with the Final Quantitative Report, were distributed to conference participants both through the European Commission in the Exhibition Area and through Arcigay in the Global Village of NGOs.