

Learn about it at work: an HIV poster campaign in Russia

The proposed new standard on HIV/AIDS that is under discussion at the International Labour Conference is not only the first international human rights instrument to focus explicitly on HIV/AIDS. It also contains provisions on prevention programmes and anti-discrimination measures at national and workplace levels aimed at strengthening the contribution of the world of work to HIV prevention, treatment care and support. This story demonstrates how a participatory approach and involvement of social partners allowed to create an effective HIV poster campaign in Russia.

06/16/2010

hiv_poster

MOSCOW, Russian Federation (ILO News) – Even though the HIV prevalence in Russia is relatively low, the growth rate of identifiable HIV cases is now one of the world's fastest. One of the challenges for the country is to expand efforts from medical and public health interventions to the social and labour sphere thus strengthening HIV prevention, awareness and education.

HIV/AIDS Workplace Education Programme, funded by the U.S. Department of Labour and implemented by the ILO, was designed to educate workers at pilot enterprises in the Murmansk and the Moscow regions of Russia on methods of HIV/AIDS prevention, to reduce risky behaviours that lead to the spread of HIV/AIDS infection, and prevent discrimination against workers living with HIV.

“Workplaces are an ideal place to educate workers on safe behaviours and HIV/AIDS prevention, because staff are homogeneous in their socio-cultural and demographic characteristics, while enterprises provide a well-structured environment and material, legal and normative base for constructive social dialogue”, says Irina Sinelina, project coordinator.

During the baseline survey organized to determine the real level of HIV awareness among workers, the ILO experts were surprised to find out how little the target groups knew about HIV/AIDS, on the one hand, and how reluctant they were to talk about it, on the other hand.

“Each group had their own ‘reason’ for this, says Vladlena Diachkova, trainer. A group of civil servants, for instance, thought that HIV/AIDS had nothing to do with them; factory workers were shy to talk about it in public, while truck drivers, our most outspoken audience, simply did not take the HIV risk seriously.”

It took the trainers and peer educators time and effort to create an atmosphere of trust and open discussion in the focus-groups. This is how a female employee put it: “It is considered inappropriate to talk openly about things like condoms and how to use them. I used to be ashamed to discuss these issues even with my children, let alone to bring up the subject at a meeting – everyone seemed to be embarrassed and reluctant to talk. We should thank the trainers for finding the right words to approach the subject. I know now how to discuss this subject with my son. I want to warn him, to help him – there are so many dangers around.”

An innovative feature of the ILO/USDOL programme was that the social partners and workers at the pilot enterprises, together with the ILO experts, determined the content of all information materials. That was how a series of booklets, posters, and brochures under the Learn about it at work slogan was prepared.

“Why posters? The idea came from the truck drivers”, Vladlena Diachkova recalls. “A poster is something we in Russia are used to have in our workplace, they explained, it is always there, on the wall, and it is not a booklet that some may feel shy to take in public.”

The most eye-catching one is the poster “Check the tires” designed for the workers of the transport sector, which focuses on the importance of condom use as a measure of HIV/AIDS prevention. The poster with the eyesight test saying “Do YOU see a problem?” carries the message that HIV is everybody's business and all should be concerned about it. A series of five posters promoting non-discrimination of workers living with HIV/AIDS depict people in a number of typical settings and situations (at work, at home, in line at a ticket counter, etc.) with the common slogan “Do not cross us out of life”.

Nikolai Khlopkov, from the Idency company that designed the posters, has changed his opinion about how the work should be organized: “Frankly speaking at first we could not understand why the posters were to be discussed with so many partners. We are in the business long enough and we thought we knew

better how to present the HIV problem. But now I have to admit: such a participatory approach gave excellent results, allowed us to reach out to the target groups, and the posters came out just great.”

The ILO/USDOL Workplace Education Programme has been completed, but its methodology, publications and posters are available on a CD disk, and any enterprise can use these materials to educate its employees in HIV prevention.

The posters now live a life of their own. In March 2008 they won the first prize at the Regional Authorities' Contest of Advertising Materials in Novosibirsk. The series was awarded the first prize in the nomination “Non-profit and Social Advertising” and funds were provided by AIDS East-West Foundation (AFEW) to issue an additional 20,000 posters, which were then distributed in ten regions reaching over 100,000 workers and family members, as well as the general public in Central Russia and Siberia.

Recently the ILO posters were selected for a mobile exhibition called HIV/AIDS. History in Posters that consists of 20 posters from Germany, Belgium, UK, USA, Russia and Moldova created in different years since the beginning of the HIV epidemic. Each poster reveals different aspects of HIV infection – prevention, awareness and tolerance. Now the exhibition is in the city of Oryol. During 2010 it will be placed in 11 cities of Russia at major universities, youth clubs, exhibition halls, museums and galleries. Geography of the exhibition covers the Far East, Volga region, Siberia, south and central cities of Russia.

“Maybe that is the most important result of our work: the communication materials developed under our project are still in demand and they help other enterprises to organize targeted, cost-effective and sustainable HIV prevention programmes”, says Irina Sinelina.