Reviewer's report

Title: "Virus Carriers" and HIV testing: Navigating Ukraine's HIV policies and programming for female sex workers

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Reviewer: Tetiana Kiriazova

Reviewer's report:

This very interesting manuscript of A.Tokar and colleagues describes how HIV testing policies were formed and implemented in the post-Soviet Ukraine. The desk review is comprehensive and of a great value. However, I have a feeling that mentioning of FSWs' access to HTC services is somewhat artificially brought up and is much weaker than the main body of the paper. I would suggest to talk about key affected populations, including FSWs, if the authors want to pay a specific attention to this group. However, there are no specific HTC services for FSWs - and they are not supposed to exist, as "separation of key affected populations from the rest of the health system" is not considered a positive feature of the vertical health system.

I completely agree that discriminatory and mandatory approaches to HIV testing have shifted towards voluntary testing, self-testing and assisted HIV testing, yet stigma remained a persistent barrier to access testing - not only among FSWs, but among all key populations. "Fragmentation of services available to female sex workers" - as here the authors do not talk about specific potential needs of female sex workers but again, about HTC services, I do not see a reason to talk specifically about FSWs - there is the same situation with PWID or MSM. And there are whole chapters in the manuscript where FSWs have not been mentioned even once.

I would focus this paper on the evolution of the HTC system in Ukraine, including services (or access to services) for the key populations (including FSWs), and on the factors that might affect continuity and sustainability of HIV testing services in Ukraine, independently of the FSW group. (By the way, currently, due to the robust network of NGOs, especially in the cities, such populations have much better access to free HTC services than other population of Ukraine).

A couple of minor suggestions:

Line 79 - to add "estimated 80,100 FSWs in Ukraine";

Lines 124- 125 - "We collected National Programmes of HIV/AIDS in Ukraine, which have the status of a national law; since1992, seven policies were issued". However, only starting with the Program 2009-2013 these HIV/AIDS programs gained status of a national law; before that it was a decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.
Thank you, and good luck with your submission.

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