

Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Overview

- The number of people living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia continued to rise in 2006. An estimated 270 000 people were newly infected with the virus, bringing to 1.7 million the number of people living with HIV in 2006—a twenty-fold increase in less than a decade.
- Although the rate of new HIV infections appears stable after the steep increases observed in 2001, an increase in the number of new HIV cases was again reported in 2005, compared to the two previous years.
- Almost one third of newly-diagnosed HIV infections in this region are in people aged 15-24 years. The majority of young people living with HIV live in two countries: the **Russian Federation** and **Ukraine** which, together, account for approximately 90% of all people living with HIV in this region.
- Progress in expanding access to antiretroviral therapy has been slow. As of mid-2006, fewer than 24,000 people were receiving antiretroviral treatment—only 13% of the estimated 190,000 people in need of treatment.
- People who use non-sterile injecting drug equipment remain especially poorly-served by efforts to roll-out antiretroviral therapy. Although they represent more than two thirds of HIV cases in the region, they comprise only about one quarter of people receiving antiretroviral therapy.
- In Eastern Europe overall, using non-sterile injecting drug equipment remains the predominant mode of HIV transmission.
- In the context of such inadequate treatment and care coverage, the AIDS death toll in Eastern Europe and Central Asia grew from 48 000 in 2004 to 84 000 in 2006.

Country developments

- The HIV epidemic in the Russian Federation continues to grow. A little more than 35 500 new HIV cases were reported in 2005, bringing to nearly 350 000 the total number of infections documented since the epidemic began. However, the official count reflects only those people who have been in direct contact with Russia's HIV reporting system. The actual number of people estimated to be living with HIV is much higher; around 940 000 at the end of 2005.
- Some 80% of people living with HIV in Russia are among young people between 15-30 years-old. The proportion of new HIV infections due to unprotected sex has grown and at over 40%, young women constitute a larger proportion than ever before of newly reported HIV cases.
- **Ukraine's** HIV epidemic continues to grow. Annual HIV diagnoses have more than doubled since 2000, reaching 13 786 in 2005 and bringing to over 97 000 the total

number of officially-recorded HIV infections. Since that tally only includes infections among people who have been tested at government facilities, the actual number of people living with HIV in **Ukraine** is considerably higher—an estimated 377 000 at the end of 2005. National adult HIV prevalence was estimated at 1.5% in 2005.

- HIV prevalence in **Ukraine** has consistently exceeded 5% among injecting drug users, sex workers, and men who have sex with men, but remains less than 1% among pregnant women in urban areas.
- **Ukraine** presents a vivid example of how swiftly an HIV epidemic can move beyond people at higher risk of exposure into the general population. The proportion of people infected with HIV through heterosexual transmission in **Ukraine** increased from 14% of new cases during 1999-2003 to over 35% of new cases in the first six months of 2006.
- Although much smaller in scale, some of the epidemics elsewhere in the region are also growing. Since 2001, the rates of newly-reported HIV infections have more than doubled in **Georgia** (from 20 per million to 54 per million in 2005) and **Republic of Moldova** (from 55 per million to 127 per million in 2005), and almost quadrupled in **Uzbekistan** (from 22 per million to 83 per million in 2005).
- The biggest epidemic in Central Asia is in **Uzbekistan**, which straddles major drug-trafficking routes and where the number of reported HIV cases has more than doubled since 2001. An estimated 31 000 people in **Uzbekistan** were living with HIV in 2005.
- Much smaller epidemics are underway in **Kyrgyzstan** and **Tajikistan**. There, most new HIV cases involve people who inject drugs. In **Tajikistan**, the number of officially reported HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs has grown four-fold—from 31 in 2001 to 142 in 2005. The epidemic in **Kyrgyzstan** appears to be relative stable, with 130-170 new HIV cases having been reported annually since 2001. Very few HIV cases have been reported in **Turkmenistan**, and little is known about the patterns or trends of HIV transmission there.
- More than twice as many new HIV cases were reported in the **Republic of Moldova**—533 in 2005, up from 209 in 2002. About half of the new infections are attributable to unprotected sexual transmission.
- In **Georgia**, a rising trend in new HIV cases has also been observed; the 242 infections recorded in 2005 were more than double the number reported in 2002.

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