

## North America, Western and Central Europe

### Overview

- In these regions, the total number of people living with HIV continues to increase, in great part due to the life-prolonging effects of antiretroviral therapy, a relatively steady number of new HIV infections each year in North America and an increase in the number of new HIV diagnoses in Western Europe since 2002.
- Approximately 2.1 million people were living with HIV in North America, Western and Central Europe in 2006, including 65 000 people who newly acquired the virus.
- In the context of widespread access to effective antiretroviral treatment, comparatively few people died of AIDS-related illnesses in these regions (an estimated 30 000 in 2006).

### Country developments

- Worldwide, only seven countries are estimated to have more people living with HIV than the **United States of America**, where 1.2 million were living with the virus in 2005.
- In 2001-2004, 50% of HIV diagnoses were among African-Americans and 20% among Hispanics (who constitute only 12% and 14% of the **US** population respectively).
- Men still account for the majority of HIV diagnoses in the **US**—about 73% in 2004. Almost two thirds of HIV infections diagnosed in men in 2004 were attributable to unsafe sex between men, and several studies have reported evidence of an increase in unsafe sexual behaviour in this group.
- Provision of antiretroviral therapy in the **US** has resulted in an 80% decline in AIDS related death rates between 1990 and 2003. At least 3 million years of life have been saved as a direct result of effective treatment and care for people living with HIV in the **US**.
- At the end of 2005, there were an estimated 58 000 people living with HIV in **Canada**, which represents an increase of 16% over the 2002 estimate of 50 000.
- Some 740 000 people were living with HIV in **Western and Central Europe** in 2006.
- In **Western Europe**, just over one third (35%) of HIV infections diagnosed in 2005 occurred during sex between men, while more than half (56%) were acquired during heterosexual intercourse.
- About three quarters of heterosexually-acquired HIV infections in **Western Europe** were among immigrants and migrants, reinforcing the need to adapt prevention, treatment and care services so that they reach these populations.
- The largest increase in annual new HIV diagnoses has been in the **UK** where diagnoses have doubled since 2000, exceeding 7200 in 2004 and reaching 7700 in 2005.

- Around one third of people living with HIV in the **UK** do not know they are infected and knowledge of HIV appears to be deteriorating. In a 2005 survey, only 70% of respondents in London knew that HIV can be transmitted through unprotected sex.
- Studies among men who have sex with men show HIV prevalence of between 10%-20% in **Western Europe** and several studies have reported increases in the proportion of men who have sex with men who report having recently engaged in higher-risk sexual behaviour.
- Compared to 2001, the number of HIV diagnoses among men who have sex with men was three quarters higher in the **Netherlands** (75%), more than two thirds higher in **Portugal** (68%) and **Switzerland** (71%), and 40% higher in **Belgium** in 2005.
- The effectiveness of focused harm reduction programmes in reducing HIV infections among people who inject drugs is evident in several countries. In **Portugal**, HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs were almost one third lower in 2005 than in 2001; in **Spain** HIV prevalence among injecting drug users declined by half in Barcelona (44% to 21% between 1995 and 2001-2003); and in the **Netherlands** the number of new HIV diagnoses dropped from 174 in 2002 to 29 in 2005.
- The epidemics in **Central Europe** remain small in comparison with the rest of Europe and only four countries reported more than 100 new HIV diagnoses in 2005.

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