

PRESS RELEASE

Eastern European countries show increasing new HIV infections while some harm reduction programmes are decreasing

UNAIDS concerned that a number of countries in this region are reporting reductions in critical investments in the AIDS response.

VIENNA, 16 July 2010— Eastern Europe and Central Asia is the only region where HIV incidence clearly remains on the rise. Early indications are that the number of newly diagnosed HIV cases in 2009 has increased since 2008. Russian Federation has reported an 8% increase in reported cases, Georgia a 10% increase and Belarus a 22% increase.

Injecting drug use remains the primary route of transmission in the region. Use of contaminated equipment during injecting drug use was the source of 57% of newly diagnosed cases in eastern Europe in 2007. An estimated 3.7 million people in the region currently inject drugs, of which one in four are believed to be HIV positive.

“It should concern all of us that some countries are closing down HIV prevention services for injecting drug users when they should be scaling up,” said Mr Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “Epidemics driven by injecting drug use can grow rapidly when HIV prevention services are not available.”

In the latest round of country progress reports, coverage of HIV prevention programmes for injecting drug use remains low. In the Russian Federation, coverage was 23.8% in 2007, but only 13.6% in 2009 and Georgia went from 17% down to 11.4% in the same time period.

As most injecting drug users are sexually active—often with non-injecting partners—the existence of a major injection-driven epidemic has also fuelled a growth in heterosexual transmission of HIV in the region. Ukraine has the highest level of reported HIV cases in the region. The number of new infections in the country has gone up from 18,963 in 2008 to 19,840 in 2009, and heterosexual transmission has eclipsed injection driven transmission.

The news comes as the global AIDS community gathers in Vienna for the XVIII International AIDS conference.

“Eastern Europe can not lag behind in the prevention revolution,” added Mr Sidibé. “Evidence shows unequivocally, harm reduction programmes save lives and are a smart investment.”

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[UNAIDS' vision: Zero discrimination. Zero new HIV infections. Zero AIDS-related deaths.](#)

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UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org.