Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Latest epidemiological trends

- The estimated number of adults and children living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia rose to 1.5 million [1.4 million–1.7 million] in 2008, a 66% increase from 900 000 [800 000-1.1 million] in 2001.

- HIV prevalence in the region is on the rise, with severe and growing epidemics in the Ukraine and the Russian Federation. With an adult HIV prevalence of 1.6% [1.1-2.0%] in 2007, Ukraine has the highest prevalence in all of Europe.

- Three countries in the region (Estonia, Russian Federation and Ukraine) have HIV prevalence that exceeds 1%.

- A number of countries have expanded access to antiretroviral therapy, although treatment coverage remains quite low. By December 2008, 22% of adults in need of treatment were receiving it—less than the global average for low- and middle-income countries (42%).

- Evidence suggests that injecting drug users, the population most at risk of HIV infection in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, are often the least likely to receive antiretroviral therapy.

- High HIV prevalence among injecting drug users has been reported in Ukraine (38.5–50.3%) and the Russian Federation (37%).

- Although HIV prevention coverage for injecting drug users remains low in the region, scattered progress has been reported in expanding harm reduction services. In Estonia, the number of sterile syringes distributed through harm reduction programmes per injecting drug users doubled, reaching 112.

Key regional dynamics

- Injecting drug use remains the primary mode of HIV transmission in the region. With increasing transmission among the sexual partners of drug users, many countries in the region are experiencing a transition from an epidemic concentrated among injecting drug users to one that is increasingly characterized by significant sexual transmission.

- Use of contaminated drug injecting equipment was the source of 57% of newly diagnosed HIV infections in Eastern Europe in 2007. An estimated 3.7 million people currently inject drugs in the region, and roughly one in four are believed to be HIV-infected.

- In Eastern Europe, heterosexual transmission was the source of 42% of newly diagnosed HIV infections in 2007.

- The common overlap between sex work and injecting drug use further facilitates the spread of HIV in the region. In the Russian Federation, studies indicate that more than 30% of sex workers have injected drugs. In Ukraine, HIV prevalence among sex workers ranges from 13.6% to 31.0%.
- HIV transmission between men who have sex with men accounts for a small share of new infections in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In 2007, sex between men accounted for only 0.4% of newly diagnosed HIV infections in Eastern Europe.

- However, HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men is 5.3% in Georgia, 6% in the Russian Federation and 10–23% in Ukraine.

- One of the biggest achievements in the AIDS response in the region has been the high coverage of services to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission. In December 2008, the coverage of services to prevent mother-to-child transmission exceeded 90% in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

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