

LATIN AMERICA

More than 1.7 million people are living with HIV in Latin America. In 2004, around 95 000 people died of AIDS, and 240 000 were newly infected. Around 610 000 women are currently living with HIV in the region.

- Two countries in this region—Guatemala and Honduras—have national adult HIV prevalence rates of over 1%. But lower prevalence in other countries disguises the fact that serious, localized epidemics are also underway in several other countries.
- Brazil accounts for more than one third of the people living with HIV in Latin America.
- Brazil's epidemic at first affected mainly men who have sex with men and then injecting drug users. However, the epidemic has grown more heterogeneous and heterosexual transmission is now responsible for a growing share of HIV infections, with women increasingly affected.
- The role of injecting drug use in Brazil's epidemic should not be underestimated. In some areas, injecting drug users constitute at least half of AIDS cases. However, harm reduction programmes in some cities have been associated with steep drops in HIV prevalence among injecting drug users in recent years— notably in Salvador where prevalence fell from 50% in 1996 to 7% in 2001.
- HIV in Argentina remains concentrated largely in the urban areas of Buenos Aires, Cordoba and Santa Fe provinces, with an estimated 65% of HIV infections occurring in the capital Buenos Aires and its surrounding areas. However, the epidemic is changing. Whereas throughout the 1980s and much of the 1990s HIV transmission occurred mainly through injecting drug use, sexual transmission of HIV—mainly from infected drug users to their female and/or male partners—now accounts for an estimated 80% of all reported AIDS cases.
- In a general population study in 24 Peruvian cities, 44% of men aged 18 to 29 years said they paid for sex (45% of them did not consistently use condoms with sex workers) and 12% said they had sex with other men (68% of them did not use condoms consistently in those encounters).
- In Central America, where the epidemic to a large extent is still concentrated in large urban areas, the numbers of HIV infections have been rising in several countries (including El Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama) since the late 1990s, but HIV prevalence remains highest in Guatemala and Honduras. Among people living with HIV, men outnumber women by roughly 3:1 in most countries.
- Worst-affected is Honduras, where adult prevalence of almost 2% meant that an estimated 63 000 people were living with HIV at the end of 2003. AIDS-related diseases are now estimated to be the second-leading cause of death in

Honduras.

- In most Central American countries, street-based sex workers are at least twice as likely to be HIV-infected than their counterparts working out of brothels, bars and hotels.
- Sex between men is a major factor in the epidemics throughout the region, dramatically so in Costa Rica. More than half of AIDS cases in 1998–2002 were among men who have sex with men, a significant percentage of whom also have sex with women.
- In several countries, there is still a mismatch between prevention spending priorities and the evolution of the countries' epidemics.
- Most countries direct the bulk of their prevention expenditure to sex worker programming. Prevention spending does not yet reflect the fact that sex between men is a driving force in the epidemic throughout the region.
- On the treatment front, Brazil remains a beacon among developing countries. It continues to offer all people living with HIV access to antiretroviral drugs via its national health system. As a result, the life expectancy of AIDS patients has increased dramatically. A recent study calculated that median survival was only five months for cases diagnosed in the 1980's whereas for those cases diagnosed in 1996 the median survival was nearly five years.
- AIDS cases and AIDS mortality have declined in several other countries, including Argentina, Costa Rica and Panama, after expansion of antiretroviral treatment access.

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