

# **Figures talk: HIV/AIDS in the WHO European Region, 2012. Halting and reversing the spread of HIV by 2015 are at stake**

Copenhagen, 27 November 2013

## **1. Steadily growing HIV epidemic**

Since the start of the epidemic, more than 1.5 million people have been diagnosed with HIV in the WHO European Region, including 131 000 new HIV cases in 2012.

HIV attacks the immune system and causes lifelong severe illness with a long incubation period. The end-stage of the untreated infection, AIDS, results from the destruction of the immune system.

## **2. New HIV infections 3 times higher in the east than the west**

Of the over 131 000 new HIV infections in the Region, 100 000 (3 out of 4) were reported across countries in the east, while 31 000 were reported in countries in the west and centre (see figure for explanations of these country groups).

## **3. AIDS: wide gap between east and west**

New AIDS cases were over 3 times higher in the east than in the west and centre in 2012. While reported AIDS cases declined by 54% in the west, the number of people newly diagnosed with AIDS increased by 113% in the east between 2006 and 2012.

## **4. Significantly increased AIDS deaths in the east**

Between 2006 and 2012, reported deaths among people with AIDS decreased by 14% across the Region as a whole and increased by 58% in the east only. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and WHO/Europe, the numbers of estimated deaths were as high as 91 000 in eastern Europe and central Asia and 7 600 in western and central Europe: an almost twelve-fold difference.

## **5. HIV still highly concentrated in key populations**

The groups most affected were people who inject drugs and their sexual partners in the east, and men who have sex with men and people coming from countries with generalized HIV epidemics (where prevalence is higher than 1% in the general population) in the west.

## **6. Heterosexual transmission predominant in the east**

Interventions to prevent and treat HIV among people who inject drugs need to continue to form the cornerstone of the response in the east. Nevertheless, heterosexual transmission has

climbed over the last few years, becoming the predominant transmission mode in most countries in the east and currently accounting for 60% of cases.

## **7. Insufficient increase in HIV testing and counselling**

HIV testing and counselling need to be scaled up. In 2012, 50% of newly diagnosed HIV infections in the Region were diagnosed late (with CD4 cell counts below 350/mm<sup>3</sup>) and 30% even later (with CD4 cell counts of 200/mm<sup>3</sup> or lower), causing delayed initiation of antiretroviral therapy.

## **8. Antiretroviral therapy still suboptimal**

The rise in new HIV and AIDS cases in the east was closely linked to poor coverage of prevention measures and antiretroviral therapy (ART). While the number of people receiving ART increased by 45% from 2011 to 2012 (rising to almost 200 000), only about a third (35%) of the people who needed ART were receiving it. ART coverage was much higher in the west.

## **9. Need for scaled-up harm-reduction measures in the east**

Access to opioid substitution therapy and needle and syringe programmes remained limited in many countries in the east. Scaling up these essential harm-reduction measures is key to reducing the transmission of HIV among people who inject drugs and their sexual partners.

## **10. Raising treatment coverage by applying new guidelines**

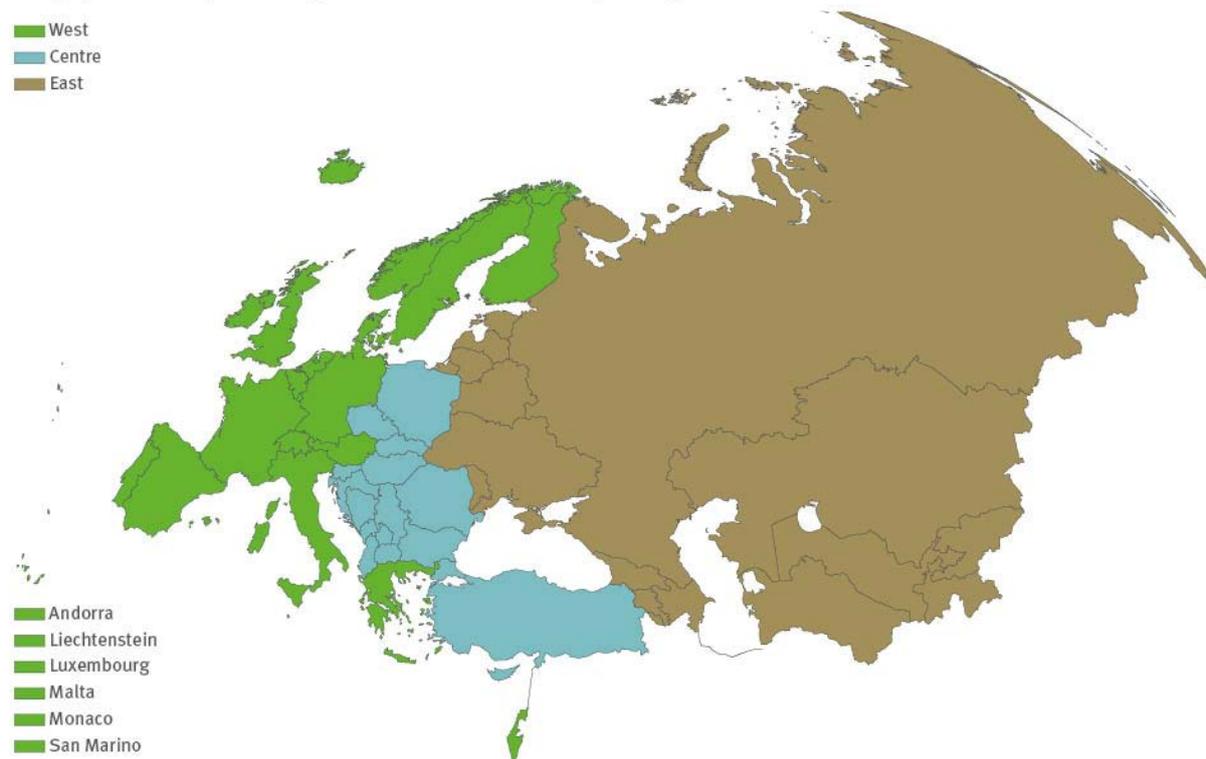
New WHO treatment guidelines call on all countries to start treatment earlier for adults living with HIV – with CD4 cell counts at 500 cells/mm<sup>3</sup> or lower – as their immune systems are still strong. WHO's 2010 guidelines recommended offering treatment to people with cell counts of or below 350 CD4 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>.

Implementation of the new guidelines will result in more people in the Region receiving ART, reducing AIDS-related mortality and preventing further transmission of HIV infection.

## **Further information**

The 53 countries in the WHO European Region are divided into three geographical areas based on epidemiological considerations and in accordance with the division used in previous reports on HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe dating back to the 1980s (see figure): west (23 countries), centre (15 countries) and east (15 countries). The division reflects similarities in epidemiological dynamics, such as epidemic levels, trends over time and transmission patterns.

## Geographical and epidemiological areas in the WHO European Region



The countries covered by the report are grouped as follows:

- West, 23 countries: Andorra, Austria\*, Belgium\*, Denmark\*, Finland\*, France\*, Germany\*, Greece\*, Iceland, Ireland\*, Israel, Italy\*, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg\*, Malta\*, Monaco, Netherlands\*, Norway, Portugal\*, San Marino, Spain\*, Sweden\*, Switzerland, United Kingdom\*.
- Centre, 15 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria\*, Croatia\*, Cyprus\*, Czech Republic\*, Hungary\*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland\*, Romania\*, Serbia, Slovakia\*, Slovenia\*, Turkey.
- East, 15 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia\*, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia\*, Lithuania\*, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

\* Countries which constitute the European Union as of 1 July 2013.

Source: ECDC, WHO Regional Office for Europe. HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2012. Stockholm: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; 2013.

## LINKS

- HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2012  
ECDC, 2013  
<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/communicable-diseases/hivaids/publications/2013/hivaids-surveillance-in-europe-2012>
- Global update on HIV treatment 2013: results, impact and opportunities  
WHO headquarters, 2013  
<http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/progressreports/update2013/en>
- Global report. UNAIDS report on the global AIDS epidemic 2013  
UNAIDS, 2013  
<http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/campaigns/globalreport2013/globalreport>
- Consolidated guidelines on the use of antiretroviral drugs for treating and preventing HIV infection. Recommendations for a public health approach  
WHO headquarters, 2013  
<http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/guidelines/arv2013/download/en/index.html>