

AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Interagency
Coalition on AIDS
and Development



Coalition
interagence sida
et développement

1 Nicholas Street, Suite 726 Ottawa ON K1N 7B7
Telephone: (613) 233-7440 • Fax: (613) 233-8361
E-mail: info@icad-cisd.com • Web: www.icad.cisd.com

The People Infected

As of the end of 2002, the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization estimate that there are 1.2 million persons living with HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (a region that encompasses the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, including the countries of the former Soviet Union). There were 250,000 new infections in 2002. The epidemic has claimed the lives of 25,000 people in the region. HIV incidence is rising faster here than in any other part of the world. Among 80% of new infections in the countries of the former Soviet Union were among people younger than 29. Injection drug use remains the predominant mode of transmission. Socio-economic instability in the region is contributing to the spread of HIV.

Profile of the Epidemic

- **The Russian Federation is experiencing an exceptionally steep rise in reported HIV infections.** HIV epidemics have been identified in more than 30 cities and in 86 of the country's 89 regions. The number of reported HIV infections rose from 10,993 at the end of 1998 to over 200,000 by mid-2002. The actual number of cases is believed to be much higher.
- **With an HIV prevalence rate of 1%, Ukraine has the highest number of people living with HIV in the region.**
- **In Central Asia, the epidemic is making inroads in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.** Uzbekistan has recorded a steep rise in HIV infections; 620 infections were recorded in the first half of 2002, almost as many as had been recorded in the entire previous decade.
- **HIV incidence is rising sharply in the Baltics.** Estonia, which now has the highest rate of infection in the region, saw the number of reported infections rise from 12 in 1999 to 1,474 in 2001. In Latvia, the number of reported infections rose from 25 in 1997 to 1,115 in mid-2002. In one prison in Lithuania, 15% of the inmates tested positive for HIV in 2002.
- **Unsafe injection drug use practices are fuelling the epidemic.** In the Russian Federation, up to 90% of reported infections have been attributed to injection drug use. A recent community survey among drug users in the city of Togliatti found HIV prevalence rates of more than 50%. Some injection drug users are very young. One study among Moscow secondary students revealed that 4% of them had injected drugs.
- **Heterosexual intercourse has become a prominent mode of HIV transmission in Ukraine and Belarus.** New diagnoses of HIV in persons infected through heterosexual intercourse in Ukraine accounted for 28% of all new cases in the first half of 2002, up from 15% in 1998. In Belarus, about 27% of new infections in 2001 were attributed to heterosexual transmission.
- **Men who have sex with men can face a significant risk of acquiring HIV, especially when unsafe sex and injection drug use overlap.** A survey in this population in Kazakhstan in 2001 found that 9% of the men injected drugs and that only 3% regarded constant condom use as the most effective way of protecting themselves.
- **In Central Europe, there have been successes in controlling the epidemic.** Prevalence remains low in countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, where well-designed national AIDS programmes have been implemented.

ICAD's aim is to lessen the impact of HIV/AIDS in resource-poor communities and countries. We are a coalition of Canadian international development organizations, AIDS service organizations and other interested organizations and individuals. Funding for this publication was provided by Health Canada. The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Minister of Health. Most of the information in this fact sheet is taken from information released by the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization for World AIDS Day 2002. Additional copies of this fact sheet are available on the ICAD website at www.icad-cisd.com. Le feuillet "Le sida en Europe de l'Est et en Asie centrale" est disponible en français.