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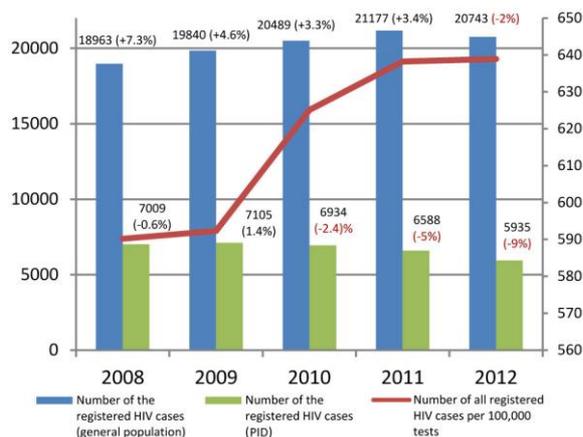
Harm reduction wins the battle against HIV/AIDS in Ukraine

The largest HIV-prevention program in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region implemented by the *International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine* with support of the Global Fund has proven its success. It resulted in continuous decrease of HIV transmission among people who inject drugs (PID), the key group exposed to HIV, as well as has impacted the stabilization of the HIV epidemic in Ukraine: in 2012 for the first time since 1999, the overall number of newly registered HIV cases in Ukraine decreased.

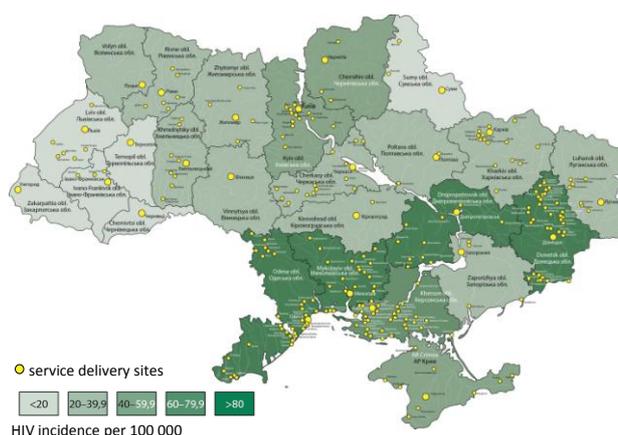
Impact of the prevention programs among vulnerable groups

International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine (Alliance Ukraine) has been implementing large scale HIV prevention programs among vulnerable groups in Ukraine for a number of years. Due to the program in 2012, 171 958 people who use drugs had access to services, such as syringe exchange, information material and condom distribution, HIV and STI rapid testing and counseling. The program is implemented in 302 cities, small towns and villages all over Ukraine. As a result, since 2007 epidemiologists have been observing HIV incidence decrease among PID (the number of registered HIV cases among PID dropped from 7 127 in 2006 to 5 935 in 2012 given yearly increase in testing among this group). This dynamics has boosted over past three years: in the context of growing access to testing the number of newly registered HIV cases in 2012 dropped by 9% in comparison with 2011.

This tendency has resulted in stabilization of HIV epidemic in general population. In 2012 for the first time since 1999 a decrease of HIV incidence was registered among general population (from 21 177 cases in 2011 down to 20 743 cases in 2012, or 2% less compared to 2011).



Picture 1. Dynamics of the officially registered HIV incidence among general population and people who inject drugs. Source: Ukrainian Center for Socially Dangerous Disease Control of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine



Picture 2. Map of harm reduction service delivery by Alliance Ukraine partners. Source: Alliance Ukraine reporting data, 2013

Ukraine is not Russia

Ukraine is an example for other countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. WHO in its 'European Action Plan for HIV/AIDS 2012–2015' stated that "HIV remains an increasingly serious public health challenge in the WHO European Region, with (in its eastern part) the fastest growing epidemic in the world"¹.

¹ European Action Plan for HIV/AIDS 2012–2015, World Health Organization, page 68. http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/153875/e95953.pdf

Just about a year ago, UNAIDS in its 2011 Report stated that “the Russian Federation and Ukraine account for almost 90% of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region’s epidemic. Injecting drug use remains the leading cause of HIV infection in this region, although considerable transmission also occurs to the sexual partners of people who inject drugs”².



Picture 3. Dynamics of the officially registered HIV incidence among PID and general population in Ukraine and Russian Federation. Source: Ukrainian Center for Socially Dangerous Disease Control of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine and Federal Scientific Methodological Center for HIV Prevention and Response of the Russian Federation

In the context of the region Ukraine is often cited alongside Russia, nevertheless the epidemic trends in these two countries are very different. The trend observed in Ukraine is opposite to the situation in the Russian Federation, our closest neighbor, where the epidemic developed in a similar manner before 2007. Although both countries have large scale awareness campaigns and equally low access to ART in both two countries (22-27% in Russian Federation in comparison with 17-28% in Ukraine³), absence of substitution maintenance therapy and lack of prevention programs among PID in Russia are the major reasons for continuous epidemic increase among this group. Consequently, as can be seen on picture 3, no impact on the epidemic among general population is registered in the Russian Federation; on the contrary, HIV incidence is growing annually.

Actions to be taken

Ukraine is awaiting for re-submission of the increased state budget for funding prevention and fighting three diseases: HIV, TB and Viral Hepatitis to be made by 15th of May 2013. Such instruction was given by the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich to Ukrainian Government. As of today Ukraine is nearly the only country in the world allocating “zero” state funding for HIV-prevention. This practice should be changed, it is critically important to allocate funding for prevention of HIV among vulnerable groups from the state and local budgets within the framework of 2013 budget and the new National HIV/AIDS Program for 2014-2018.

Ukraine experience should be broadly used in the region. Unique programming skills and implementation history must be replicated by neighboring countries to finally produce an effect on the HIV epidemic in one of the most affected regions in the world. [Regional Technical Support Hub](#) hosted by Alliance Ukraine serves as a mechanism for such knowledge sharing, especially within the EECA region.

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² World AIDS Day Report | 2011, UNAIDS, page 8.

http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/unaidspublication/2011/jc2216_worldaidsday_report_2011_en.pdf

³ Report on the global AIDS epidemic 2012, UNAIDS, page A62.

http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2012/gr2012/JC2417_GR%202012_Annexes_en.pdf