



# Overcoming obstacles to late presentation for HIV in Europe

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## BACKGROUND

Progress has been made on access to HIV treatment across the WHO European Region, but significant challenges remain. HIV in Europe is a pan-European initiative, launched in 2007, that has succeeded in creating a platform between European advocates, clinicians, researchers and policy-makers around the prevailing challenge of getting people living with HIV earlier diagnosed and into treatment, care and support.

## METHODS

- Building on past achievements of the HIV in Europe initiative, including the adoption of the European Parliament joint resolution on early diagnosis and early care, the initiative reinforces collaboration, advocacy and networking activities in the field throughout Europe on national and EU levels.
- The initiative is driven by acknowledging the importance of evidence to move the political agenda forward and seeks to implement innovative and evidence-based testing initiatives to get people tested and into care earlier in the course of their HIV infection.
- Pilot projects have been initiated on crucial barriers to testing and improvement of surveillance data, both of which are important to prevent HIV transmission, promote human rights of PLWHA and to deliver quality and timely HIV treatment and care.

### Overcoming obstacles to late presentation for HIV in Europe

| Key barriers  | Results   |
|---|---|
| 1. A lack of understanding of what is meant by "a person presenting late for care"                        | Result 1: A consensus definition of late presentation has been developed.   |
| 2. Great uncertainty with regard to the number of people living with HIV in the European Region           | Result 2: Preparation of a document to provide guidance to countries on methods available and data needed to estimate numbers of people infected but not yet diagnosed.   |
| 3. No list of HIV indicator diseases across Europe  | Result 3: A pilot study initiated will assess HIV prevalence in eight indicator diseases in specific populations. The project includes 17 centres in 14 countries and the plan is to screen 7000 persons with an indicator disease for HIV. |
| 4. Stigma is one of the major barriers for both early HIV testing and earlier initiation of HIV treatment | Result 4: Support for the People Living with HIV Stigma Index in 5 European countries.  |
| 5. Criminalisation of HIV   | Result 5: A review of how criminalisation of HIV can deter people from seeking HIV testing and have other negative consequences for public health.  |

### Results 1: When is a patient presenting late for care?

**Late presentation:**  
Persons presenting for care with a CD4 count below 350 cells/μL or presenting with an AIDS-defining event, regardless of the CD4 cell count.

**Presentation with advanced HIV disease:**  
Persons presenting for care with a CD4 count below 200 cells/μL or presenting with an AIDS-defining event, regardless of the CD4 cell count.

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The European Late Presenter Consensus working group recommends that all national health agencies, institutions, and researchers implement this definition when reporting surveillance or research data related to late presentation of HIV.

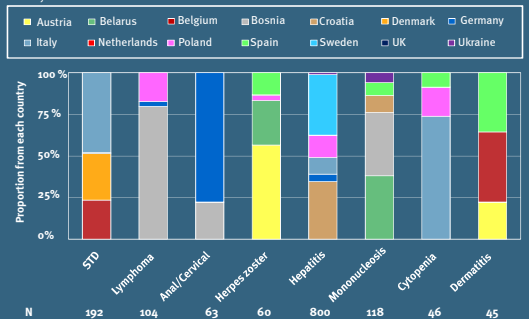
### Results 2: The number of undiagnosed PLHIV

- The surveillance to identify the exact extent of the number of undiagnosed PLHIV remains insufficient across Europe. Different estimation approaches exist, using different sources of data, and many countries do not appear to produce any estimates.
- The HIV in Europe initiative has initiated a Working Group on Estimation of HIV Prevalence in Europe who will present a document outlining all available approaches and providing the necessary guidance for using them.
- The guidance document can help countries decide which data to collect in order to improve approaches of estimating the number of undiagnosed people living with HIV.

Guidance for countries on requirements and available methods for estimation of the number of people with HIV, to be published as a review in *AIDS* 2010

### Results 3: Indicator Diseases Project

A survey to better define what diseases and conditions are indicators for an HIV prevalence 10.1% was launched in May 2009. The figure below shows the participation of countries in the Indicator Diseases Project and enrolment by disease by 15 June 2010, where 1,428 out of 7,000 persons were enrolled into the surveys.



### Results 4: The influence of stigmatisation on access to testing and treatment

- In 2008 the Global Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+), the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW), the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and UNAIDS presented 'The People living with HIV Stigma Index'. The Index aims to build the evidence base for understanding stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV.
- HIV in Europe supports the implementation and roll-out of the stigma index in Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Moldova and Turkey. The issue of access to treatment and barriers to testing has been embraced by the country teams wishing to implement the index.

Country reports and a report examining the effects of stigma and discrimination on access to testing and treatment available by 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2010

### Results 5: Criminalisation of HIV and the impact on testing and treatment

- The aim of the "Criminalisation of HIV in the European Region" study is to review legislation across the European Region that singles out the criminalization of HIV, and describe such laws, the reasoning for them and investigate whether this has had any effect on the spread of the disease in the country including its potential impact on testing.
- The pilot study consists of an analysis and evaluation of the HIV transmission and exposure laws in 5 countries (Hungary, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK (England and Wales)).

Discussion and Issues Paper on Criminal Liability for Exposure to and Transmission of HIV, to be published in 2010

## CONCLUSION

HIV in Europe recommends:

- The initiation of audits to evaluate whether testing is being conducted in situations where there is an obvious indication;
- Increased interaction and awareness raising among clinicians within different specialties and implementation of indicator disease guided testing;
- Collection of key additional surveillance data for more reliable estimations of the size of the infected but not yet diagnosed population;
- Development and implementation of evidence-based strategies to reduce the barriers to testing due to stigmatisation, discrimination and criminalisation.

### The HIV in Europe Study Group

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**Working Group on the Criminalisation of HIV (convenor: Matthew Weat, University of London, UK)**

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