

REGIONAL REPORT ON HIV/AIDS 2005



B U R E A U F O R D E V E L O P M E N T P O L I C Y



MEETING THE CHALLENGE

ADDRESSING HIV/AIDS
IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE CIS REGION

The Answer Lies Within

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FOREWORD

One of the biggest social, economic and development challenges facing us today is HIV/AIDS. The pandemic is affecting all levels of society in every region of the world.

The Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region is experiencing one of the world's fastest growing rates of HIV infections. Since the mid 1990s, UNDP has been making strides in assisting individuals and organizations working on HIV/AIDS. Most recently, we have committed ourselves to equipping national stakeholders with crucial leadership skills that can be used to accelerate the national response. UNDP sponsored the application of a highly innovative methodology to enhance leadership, which is widely used by the business sector. Since 2002, the Leadership for Results Programme has been successfully implemented in Ukraine, and elements of it have been introduced in Belarus and Lithuania. The Programme has also been launched in the Russian Federation. This has helped UNDP Country Offices' capacity to enhance the process of application for funds from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) and funded a number of local breakthrough initiatives where NGOs are taking the lead in action against HIV/AIDS. Leadership capacities have been developed at national, local and individual levels. Stigma and discrimination is being addressed and more people in the region recognize the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, drug users and prisoners. Underlying causes driving the epidemic are being addressed and vulnerable groups such as commercial sex workers and injecting drug users are being included in policy-making processes and are beginning to use the tools to protect their well-being.

These achievements, however, are just the beginning. As we said in the Regional Human Development Report on HIV/AIDS, 'Reversing the Epidemic: Facts and Policy Options', responding to the epidemic will require not only acknowledging the existence of the problem, but taking strategic, nationally driven and well coordinated action to implement all the possible approaches. UNDP, in close collaboration with other UNAIDS co-sponsors, donors, the Global Fund and civil society partners, will continue to expand its activities targeting leadership and governance problems surrounding the issue of HIV/AIDS. We have to carefully advocate for and support such initiatives that make a critical positive difference and enable national stakeholders to be in charge of policy development and programme implementation.

In the upcoming months and years, we will continue to develop and strengthen our partnerships with international, national and local stakeholders in order to ensure sustainability of efforts. By including people living with HIV/AIDS and using cross-sectoral processes of policy design and implementation, we will help



F O R E W O R D

to ensure better policy outcomes. We will continue to develop national capacities and strengthen human and institutional resources that are necessary to absorb the available international assistance. Lastly, we want to facilitate the sharing of good practices and experiences across all countries of the region. We will persist in developing individual leadership through the Leadership for Results programme to empower people to take action and generate results.

This report seeks to communicate some of the impressive achievements accomplished through the collective efforts of UNDP, governments, UN partners, the private sector and committed individuals and civil societies in Eastern Europe and the CIS. It is clear that the region and its people have a substantial opportunity to meet the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the commitments of the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS. We hope that by highlighting some of the important initiatives through this report, we will inspire others to continue this critical work in reversing the spread of HIV. We are obliged to help make the future bright and prosperous for all the people of the region, especially the poorest and least fortunate.



Shoji Nishimoto

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Introduction

The region of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States has one of the highest growth rates of new HIV infections in the world.

Official estimates of the numbers of people living with HIV/AIDS in this region at the end of 2004 were as high as 2.1 million. The epidemic is one of the biggest social, economic and development challenges facing these nations. It is affecting all levels of society, deepening poverty, and threatening to reverse years of development achievements. It is now being recognized that HIV/AIDS is not only a health issue, but a complex social, economic and human rights problem. It has its roots in poverty and inequality; in stigma and discrimination surrounding drug users; in denial and silence about these problems; also in erosion or relaxation of rigid cultural norms as well as armed conflicts that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Such a complex epidemic demands a complex response – one that addresses systems and structures as well as underlying causes.

United Nations Development Programme has achieved several critical, visible and tangible successes through the Leadership for Results programme, its country and regional initiatives and through its role in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM).

Distinct from the role of other UNAIDS partners, UNDP's mandate is to strengthen capacity at the national level, address governance challenges and develop leadership at every level. UNDP focuses its work in the four key areas outlined in the Declaration of Commitment adopted at the UN General Assembly Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS) in 2001. These key areas are captured in the Leadership for Results Programme and include: prevention; care, support and treatment; reduction of vulnerability; and mitigation of socio-economic impact. UNDP's activities in these areas address the sixth Millennium Development Goal (MDG), to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. It has become evident that without reaching this goal, other MDG targets relating to poverty and gender equality cannot be achieved.

The purpose of this report is to capture some of UNDP's successes in addressing HIV/AIDS and meeting the UNGASS goals and MDGs in Eastern Europe and the CIS. The Leadership for Results programme responds to the epidemic through three key service lines – Leadership and Capacity Development, Development Planning and Implementation and Advocacy and Communication. UNDP also supports the implementation of GFATM financed grants at country level. In partnership with national governments and Civil Society Organizations (CSO), UNDP initiates various regional and national initiatives to mitigate the socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS.



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UNDP has provided path-breaking support in shifting the HIV/AIDS response from a purely medical intervention to one that addresses underlying causes and is comprehensive and multi-sectoral. It has helped generate institutional and individual understanding of the epidemic and has strengthened national capacity. UNDP has improved governance by going beyond structural changes to addressing organizational inertia. Countries where UNDP programmes have been implemented have begun to recognize the rights of vulnerable groups such as injecting drug users and commercial sex workers, and most importantly, have addressed the underlying causes of the epidemic, moving people to take action and produce results.

In Ukraine and Russia, UNDP has engaged leaders at all levels and sectors of society, helping to break the silence around HIV/AIDS through the transformative approach of the Leadership for Results programme. Ukraine generated astounding breakthroughs as a result of this programme: the first-ever testing service for men who have sex with men (MSM) recognized the needs of this ostracized group; media initiatives broke the silence; a television show that reached ten million people, helped transform public attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS; and a policy addressing workplace discrimination and access to care for thousands was developed with the International Labour Organization.

In Russia, government officials and celebrities commemorated World AIDS Day, bringing together stakeholders from different sectors of the society to work towards a common goal. The programme demonstrated the public commitment to respond to HIV/AIDS. The “Sport for AIDS” initiative and the “We Will Rock You” musical featuring celebrities, were significant in reaching out to young people, generating public awareness and financial contributions, and securing the commitment of influential people to make a difference.

UNDP has supported countries in mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into their development policies, strengthening partnerships, and increasing dialogue and information sharing among nations. It has brought together national governments, other UN agencies, civil society, the private sector and the media to create a truly multi-sectoral response. The launch of the Regional Human Development Report on HIV/AIDS, ‘Reversing the Epidemic: Facts and Policy Options’ provided a comprehensive regional analysis of the HIV/AIDS situation. It alerted policy makers to the importance of responding to HIV/AIDS and provided a detailed framework for the way forward.

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'Partnership Against AIDS', a regional initiative, has energized East-East cooperation, increasing dialogue among political leaders and the sharing of best practices. A database set up as part of the initiative has been extremely useful for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in providing quick and easy access to expertise and assistance.

UNDP has also developed national initiatives that are regarded as best practices. Romania's 'All About HIV/AIDS', created an online information and counselling site. Accompanied by prevention campaigns, counselling at schools and universities and a popular adolescent radio talk show, this project has reached more than 300,000 youths.

UNDP has also strengthened Government capacity, supported national strategic HIV/AIDS plans and provided effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms through its role in the Global Fund. In several countries, UNDP is acting as Principal Recipient (PR) and managing the implementation of GFATM financed grants. In most of the region, UNDP is providing capacity building support to national Principal Recipients to effectively manage and deliver on these national grants.

The breakthroughs and initiatives documented in this report are only a portion of the many that have been generated.

Monica Sharma

Monica Sharma

Director

HIV/AIDS Group

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Thousands of youth in Romania have been reached through the AIDS prevention programmes.



Overview

In the last two decades, Eastern Europe and the CIS region has undergone vast political, social and economic transitions. Many countries are struggling with issues of poverty, increasing mortality rates, reduced life expectancy, social dislocation and a decrease in access to and quality of services.

Health structures in the region have been steadily deteriorating. Such conditions have translated into disillusionment, especially among the young, many of whom have turned to substance abuse and commercial sex work as means of survival. Often they end up in prisons where unfavourable conditions increase their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. High levels of stigma and discrimination have further exacerbated the situation.

UNAIDS estimates that as many as 210,000 people contracted HIV in the Eastern Europe and the CIS region in 2004, taking the total number of people living with the disease to an estimated 2.1 million. Ukraine is the worst-affected country in the region, with an adult prevalence rate of 1.4% (660,000 people). In Russia there are over 860,000 people estimated to be living with HIV.¹

Injecting drug use is the most prevalent cause of HIV in the region. Increased opium production in Afghanistan has fuelled heroin markets in Central Asia, the Russian Federation and Eastern Europe. This region is both a transit and destination region for heroin and other drugs. People aged 15 to 29 years old are the most affected by the drug trade. In 2002–2003, seventy percent of new HIV cases in CIS countries were attributed to injecting drug use and the number of opiate users in this region may be as high as 3 million. About 73 percent of the HIV cases in Ukraine were

UNDP seeks to promote partnerships between key actors in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

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