Europe and Central Asia Are Failing to Curb the HIV Epidemic

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New diagnoses of HIV in Europe and Central Asia increased by 80 percent between 2004 and 2013, from 76,000 to 136,000 diagnoses, Reuters reports. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe published new data of 2013 diagnoses, along with a call to strengthen and tailor HIV-fighting efforts to the specific needs of individual nations across the vast region.

More than 105,000 of the HIV diagnoses in 2013 were reported in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, while over 29,000 were reported in the European Union and the European Economic Area (EU/EEA), and 2,000 came from other non-EU countries. Eastern Europe and Central Asia's annual HIV diagnoses have doubled since 2004, while those in the European Union and European Economic Area have remained stable.

"Europe has not managed to reach the 2015 Millennium Development Goal target to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, and time is running out. While we are increasingly facing emerging health threats, this reminds us that we cannot afford to drop our guard on HIV/AIDS," Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO regional director for Europe, said in a press release.

"In Eastern Europe, where 77 percent of all new infections were reported, two-thirds of cases among injecting drug users were detected late," Jakab said. "This means they are more likely to transmit HIV, their treatment is more expensive and they are more likely to die."

"Looking at our data, we clearly see that across Europe the populations most at risk of HIV infection are not reached effectively enough, particularly men who have sex with men," ECDC director Marc Sprenger said in the same press release.

In the European Union and European Economic Area, sex between men accounted for 42 percent of new diagnoses in 2013. According to Sprenger, "The number of HIV diagnoses among this group has increased by 33 percent compared to 2004—and has been going up in all but four EU/EEA countries. This is why prevention and control of HIV among men who have sex with men has to be a cornerstone of national HIV programs across Europe."

The rate of reported AIDS cases in the European Union and European Economic Area has fallen by 48 percent over the past decade, while more than tripling in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.<

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