

# HIV/AIDS in Ukraine

## *A USAID Brief*

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is spreading rapidly in Ukraine, where the number of AIDS deaths doubled from 1999 to 2000. As of December 1, 2001, almost 42,000 Ukrainians were registered as HIV-positive, although health officials estimate the actual number to be closer to 500,000. At the end of 2001, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated that 250,000 Ukrainian adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS, with an adult prevalence of about 1 percent.

The leading cause of HIV transmission remains injecting drug use (62.5 percent of total cases), although the proportion of AIDS cases attributed to this mode of transmission has declined over the last five years. This trend indicates that HIV is spreading through sexual contact as well as through injecting drug use.

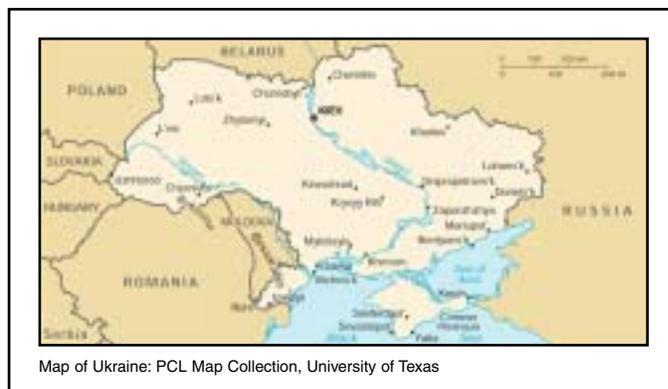
Young people are increasingly involved in injecting drug use, and most injecting drug users are between 14 and 28 years old. More than 80 percent of HIV-infected persons are in the 15 to 29 year age range. Since 1996, the number of HIV-infected prisoners, many of whom are drug users, has increased dramatically in Ukraine.

The Ministry of Health's new HIV/AIDS policy emphasizes provision of voluntary testing, pre-test and post-test counseling, information dissemination on prevention methods, distribution of condoms, and disinfecting agents for needles and syringes. Given the high cost of medications, treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS is limited. The Ukrainian Ministry of Health does not provide free condoms to any groups vulnerable to HIV infection.

## **NATIONAL RESPONSE**

The response by the government of Ukraine to HIV/AIDS involves a number of government agencies, laws, policies, and practices. By 1992, a National AIDS Committee was in place, and UNAIDS was working to make the government sensitive to the need to undertake strategic planning and implement HIV/AIDS approaches adapted from other parts of the world. In 1996, the influence of this Committee began to diminish due to contentious budget negotiations. The Committee was dissolved in 1998, but by August 1999, the government had created a National Coordinating Council on the Prevention of AIDS Disease, headed by a Vice Prime Minister.

Historically, some regions of Ukraine have initiated their own AIDS prevention programs. As of 1999, state AIDS prevention programs were mandated by the national government in all 24 regions, the Crimean



Autonomous Republic, and the cities of Kiev and Sevastopol. Money from the central budget covered expenditures related to mandatory blood testing, scientific research, and provision of diagnostic equipment; all other programs were funded by local agencies.

From 1995 to 1997, the government provided only 42 percent of the approved budget for national AIDS programming. To date, the government's budget priorities for HIV/AIDS have been to assure blood safety and adequate provision of test kits. Much less money has been allocated for prevention activities.

## **USAID SUPPORT**

In FY 2001, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated \$1.47 million to HIV/AIDS activities in Ukraine—an increase from the FY 2000 allocation of \$1.1 million.

*USAID supports the following country programs:*

### *Behavior change communication*

From 1997 to 1999, USAID, through Johns Hopkins University, provided technical support to five non-governmental organizations (NGOs) undertaking behavior change interventions with vulnerable populations. Behavior change communication materials were developed to support these interventions.

### *Capacity building*

In September 2000, USAID/Kiev provided funds to the Counterpart Alliance for Partnership to strengthen the capacity of Ukrainian health NGOs to effectively deliver health services, including HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention services aimed at injecting drug users, and sex workers and their clients.

### *Mother-to-child transmission*

The American International Health Alliance works with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Medecins Sans Frontieres, and Odessa health care institutions to implement a program to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

### *Prevention/Awareness*

USAID and the European Union currently implement a joint HIV/AIDS Prevention and Awareness Program in Ukraine. The European Union has committed \$1.8 million, and USAID/Kiev has committed \$3.47 million. As part of this effort, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance is developing a national clearinghouse to disseminate best practices, provide information on consultant resources, and provide current HIV/AIDS data. The organization also supports 20 Ukrainian NGOs working in this area. The British Council, which is funded by the European Union, is implementing youth-oriented prevention programs in five oblasts.

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS (end 2001)	From 250,000 to 500,000
Total Population (2001)	49.1 million
Adult HIV prevalence (end 2001)	1%
<b>HIV-1 Seroprevalence in Urban Areas</b>	
Population at High Risk (i.e., sex workers and clients, STI patients, or others with known risk factors)	0.6-3.1%
Population at Low Risk (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	.4%

*Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau, Ministry of Health*

## **CHALLENGES**

UNAIDS, the Civil-Military Alliance to Combat HIV/AIDS, the Health Technical Services Project, and Monitoring the AIDS Pandemic (MAP) have recommended a number of actions to address HIV/AIDS in Ukraine:

- Conduct behavioral research among vulnerable groups including youth, injecting drug users, female sex workers, and men who have sex with men.
- Focus HIV/AIDS activities on priority vulnerable groups, mainly injecting drug users and female sex workers.
- Expand harm reduction activities among injecting drug users, such as providing information materials, needle and syringe exchange, and substitution therapy that focuses on the provision of drugs.
- Enhance support for prevention and management of STIs.
- Identify HIV/AIDS-related NGOs and provide them with technical assistance and capacity building support.
- Implement peer education prevention programs in- and out-of-school youth.
- Develop social support groups for sex workers and men who have sex with men.
- Emphasize intersectoral cooperation in addressing HIV/AIDS, STIs, and tuberculosis.

## **SELECTED LINKS AND CONTACTS**

1. USAID/Ukraine: Christopher D. Crowley, Mission Director, 19 Nizhniy Val, Kyiv, Ukraine 04071.  
Tel: 380-44-462-5678, Fax: 380-44-462-5834.
2. UNAIDS: Douglas Gardner, UN Resident Advisor, United Nations Office in Ukraine, 1 Klovsky Uzviz, Kiev, Ukraine. Tel: 380-44-253-9323, Fax: 380-44-253-2607.
3. Civil-Military Alliance to Combat HIV and AIDS: Stuart J. Kingma, Co-Director, 20 route de l'Hopital, CH-1180 Rolle, Switzerland. Tel: (41-21) 825-35-29, Fax: (41-21) 825-35-86.

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For more information, see [www.usaid.gov/pop\\_health/aids/](http://www.usaid.gov/pop_health/aids/) or [www.synergyaids.com](http://www.synergyaids.com).*

*Please direct comments on this profile to: [info@synergyaids.com](mailto:info@synergyaids.com).*

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