Middle-East and North Africa

Overview

- An estimated 68,000 people newly acquired HIV in 2006, bringing to 460,000 the total number of people living with the virus in the region. Around 36,000 people died of AIDS-related illnesses in the Middle-East and North Africa in 2006.

- Most reported HIV infections have been in men, but the proportion of women becoming infected is increasing.

- Uneven (and, in many places, inadequate) HIV surveillance systems make it difficult to gauge precisely the patterns and trends of the epidemics in many countries of this region—especially among most-at-risk groups such as injecting drug users, sex workers and men who have sex with men.

- Improved data collection in some countries (such as Algeria, Iran, Libya and Morocco) show that localized HIV epidemics exist across the region, while a generalized epidemic persists in Sudan.

- It is estimated that some 75,000 people in the region are in need of antiretroviral therapy, but only 4000 were receiving it at the end of 2005.

Country developments

- Sudan has by far the biggest epidemic in this region. Adult HIV prevalence was 1.6% in 2005 and some 350,000 people were living with the virus. Knowledge of HIV in Sudan is extremely poor; only 2% of men surveyed knew that condoms can prevent HIV transmission. One study found that HIV prevalence was 9.3% among men who have sex with men in Khartoum State.

- High levels of HIV infection have been found among the estimated 137,000 people who inject drugs in Iran. Almost one in four (23%) people who inject drugs participating in a recent study in the Iranian capital, Tehran, were found to be living with HIV.

- Studies have shown that as many as four in ten people who inject drugs in Algeria; five in ten in Egypt and Morocco; and six in ten in Lebanon have shared syringes.

- Unprotected sex (including during paid sex and sex between men) is also a major factor in the region’s epidemics. HIV infections levels of 9%-10%, 2.2% and 4.4% have been found among female sex workers in Saida and Tamanrasset in Algeria; and Morocco and Sudan respectively.

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