

**ALBANIA COUNTRY PROGRESS  
REPORT**

**2007**

## **1. OVERVIEW OF HIV/AIDS SITUATION IN ALBANIA**

Since 1993, 255 HIV/AIDS cases have been reported in Albania. Albania is considered a low prevalence country based in the number of diagnosed and reported cases. Nevertheless the trend of HIV infection is going up and the estimates show a high number of undiagnosed cases. This fact emphasizes that is very important to strengthen continually the Surveillance System and to promote the Voluntary and Counseling Centers (VCT) especially for vulnerable groups.

On the other hand, the different estimates show that Albania can be faced with a quick increase of HIV cases, if are not taken into account the prevention measurements.

During the first evaluation period of HIV infection (1993-2000) the average number of reported HIV cases was 6-7 cases per year. In the second period (2001-2003) it was noticed a double number of HIV cases (10-20 cases) comparing with the first period and in the three last years this figure is more than 30 reported cases.

It's important to mention that during the year 2007 there are reported 44 new HIV cases from which 31 are males and 13 are females.

The majority of the cases (out of 255 cases) belong to age groups 25-34 yr and 35-44 yr, respectively 67 and 80 cases.

The number of infected females has been increased, especially after the year 2000. The percentage of HIV infected females is around 29.5 %.

The sexual transmission is the main way of HIV transmission, 87 % belong to sexual transmission (77% belong to heterosexual and 10 % to homo-bisexual transmission). 4% of the total cases re infected by blood transfusion, 4.7 % belong to MTCT and only 1% belong to IDU.

Based on epidemiological investigations 60 % out of the total HIV cases have been infected abroad and 40 % in Albania. 67 % live in urban areas and the rest in rural areas.

The first case was diagnosed in 1993 and from that period 55 HIV cases have been died from AIDS.

59 HIV cases get ART therapy from the year 2004 at Infectious Diseases Department, at Tirana University Hospital Center.

38 % of HIV diagnosed cases have done compulsory education, 47 % have finished high school and only 11 % have finished University.

Most of the activities in the field with vulnerable populations such as: IDU, MSM, Roma community, CSW and MARA, are being performed through NGO's, partners of the National AIDS Program. For the 2007 the implementation in the field has been active and further boosted by the financial support of the GFTAM. So we can say that most of the targets set for the

vulnerable populations have been reached. IDUs are reached and served through a number of activities including: needle exchange, counseling, medical support, training, peer education.

Providing HIV/AIDS education to injecting drug users in the prison system is another activity carried out by NGO's. It has been achieved through Information and sensibilisation sessions related HIV infection with prisoners, and identification of peer educators. The activities are implemented in two prisons (Rrogozhina Prison and one (Nr.302) prison in Tirana). There is also a drug substitution program running in Tirana. Number of IDU participating in this program is 110.

Prevention activities among MSM are happening mainly in Tirana. They were reached through a variety of activities including HIV/AIDS education, distribution of IEC materials, counseling. A drop-in center for MSM in Tirana was established and is operated by NGO. The center is frequented in average by 3-5 MSM every day.

The members of Roma community are reached through peer education and other prevention activities in different districts. The activities of peer education have been implemented in the following location Tirane, Lezhe, Shkoder, Pogradec, Berat, Fier

During the third quarter of the 2007, following on the immense work of planning for the openings of the ambulatory clinic for HIV/AIDS and the 9 VCT opened at the prefecture levels (Tirana, Lezhe, Shkoder, Durres, Fier, Gjirokaster, Vlore, Korce), training for most of the staff to work in these centers has been conducted. These centers will have the continuous support from the NAP and the GFTAM even in the fourth quarter in order to make possible proper functioning in terms of quality of services and reporting. Also NAP with the support of the IPH has put a positive pressure on the Public health directors for them to be more involved in development of the VCT in their own prefecture and planning themselves for procurement of the kits and supplies for their VCT.

The outpatient clinic was opened in December, at the University Hospital Center "Mother Teresa", Department of Infectious Diseases. The center is well equipped and as staff including, doctors, nurses, lab technicians, psychologist is offering services in this clinic for PLWHA

Plans to speed up the process for conducting the second Bio-BSS survey have moved forward. This is very important for understanding the HIV epidemic, the trends of HIV among IDU, MSM, and Roma populations that are the main target groups of the HIV/AIDS National Strategy and as well the focus of the GFTAM intervention for the HIV in Albania. An important aim is also to compare data with the previous Bio-BSS. Bio-BSS study (using the RDS methodology for hard to reach populations such as MSM and IDU) was conducted for the first time in Albania during 2005. The survey working group gathered several times has decided that this time the focus on the testing will be for HIV, Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Hep C, and Syphilis infections.

Also another important decision made is that for the Roma population only, Bio-BSS will be conducted outside of Tirana as well in order to have a better view of the situation with this target group. Selection is made for 4 other sites other those 3 sites in Tirana for the Roma Population. Plans are that the field work for the Bio – BSS starts during March 2008.

National AIDS program has started together with a group of experts the process of the revision of the National HIV strategy following the process of the revision of the legislation in Albania during the 2007. The draft law on HIV/AIDS prevention and control is now in the parliament following the procedures for its approval.

Still there are some gaps that we identify:

Media promotion and IEC campaigns. We think that is important to scale up toward that direction for advocacy for our target groups, promotion of activities, spread of information, and better transparency of this major program for the general public.

We think that a proper GAP analyses need to be conducted in order to cope with emerging issues and to better adopt needs to interventions

In regard to the treatment it is now the fourth year that the ministry of health is procuring through UNICEF ARV's, but still this is considered provisional as there are certain concerns for this system:

- This system doesn't match needs with offer and is not time bound, with regard to planning in advance the quantity and the quality of the drugs.
- Form this list there is mix of generics and patent drugs, which makes the planning process difficult. Because of not possible planning for the whole year, some of the drugs have been expired and some finished before the next supply. With this kind of procedure the drugs provided have a narrow expiry period.
- There is no system for determining and tracking needs, usage rate and proper planning for these needs.
- Lack of straightforward system for procurement and distribution of ARV's within Albania.
- There is lack from time to time of drugs (ARV'S) for children.

There is the necessity to take measures to improve procurement system for medical drugs and diagnostic tests, including the development of a strategy for reducing prices, development of methods for determination of needs for medicines; clear system of procurement, distribution of medicines and control over their usage.

## 2. SUMMARY OF INDICATORS

### NATIONAL COMMITMENT AND ACTION

Domestic and international AIDS spending by categories and financing sources	1, 110, 357 USD, Domestic 1266600 USD, International
Percentage of donated blood units screened for HIV in a quality assured manner.	100 percent of units tested for HIV.
Percentage of adults and children with advanced HIV infection receiving antiretroviral therapy.	62 people are on ARV therapy.
Percentage of most-at-risk populations who received an HIV test in the last 12 months and who know their results.	According 2005 Bio-BSS, 30% of IDU reported to have had an HIV blood test. Of those who were tested, almost two-thirds were tested voluntarily, and most respondents (94.3%) who were tested for HIV had received the results of their test.
Percentage of most-at-risk populations reached with HIV prevention programmes.	Number of IDUs participating in harm reduction programs 1807 Number of MSM participating in targeted HIV prevention programs 209

### KNOWLEDGE AND BEHAVIOUR

Percentage of most-at-risk populations who both correctly identify ways of preventing sexual transmission of HIV and who reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission.	According to 2005 Bio-BSS ,egarding HIV/AIDS prevention knowledge, an estimated 9 in 10 IDU (86.7%) know that a person may avoid HIV/AIDS by consistently using condoms, while about three-fourths (76.9%) cited a monogamous sexual relationship as a means of protection. However, less than one-third of the sample (30.2%) mentioned abstinence from sex as a way to protect oneself from HIV/AIDS For MSM, an estimated 86% also know that HIV can be transmitted by using previously used needles, and 80% know that a pregnant mother can transmit the virus to her unborn child. Only one-fourth of MSM know that HIV is not transmitted through mosquito bites or by sharing a meal with someone living with HIV.
Percentage of young women and men aged 15-24 who have had sexual intercourse before the age of 15.	According to 2005 Bio-BSS, 23,4 % of Roma people and 4.3% of general population have had sexual intercourse before age 15. The results are only for Capital City and for the age group 18-49 years old
Percentage of women and men aged 15-49 who had more than one partner in the past 12 months reporting the use of a condom during their last sexual intercourse.	According to 2005 Bio-BSS, Condom use at last sex with non-regular, non-commercial partners were 54.1% for Roma and 57.1% for general population. The results are only for

	Capital City and for the age group 18-49 years old
Percentage of men reporting the use of a condom the last time they had anal sex with a male partner.	According to 2005 Bio-BSS, 60% of MSM reported to use condom last time they had sex with a non-commercial partner
Percentage of injecting drug users reporting the use of a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse.	38.9 % reported using a condom the last time they had sex with non-regular, non-commercial partner
Percentage of injecting drug users reporting the use of sterile injecting equipment the last time they injected.	66% injected using a new needle last time they injected 38.3 % reported using a new needle & syringe every time they injected in the last month, and 35.9 % reported doing so most of the time.
Percentage of young people aged 15-24 who are HIV infected.	As December 2007, there are 26 people infected aged 15-24. Only in 2007 there are 3 cases.
Percentage of most-at-risk populations who are HIV-infected.	According to 2005 Bio- BSS study the estimated HIV prevalence among MSM is 0.8%
Percentage of infants born to HIV-infected mothers who are infected	As December 2007 there are 18 infected children (0-14 years of age). Only in 2007 there are 4 cases