



ON THE TIPPING EDGE!

Call for urgent action in response to rapidly expanding HIV epidemics among gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people in newer EU member states and enlargement countries

A new era of sexual health and wellbeing for gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people, free from fear, stigma and discrimination, is being ushered in by massive declines in HIV infections in cities such as London, New York and San Francisco, achieved through community engagement and activism combined with investments in new tools and approaches, delivered as part of a comprehensive package of sexual health services.

Elsewhere, too many are left behind...

We, civil society organizations from 33 countries in Europe and Central Asia and six European networks signed in 2008 **'THE LJUBLJANA DECLARATION'**, warning that HIV remains a most alarming health threat among gay men and other men who have sex with men across the European continent and making a series of suggestions for actions to improve gay sexual health and well-being.

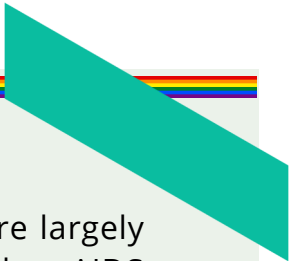

Today, a decade later, a staggering **300% rise in new HIV diagnoses among gay men and other men who have sex with men** shows that our warnings in the Declaration were largely ignored and now have come true across thirteen newer EU member states - Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia - and six EU enlargement countries - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. Those are the countries this Declaration focuses on today, yet HIV epidemics continue to be a source of concern to us in almost all European countries.

Mounting evidence and technical guidance from leading European and international organizations have further underpinned the need for and the effectiveness of the **suggestions we made in the 2008 Declaration** for expanded high-quality prevention, testing and support programs for gay men and other men who have sex with men.

Moreover, compelling evidence is now at hand on the **high effectiveness of new tools and approaches** such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), community-based testing and sexual health service delivery and immediate treatment for people testing HIV positive, which, when implemented as part of a comprehensive sexual health package, in some European locations have led to dramatic declines in HIV infections among gay men and other men who have sex with men.

Government reports, however, confirm major gaps in HIV prevention programs with gay men and other men who have sex with men, a high proportion of undiagnosed HIV infections and slow progress in reaching the 90-90-90 treatment targets in the nineteen countries.





We commend that some governments have initiated special efforts to review and address the expanding epidemics among gay men and other men who have sex with men, and to introduce the new and highly effective tools and approaches. We still urge these countries to **ensure rapid implementation**, and other countries to **follow their good example**.

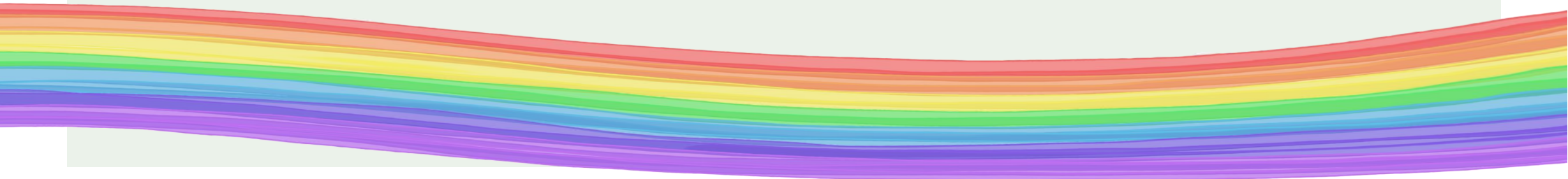
In the majority of countries, **the epidemics** appear still to be **occurring silently in a challenging context** with significant legal and policy barriers and negative public attitudes in relation to **lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people**. We note with grave concern the huge **lack of data, research and prevention programmes** addressing in particular **HIV among trans people in Europe**.

At the European and international level, few if any initiatives have been launched to address the alarming situation, further aggravated by the **withdrawal of the Global Fund** from most of the 19 countries mentioned above which previously benefited from support.

In the 1980s and 1990s, these countries were largely spared from the ravaging impact of the AIDS epidemics in the northern and western parts of the EU/EEA region. The **countries are now reaching a tipping point** where the epidemics are spiraling out of control and rapidly reaching HIV prevalence levels on par with or exceeding those in countries with older HIV epidemics among gay men and other men who have sex with men.


As signatories of the 2008 Ljubljana Declaration, we cannot tolerate continued neglect and inaction. We **call for urgent action to change the trajectory of the expanding epidemics**, which are now threatening to undermine the recent progress in improving the life quality and human rights situation of LGBTI people.

As demonstrated by progress made by some EU member states, new knowledge, tools and approaches are bringing the visionary goals of ending AIDS by 2030 in Europe and leaving no one behind are within close reach.





We call upon governments in the nineteen EU member states and candidate countries to honor their international commitments and upon EU member states to meet their obligations to respect the fundamental values of the EU, including the right to health as stipulated by article 35 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights:

- As a matter of urgency, invest in the rapid scaling up and implementation of the package of HIV prevention interventions for gay men and other men who have sex with men recommended by ECDC;
 - Ensure through such investments the development of inclusive, people-centered, competent and comprehensive health services for gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people;
 - Ensure as priorities full and immediate access to PrEP, self- and community-based testing for HIV, screening for STIs and adequate medical monitoring, as well as to treatment for those diagnosed with HIV and STIs;
 - Engage at all levels gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people, including those living with HIV, in the development, implementation and evaluation of HIV prevention and sexual health programs;
 - Establish social contracting mechanisms and invest in the scaling up of community-based sexual health service delivery and prevention interventions for gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people;
 - Review and address discriminatory attitudes, policies and practices related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics of LGBTI people and to medical conditions such as HIV positive status which contribute to health inequalities and hamper access to health services for LGBTI people;
 - Ensure access to LGBTI-inclusive comprehensive and good quality sexual and relationship education for all young people, in accordance with international evidence-based standards;
 - Strengthen systems for biological and behavioral surveillance of HIV among gay men and other men who have sex with men and trans people.
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We call upon the European Commission and EU institutions to

- Recognize and address the situation of expanding HIV epidemics among gay men and other men who have sex with men in nineteen newer EU member states and candidate countries as an urgent priority, as stipulated by the principles of the EU Action Plan on HIV/AIDS;
- Advocate for and ensure sustainable financing for HIV, sexual health and rights programs for LGBTI people as a priority in negotiation on pre-accession assistance within the EU strategy and action plan for the Western Balkans;
- Ensure that existing and new projects and programs supported by EU funding instruments and mechanisms are adjusted and designed to better target the sexual health needs of gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people in the 19 countries;
- Launch an EU Joint Action on HIV among gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people to build political leadership and facilitate a rapid exchange of information and best practices among member states with declining rates of HIV infections among gay men and other men who have sex with men and those with rapidly expanding epidemics;
- Reinforce actions to bring HIV on the political agenda and strengthen political leadership in response to HIV among gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people at European and national levels, including through policy dialogue and negotiations on structural funds for EU member states;
- Create a grant mechanism for civil society organizations to support advocacy, capacity building and community-based service delivery for gay men, other men who have sex with men and trans people;
- Support research that addresses the gaps in knowledge and understanding within the epidemic and the way problems should be addressed (including community based research);

We ask UNAIDS, WHO and other international organizations to reinforce advocacy and efforts to build political commitment for scaling up responses to the rapidly expanding epidemics, and to intensify efforts towards ensuring the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of health for LGBTI people everywhere, in accordance with the Charter of the UN and the Constitution of WHO.

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AIDS Action Europe



Asociatia Romana Anti-Sida



European AIDS Treatment Group



ILGA Europe



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