

The first cases of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) were diagnosed almost 30 years ago. The onset of AIDS is normally caused as a result of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection and can manifest itself as any number of different diseases, such as pneumonia and tuberculosis, as the immune system is no longer able to defend the body. There is a time lag between HIV infection, AIDS diagnosis and death due to HIV infection, which can be any number of years depending on the treatment administered. Despite worldwide research, there is no cure currently available.

In 2008, the number of newly reported cases of AIDS was approximately 5 300 across the European Union as a whole, representing an unweighted average incidence rate of 12.7 per million population (Figure 1.12.1). Following the first reporting of AIDS in the early 1980s, the number of cases rose rapidly to reach an average of more than 37 new cases per million population across EU countries at its peak in the middle of the 1990s, almost three times current incidence rates (Figure 1.12.2). Public awareness campaigns contributed to steady declines in reported cases through the second half of the 1990s. In addition, the development and greater availability of antiretroviral drugs, which reduce or slow down the development of the disease, led to a sharp decrease in incidence from 1996.

The highest AIDS incidence rates among EU countries in 2008 were reported in Estonia, Latvia, Portugal and Spain, at 25-50 new cases per million population. Spain had the highest incidence rates in the first decade following the outbreak, although there was a sharp decline from 1994 onwards. Incidence rates in Portugal peaked somewhat later, towards the end of the 1990s. AIDS incidence rates in Estonia have increased rapidly since the mid-2000s. Central European countries such as the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary and Poland report the lowest incidence rates of AIDS among EU countries.

In the European Union, approximately 730 000 persons were living with HIV infection in 2007 (Figure 1.12.1). Italy, Spain and France had the greatest number of persons, followed by the United Kingdom and Germany. HIV prevalence estimates were highest

in those countries with high AIDS incidence rates – Estonia, Latvia, Portugal and Spain, along with Switzerland – all at over 300 persons per 100 000 population. Over 25 000 new cases of HIV were diagnosed in the European Union in 2008. The predominant mode of transmission of HIV is sex between men, followed by heterosexual contact. However, among eastern European countries, injecting drug use is still the most common mode (ECDC and WHO Europe, 2009). Approximately 75% of heterosexually acquired HIV infection in Western and Central Europe is among migrants.

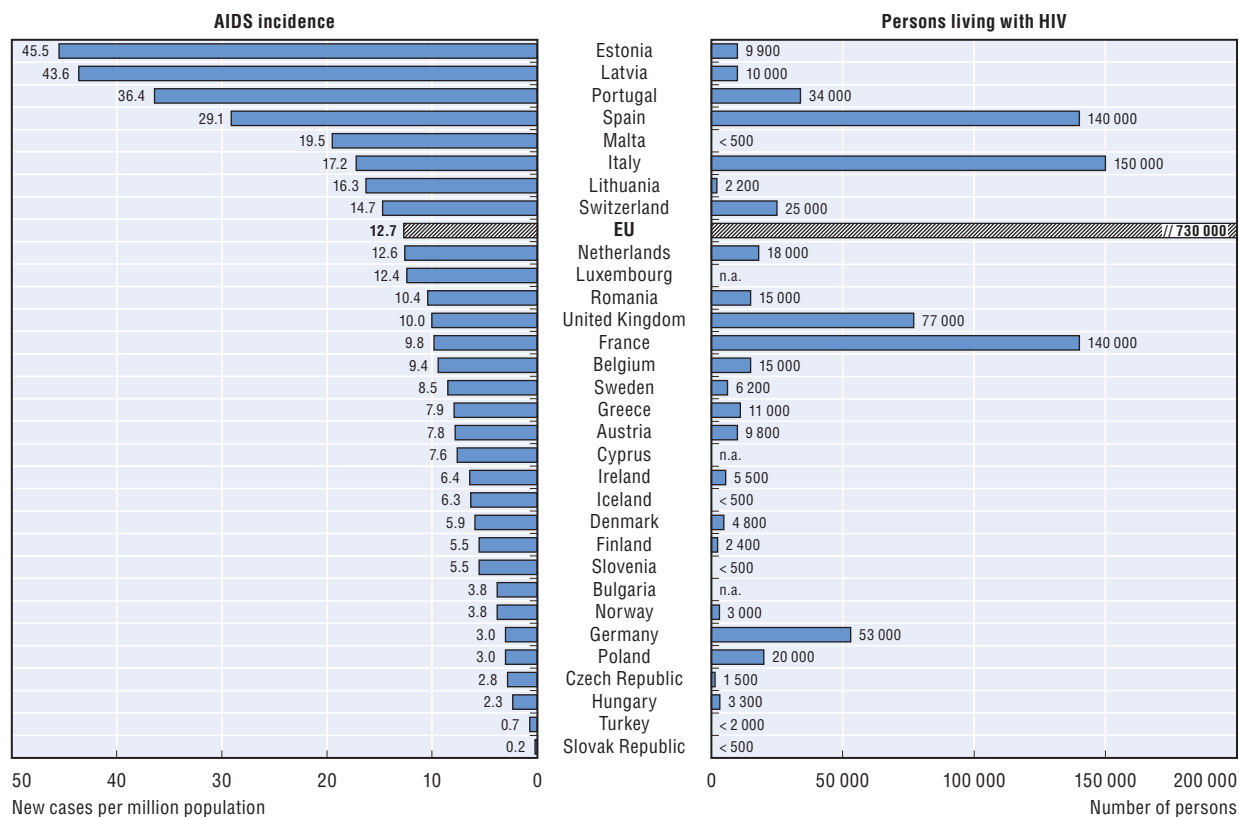
In recent years, the overall decline in AIDS cases has slowed down. This reversal has been accompanied by evidence of increasing transmission of HIV in several European countries, attributed to complacency regarding the effectiveness of treatment and a waning of public awareness regarding drug use and sexual practice. Since 2000, the rate of newly diagnosed cases of HIV has more than doubled to 89 per million population in 2008 (ECDC and WHO Europe, 2009). Further inroads in AIDS incidence rates will require more intensive evidence-based HIV prevention programmes that are focused and adapted to reach those most at risk of HIV infection (UNAIDS, 2008).

Definition and deviations

The incidence rate of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is the number of new cases per million population at year of diagnosis. Note that data for recent years are provisional due to reporting delays, which sometimes can be for several years depending on the country.

Estimates of the number of persons living with human Immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are calculated by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2008), and are based on national research studies. These estimates include all people (adults and children) with HIV infection in 2007, whether or not they have developed symptoms of AIDS.

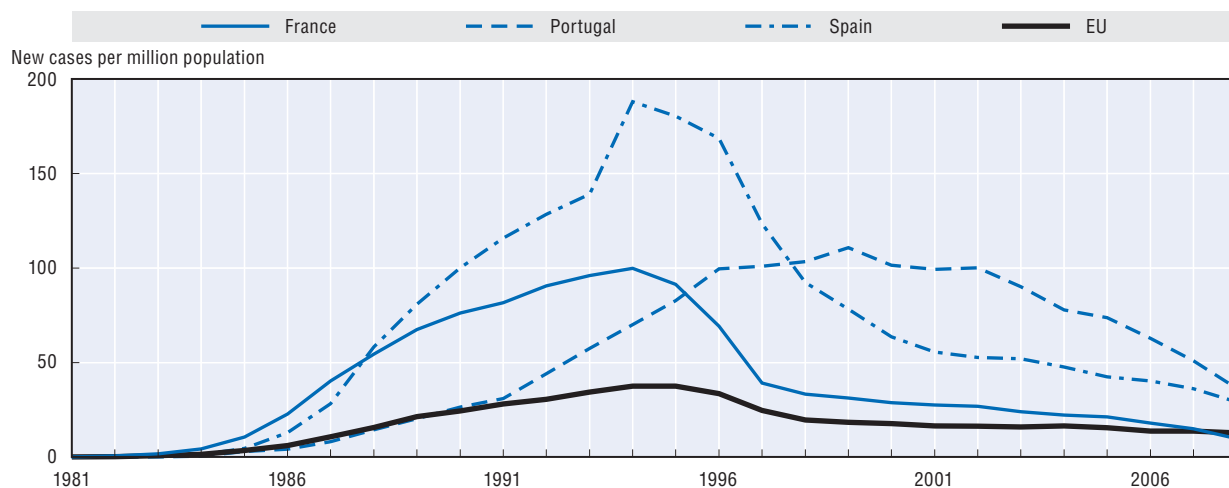
1.12.1. AIDS incidence rates in 2008, and estimated number of persons living with HIV in 2007



Source: OECD Health Data 2010; ECDC and WHO Europe (2009); UNAIDS (2008).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932336008>

1.12.2. Trends in AIDS incidence rates, selected EU countries, 1981-2008



Source: OECD Health Data 2010.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932336027>



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