

## **Poland**

### **Background**

Poland has an adult prevalence rate of 0.07% and an estimated 13,000 adults living with HIV/AIDS. Since the late 1980's, the epidemiological situation has been affected by the spread of HIV into the community of intravenous drug users. In the late 1990's, the epidemic moved from "old" heroin addicts to younger people experimenting with injection drugs, including injected amphetamine, and to the general population and especially women.

The number of AIDS cases in Poland has stabilized, with the number of newly detected infections staying at several hundred a year. But especially given the much higher infection rates in some neighboring countries, the epidemic still poses a major threat.

The Government of Poland was one of the first in Eastern Europe to formally recognize and to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The adoption by the Parliament in 1995 of the first National Programme of HIV Prevention and Care for People Living With HIV/AIDS assigned the main co-ordinating and implementation task to the Ministry of Health. Also involved were the Ministries of Education, Defence, Internal Affairs and Administration, Transportation and Marine Economy, Labour and Social Policy and Justice.

### **UNDP's Role**

In 1995, the UNDP Country Office in Warsaw started to assist the Polish Government in HIV prevention and provision of support to people living with HIV/AIDS. Starting from what was virtually a zero budget, over \$3 million was mobilized to focus on the most vulnerable parts of society. Support was provided to the drafting and implementation of the National AIDS Plan for 1996 – 1999, which was funded by the government.

In particular, UNDP played a key role in facilitating wide participation from the NGO community in implementing the National AIDS Plan. At present, about 80% of government activities and funds in the area of prevention are contracted out to NGOs.

The main goal of UNDP's intervention has been to limit the spread of HIV in the community of intravenous drug users and to help provide the necessary services and assistance to people already affected by the epidemic. At the same time UNDP has been issuing targeted publications and using the media to address the information needs of the general population, and mobilising local authorities to get actively involved in implementation of the National AIDS Plan on the local level.

Along with the UNAIDS Secretariat, UNFPA and WHO, strategic partnerships have been established with NGO's, the Ministry of Health, the Soros Foundation (International Harm Reduction Programme), bilateral donors and the private sector (including Levi Strauss & Co).

One strategic result already achieved by UNDP has been that the community of people living with HIV/AIDS in Poland is now mobilised to work in the area of HIV prevention and care. Many individuals have become professional and successful AIDS educators, who at the same time provide comprehensive knowledge about HIV and AIDS issues, and share their personal experience of living with the virus. Others act as street workers in needle and syringe exchange programmes, organise support groups for other People Living with HIV/AIDS; or coordinate volunteers programmes for provision of social and medical services.

Step-by-step capacity building in NGO sector is illustrated in the following two cases of UNDP assistance:

- ? **Harm Reduction in the Intravenous Drug Use Community** UNDP has co-operated with the Soros Foundation in providing funds to two NGO's in Warsaw and Krakow. Since 1999 both organisations have been model examples of best practice in harm reduction. They have a complex system of providing assistance to drug users, which includes needle exchange, methadone, shelter, social and material support, referral to therapeutic services. Numerous specialists from other countries in the region have participated in study tours to learn more about these successful programmes.
  
- ? **Support to People Living with HIV/AIDS** In 1995 a group of persons living with HIV/AIDS established a small NGO, the "Be with Us" Association, in Warsaw. These activists were trying to speak up for their rights, the rights of their friends, partners and families affected by HIV/AIDS. Being concerned about their privacy and security of their families, and having little experience in NGO management and advocacy work, they asked UNDP for assistance to cover their first basic costs of the NGO's existence. Within 2 years they had established a 24 hour AIDS hot-line financed by the National AIDS Centre. With the initial help from UNDP in 1997 they organized the first National Meeting of People Living with HIV/AIDS, which has become an annual event financed largely by pharmaceutical companies.

The success in of these initiatives in Poland has lead UNDP to organize a Meeting in Warsaw in May 2001 to design a regional programme of assistance. The National AIDS Centre of the Ministry of Health has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNDP to establish a "Resource Centre" for the sharing of experience and lessons learned and best practices as well as establishing of the databank of experts and consultants in the region. Under the modalities of East-East co-operation, eleven countries in the region will be able to co-operate and work together in their efforts to mitigate the impact of the epidemic.