

# EU's Levers to End HIV/AIDS in Ukraine



## Policy Report

December, 2024

Ukraine has long faced significant challenges in addressing its HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is one of the largest in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. Prior to the war, the country made notable strides in HIV prevention, treatment, and support for key populations, largely through a collaborative approach involving the government, civil society, and international donors like the Global Fund and PEPFAR. However, the ongoing conflict has severely disrupted the healthcare system, creating new barriers to treatment and exacerbating the vulnerabilities of people living with HIV.

Ukraine's path to EU membership offers a unique opportunity to reform its HIV/AIDS policies, enhance human rights protections, and integrate international best practices into its healthcare system.

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## On this policy brief

In February 2024, Aidsfonds, Friends of the Global Fund, and the Alliance for Public Health Ukraine convened stakeholders from Ukrainian authorities, EU institutions, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the UN, and civil society to discuss Ukraine's AIDS response and the EU's potential role in advancing it. The recommendations in this policy brief have been developed by the organisers, based on and elaborating upon these discussions. However, they represent the views of the organisers alone and should not be interpreted as endorsements by the aforementioned stakeholders unless explicitly stated otherwise.

We would like to extend our thanks to all the individual contributors from CO "Legalife-Ukraine", Cohort NGO, the Eastern and Central European and Central Asian Commission on Drug Policy (ECECAD), Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA), the Eurasian Movement for the Right to Health in Prisons, EuroHealthNet, ECDC, ILGA-Europe, ILGA-World, the International Network of People Who Use Drugs (INPUD), the National LGBTI Consortium of Ukraine #LGBTI\_PRO, the Public Health Center of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, Public organisation "ALLIANCE.GLOBAL", the Regional Expert Group on Migration and Health for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and the WHO Regional Office for Europe for their invaluable input to this policy brief.

Above all, this brief is dedicated to the health workers and community leaders in Ukraine who have ensured the continuity of health services throughout the war. Your unwavering commitment and resilience are profoundly appreciated.



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# Background

## Ukraine's HIV/AIDS response before the war

The Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region has the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the world, with Ukraine facing the second-largest AIDS epidemic in the region. Before the war, Ukraine made substantial progress in its AIDS response. The country expanded access to life-saving HIV medications, partnered with community-led and community-based organisations, and secured full state financing for innovative prevention services targeting key populations (UNAIDS). Ukraine stood out as the only country in the region where the government financed a basic package of HIV prevention services for key populations from the state budget. These services, delivered by community-led and community-based organisations contracted by the Ukrainian government, benefited hundreds of thousands of people (UNDP).

## Impact of the war on Ukraine's healthcare system and HIV response

In February 2022, Russia launched a large-scale military invasion of Ukraine, causing widespread civilian casualties and extensive infrastructure damage. Millions of Ukrainians were displaced internally or forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

Ukraine's healthcare services have been severely affected by security challenges, disrupted supply chains, restricted mobility, energy crises, and mass displacement. Staffing shortages, budget constraints, and damage to healthcare facilities have further strained capacity, with some services temporarily suspended due to hospital damage or occupation. Delivering humanitarian aid, particularly in remote areas, remains challenging amid ongoing security threats and logistical constraints.

The war has worsened mental health challenges, with rising cases of PTSD, depression, and anxiety placing additional strain on the healthcare system. These issues disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including key populations and people living with HIV, who also face human rights violations such as displacement and violence. Addressing these needs is crucial to ensuring treatment adherence and access to essential services.

Additionally, the war has worsened the situation for drug users, who face difficulties in accessing life-saving opioid treatments and harm reduction programmes, especially in occupied territories. As a result, many people living with HIV have been at significant risk of treatment interruption, particularly in these areas.

As a result, many people living with HIV have been at significant risk of treatment interruption, particularly in occupied territories.

Despite these challenges, Ukraine's government has maintained strong support for HIV programmes, including those addressing human rights-related barriers to services. This commitment has been implemented through an effective coalition of government, civil society and community-led organisations, international organisations, and donors – particularly the Global Fund and PEPFAR (United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief). Together, they have managed to secure essential supplies of antiretroviral therapy, tuberculosis medicines, and opioid agonist therapy, and enabled community-based organisations, such as the Alliance for Public Health and 100% Life, to ensure continuity of HIV treatment and to scale up access to PrEP and harm reduction services.

The sustainability of Ukraine's HIV/AIDS response hinges on the continued ability of all involved actors to deliver essential services and maintain critical support networks.

## EU's support to Ukraine

Since the onset of the war, the EU has consistently supported Ukraine with political, financial, and humanitarian assistance, benefiting both Ukrainians and host communities. This support presents an opportunity to strengthen health systems, enhance health security, and sustain aid to individuals affected by HIV in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, with a focus on post-war recovery needs:

- In 2022, Ukraine joined the EU4Health programme and Horizon Europe, enabling Ukrainian stakeholders to access EU funding for health programmes, research, and the recovery of the health sector.
- The EU established the Ukraine Facility, a dedicated financial instrument worth up to €50 billion to support Ukraine's reconstruction and modernisation, including in the healthcare sector. This support is direly needed, as a March 2023 report by the World Bank estimated that reconstruction and recovery needs in the health sector would total approximately US\$16.4 billion by 2033. The facility includes three pillars: direct state budget support, an investment framework to mobilise investments for Ukraine's recovery, and technical support for reforms and interest coverage on loans. State funding will be used to implement reforms and investments outlined in the "Ukraine Plan," presented by the Ukrainian government in March 2024 and approved by the EU Council in May 2024. While the plan emphasises structural reforms and investments across various sectors, it does not explicitly detail specific health sector initiatives. However, the overarching goal of modernisation and alignment with EU standards, including on human rights protections, implies that health system reforms are likely part of the broader strategy to enhance public services and improve the well-being of Ukrainian citizens. The plan was positively assessed by the European Commission, enabling the disbursement of up to €1.89 billion in pre-financing.
- Ukraine's new status as an EU candidate country strengthens the potential for further reforms that can support the HIV/AIDS response, including in the areas of drug policy reform, drug treatment regulation, decriminalisation of sex work, acceleration of reforms protecting LGBTIQ+ rights, penitentiary healthcare reform and decriminalisation of HIV exposure and transmission.
- The EU is a founding member and key donor to the Global Fund, a crucial partner in Ukraine's HIV/AIDS efforts. Due to the enormous costs of the war, the Ukrainian government is currently unable to fulfil many of the commitments made before February 2022, including financing HIV and tuberculosis prevention and treatment services from the national budget. International donors, such as the Global Fund, have stepped in to fill these critical gaps by funding essential commodities and services. In September 2022, the EU pledged €715 million for the period 2023–2025.

## The Global Fund's operations in Ukraine since the onset of the war

- Between March 2022 and August 2023, the Global Fund approved US\$27.7 million in emergency funding to support the continuity of HIV and TB prevention, testing and treatment services in Ukraine.
- This is in addition to the US\$165.5 million approved in December 2023 for the 2024-2026 implementation period to support Ukraine in fighting HIV and TB and strengthen its systems for health.
- This new funding builds on the US\$135.7 million in grants and catalytic matching funds allocated to Ukraine to support the fight against HIV and TB in the country over the 2021-2023 implementation period, and US\$54.5 million for the country's COVID-19 response – totalling nearly US\$190 million.
- The Global Fund has also approved US\$28 million to reprogram existing grants to respond and adapt to the programmatic needs of the country.
- Since 2003, the Global Fund has invested over US\$1 billion in Ukraine to support HIV and TB programmes, as well as initiatives to adapt health service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. These adaptations, along with strengthened resilience in health and community systems, have proven essential during the ongoing crisis.

The Global Fund's flexible systems allowed this additional funding to progress from planning to approval in just five days. The Global Fund's procedures and responsiveness have been critical in addressing the crisis from its onset, enabling partners to prioritise essential life-saving interventions. Global Fund-supported HIV and TB programmes in Ukraine have adapted to continue operations, employing innovative approaches such as the expanded use of mobile units, extending HIV and TB testing to the military, and providing social support, home deliveries, and mental health services for displaced individuals and healthcare workers. These programmes also offer critical assistance for individuals experiencing gender-based or domestic violence, as well as legal aid and counselling for those facing stigma and discrimination related to their sexual or gender identity or their HIV/TB status.



# Recommendations to the EU

## Ukraine's accession to the EU

Ukraine applied for EU membership in February 2022 and was granted candidate status in June 2022. Accession negotiations were launched by the European Council in December 2023, with a negotiation framework established by June 2024. These negotiations are organised into clusters and chapters, during which Ukraine aligns its laws and standards with those of the EU. The European Commission monitors progress through annual enlargement reports, the first of which was published in November 2023.

Ukrainian civil society organisations are actively engaged in the EU accession process. They contribute by monitoring reforms, providing expert input on legislative changes, conducting public awareness campaigns, and participating in consultations with the government and EU institutions to ensure alignment with EU standards.

Ukraine has the second-largest HIV epidemic in the WHO European Region. The EU accession process presents a critical opportunity to integrate a rights-based approach to healthcare for people living with HIV and those most at risk as part of the reform agenda. It is widely recognised that the criminalisation of drug use and possession, sex work, consensual same-sex relations, and HIV transmission not only hinders HIV prevention and treatment but also violates the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Criminalisation of certain groups is a primary driver of the HIV epidemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The following recommendations aim to ensure that Ukraine's legal and policy frameworks for HIV/AIDS align with EU standards, enhance the national response, and support reforms central to a rights-based HIV response. This section outlines six key reforms:

- **Drug policy reform**
- **Drug treatment regulation**
- **Decriminalisation of sex work**
- **Acceleration of reforms to ensure and protect LGBTIQ+ rights**
- **Penitentiary healthcare reform**
- **Decriminalisation of HIV exposure and transmission**



## 1. Drug policy reform

**The situation:** Ukrainian law imposes severe penalties for drug possession, including incarceration for small quantities intended for personal use. The disproportionate emphasis on law enforcement over public health undermines the development of democratic institutions, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights. Reforming these drug laws and policies would address these issues by fostering a more just and equitable society, reducing the burden on law enforcement, and redirecting resources to enhance public health and social well-being.

- The EU's Drug Strategy (2021-2025) identifies the provision of alternatives to coercive sanctions as a priority: "Although all Member States employ at least one alternative to coercive sanctions for drug-using offenders and for people arrested, charged with or convicted for drug-related offences or people found in possession of drugs for personal use, stepping up efforts and mainstreaming the implementation of effective measures should be progressed. In this regard, drug consumption and/or drug possession for personal use or possession of small amounts do not constitute a criminal offence in many Member States, or there is the option to refrain from imposing criminal sanctions".
- The Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health on Drug Use, Harm Reduction, and the Right to Health (A/HRC/56/52) advocates for the decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use and calls for alternative regulatory approaches that prioritise health and human rights over punitive measures.

### Recommendation

**Laws that treat personal drug possession without intent to distribute as a criminal offence should be repealed. Drug policy reform in Ukraine must be systematic, with the adoption of a new evidence-based strategy informed by community, civil society, and human rights perspectives. This approach should ensure access to treatment and justice in a transparent, inclusive, and rights-oriented manner.**

**Why change is important?** Decriminalising drug possession for personal use reduces stigma and discrimination, thereby improving access to healthcare, harm reduction, and legal services. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health (A/HRC/56/52) has emphasised that punitive drug laws exacerbate health disparities, particularly among marginalised groups. This highlights the need for harm reduction approaches and the decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use.

## 2. Drug treatment regulation

**The situation:** From an HIV perspective, treatment for opioid use disorder is critically important in Ukraine, where opioid injection is widespread. Before the war, less than 6% of the over 200,000 people injecting opioids in Ukraine were receiving Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT). OAT remains heavily regulated in Ukraine, although some restrictions have been eased due to COVID-19 and the war. Ukraine's OAT coverage is significantly lower than the lowest rates among EU countries, highlighting a significant gap.

- One of the priority areas of the EU Drug Strategy (2021–2025) is that EU Member States ensure voluntary and non-discriminatory access to a broad range of effective evidence-based services, including professional counselling, psychosocial, behavioural, and medication-assisted treatment. This includes person-centred opioid maintenance therapy, rehabilitation, social reintegration, and recovery support programmes.



**Recommendation**  
Drug treatment regulation should be aligned with EU standards and integrated into the health chapter of the accession negotiations. It is essential to remove all legal and regulatory barriers, restrictive inclusion criteria, and other obstacles to make OAT widely available in primary care facilities, regularise take-home doses of methadone for stable patients, and introduce methadone into custodial settings.

**Why change is important?** Expanding access to OAT aligns with EU principles of equitable, person-centred healthcare. Scaling up OAT access can significantly reduce HIV transmission among people who inject drugs, the largest key population and one of the most vulnerable to HIV infection in Ukraine. Furthermore, integrating OAT into primary care and custodial settings ensures continuity of care, improves health outcomes, and reduces stigma.

### 3. Decriminalisation of sex work

**The situation:** Article 181.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences imposes administrative sanctions or fines for commercial sexual transactions. Repeated offences can result in higher fines. Additionally, several sex work-related acts are defined as crimes in the penal code.

- The Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026, approved by the UN General Assembly, prioritises the removal of laws criminalising sex work to foster and enable a legal environment for a rights-based HIV response.

#### Recommendation

**Decriminalise sex work and recognise it as legitimate work to enable better health and social protections for sex workers.**

#### Why change is important?

Criminalising sex work increases the risk of HIV acquisition and exposes sex workers to violence from clients, police, and others. It also creates significant barriers to accessing healthcare services, including effective HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support. Additionally, the lack of recognition of sex workers as legitimate workers denies them access to the basic health and social safety nets provided to other workers.





#### 4. Acceleration of reforms to ensure and protect LGBTIQ+ rights

##### 4.1 Protection against hate crimes

**The situation:** The latest government action plans for implementing the National Human Rights Strategy (the 2015–2020 plan and the 2021–2023 plan) included commitments to criminalise hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, the Criminal Code still lacks specific provisions addressing such crimes against LGBTIQ+ individuals. Draft Law 5488, which aims to criminalise hate crimes and explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected grounds, remains unadopted. As a result, investigations and prosecutions of anti-LGBTIQ+ violence are often inadequate.

- The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recommends recognising sexual orientation and gender identity as aggravating factors in hate crimes.
- The EU acquis mandates protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, as outlined in key legal instruments such as Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which requires the EU to combat such discrimination in its policies and activities.

##### Recommendation

**Adopt Draft Law 5488 to criminalise hate crimes, explicitly including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected grounds.**

##### Why change is important?

Criminalising hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity is essential for protecting LGBTIQ+ individuals from violence and discrimination. Stigma and discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity often create barriers to healthcare access, reducing the uptake of HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services. Adopting these protections would align Ukraine with EU acquis obligations and uphold the principle of non-discrimination.

## 4.2 Anti-discrimination

**The situation:** Ukraine's 2015 anti-discrimination law protects individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, partially aligning with EU standards. However, current legislation does not extend these protections comprehensively to other areas of life, leaving members of the LGBTIQ+ community in Ukraine exposed to significant legal gaps in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, housing, and access to services.

- EU Directive 2000/78/EC mandates that Member States prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in key areas, including employment, education, and social protection. The directive seeks to ensure equal treatment and protect individuals from unfair practices due to their sexual orientation, fostering inclusivity and upholding human rights across the EU.

- The European Commission's LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy (2020–2025) highlights the importance of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. It calls for the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity protections in all relevant areas of life, such as education and healthcare. The strategy specifically encourages Member States to enhance their legal frameworks to address the needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals across all sectors and public services.

### Recommendation

**Expand anti-discrimination laws to include explicit protections for LGBTIQ+ individuals in areas such as education, healthcare, housing, and access to services, in line with EU Directive 2000/78/EC and the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2020–2025, ensuring comprehensive legal safeguards across all aspects of life.**

### Why change is important?

Expanding anti-discrimination protections to encompass education, healthcare, housing, and access to services is essential for addressing the systemic inequalities faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals. Discrimination in education can limit opportunities, perpetuating socioeconomic disadvantage and increasing vulnerability to health risks, including HIV. Housing security is equally crucial, as homelessness or unstable living conditions are strongly linked to poorer health outcomes and limited access to HIV prevention and care. Inclusive healthcare protections ensure LGBTIQ+ individuals can seek medical support without fear of stigma or mistreatment, directly improving access to HIV testing, treatment, and prevention services. Broadening these protections promotes equality across key areas of life, addressing the structural drivers of HIV vulnerability and fostering healthier, more inclusive communities.



### 4.3 Removing barriers for transgender people

**The situation:** Transgender individuals in Ukraine face significant barriers to healthcare due to outdated and pathologising medical protocols. Despite the World Health Organization’s adoption of ICD-11 (the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases), which removes the pathologisation of transgender identities, Ukraine continues to use the ICD-10, which classifies “transsexualism” as a mental disorder. This outdated classification contributes to stigma and discrimination. Additionally, Ukraine lacks a streamlined legal gender recognition process, which complicates access to healthcare and other services. Transgender individuals face administrative and medical hurdles, such as psychiatric evaluations, in order to change their gender marker, further exacerbating barriers to essential healthcare, including HIV services.

- The European Commission’s LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2020–2025 emphasises the importance of legal gender recognition as a crucial step towards ensuring equality and protection for transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Legal gender recognition is vital not only for recognising the dignity and rights of transgender people but also for improving access to healthcare services, including HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. discrimination based on sexual orientation, as outlined in key legal instruments such as Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which requires the EU to combat such discrimination in its policies and activities.

#### Recommendation

**Implement ICD-11 to depathologise transgender identities and update legislation to enable quick, transparent, and accessible legal gender recognition based on self-determination.**

#### Why change is important?

The use of outdated and pathologising classifications hinders transgender people’s access to healthcare, particularly HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. These classifications perpetuate stigma, exacerbating the disproportionate impact of HIV on transgender communities. Implementing ICD-11 and streamlining legal gender recognition would align Ukraine’s healthcare system with international standards, reduce stigma, and improve access to gender-affirming healthcare, which is critical for combating the spread of HIV.



## 5. Penitentiary healthcare reform

**The situation:** Currently, the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine is responsible for providing healthcare services to people in prisons. However, the post-Soviet medical system for convicts and prisoners falls short of delivering adequate healthcare. This gap is particularly evident as the civil healthcare sector undergoes significant improvements driven by ongoing reforms.

### Recommendation

**Healthcare responsibilities should be transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Health. This transfer should encompass all levels of care, including primary, secondary, and emergency medical services, as well as the procurement of medicines and supplies. Key political decisions have already been made, and the necessary normative documents have been developed. Ukraine would greatly benefit from further EU support to advance the practical implementation of penitentiary healthcare reform.**

## 6. The decriminalisation of HIV exposure and transmission

**The situation:** In 2011, Ukraine adopted the Law on Combating the Spread of Diseases Caused by HIV and the Legal and Social Protection of People Living with HIV. In 2023, significant amendments were made to this law to remove barriers to HIV testing, abolish the concept of “risk groups,” and guarantee universal access to HIV services, including Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and self-testing. However, Article 130 of the Criminal Code still criminalises the transmission of HIV, even when unintentional, which remains a significant barrier to effectively addressing the epidemic.

- The EU Action Plan on HIV/AIDS 2014-2020 called for the decriminalisation of HIV transmission, advocating that laws should not be used to penalise people with HIV for behaviours that are not harmful or intentional.

### Why change is important?

The separation of prison and civil healthcare systems undermines the provision of medical services for detainees, particularly in critical areas such as HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. These challenges are especially acute in high-risk settings like prisons.

### Recommendation

**Repeal Article 130 of the Criminal Code and the criminalisation of HIV transmission.**

### Why change is important?

The EU Action Plan on HIV/AIDS 2014-2020 called for the decriminalisation of HIV transmission, advocating that laws should not be used to penalise people with HIV for behaviours that are not harmful or intentional.

## EU's financial tools and instruments

This section outlines recommendations related to:

- EU4Health
- Research and innovation
- Global partnerships instrument
- The Ukraine Facility

### 1. EU4Health

#### Programming of the current EU4Health programme:

- Ensure that Ukraine receives treatment equal to other beneficiary countries, addressing challenges stemming from the conflict and other context-specific issues.
- Include operating grants in the remaining EU4Health Work Programme. Such grants would provide vital support to Ukrainian NGOs and community-led or community-based organisations.
- Issue targeted calls to support the prevention, testing, and linkage to care for communicable diseases, with a focus on vulnerable groups and dedicated funding for community-led and community-based organisations and services.
- Ensure that each call remains inclusive of the health needs of migrants from Ukraine.
- Allocate at least 20% of the budget to Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, as set out in the EU4Health framework regulation.
- Further support cross-border collaboration between Ukrainian and other European public health institutions and stakeholders, including clinical exchange, data exchange, and peer learning.

#### Future EU4Health programme:

- Maintain health as a core EU priority in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).
- Increase the programme's budget in the next MFF to account for its expansion to new countries.
- Ensure equal involvement of Ukrainian health stakeholders in consultations on the new programme's design, allowing for the consideration of conflict-related and local challenges.
- Given the burden of infectious diseases in these countries and rising population mobility, allocate specific funding for communicable diseases alongside horizontal calls.
- Boost funding for community-led and community-based service delivery and monitoring, which are essential for strengthening health system resilience.
- Facilitate Ukraine's integration into the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA).



## 2. Research and innovation

### Horizon Europe:

Enhance support for the Ukrainian research and innovation community by increasing funding, simplifying application processes, and fostering collaborations with EU research institutions.

- Strengthen partnerships through collaborative projects, knowledge exchange, and joint training programmes, while ensuring ongoing support and monitoring to sustain increased participation and integration into the broader European research ecosystem.
- Invest in capacity-building initiatives by funding training programmes and fellowships to equip Ukrainian researchers and healthcare providers with cutting-edge knowledge and skills in HIV and TB care.
- Foster partnerships between biomedical research, public health, and social sciences to address systemic barriers to the prevention, treatment, and care of HIV and TB.
- Issue calls for proposals targeting infectious diseases, including HIV and tuberculosis, to support the development of innovative prevention, treatment, and cure tools, along with implementation research, interdisciplinary studies, and effective community-based interventions.
- Support digital health innovations such as telemedicine and AI-driven tools to improve diagnostics, treatment accessibility, and adherence, particularly in remote and conflict-affected regions.
- Facilitate partnerships to accelerate the development of advanced treatments and ensure affordable access to HIV and TB medications in Ukraine.

### FP10:

On top of the recommendations above, which remain valid for FP10, we recommend to:

- Increase the Framework Programme budget to €200 billion, allocating 10% to a dedicated health cluster.
- Evaluate the participation of Ukrainian researchers in EU-funded programs, to identify barriers such as administrative, financial, or technical challenges. Develop tailored strategies to address these bottlenecks, including capacity-building initiatives, streamlined application processes, and targeted funding opportunities.

### 3. Global partnerships instrument:

- Scale EU Official Development Assistance to at least €200 billion, maintaining a dedicated instrument for development cooperation and preserving the target of allocating at least 20% to human development.
- Ensure adequate funding for the future Global Challenges Programme, grounded in a comprehensive assessment of the funding needs of global health initiatives and other multilateral organisations.
- In 2025, play a full role in the success of the 8th Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria replenishment, and actively participate in Global Fund governance, including the Board and committees, to support continued investments in challenging operating environments, emergency settings, and multi-country grants for community-led programmes targeting key populations (incl. in ineligible countries). Additionally, support the sustainable transition from Global Fund funding for countries accessing the European Union.
- Closely monitoring the impact of a potential shutdown of PEPFAR on HIV efforts in Ukraine.

### 4. The Ukraine Facility

- Increase transparency and information sharing regarding the Ukraine Facility's goals, processes, and funding mechanisms. Clear and accessible communication is essential to ensure that stakeholders, including Ukrainian authorities, civil society, and international partners, can effectively engage and align their efforts. Regular updates, stakeholder consultations, and publicly available information should be prioritised to build trust and facilitate coordinated implementation.
- Provide financial support for the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and modernisation of the health sector, including health reforms, regulatory frameworks, community health systems, infrastructure, medical equipment, and innovative health technologies, in alignment with Ukraine's national plans.
- Mobilise additional funding to address rehabilitation and reconstruction needs (from EU member states and external actors) and promote donor coordination.
- Ensure adequate funding post-2027.



## 3.1 Facts and statistics

- **HIV epidemic in Ukraine:** Ukraine has an estimated population of 244,877 people living with HIV (PLHIV)<sup>1</sup>, making it the second-largest HIV epidemic in the WHO European Region. The epidemic is concentrated in key populations:
  - » People who inject drugs: 20.3% prevalence
  - » People in prisons and other closed settings: 8.9% prevalence
  - » Sex workers: 3.1% prevalence
  - » Men who have sex with men: 3.9% prevalence
  - » Transgender people: 1.7% prevalence
- **Progress Toward UNAIDS 95-95-95 Targets:** Ukraine has made significant strides toward achieving the UNAIDS 95-95-95 goals, reaching 75<sup>2</sup>-75-95 in 2023<sup>3</sup> (up from 70-72-93 in 2018).
- **Antiretroviral therapy coverage:** Antiretroviral therapy (ART) coverage among people living with both TB and HIV increased from 65% in 2015 to 92% in 2022<sup>4</sup>.
- **Antiretroviral therapy abroad:** As of 2024, approximately 8,000 patients are receiving ART outside Ukraine, an increase from 5,000 patients in 2023<sup>5</sup>.
- **Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT):** The number of patients on OAT has increased by 20.2% over the past two years, reaching 29,779 people in 2024.
- **Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP):** PrEP usage more than doubled between 2021 and 2023, reaching 13,147 individuals<sup>6</sup>.
- **Tuberculosis (TB):** The incidence rate of TB fell steadily between 2015 and 2021, from 91 to 73 cases per 100,000 population, but increased to 90 cases per 100,000 in 2022<sup>7</sup>. However, the prevalence and mortality level of TB remain high in the country and drug-resistant TB remains a public health threat.
- **Mental health needs:** An estimated 9.6 million people in Ukraine are at risk of, or currently living with, a mental health condition, with 3.9 million experiencing moderate to severe symptoms<sup>8</sup>.

- **Population displacement:** As of the end of 2023 some 10 million Ukrainians remain displaced, including 3.7 million within Ukraine and a further 6.3 million who have sought safety abroad<sup>9</sup>.
- **Humanitarian assistance:** 14.6 million people in Ukraine are in need of humanitarian assistance; however, only 8.5 million are currently receiving aid<sup>10</sup>.

## 3.2 Ukraine's model and strengths

Despite the significant health challenges caused by the war, Ukraine stands out as a model of innovation and a regional pioneer in addressing HIV and TB. A strong coalition of government, civil society, international organisations, and donors has sustained HIV treatment and services through the supply of antiretroviral therapy, tuberculosis medicines, and opioid agonist therapy. The resilience and innovation of community-led and community-based organisations have been pivotal in reaching populations at greater risk of HIV and TB during the war. These organisations have provided direct healthcare services, essential psychosocial support, counselling, and continuity of care where formal healthcare systems are disrupted.

Decentralised healthcare services - including mobile clinics, telemedicine, and community outreach - have reduced the need for individuals to visit hospitals in dangerous or hard-to-reach areas. Ukraine has also become a leader in using AI-driven innovations to combat HIV and TB amidst the challenges of war. These include AI-powered diagnostics for TB, predictive modelling for ARV treatment adherence, and tools for identifying at-risk patients to enable timely interventions.

Amidst the crisis, Ukraine has developed models and expertise that can be shared with many EU member states and neighbouring countries. Its innovative approaches to community-based healthcare delivery, AI-driven tools for health management, and decentralised care systems could offer valuable lessons for strengthening public health systems across the region.

### 3.3 Resources

- Alliance for Public Health: Official Statement on the Anniversary of the Brutal War: Two Years of Resilience (2024). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/7sgTG>
- Council of the European Union, EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/1mjTY>
- Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity (ECOM): Gender Barriers in Access to HIV Services for Transgender Women in 15 Countries of Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia (2023). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/Qqiu1>
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2023 – 2022 data. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/NDkvh>
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Operational Considerations for the Provision of HIV Continuum of Care for Refugees from Ukraine in the EU/EEA (2022). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/tmqgY>
- European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), ECRI report on Ukraine (2017). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/TuJry>
- Regional Expert Group on Migration and Health in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Ukrainian Refugees in European Countries: Barriers, Solutions and Best Practices (2023). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/LjZ3F>
- The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Progress Assessment Global Fund Breaking Down Barriers Initiative (2023). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/LwEt2>
- UNAIDS, Two Years On: UNAIDS supports Ukraine’s commitment to the HIV response (2024). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/miWIT>
- UNAIDS, Human Rights Factsheet series: Transgender and Gender Diverse People (2021). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/mKbi2>
- United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health, Report on Drug Use, Harm Reduction, and the Right to Health, A/HRC/56/52 (2024). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/yGEuK>
- World Bank, Government of Ukraine, European Union, United Nations, Ukraine Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (2023) Available at: <https://shorturl.at/SZZKZ>

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<sup>1</sup> The latest estimated data, as of 2021 (Centre for Public Health of the Ministry of Ukraine)

<sup>2</sup> Idem

<sup>3</sup> WHO

<sup>4</sup> Idem

<sup>5</sup> Centre for Public Health of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine

<sup>6</sup> PrEPWatch

<sup>7</sup> WHO

<sup>8</sup> Idem

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR

<sup>10</sup> OCHA

