

Injecting drug is one of the main modes of HIV transmission. Over the past few years, increased HIV prevalence among injecting drug users was documented in a number of countries of the region of Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa.

Latest estimates show an accelerated increase in HIV infections in the region. Approximately, 100,000 people become infected in 2005 only. The total number of people living with HIV/AIDS is estimated 620,000 people.

Although the main mode of HIV transmission in the Region is unprotected sexual contact, injecting drug use is becoming an increasingly important factor, it is the predominant mode of infection in at least two countries namely Islamic Republic of Iran and Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Islamic Republic of Iran has responded with a pioneering experience in the field of reducing the risks of HIV prevalence among injecting drug users particularly in prisons. Substitution therapy, syringe distribution and HIV counseling, testing and treatment were offered to the prisoners to prevent the spread of HIV.

Harm reduction concept means taking the necessary interventions that can help in achieving better chances for HIV prevention among drug users, and avoiding unsafe practices that make them more vulnerable to be infected with the virus and infect others.

Based on these facts, the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and UNAIDS Regional support team are organizing a regional workshop on drug use and HIV entitled “ towards implementation of comprehensive HIV and AIDS Response among drug

users in the Region”.

This workshop is a collaborative activity held within the framework of :

- The Fourth Regional Working Group on Drug Use and HIV in MENA, convened by the UNODC Cairo Regional Office.
- Strengthening Civil Society Organization on Harm Reduction in the MENA Project, supported by WHO and the International Harm Reduction Association (IHRA)

Participants to the workshop are experts representing the concerned International Organizations and representatives of 15 countries. The workshop aims at:

- Increase commitment and agree on next steps for developing and implementing a comprehensive response to drug use and HIV, including outreach activities, as part of the National Strategic Plans on AIDS.
- Build capacities to effectively utilize emerging data from assessments on drug use and AIDS towards adapted programming in countries.
- Identify capacity-building needs to secure sustainable implementation of drug use and HIV programmes, including harm reduction measures

