

UNGASS COUNTRY PROGRESS REPORT

The Netherlands and Parts of the Dutch Kingdom in the Caribbean

Reporting period: January 2011–December 2013

Submission date: 31 March 2014

Abbreviations

(Ministry of) VWS	(Ministry of) Health, Welfare and Sport
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ASG	'Aanvullende regeling Seksuele Gezondheidszorg'
cART	Combination antiretroviral treatment
CIb	Centre for Infectious Disease Control
CVZ	'College voor Zorgverzekeringen'
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
GDP	Gross domestic product
GGD	Municipal health service
GP	General practitioner
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IDU	Intravenous drug use
IGZ	The Netherlands Health Care Inspectorate
MSM	Men who have sex with men
NCPI	National Composite Policy Index
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PLWHA	People living with HIV/AIDS
RIVM	National Institute for Public Health and the Environment
SHM	'Stichting HIV Monitoring'
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WBMV	'Wet op Bijzondere Medische Verrichtingen'
WHO	World Health Organization

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II. Status at a glance

Writing process

This Country Progress Report for the Global AIDS Response Progress Reporting 2014 is based on previous reports in connection with the 2001 'Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS' as well as the 2004 'Dublin Declaration on Partnership to Fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia'. The report has been compiled by the Ministry of Health Welfare and Sport (VWS) and the Centre for Infectious Disease Control (CIb) of the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) with contributions from other ministries civil society and other stakeholders. STI AIDS Netherlands, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and an expertise STI centre for HIV and other STI, has consolidated the input from other NGOs. In particular, this involved completing part B of the National Composite Policy Index (NCPI) questionnaire and commenting on a final draft version of this Country Progress Report.

Status of the epidemic

The HIV epidemic in The Netherlands is evolving slowly and its characteristics have not changed substantially during the reporting period 2011-2013.

The Netherlands has a concentrated HIV epidemic, i.e. a low prevalence of HIV infection in the general population but a higher prevalence in specific sub-populations¹. Primary high-risk sub-populations are men who have sex with men (MSM) and migrants from high-prevalence countries. The epidemic in the Netherlands is primarily fuelled by transmission among MSM.

The number of HIV-infected individuals (15-70 years) living in the Netherlands on 1 January 2008 has been estimated to be 21,500 (19,000-24,000)². This represents an increase of about 10% in comparison with the previous estimate in 15-49-year-olds from 2005. The estimated HIV infection prevalence remained at 0.2% in the adult population. Of the HIV infections in January 2008, 55% were estimated to be attributed to MSM transmission, 40% to heterosexual contacts and 4% to intravenous drug use (IDU).

In June 2013, 21,157 patients at HIV treatment centres in the Netherlands were registered by the Stichting HIV Monitoring (SHM)³. The average increase in new HIV diagnoses is 1,100 per year, including 700-750 cases among MSM. Of 17,006 (80%) patients alive in active follow-up in the Netherlands as of June 2013, 16,813 (99%) were adults (≥ 18 years) and 193 (1%) were children and adolescents. Of the 17,006 patients, 80% were male and 20% were female. The median age was 47 years (interquartile range 39-54 years). The HIV patient population is ageing and currently 37% of the patients is 50 years or older.

Of adult patients in follow-up in the Netherlands as of June 2013, the largest group was MSM (60%). The majority of newly diagnosed infection occurred also in MSM (67%). Heterosexuals accounted for 30% of patients (16% of men and 87% of women). Heterosexuals included a considerable proportion of individuals originating from other countries than the Netherlands (32% originated from the Netherlands). The most common

¹ UNAIDS and WHO. 2000. Guidelines for second generation HIV surveillance. Available from: http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/surveillance/en/cds_edc_2000_5.pdf

² RIVM/CIb. 2009. National estimate of HIV prevalence in the Netherlands: comparison and applicability of different estimation tools

³ SHM. 2013. Monitoring Report 2012. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection in the Netherlands. Available from: <http://www.hiv-monitoring.nl/english/>

area of origin was sub Saharan Africa (42% of heterosexuals). IDU constituted 2% of patients.

Until June 2013 of the 4,151 patients no longer in care 2,104 patients had died, the other were lost to follow-up. The AIDS incidence and mortality among HIV-infected individuals appear to exhibit a slight decline in recent years^{4,5}.

The status of the epidemic is detailed under the prescribed headings of section 'III. Overview of the AIDS epidemic'.

Policy and programmatic response

During the reporting period 2011-2013, the overall HIV/AIDS-related policy and programmatic frameworks in the Netherlands have remained largely unaltered, notwithstanding a number of important developments. Basis for the HIV policy is the national policy plan STI/HIV 2012-2016 "To renew and reinforce" of December 2011. Goals will be under review in 2014. The plan was developed by the Centre for Infectious Disease Control in close collaboration with the Ministry Health Welfare and Sport, and all other stakeholders involved in HIV and STI control ((sub-)national (non-)governmental stakeholders).

The national STI/HIV plan outlines central principles of Dutch HIV/AIDS policy, such as the importance of prevention, the importance of linkage between prevention and care as well as efforts to ensure low-threshold access to testing and treatment. The national plan further underlines the crucial contributions of different (non-)governmental stakeholders in the area of STI/HIV. The responsibilities and relations of these organisations are described in order to reduce overlap and gaps. The division of responsibilities are mainly organized by risk groups and serves to promote tailor-made approaches based on appropriate expertise.

HIV/AIDS policy is primarily a responsibility of the Ministry of VWS. It should be recognised, however, that policy development in the realms of HIV/AIDS depends on the collaboration of a range of (sub-)national (non-)governmental stakeholders. Similarly, the implementation of HIV/AIDS policy-related activities relies on collaboration among a multitude of stakeholders.

The Dutch government seeks to place HIV/AIDS policy in a larger framework of sexual health. The national STI/HIV plan builds upon previous policy reports, such as the sexual health policy document of 2009⁶. Of further influence is the national note on health policy (Landelijke nota gezondheidsbeleid, 2011⁷), which forms the basis for the current lifestyle policy, addressing multiple health issues, including sexual health.

Based on STI/HIV epidemiology in its behavioural context, the following risk populations are identified in the national STI/HIV plan:

- Young people
- Men who have sex with men (MSM)
- Migrants (primarily those from HIV-endemic countries)
- HIV-infected persons

Furthermore, the following points of special interest for STI/HIV control and policy are acknowledged:

⁴ RIVM/CiB. 2013. Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, in the Netherlands in 2012. Available from: : <http://www.rivm.nl/bibliotheek/rapporten>

⁵ SHM. 2013. Monitoring Report 2012. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection in the Netherlands. Available from: <http://www.hiv-monitoring.nl/english/>

⁶ VWS. 2009. Seksuele gezondheid. Available from: <http://www.minvws.nl/includes/dl/openbestand.asp?File=/images/seksuele-gezondheid-tcm19-190298.pdf>

⁷ VWS, May 2011 National health policy document "Gezondheid Dichtbij"

- Lifestyle policy (referring to the national note⁸)
- Antibiotic resistance to gonorrhoea
- Linkage between additional health care and regular health care settings
- Linkage between prevention and care
- Quality assurance
- Collaboration and control

The policy and programmatic responses are detailed under the prescribed headings of section 'IV. National response to the AIDS epidemic'.

GARPR/UNGASS indicator data

For historical reasons and considering local contexts, such as existing set-up of surveillance and monitoring activities, data and/or information are not consistently available to allow for a complete representation of GARPR/UNGASS indicators as per specific formats of the UNGASS reporting guidelines. However, relevant data and/or information in this regard are presented in this report.

III. Overview of the HIV/AIDS epidemic

The Netherlands has a concentrated HIV epidemic, i.e. a low prevalence of HIV infection in the general population but a higher prevalence in specific sub-populations⁹. Primary high-risk sub-populations are MSM and migrants from high-prevalence countries. The epidemic in the Netherlands is primarily fuelled by transmission among MSM.

Estimation of the HIV epidemic¹⁰

The number of HIV-infected individuals (15-70 years) living in the Netherlands on 1 January 2008 has been estimated to be 21,500 (19,000-24,000) (Figure 1). This represents an increase of about 10% in comparison with the previous estimate in 15-49-year-olds from 2005. The estimated HIV infection prevalence remained at 0.2% in the adult population.

Of the estimated number of PLWHA, 55% were estimated to be attributed to MSM transmission, 40% to heterosexual contacts and 4% to IDU. Estimation of the HIV prevalence in risk groups in the Netherlands yielded the following preliminary results: MSM 5.1%, IDU 7.1%, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa 3.1%, migrants from the Caribbean 0.4%, female sex workers 1.8%, and for the remaining population 0.02%.

About 60% (53-67%) of people infected with HIV was estimated to have been diagnosed. The estimated proportion of diagnosed infections exhibited geographical variations, 85% in Amsterdam, 54% in Rotterdam and 53% in the rest of the country. The estimated proportion of diagnosed infections also differed by risk group. Of HIV-infected MSM, 65% were estimated to have been diagnosed. Of infected sex workers, 34% were estimated to have been diagnosed. In the IDU population, the estimated proportion of diagnosed individuals varied between 57% in Rotterdam to 91% in Amsterdam.

With regard to migrant populations, 50% of infected migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and 55% of infected migrants from the Caribbean were estimated to have been diagnosed. In

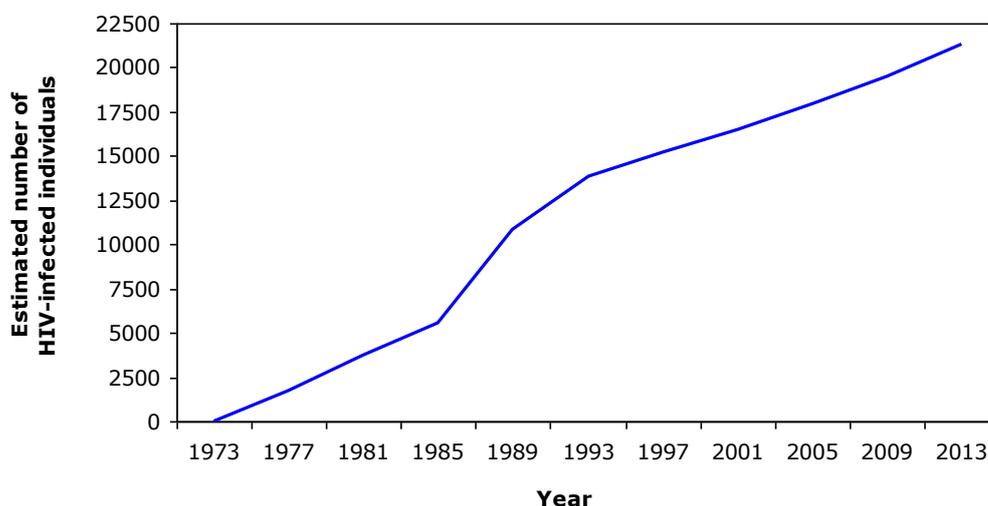
⁸ VWS, May 2011 National health policy document "Gezondheid Dichtbij"

⁹ UNAIDS and WHO. 2000. Guidelines for second generation HIV surveillance. Available from: http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/surveillance/en/cds_edc_2000_5.pdf

¹⁰ RIVM/CIb. 2009. National estimate of HIV prevalence in the Netherlands: comparison and applicability of different estimation tools.

general, women were more likely to have been diagnosed than men, probably due to antenatal screening and differences in health care seeking behaviour.

Figure 1. Estimated number of people living with HIV-infection, The Netherlands, 1973-2013 (Source: RIVM/Cib)



Registration of Stichting HIV Monitoring (SHM)¹¹

HIV infection is not notifiable by law in the Netherlands. However, data about HIV infected individuals are collected by SHM as part of routine health care for HIV patients. Treatment data for all HIV patients receiving care at 26 HIV treatment centres are collected.

As of June 2013, 21,990 HIV-infected patients were ever registered at HIV treatment centres by SHM. This includes 833 patients from the Netherlands Antilles (see chapter p21). Of these 17,006 are in care in the Netherlands. In 2012, 843 new HIV patients were reported. Of the 17,006 patients in care in the Netherlands, 193 were 18 years or younger. Of the patients in care, 30.3% were female. The proportion of MSM of total patients in care was 60% as of June 2013. The proportion of heterosexuals was 30%. The HIV patient population is ageing; of all registered patients 22% are 55 years or older.

Table 1 describes basic characteristics of registered HIV-infected patients in the Netherlands as of June 2013. The largest group was MSM (56%). Heterosexuals accounted for 32% of patients (18% of men and 85% of women). Heterosexuals included a considerable proportion of individuals originating from other countries than the Netherlands (53%). The most common areas of origin were sub Saharan Africa, Western Europe and Latin America. IDU constituted 4% of patients (4% of men and 5% of women).

In 2010, 66% of diagnosed cases were MSM. Of all registered HIV-infected MSM, 83% were of Dutch origin.

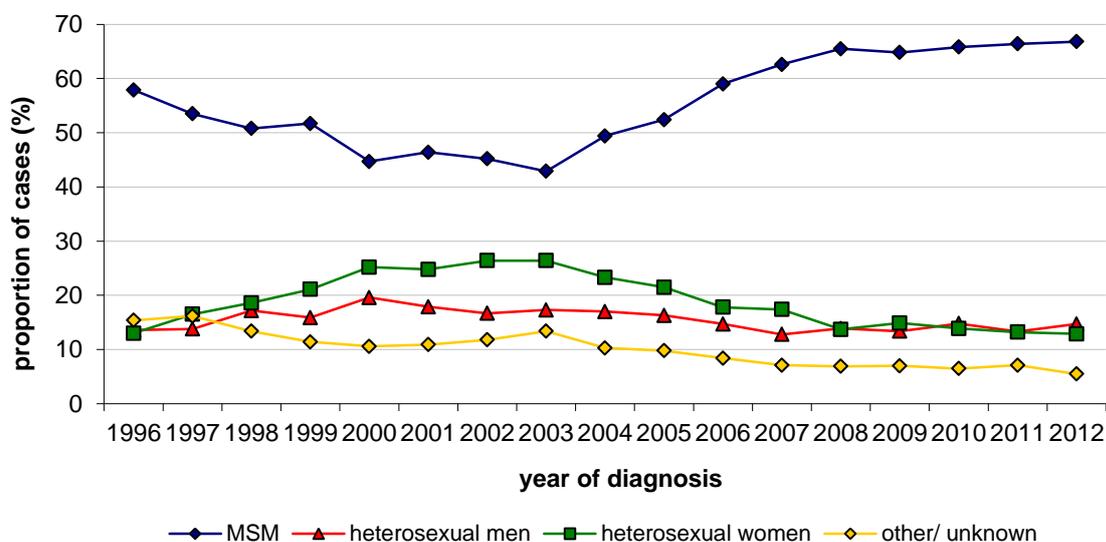
¹¹ SHM. 2013. Monitoring Report 2012. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection in the Netherlands. Available from: <http://www.hiv-monitoring.nl/english/>

Table 1. Characteristics of all registered HIV-infected patients, the Netherlands, as of June 2013 (Source: SHM)

Category	Men		Women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
All	13,610	80	3,396	20	17,006	100
Transmission						
MSM*	10,161	75			10,005	56
Heterosexual	2,208	16	2,953	87	5,161	30
IDU*	260	2	95	3	355	2
Blood (products)	132	1	83	2	215	1
Other / unknown	849	6	265	8	1,114	7
Age category (years)						
0-12	65	0	60	2	125	1
13-17	32	0	37	1	69	0
18-24	276	2	93	3	369	2
25-34	1,661	12	714	21	2,375	14
34-44	3,489	26	1,164	34	4,653	27
45-54	4,885	36	888	26	5,773	34
55-65	2,354	17	321	9	2,675	16
>65	848	6	119	4	957	6
Region of origin						
The Netherlands	9,108	67	983	29	10,091	59
Sub-Saharan Africa	1,021	8	1,449	43	2,470	15
Western Europe	816	6	129	4	945	6
Latin America	900	7	301	9	1,201	7
Caribbean	518	4	173	5	691	4
Other/unknown	1247	9	361	11	1608	9

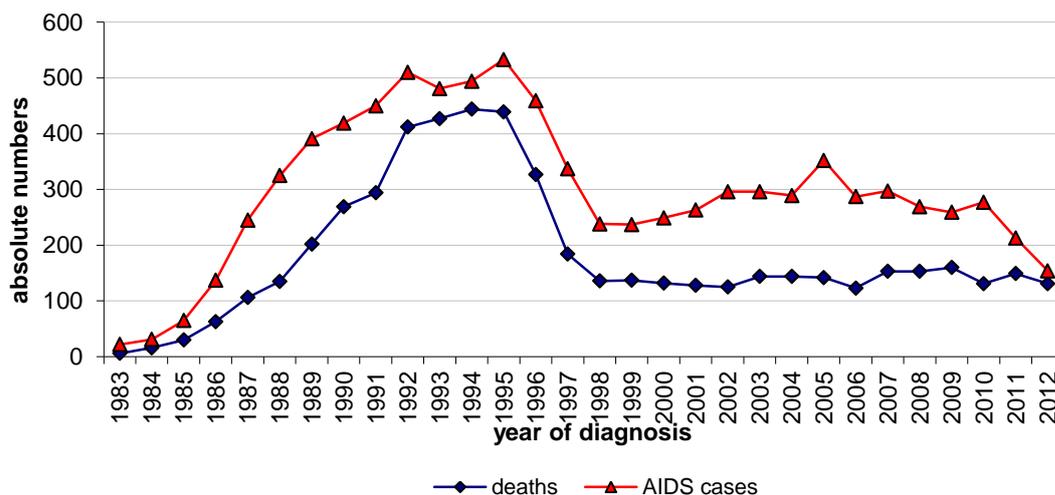
* MSM, men who have sex with men; IDU, intravenous drug use

Figure 2. Proportion of annual HIV cases in care by transmission risk group and year of diagnosis, the Netherlands, 1996-2012 (data for year 2012 are incomplete) (Source: SHM)



Until June 2013 of the 4,151 patients no longer in care 2,104 patients had died, the other were lost to follow-up. The AIDS incidence and mortality among HIV-infected individuals appear to exhibit a decline in recent years^{12,13}.

Figure 3. Number of AIDS cases and deaths among HIV patients, 1983-2012 (data for year 2012 are incomplete) (Source: SHM, RIVM)



The majority of the patients in care, 87%, had started with combination antiretroviral treatment (cART). The most frequently prescribed regimes, which accounted for 57% of all treatment combinations, were a combination of tenofovir/emtricitabine and either efavirenz or nevirapine. Tenofovir as part of any treatment combination was used by 70% of the patients, whilst efavirenz was used by 26%, nevirapine by 15% and abacavir/lamivudine by 12%. The costs for antiretrovirals amount to about €140 million per year in 2013.

The increase in CD4 counts at diagnosis and a decrease in proportion of late diagnoses suggests that patients are testing positive for HIV increasingly earlier in the course of their infection. This earlier diagnosis is also apparent in the observed increase from 10% in 1996 to 37% in 2010 in the proportion of MSM who were diagnosed with a recent infection (defined as 1.5 years, at most, between the last negative HIV test and the first positive test). Diagnosis with a recent infection was less common in older MSM. Amongst the MSM diagnosed in 2008 or later, 48% of the diagnosed HIV infections were classified as recent amongst those aged 18 to 24 years, but only 24% were recent infections in those aged 55 years or older. Also, the proportion of recent infections amongst heterosexuals appeared to increase, but to a more moderate extent (5% in 1996 to 10% in 2010)

Additional information is available in the reports of SHM that are published in English on an annual basis¹⁴.

Surveillance based on data from STI centres¹⁵

¹² RIVM/CIb. 2013. Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, in the Netherlands in 2012. Available from: : <http://www.rivm.nl/bibliotheek/rapporten>

¹³ SHM. 2013. Monitoring Report 2012. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection in the Netherlands. Available from: <http://www.hiv-monitoring.nl/english/>

¹⁴ SHM: <http://www.hiv-monitoring.nl/>

¹⁵ RIVM/CIb. 2013. Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, in the Netherlands in 2012. Available from: : <http://www.rivm.nl/bibliotheek/rapporten>

An STI/HIV surveillance system is in place where eight coordinating municipal health services (GGD) report STI/HIV-related data and information to the RIVM/Cib. The system is based on 27 STI centres with nationwide coverage. The STI centres cater for high-risk groups and can be contacted on basis of anonymity. They provide low-threshold and free of charge STI/HIV testing and care (see section 'IV. National response to the AIDS epidemic').

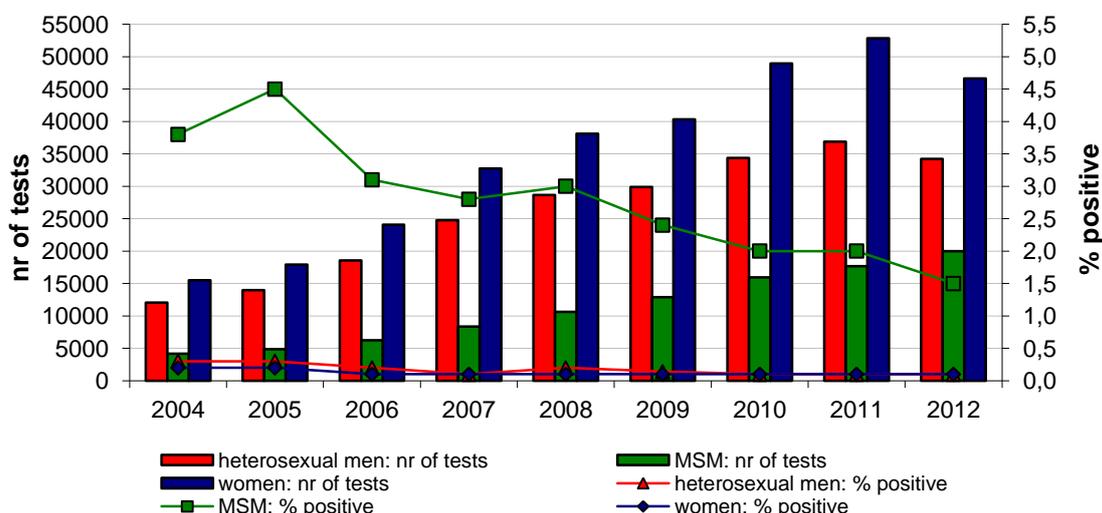
In 2012, 358 individuals were newly diagnosed with HIV at the STI clinics in the Netherlands. Of these infections, 8% occurred in MSM, 7% in heterosexual men and 8% among women. The positivity rate among MSM decreased from 3% in 2008 to 1.5% in 2012. Among heterosexual men and women it remained 0.1%. Among heterosexual STI clinic attendees the HIV positivity rate was highest among those from sub-Saharan African origin (heterosexual men 0.3%, women 0.6%, MSM 2.5%). Among MSM, HIV positivity rate was highest among MSM aged 35-39 years (0.2%).

Among newly diagnosed HIV-positive MSM, 28% was concurrently diagnosed with chlamydia and 23% with gonorrhoea. These findings suggest the presence of considerable sexual risk behaviours in certain sub-populations of HIV-infected individuals.

The STI centre surveillance showed that the HIV test uptake had increased from 56% in 2004 to 86% in 2012 in STI clinic attendees who were not previously diagnosed with HIV.

Additional information is available STI/HIV publications of RIVM/Cib, including comprehensive reports published in English on an annual basis¹⁶.

Figure 4. Total number of HIV tests and positivity rate of new HIV diagnoses by gender and sexual preference, STI centres, the Netherlands, 2004-2010 (Source: RIVM/Cib)



Screening programmes

Antenatal screening¹⁷

Routine screening for HIV infection is offered to all pregnant women since January 2004. About 185,000 women are tested annually. Uptake is about 99.8%. The HIV testing is

¹⁶ RIVM/Cib STI/HIV: <http://www.rivm.nl/cib/themas/soa/>

¹⁷ RIVM/Cib. 2009. Effectiveness of antenatal screening for HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis in the Netherlands, 2006-2008.

conducted according to the 'opting out' approach and is combined with other antenatal screening activities. There has been one report of a child born with HIV in the Netherlands in 2012. HIV prevalence among pregnant women has been stable at 0.05% between 2006-2011 (80-100 diagnoses per year). Approximately, forty percent of the HIV infections among pregnant women in that period were newly diagnosed. The prenatal screening is estimated to prevent 5-10 HIV infections per year among newborns.

*Blood screening*¹⁸

Sanquin Blood Supply Foundation screens blood donated by new and existing donors for HIV (and Hepatitis B and C, and syphilis). In 2011 no new donors were found to be HIV infected.

Specific studies in high-risk populations

The Amsterdam cohort studies monitor HIV incidence in self-selected populations of MSM and drug users in Amsterdam¹⁹. In this sample of MSM the HIV incidence was to 0.69 per 100 person-years in 2012, compared to 2.0 and 1.5 in 2009 and 2008, respectively. In contrast, the HIV incidence among drug users in this sample has declined to zero in recent years. These cohorts are useful to monitor trends in these groups but generalization may not be possible.

In 2002-2006 surveys were conducted in population groups at high risk for HIV infection, i.e. different ethnic minorities, sex workers, clients of sex workers and IDU²⁰. Similar systematic surveillance efforts have not been conducted during the present reporting period. Following an evaluation of the surveys in 2007²¹, it was concluded that it would be more valuable and efficient to monitor trend in these high risk groups through routinely collected data from STI clinics, general practitioners (GP), methadone posts, etc.

In 2007/2008, in view of the high STI occurrence among HIV infected clients at STI centres, an STI prevalence study among HIV infected MSM was conducted. This revealed high occurrence of chlamydia or gonorrhoea (10.5%), syphilis (4.9%), infectious Hepatitis B (0.2%) and new Hepatitis C infections (0.5%).

These results indicate frequent presence of risk behaviours and co-infections that could facilitate transmission of HIV. The results prompted the modification of guidelines to extend testing for syphilis and Hepatitis B and C in regular care. In 2011, the RIVM started a study in collaboration with both regular health care and STI clinics to assess the cost effectiveness of routine screening for chlamydia and gonorrhoea in HIV infected MSM who are in specialised HIV care. The outcome is that routine STI testing within HIV-treatment centres is indeed cost effective for this group of patients. Currently discussions with the specialists and insurances about implementation of this advice are ongoing.

IV. National response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic

Human rights aspects such as universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and support constitute a fundamental principle in the Netherlands. In the

¹⁸ Sanquin. 2009. De gezichten van 2008: jaarverslag 2009. Available from:

http://www.jaarverslagsanquin.nl/sanquin_jaarverslag_2008.pdf#page=19

¹⁹ The Amsterdam Cohort Studies. 2009. The Amsterdam Cohort Studies on HIV infection and AIDS: a summary of the results 2001-2009. Available from:

<http://www.amsterdamcohortstudies.org/menu/reports/ACSSummary20012009.pdf>

²⁰ UNGASS Country Progress Report, the Netherlands, 2008

²¹ RIVM/CIb. 2009. Evaluatie RIVM hiv-surveys hoogrisicogroepen. Available from:

<http://www.rivm.nl/bibliotheek/rapporten/210261001.pdf>

national policy plan STI/HIV 2012-2016 "To renew and reinforce"²² the overall HIV/AIDS policy and programmatic frameworks are explained. They have remained largely unaltered during 2012-2014, notwithstanding a number of important developments. This reflects the notion that appropriate services are usually deemed to be in place. Nonetheless, continuous commitment, monitoring and development are needed to ensure adequate policy and programmatic frameworks.

Stakeholders of the national response

The Ministry of VWS²³ is primarily responsible for the development and implementation of HIV/AIDS policy and programmatic frameworks. However, related activities depend on the collaboration of a range of (sub-)national (non-)governmental stakeholders.

RIVM/Cib²⁴ is affiliated with the Ministry of VWS and advises, where indicated in consultation with relevant stakeholders, civil society organisations and professionals, the Ministry about STI/HIV policy. RIVM/Cib conducts STI/HIV surveillance, control and research and has a coordinating role among stakeholders. Further to the above, RIVM/Cib assesses work plans of other organisations in the area of STI/HIV prevention and grants subsidies within the framework of national policy.

NGOs that receive governmental subsidies for HIV/AIDS-related programmes include: STI AIDS Netherlands²⁵ (having programmes focusing on policy, professionals, general public, msm and ethnic minorities, youth, as well as sex workers), Mainline²⁶ (focusing on drug users) and Rutgers WPF²⁷ (focusing on sexual health and behavioural interventions and monitoring amongst on lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgenders). The government subsidises two organisations that concentrate on people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA): the HIV Vereniging Nederland²⁸ (focusing on information and support) and SHM²⁹ (focusing on surveillance and research based on HIV patients in medical care). The governmental subsidies to these NGOs amount to about €10 million per year. The national 'STI and sexual health platform' meetings four times per year provide, among others, a platform for information exchange and coordination among NGO and governmental stakeholders.

Municipal authorities are legally co-responsible for STI/HIV-related prevention and care. These municipal tasks are typically conducted by the GGD.

Prevention

Primary prevention

The frameworks for STI/HIV prevention activities in the Netherlands are described in the national STI/HIV policy plan 2012-2016³⁰, as well as in the sexual health policy document

²² RIVM/Cib, December 2011. National STI/HIV policy plan 2012-2016 "To renew and reinforce". Available from

http://www.rivm.nl/Bibliotheek/Algemeen_Actueel/Nieuwsberichten/2011/Nationaal_soa_hiv_plan_2012_2016

²³ Ministry of VWS: <http://www.minvws.nl/>

²⁴ RIVM/Cib: <http://www.rivm.nl/cib/>

²⁵ STI AIDS Netherlands: <http://www.soaids.nl/>

²⁶ Mainline: <http://www.mainline.nl/>

²⁷ Rutgers World Population Foundation: <http://www.rutgerswfp.nl/>

²⁸ HIV Vereniging Nederland: <http://www.hivnet.org/>

²⁹ SHM: <http://www.hiv-monitoring.nl/>

³⁰ RIVM/Cib, December 2011. National STI/HIV policy plan 2012-2016 "To renew and reinforce". Available from

from 2009³¹. The promotion of safe (sexual) practices by provision of information is an important component of primary HIV/AIDS prevention. In this regard schools play an important role in informing youth and comprehensive sexuality education is obligatory from 2012 onwards. The GGD and youth health care services are other settings where information about safe practices is disseminated.

Information about safe sex and prevention of STI/HIV is mainly communicated by means of targeted communication activities for specific groups such as MSM, migrants, sex workers, youth³² and IDU³³. In general, NGOs play key roles in primary prevention of HIV by provision of information, especially among high risk groups. Information activities utilize internet, printed materials, peer-to-peer education, outreach activities, etc. Additionally these organisations play a role in education of professionals and peers.

Among drug users, harm reduction has proven to be a successful and cost-effective approach to HIV/AIDS prevention. Harm reduction is one component of a larger context which also includes prevention and treatment of the drug use per se. Methadone treatment programmes are available for opiate addicts and the majority of them participate in such programmes. The percentage of injecting drug use is relatively low (about 9% of heroine users). There are no national data on the number of needles and syringes distributed to IDU although some information is available at subnational levels.

Low-threshold access to information, testing and care

Promotion of HIV testing is conceived of as a crucial aspect of HIV prevention in the Netherlands. Persons who know they are HIV-infected can receive care and support, which can prevent further transmission of the infection.

As mentioned above, a large proportion (about 40%) of HIV-infected individuals is estimated to be unaware of their infection. In 2002, an 'active testing policy' was put in place, including antenatal screening (introduced 2004) and integration of the active testing policy in the STI/HIV-protocol for GPs³⁴.

Moreover, since 2006 and in addition to the regular system for health care delivery and health promotion, there is a specific regulation ('Aanvullende Seksuele Gezondheidszorg' (ASG)) to provide low-threshold and free of charge STI/HIV testing and care. In 2009, to further stimulate HIV testing, it was decided that HIV testing according to the 'opting out' approach would be included in the above-mentioned ACS regulation. This means that a HIV test is performed as a standard. The patients are informed about the practice and may choose not to undergo the HIV test.

Since January 2012, the above-mentioned ASG regulation also integrally provides additional care for sexual health, primarily directed towards vulnerable groups of youngsters and offers low-threshold services that can support youth with questions and problems regarding sexuality (before 2012 this was part of a separate regulation).

These sexual health services target high-risk groups. The services are provided at 27 STI centres spread over the country. Eight GGDs have a coordinating responsibility in their regions. The RIVM/CIb coordinates the implementation of the regulation and performs the surveillance. Quality documents support the delivery of high quality services. The associated

http://www.rivm.nl/Bibliotheek/Algemeen_Actueel/Nieuwsberichten/2011/Nationaal_soa_hiv_plan_2012_2016

³¹ VWS. 2009. Seksuele gezondheid. Available from:

<http://www.minvws.nl/includes/dl/openbestand.asp?File=/images/seksuele-gezondheid-tcm19-190298.pdf>

³² http://www.soaids-professionals.nl/soaids_nl/jongeren

³³ <http://www.mainline.nl/>

³⁴ UNGASS Country Progress Report, the Netherlands, 2012

costs are reimbursed in proportion to the number of identified STIs, which should stimulate a focus on high-risk groups.

Currently, the regulation is under revision as an outcome of an evaluation. Most important effect is that the form of reimbursement is changing into a lump sum way of financing. This poses the municipal health services before the challenge implement other ways of care. In this context e-health approaches are piloted.

The annual costs for the regulation amount to about €30 million.

Linkage between prevention and care

The national STI/HIV policy plan underlines the value of linking STI/HIV prevention and care. The setting of STI/HIV care presents an opportunity to reach people in high risk groups and to modify (risk) behaviours. By means of partner notification additional persons at risk for transmission may be given the opportunity to access testing and care.

Care, treatment and support

The general principle in the Netherlands is that everyone in need should receive appropriate health care. HIV/AIDS is not an exception in this context. The Netherlands Health Care Inspectorate (IGZ) supervises the access to and quality of care in the Netherlands.

HIV treatment is available for all patients with an indication (and has been since ART became available). The provision of treatment is legally regulated to ensure its high quality ('Wet op Bijzondere Medische Verrichtingen' (WBMV)). This legislation gave responsibility for the actual care to specialists situated in 26 HIV treatment centres throughout the Netherlands. Two treatment centres are specialized in paediatric treatment. In addition to specialized clinicians there are also specialised HIV/AIDS nurses who serve as case-managers. Currently the HIV centres are no longer part of this legislation. In order to guarantee quality of care special guidelines for treatment of HIV/AIDS are submitted, indication for example the necessity a minimum number of patients treated annually.

In principle everyone who receives health care is charged by the health care provider for the care received, regardless of one's nationality or legal status. However, the costs can be covered under a health insurance, an international social security regulation (like Regulation (EC) no. 1408/71) or a bilateral social security convention. In these latter cases the (E)111-procedure will apply. Under the Health Insurance Act ('Zorgverzekeringswet'), all residents of the Netherlands are obliged to have a health insurance. Further to the above, the legislation prohibits insurance companies to decline health insurance for persons (including HIV-infected individuals) who are legally entitled/obliged to be insured. The Netherlands has a system where health insurers are compensated for predictable health care cost of their insured portfolio ('risicovereveningssysteem'). For this reason health insurers have no benefit in refusing people with a preexisting condition.

Asylum seekers and individuals without legal basis for residence

There are arrangements to provide HIV/AIDS prevention and care for (failed) asylum seekers in the Netherlands. The Dutch Government compensates the healthcare providers for the costs associated with healthcare for individuals with an ongoing request for asylum (currently approximately €3.800 per asylum seeker per year) ('Regeling Verstrekkingen Asielzoekers' and Regeling Zorg Asielzoekers'). The principle is that health care provided corresponds to standard care in the Netherlands. Asylum seekers accommodated in asylum centres receive, in collaboration with the GGD, information about STI/HIV prevention. In this regard a yearly plan is developed by the asylum centre and the GGD. Asylum seekers with an assigned asylum status must (as Dutch nationals) arrange their own insurance coverage.

The Netherlands does not regard HIV/AIDS alone as a reason for granting asylum, unless under exceptional circumstances pursuant to the European 'Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms'. Should a person in need of treatment have to leave the country, Dutch authorities will if necessary establish contact with counterparts in the country of destination in order to facilitate continuation of treatment. Under certain circumstances, failed asylum seekers may be granted to stay in the Netherlands based on medical grounds, including HIV/AIDS. Signalling of medical problems at an early stage in the asylum process can help to avoid a gap between a failed asylum request and a decision regarding a request based on medical grounds. Furthermore, since January 2010 rejected asylum seekers with an ongoing request based on medical grounds are under certain circumstances entitled to accommodation and reimbursements for costs associated with health insurance. Should the request to stay in the Netherlands based on medical grounds be granted the (rejected) asylum seeker must (as Dutch nationals) arrange their own health insurance.

Persons who are illegally present in the Netherlands have to pay their own health care expenses. They are not covered by the Health Insurance Act, nor can they apply for social assistance. Should these undocumented persons fail to pay for the cost of medical care, the health care provider can claim part of his costs from a national health insurance board ('College voor Zorgverzekeringen' (CVZ)). For this purpose the CVZ receives approximately €21 million per year out of the budget of the Ministry of VWS.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned arrangements, unfamiliarity with the Dutch health care system may be a possible obstacle for asylum seekers and individuals without legal basis for residence. In asylum centres this is therefore given due consideration by provision of information, both routinely and in response to specific needs.

Supplementary services

As mentioned above, there are additional services that aim to provide low-threshold and free of charge access to STI/HIV testing and treatment for high-risk groups (ASG regulation). These services are intended to complement, not replace, the regular health care services. The regulation for the additional STI/HIV and sexual health care services do not differentiate between individuals based on nationality or legal status. As mentioned above, promoting testing is considered important for prevention purposes. Additionally, facilitating testing can lead to earlier HIV diagnoses and earlier treatment, thus benefitting the health of the infected individual as well.

Stigmatisation and discrimination

Stigmatisation and incidents of discrimination due to HIV infection is still a problem in Dutch society. This notion is supported by research from 2009 that suggests the presence of relatively widespread negative attitudes towards PLWHA and misconceptions about transmission of HIV³⁵.

The government has sustained its policy to increase knowledge about STI/HIV and thereby, among other things, seeks to reduce stigmatisation and discrimination due to HIV/AIDS. The national policy STI/HIV plan 2012-2016 and the sexual health policy document from 2009

³⁵ TNS NIPO. 2009. Hiv en stigmatisering in Nederland: cognities, houding en gedragsintenties omtrent hiv en aids. Available from: <http://www.soaids-professionals.nl/documenten/Rapportage-hiv-en-stigma.pdf>

underlines the contributions in this regard of several NGOs that operate with governmental subsidies.

Also, the Ministry of VWS maintains the position that HIV-infected individuals should not be prosecuted for unsafe sex unless coercion, deception or disparity in terms of power are involved. This is consistent with the notion that everyone carries a responsibility for his or hers own health.

Since August 2009, legislation ('Arbeidsomstandighedenwet') against discrimination on the work place has been strengthened. Employers are obliged to have developed a policy based on risk assessment and evaluation to prevent and handle incidents of discrimination. Discrimination based on medical conditions or handicap (thus including HIV/AIDS) is prohibited. This applies to discrimination between employees and employers as well as among employees. The Labour Inspectorate ('Arbeidsinspectie') supervises the implementation of this legislation.

General social acceptance of risk groups, such as MSM, can contribute to the success of initiatives throughout the full spectrum of the HIV/AIDS prevention and response efforts. A policy document, compiled by a coordinating ministry and with the contributions of several stakeholders, outlines the policy to enhance social acceptance of MSM³⁶.

Knowledge and behaviour change

A comprehensive national behavioural surveillance system is not established. Current insights about knowledge and behaviour in relation to HIV/AIDS are based on a range of different studies and surveillance activities. The results of different initiatives are usually not comparable due to methodological differences.

Nevertheless, existing findings illustrate that knowledge and intention to practice safe sex are frequently inadequately translated into actual safe sex. Thus, a major challenge is to foster a supportive environment for safe behaviour and build skills needed to translate intention into actual behaviour. The Centre for Healthy Living, part of the RIVM and established in 2007, has taken a step in this direction by establishing an inventory of different life-style interventions including descriptions of evidence regarding effectiveness³⁷.

High risk groups

Until 2011, Schorer performed an annual online behavioural survey, the Schorer Monitor, among MSM³⁸. Since Schorer no longer exists as an organisation, the monitoring activities haven been transferred to Rutgers WPF from 2012 on. In 2013/2014, a survey among lesbians, MSM, bisexuals and transgenders has been performed. Results are being expected before May 2014.

General population

In 2009, the Rutgers WPF (previously named Rutgers Nisso Groep) published a study about sexual and reproductive health. The study is based on a sample of 6,428 individuals in the

³⁶ Ministry of OCW. 2007. Gewoon homo zijn: lesbisch- en homo-emancipatiebeleid 2008-2011.

Available from: http://www.minocw.nl/documenten/Homo_emancipatie.pdf

³⁷ RIVM/CGL website 'Loket gezond leven': <http://www.loketgezondleven.nl/kwaliteit-van-interventies/beoordeelde-interventies/>

³⁸ Schorer. 2009. Schorer Monitor 2009.

age groups 15-70 years in the Netherlands³⁹. This publication is a first follow-up of an initial study in 2006. The changes as compared to the study in 2006 are small, as anticipated in the light of the rather short time elapsed since 2006.

The results corroborate the notion that knowledge about STI/HIV among the Dutch population is relatively high. Of respondents below 50 years of age, 70-92% gives correct answers to statements about STI/HIV (e.g. refuting that washing after sex and using birth control reduce the risk for STI/HIV infection). A lower level of knowledge was noted among boys 15-18 years of age, less educated men and women and men among ethnic minorities.

A majority did not use a condom during the past six months during sexual intercourse with a steady partner (men 78%, women 80%), or during anal sex with a steady partner (men 85%, women 88%). During sexual contacts with temporary partners in the past six months, about 50% of men and women always used a condom, while about 25% used a condom sometimes or never, respectively. Condom use appeared to be lower among older age groups and among lower educated individuals.

The report of the Rutgers Nisso Group further indicated that about one-third of men, and a somewhat larger proportion of women, had ever been tested for an STI/HIV infection. About 10% had been tested during the past year. Women had primarily been tested by the GP (61%) while men were more likely to have undergone the test at the GGD/STI clinic (49%) as compared to at the GP (44%).

Staff working in Dutch embassies in HIV-endemic areas

Dutch Embassies in HIV-endemic areas are actively committed to the code of conduct of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). All staff members have access to HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

Impact alleviation

Not applicable.

V. Best practices

Surveillance data indicate that testing is becoming more widespread. This may be interpreted as an achievement attributable to the range of efforts that seek to stimulate HIV testing. These efforts include communication about the value of testing and maintenance of low-threshold access to HIV testing, in particular for high risk groups (ASG regulation).

An enabling environment is fostered by the commitment and contributions of a range of (sub)national (non)governmental stakeholders that engage in constructive dialogue on a regular basis.

Monitoring and evaluation are recognised as essential and are applied to inform development and implementation of the HIV/AIDS policy and programmatic frameworks.

³⁹ Rutgers WPF. 2011. Seksuele gezondheid in Nederland 2009. Available from: www.rutgerswfp.nl

In December 2011, the national policy plan STI/HIV 2012-2016 "To renew and reinforce" was published. The integration of HIV/AIDS policy in a broader framework of sexual health is explained in this document and it is considered to offer potential for synergistic effects and the effective use of resources.

Harm reduction has been, and continuous to be, a successful component of HIV/AIDS prevention and control among IDU.

VI. Major challenges and remedial actions

Maintenance and further development of HIV/AIDS policy and programmatic frameworks pose a number of challenges that call for sustained commitment:

Recognising that stigmatisation and discrimination of PLWHA is still a problem in Dutch society, this is acknowledged in the national STI/HIV policy plan as an important challenge.

A large proportion (estimated about 30%) of HIV infected individuals are not diagnosed. This emphasizes the necessity of maintaining activities among risk groups and professionals and aiming to stimulate HIV testing. The incorporation of HIV testing as per the 'opting out' approach in STI centres (ASG regulation) as of January 2010 is one step in this direction.

Notwithstanding significant communication efforts, sexual risk behaviours remain at high levels in certain groups, such as MSM and ethnic minorities. The high rates of HIV/STI co-infections in HIV infected MSM underline the need for sustained control measures targeting this group. Stimulating behaviour change in high risk groups remains a significant challenge. In the context of primary prevention, the principle of evidence-based practice could occasionally be further strengthened. The Centre for Healthy Living at the RIVM is anticipated to continue stimulating the use of evidence-based interventions in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention.

STI/HIV testing, and hence also opportunities for prevention, typically occurs in the GP setting. The interaction between public health professionals and GPs in the benefit of STI/HIV control remains challenging. In general, partner notification deserves recognition to stimulate exploitation of the full potential of its application by different health professionals. These issues are addressed in our national STI/HIV policy plan.

Financial and human resources are finite and pose limitations to the implementation of programmes. For example, the costs associated with providing low-threshold access to STI/HIV testing and treatment (ASG regulation) for high risk groups have increased in recent years. Discussion has been initiated regarding how to maximize health benefits of these services while keeping the related finances sound. The first step in this respect is the integration of the ACS and ASH regulations into one ASG regulation since January 2012.

VII. Support from the country's development partners

Not applicable.

VIII. Monitoring and evaluation environment

As mentioned above, monitoring and evaluation are recognised as fundamentals to inform development and implementation of the HIV/AIDS policy and programmatic frameworks. The Ministry of VWS is responsible for overall monitoring and evaluation regarding the HIV/AIDS policy and programmatic frameworks. In practice, key responsibilities in this regard have been delegated to the RIVM/Cib that publishes an annual comprehensive surveillance report as well as briefer bi-annual interim reports. The former accommodates data and information from different STI/HIV surveillance activities and brings these together for a joint interpretation to inform national STI/HIV policy. Data and information sources include the registration of HIV patients at HIV treatment centres, managed by SHM, STI/HIV surveillance at STI centres and in GP networks, and screening of pregnant women and blood donors.

In addition, specific evaluations are conducted on a regular basis to assess the suitability of individual programmes/activities. For example, in the current reporting period evaluations have addressed the special regulations on STI/HIV testing and sexual education, respectively. Also, two initiatives have addressed the organisation⁴⁰ and effectiveness of the antenatal screening⁴¹, respectively. An update is planned for the current year. As mentioned above, the IGZ supervises the access to and quality of care in the Netherlands.

NGOs contribute to the overall monitoring and evaluation system through research, surveillance and evaluations in their areas of expertise. For example, as illustrated above, the Rutgers WPF has produced behavioural research/surveillance that is considered in the present report. NGOs serve an important function to identify weaknesses of the HIV/AIDS policy and programmatic frameworks and suggest possible solutions.

In addition to regular routine interactions, the RIVM/Cib organises a national expert meeting each year. The expert meeting offers an opportunity for (sub)national (non)governmental stakeholders to discuss recent surveillance data, research and other developments and exchange ideas, thereby informing future policy and activities in the area of STI/HIV. Furthermore, STI AIDS Netherlands organises the above-mentioned 'STI and sexual health platform' meetings on four occasions per year. Participants principally take part in these meetings in their capacity as experts, but they are also employed by Rutgers WPF, HIV Vereniging Nederland, Mainline, GGD/STI clinics, RIVM/Cib and the Ministry of VWS. These meetings provide a platform for dialogue and thereby help address the challenge of maintaining an overview of undertakings by various stakeholders.

The government seeks to engage in international activities in the area of HIV/AIDS. This includes participation in fora of and cooperation with for example the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), European Commission, World Health Organization

⁴⁰ TNO and RIVM/Cib. 2008. Procesmonitoring prenatale screening infectieziekten en erytrocytenimmunisatie 2005-2007. Available from: http://www.rivm.nl/pns/Images/2008.036%20TNO%20rapport%20Procesmonitoring%20PSIE%202005-2007_tcm95-60636.pdf

⁴¹ RIVM/Cib. 2009. Effectiveness of antenatal screening for HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis in the Netherlands, 2006-2008.

(WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). These activities and related exchange of experiences can inspire and facilitate policy and programmatic development.

IX. Parts of the Dutch Kingdom in the Caribbean

The transition process for new administrative relations within the Kingdom of the Netherlands is completed. This resulted in closer ties between the Netherlands and three islands of the Netherlands Antilles (Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba – “Caribisch Nederland”), whereas the islands of Curaçao and St. Maarten have a more independent status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This situation has consequences for the HIV/AIDS policy and programmatic frameworks in the Dutch part of the Caribbean as the Netherlands will be more directly responsible for HIV/AIDS policy on the islands of “Caribisch Nederland” as part of infectious diseases approach.

Combined data indicate that the cumulative total of HIV-infected individuals on the Dutch parts in the Caribbean amounts to 1,926 individuals (including preliminary data for 2008). Data sources include the Analytical Diagnostic Centre, Red Cross Blood Bank Foundation and the Central Bureau of Statistic of the Dutch parts of the Caribbean. These data translate into an increase of 197 (11%) HIV cases as compared to the cumulative total of 1,729 individuals in 2006⁴². The total number of HIV infected individuals appears to exhibit a relatively stable increase of about 100 persons per year. The total proportions of males and females are 57% and 43%, respectively. Sixty-four percent of the cumulative total of HIV infected individuals are attributed to the age groups of 25-44 years.

Since 2005 the Stichting HIV Monitoring follows HIV patients at the treatment centre on Curaçao. As of June 2013, 833 HIV patients were reported from this treatment centre, of whom 671 who were still alive. Reported data show that majority of the patients were male (61%), were infected via heterosexual contact (60%), and originated from the Dutch parts of the Caribbean (70%). In total, 520 (77%) patients had started cART.

The development of policy and programmatic frameworks for STI/HIV surveillance, prevention and care in the Dutch parts of the Caribbean pose challenges to concerned stakeholders. STI/HIV-related knowledge and skills among the public and professionals should be strengthened. Intensified surveillance and research are needed to shed further light on the characteristics of the epidemic, especially on risk groups and risk behaviours. The resulting information would be valuable to inform the development of policy and programmatic frameworks.

X. Contributions to international HIV/AIDS response

In 2011 the new government of the Netherlands has decided a reduction of the level of development assistance from 0.8% to 0.7% of its gross domestic product (GDP) and a focus on four priorities, among which Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, including HIV/Aids. Since ODA is linked to GDP, future budgets might be affected by economic recession.

⁴² UNGASS Country Progress Report, the Netherlands, 2008

With regard to HIV/AIDS and SRHR development assistance, the Netherlands is among the largest contributors per capita, with an annual disbursement for SRHR and HIV/AIDS amounting to € 428 million in 2010 and € 370 million in 2011. The Dutch contribution is channeled through UNAIDS, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, government-to-government, public private and product development partnerships as well as through international and Dutch NGOs.

The Netherlands has an integrated policy with regard to HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health, which is informed by two distinct perspectives: human rights and prevention, which are seen as inextricably linked. Within these perspectives, the focus is on young people and on marginalized groups. The Netherlands introduced the first youth participant in the point 7 delegation to the Global Fund.

The rights-based approach directs attention to the inequality of access to prevention, treatment and care services and on the discriminatory practices that rob people of the opportunity to assert their right to health. In addition to young people, the Dutch policy is particularly concerned with populations who are at increased risk of HIV and other infectious diseases such as people who use drugs (IDU), sex workers (SW), men who have sex with men (MSM), sexual minorities, prison inmates and mobile populations. The Netherlands is financing the " Bridging the Gaps" program of an Alliance of 7 Dutch NGOs, which have a unique and integrated approach towards the main key populations recognized in the Political Declaration of the UNGASS Aids in June 2011, namely MSM, SW and IDU.

The Dutch approach is characterized by pragmatism and informed by scientific research. The success of this policy is reflected in the Netherlands' low rates of teenage pregnancies, abortions and HIV, especially among injecting drug users. These results add credibility to Dutch SRHR policy on the international arena. The objective of universal access to prevention, treatment and care, both with respect to SRHR and HIV/AIDS, is advocated across the entire spectrum of foreign policy by Dutch officials including the Ambassador for Sexual Health and Aids.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: National Composite Policy Index questionnaire