

Spring 2022 ETW theme statement

1 April, 2022

In times of crisis, ensure access to safe testing services and linkage to care for the most marginalised groups

The current crisis in Ukraine and Eastern Europe, combined with the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic has caused a global public health emergency. Essential health services have been severely hampered and disrupted, including testing services for HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

This upcoming Spring European Testing Week (SETW), occurring 16 – 23 May, will provide an opportunity for HIV, viral hepatitis and STI-related prevention campaigners, community organisations, health care providers, health systems, and international organisations across the European region to take stock of their situation and do our collective best to address these stark issues. As millions are displaced across Europe, we must collaborate to ensure the availability of safe, voluntary, confidential testing for all who want to get tested and provide support services including prevention and linkage to care.

During times of crisis, existing vulnerabilities and inequalities related to access are exposed and exacerbated. Refugees and migrants face barriers to testing and treatment, not least if they belong to key populations and fear to request these services because of stigma, discrimination and criminalisation of these groups. To maximise opportunities to test and treat HIV, HBV, HCV and STIs, we must address funding priorities, regulatory policies, stigma and discrimination toward marginalised populations, and misconceptions related to testing, which discourage testing and linkage to care including:

- Policies that unfairly target and criminalise sex workers, trans people, people who use drugs and minority populations that act as barriers and create inequalities in service access;
- Discriminating regulatory policies that limit service access on the basis of legal status, HIV status, sex and gender identity and expression, health status (including drug dependency) or sex work;
- Outdated regulations and policies that limit or complicate testing services for well-trained service providers and their clients;
- Restrictive policies that limit proven evidence-based testing strategies including self-testing and integrated testing for HIV, HBV, HCV and STIs;
- Misconceptions about possible repercussions that a positive test result might affect residency, employment, access to healthcare or support services, etc;
- Exclusion of people who lack a device for digital access, credit/data, internet access, digital literacy or access to a safe and confidential space required for remote services¹, especially during times of crisis.

We need to come together now and during SETW to challenge and address stigmatising attitudes, prejudices and behaviours, and discriminatory treatment, laws and policies to

¹ Source: <https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/news/many-migrants-are-struggling-to-access-remote-hiv-tests-but-we-can-work-together-to-help-them/>

make testing services welcoming and available for all, especially during crisis, especially for marginalised populations.

As a first step, we need to test our own stigma and discrimination by examining our services and practices to assess whether we unintentionally exclude certain populations. Secondly, we must stand together to advocate for the abolition of policies and laws that hinder equal access to safe, voluntary and confidential testing and linkage to care.

The European Testing Week Working Group and Secretariat recognise and acknowledge that the current crisis, combined with the ongoing pandemic, can make it difficult to engage and participate in the Spring European Testing Week taking place 16-23 May 2022.

We encourage you to support the campaign to the best of your ability to ensure equal access to testing services and linkage to care, especially for the most marginalised populations such as refugees, migrants and key populations.

Here are some examples of actions you and we can take:

- Stay up to date with the latest evidence on HIV, HBV, HCV and STIs to provide accurate information for those who are newly diagnosed and answer any myths or misconceptions;
- Reflect on your own fears, judgements, behaviours and prejudices to see how they can negatively affect others;
- Ensure that your organisation can provide links to supportive services and linkage to care;
- Assess how your organisation's legal and policy environment can be adapted (within the feasibility of your organisation's structure and within the national policy and legal framework) to ensure equal access to services;
- Actively advocate for safe, voluntary and confidential testing for all.

For more information on stigma, discrimination, and misconceptions, visit the following resources:

1. [World Hepatitis Alliance. The impact of stigma and discrimination affecting people with hepatitis B. London: WHA; 2021](#)
2. [World Hepatitis Alliance. Overcoming the barriers to diagnosis of viral hepatitis: The role of civil society and the affected community in Finding the Missing Millions, White Paper. London: WHA; 2018.](#)
3. [Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. Global partnership for action to eliminate all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination. Geneva: UNAIDS; 2018.](#)
4. [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Thematic report: Stigma and discrimination. Monitoring implementation of the Dublin Declaration on Partnership to Fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia: 2012 Progress Report. Stockholm: ECDC; 2013.](#)
5. [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. A comprehensive approach to HIV/STI prevention in the context of sexual health in the EU/EEA. Stockholm: ECDC; 2013.](#)
6. [International Planned Parenthood Federation, The Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, International Community of Women living with HIV/AIDS, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. User guide: the people living with HIV stigma index. Amsterdam: GNP+, 2008.](#)

How do I participate in the 2022 Spring ETW?

We ask all organisations interested in participating to sign-up on the ETW website. By signing up on our website, you pledge to engage in activities for the week. There is no minimum requirement for participation, and you can organise as many activities as you wish. For inspiration and support to implement activities, please visit the [ETW website](#).

The ETW secretariat will collect and share your activities within the network so that other organisations can learn from your experience. Remember to follow ETW on Facebook and Twitter to see what other ETW participants are doing. We strongly encourage you to post stories with pictures from your ETW activities and posts relating to the theme – don't forget to tag us on Facebook using @European Testing Week or on Twitter using @EuroTestWeek and our hashtags #EuroTestWeek #TestTreatPrevent

You can also email your plans directly to the secretariat at eurotest.rigshospitalet@regionh.dk.