



Message by
Dr Hanan Balkhy
WHO Regional Director for the
Eastern Mediterranean
on the occasion of



**World Health
Organization**

Eastern Mediterranean Region

World AIDS Day

This World AIDS Day, we pause to reflect on a serious challenge in our Region.

The Eastern Mediterranean has the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the world, with around 610 000 people living with HIV – and the number of new infections has almost doubled in less than a decade, rising from 37 000 in 2016 to 72 000 in 2024. Yet fewer than 4 in 10 know their status, and less than a third are receiving treatment.

Eighty per cent of the burden is concentrated in five countries and, in many cases, progress has slowed. HIV programmes still rely heavily on shrinking external funds, while domestic investments remain limited. Meanwhile, stigma, discrimination, punitive laws, and the lack of community-based services continue to keep people away from prevention, testing and care.

To reverse current trends, prevention must be dramatically scaled up. This includes expanding access to comprehensive services such as pre-exposure prophylaxis and harm reduction programmes.

We must also strengthen and diversify testing strategies, including community-based and self-testing, to identify undiagnosed cases early and link people rapidly to life-saving treatment.

Despite these challenges, our Region shows what is possible. Oman has eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis. Morocco and Lebanon are expanding services and partnering closely with communities. And Egypt's Hepatitis C campaign shows how large, integrated programmes can transform health outcomes at scale.

Today, I call on all governments to raise public awareness, increase domestic funding, integrate HIV into broader health services, adopt innovative approaches, and strengthen prevention through digital health and AI.

WHO will stand with our countries and communities to build a stronger, fairer AIDS response for everyone, everywhere in our Region.



**OVERCOMING
DISRUPTION**

Transforming the
AIDS response