

THE PATH THAT ENDS AIDS

The HIV Epidemic in Asia and the Pacific

Regional data extracted from the
2023 Global AIDS Update



Foreword

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Sounding the alarm: Asia Pacific has an HIV crisis among young key populations

Who is most affected by HIV?

And what should we do to better serve them?

Across borders and over time, these questions elicit different answers. Every HIV epidemic is unique, and no epidemic remains the same.

But in Asia and the Pacific—a region with diverse political, economic, social and cultural realities—there is a shared pattern. Data from UNAIDS' 2023 Global AIDS Update reiterate that young key populations are disproportionately affected by HIV.

Young people aged 15 to 24 represent 15% of the region's population. Young key populations—men who have sex with men, people who use drugs, sex workers and transgender women in this age-group—are a small fraction of the youth population. Yet, together with their sexual partners, these young key populations account for about a quarter (26%) of all new HIV infections in Asia and the Pacific. In Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, the Philippines and Thailand, youth from key population communities and their sexual partners make up around half of the estimated new HIV infections!

Across the region, new HIV infections among young people declined by 22% between 2010 and 2022. This trend is not strong enough to end the region's AIDS epidemic by 2030, and is offset by steep rises in new infections in several countries. Since 2010, new HIV infections in the 15 to

24 age group have risen in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

The situation of men who have sex with men is especially urgent. This key population accounts for about half (52%) of all new HIV infections in the 15 – 24 age group in Asia and the Pacific. There are rising HIV epidemics among gay men in several countries. Since 2010, estimated numbers of new HIV infections among men who have sex with men increased by six times in the Philippines, tripled in Cambodia and doubled in Lao PDR.

The social context has changed. A new generation is using the internet to meet. New drugs are on the scene—from methamphetamines to synthetic opioids. It's even possible to purchase drugs online. "Chemsex"—recreational drug use during intercourse—is on the rise.

There have been declines in funding. Prevention services often do not respond to the needs of young people, let alone young key populations with their intersecting vulnerabilities. Where does a young transgender sex worker go for support? Or a young gay man who injects drugs? Across the region, these services are sadly lacking.

There is a roadmap to addressing this challenge. It comes from the 2021 – 2026 Global AIDS Strategy with its focus on ending inequalities as well as the wisdom of this region's young key population advocates.

They have demanded quality, youth-friendly and non-discriminatory programmes and services that ensure the mental wellbeing of young key populations. There should be an emphasis on providing equitable and convenient access to HIV services, to meet the needs of those living in both urban and rural areas. There should also be a drive to modernise, with innovative approaches like HIV self-testing, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and virtual interventions accessible to young key populations everywhere.

Youth advocates are using creative and innovative strategies off and online to raise awareness among young key populations. This should go side by side with efforts to tackle harmful stigma and discrimination in families, communities, schools and healthcare settings. They've also called for the review and reform of laws and policies that particularly affect young key populations. At the top of this

list are punitive laws that lead to them being treated as criminals rather than equal citizens.

Only two-thirds (65%) of all people living with HIV in this region are on antiretroviral treatment. New infections have declined by just 14% since 2010. To end the AIDS epidemic we have to significantly slow the stream of new infections. If we do not take decisive action we are at risk of seeing a reversal of prevention gains.

Compared with other regions, Asia and the Pacific has the highest proportion of key populations among people living with HIV. There is a clear mandate to confront the health and human rights challenges facing these communities. And it is especially critical that we reach their youngest and most vulnerable members.

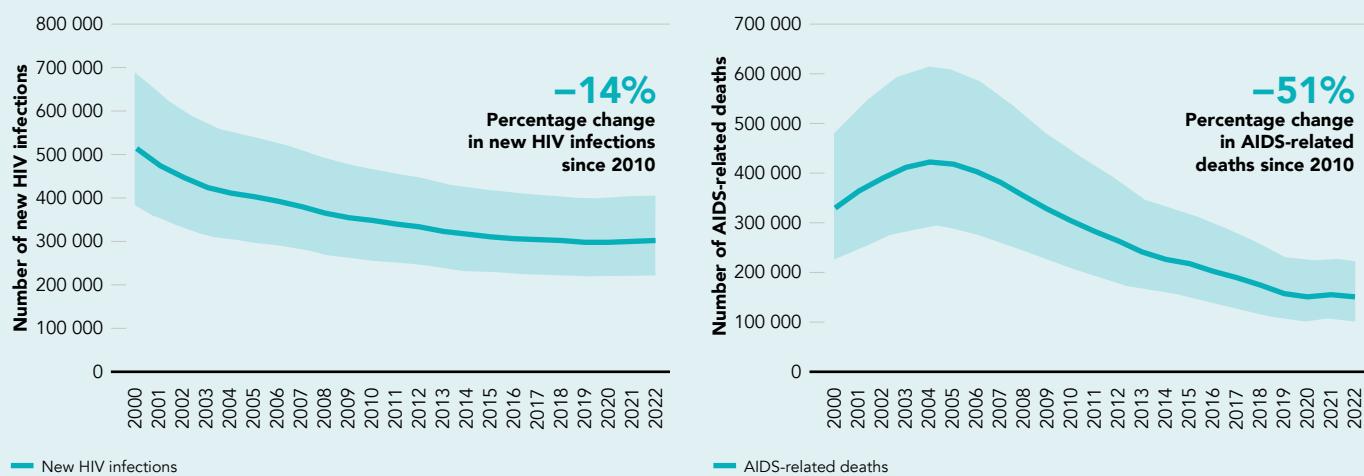
Asia and the Pacific



Marked inequalities and diverse epidemic trends affect progress in the HIV response in Asia and the Pacific. The HIV epidemic in the region disproportionately affects people from key populations, especially young people (15–24 years), and their sexual partners. Young people accounted for around a quarter of new HIV infections in the region in 2022. In Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand, nearly half of new HIV infections occurred among young people. Although the numbers of new HIV infections and HIV-related deaths have declined overall at the regional level since 2010 (Figure 4.1), some countries have experienced an expansion of their epidemics in recent years.¹

Median HIV prevalence among people from key populations remains much higher than among the general population (Figure 4.2). Since 2010, estimated numbers of new HIV infections among gay men and other men who have sex with men increased by six times in the Philippines, tripled in Cambodia and almost doubled in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The increasing use of stimulants and synthetic opioids exacerbates the risks of HIV transmission among people who use drugs (1).

Figure 4.1 Number of annual new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths, Asia and the Pacific, 2000–2022



Source: UNAIDS epidemiological estimates, 2023 (<https://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>).

¹ Countries in the region with increasing numbers of new HIV infections in 2022 include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Timor Leste.

2022 DATA

- **14%** decrease in new HIV infections since 2010
- **51%** decrease in AIDS-related deaths since 2010
- People living with HIV:
6.5 million [5.3 million–7.8 million]
- New HIV infections:
300 000 [220 000–400 000]
- AIDS-related deaths:
150 000 [110 000–220 000]

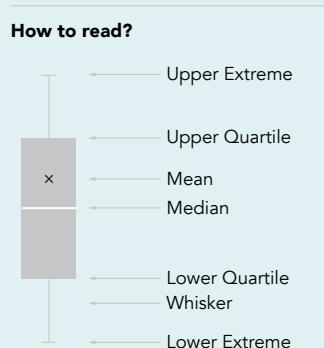
Testing and treatment cascade (all ages):

- % of people living with HIV who know their status:
78 [64–94]
- % of people living with HIV who are on treatment:
65 [54–78]
- % of people living with HIV who are virally suppressed:
62 [51–74]

Financing of the HIV response:

- Resource availability for HIV:
US\$ 3.7 billion [60% gap to meet the 2025 target]

Figure 4.2 HIV prevalence among key populations compared with adults (aged 15–49 years), reporting countries in Asia and the Pacific, 2018–2022



The median HIV prevalence among countries that reported these data in Asia and the Pacific was:

1.1% among sex workers.
4.7% among gay men and other men who have sex with men.
4.2% among people who inject drugs.
3.9% among transgender people.
0.9% among people in prisons.

The estimated HIV prevalence among adults (aged 15–49 years) is 0.2% [0.2–0.3%].

Sources: UNAIDS Global AIDS Monitoring, 2023; UNAIDS epidemiological estimates, 2023 (<https://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>).

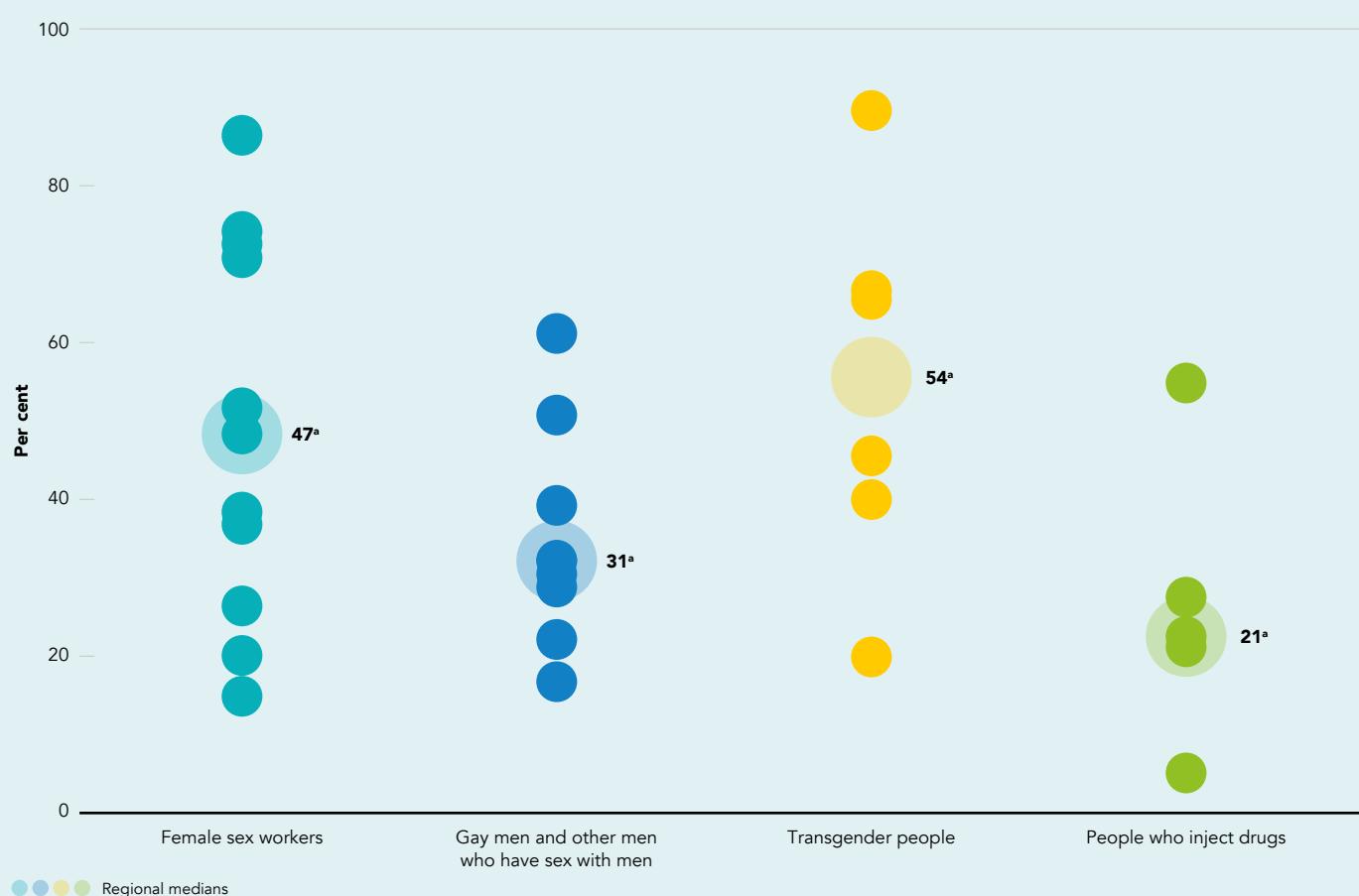
Notes: n = number of countries. Total number of reporting countries = 42.

The adult prevalence uncertainty bounds define the range within which the true value lies (if it can be measured). Narrow bounds indicate that an estimate is precise, while wide bounds indicate greater uncertainty regarding the estimate.

Efforts are under way to expand access to combination HIV prevention services, including harm reduction services, self-testing and virtual interventions, along with greater provision of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Several countries reported significant increases in the uptake of PrEP, including Viet Nam, which saw a 59% increase in PrEP use in 2022. Significant gaps in prevention service coverage remain (Figure 4.3), however, particularly among young people from key populations.

Progress towards the 95–95–95 targets has been uneven across countries and populations in the region, reflecting difficulties in reaching people from key populations and their sexual partners with testing and treatment. Antiretroviral therapy coverage over 80% has been achieved only in Cambodia, New Zealand and Thailand. In about a third of countries (eight of 22 countries with published data), antiretroviral therapy coverage is below 50%. The scale-up of dolutegravir-based regimens as the primary treatment option is progressing in the region and is expected to improve treatment outcomes.

Figure 4.3 Coverage of HIV prevention interventions among key populations, select countries with available data, Asia and the Pacific, 2018–2022



^a Calculated based on 11 reporting countries for female sex workers, 9 for gay men and other men who have sex with men, 6 for transgender people and 5 for people who inject drugs.

Source: UNAIDS Global AIDS Monitoring, 2023 (<https://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>).

Note: prevention coverage is measured as the percentage of people in a key population who report having received a combined set of HIV prevention interventions in the past three months (at least two out of three services: given condoms and lubricants; received counselling on condom use and safe sex; tested for sexually transmitted infections for transgender people, sex workers and gay men and other men who have sex with men, or received sterile needles or syringes for people who inject drugs).

Stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and people from key populations continue to pose significant barriers. All countries in the region, except New Zealand and some states in Australia, criminalize sex work. Seventeen countries criminalize same-sex sexual acts in private. Of note, in November 2022 and April 2023 respectively, the Parliaments of the Cook Islands and Singapore removed colonial laws prohibiting consensual sex between men. Transgender rights are under further threat with the recent decision of the Federal Shariat Court to strike down portions of the groundbreaking and progressive Pakistan Transgender Act 2018. Overcrowding in prisons and other closed settings remains rampant in most countries in Asia, with many offences linked to harsh punishment of drug use and possession for personal use (2). The death penalty is in place for drug offences in at least 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific.

Committed national political leadership and collaboration are essential. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the Leaders' Declaration on Ending Inequalities and Getting on Track to End AIDS by 2030 (3), which is being translated into a road map for action (4).

Community-led responses remain vital elements of the HIV response. Community-led monitoring is being implemented across the region, and efforts to harmonize approaches and provide technical assistance to community-led organizations are proceeding. Indonesia, Nepal and Papua New Guinea have already completed a full cycle of community-led monitoring, but meaningful engagement of young people from key populations in decision-making platforms remains limited (5).

The key priorities for the HIV response in Asia and the Pacific include modernizing and scaling up HIV prevention, testing, treatment and care services; leveraging innovative solutions such as PrEP and virtual interventions; removing barriers to access services; prioritizing key populations; empowering community leadership; and implementing legal and policy reforms.

Domestic resources for HIV in the region, which comprised 85% of all resources available for HIV in 2022, decreased by 3% compared with 2021. Pursuing equitable and sustainable financing should be prioritized to close the 60% funding gap in estimated annual resource needs to meet the 2025 targets.

Table 4.1 Reported estimated size of key populations, Asia and the Pacific, 2018–2022

Country	National adult population (aged 15–49 years) for 2022 or relevant year	Sex workers	Sex workers as percentage of adult population (aged 15–49 years)	Gay men and other men who have sex with men	Gay men and other men who have sex with men as percentage of adult population (aged 15–49 years)	People who inject drugs	People who inject drugs as percentage of adult population (aged 15–49 years)	Transgender people	Transgender people as percentage of adult population (aged 15–49 years)	People in prisons	People in prisons as percentage of adult population (aged 15–49 years)
Afghanistan	20 200 000			10 100		25 700					
Bhutan	470 000	600	0.14%					380	0.09%		
Cambodia	8 500 000	52 300	0.61%								
India	752 000 000									2 262 000	0.30%
Indonesia	146 000 000	278 000	0.19%	761 000	0.52%	27 100	0.02%	34 700	0.02%	268 000	0.19%
Iran	48 400 000	138 000	0.30%			187 000	0.41%			244 400	0.50%
Lao People's Democratic Republic	4 100 000										
Malaysia	19 000 000	37 000	0.21%			60 000	0.32%				
Mongolia	1 700 000	7 300	0.43%					820			
Myanmar	29 200 000	75 000	0.26%			116 000	0.40%				
Nepal	16 800 000					33 500	0.20%			22 000	0.15%
New Zealand	2 400 000					2 763		10 400	0.43%	8 400	0.35%
Papua New Guinea	5 400 000	52 200	0.96%	38 700	0.71%						
Philippines	61 200 000	231 400	0.38%	693 000	1.13%	7300		206 900	0.34%		
Singapore	2 900 000									11 900	0.66%
Sri Lanka	10 700 000	30 000	0.29%	73 800	0.72%	2 700	0.03%	2 200	0.02%		
Thailand	34 000 000			608 000	1.79%	57 600	0.17%			269 700	0.79%
Viet Nam	51 900 000			256 000	0.50%			9 100			
Estimated regional median proportion as per cent of adult population (15–49)^a			0.30%		0.82%		0.18%		0.12%		-

■ National population size estimate

■ Local population size estimate

■ Insufficient data

■ No data

Source: UNAIDS Global AIDS Monitoring, 2023 (<https://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>); Spectrum DemProj module, 2023;

^a Guide for updating Spectrum HIV estimates, UNAIDS 2023 (<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fhivtools.unaids.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F73D-Guide-for-updating-Spectrum-HIV-estimates.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>).

Note 1: Estimates shown are government-provided estimates reported for 2018–2022. Additional and alternative estimates may be available from different sources, including the Key Populations Atlas (<https://kpatlas.unaids.org/>), academic publications or institutional documents.

Note 2: The regions covered by the local population size estimate are as follows:

Afghanistan: Gay men and other men who have sex with men: Herat, Jalalabad, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz, Mazar and Zaranj.

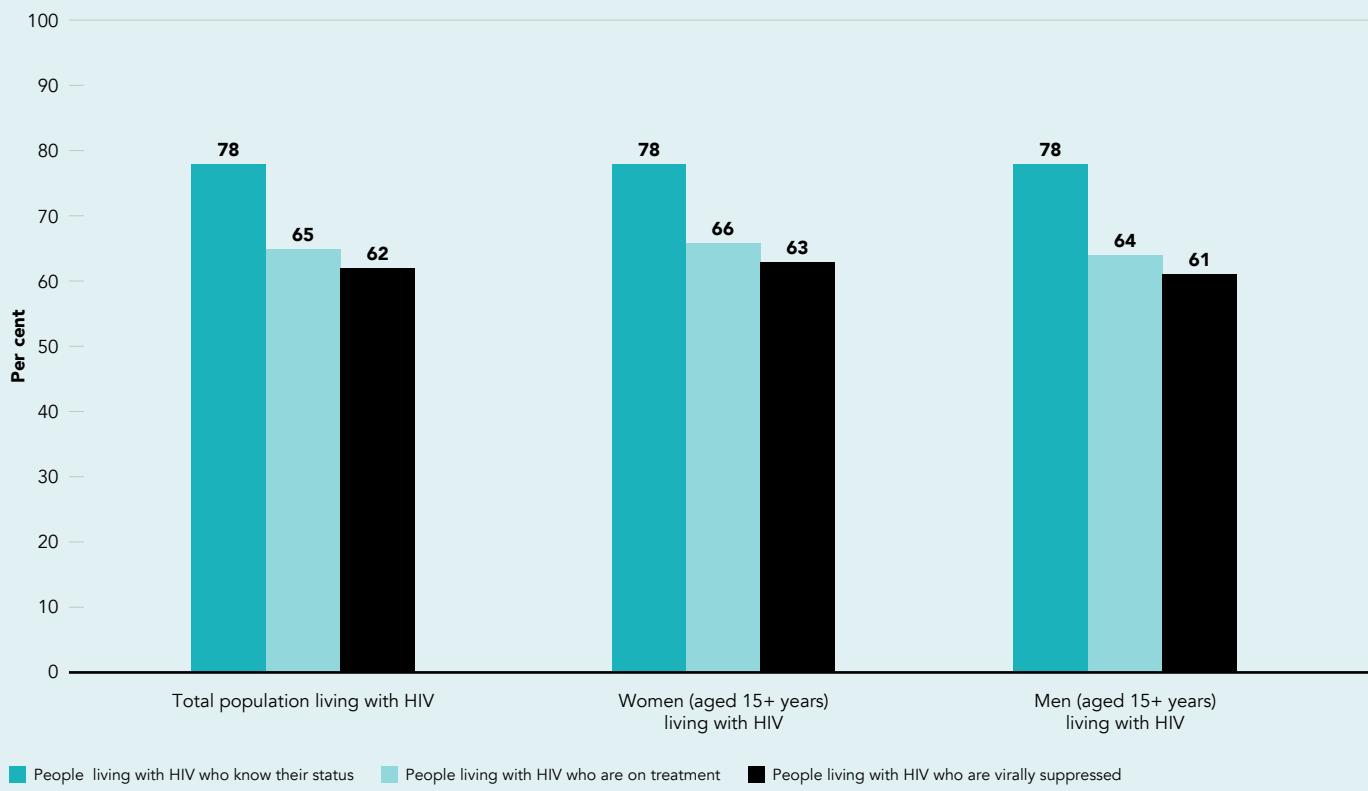
Mongolia: Darkhan, Dornod, Orkhon and Ulaanbaatar.

New Zealand: Northern Region

Philippines: Cebu, Cebu Province, Danao, Lapu-Lapu, Mandaue, Naga and Talisay.

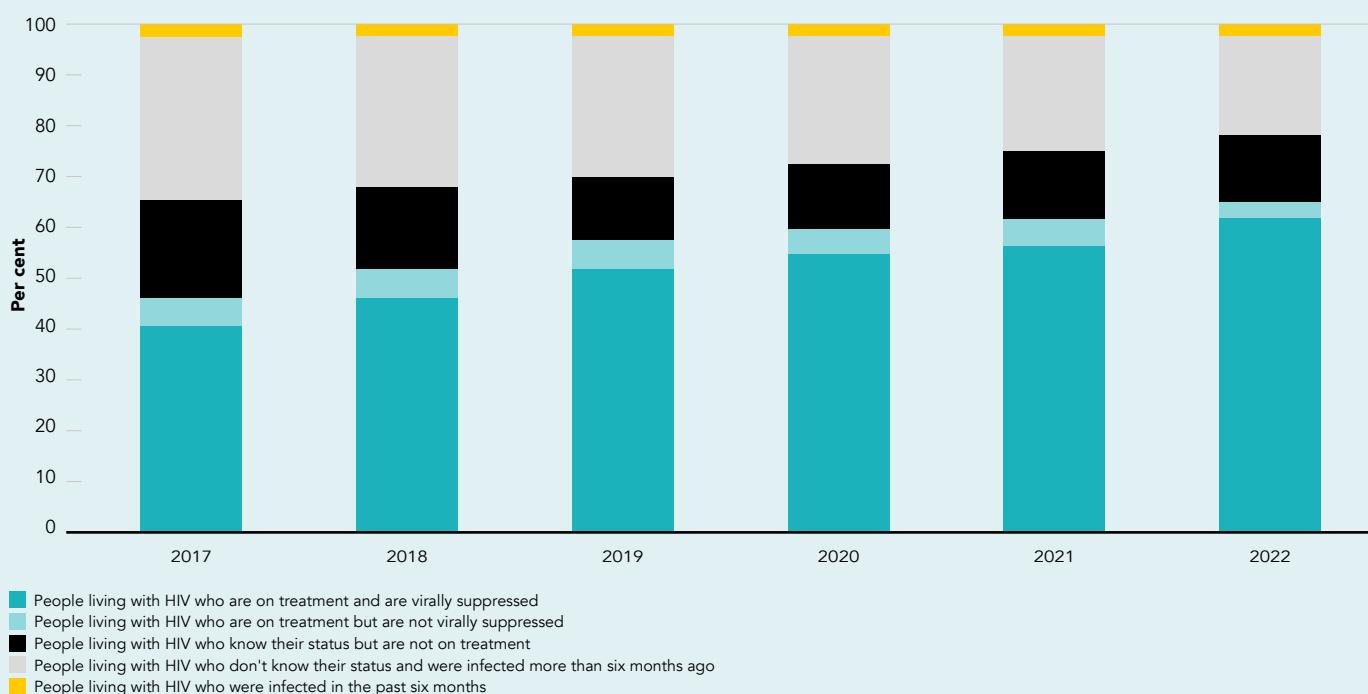
Viet Nam: Ha Noi

Figure 4.4 HIV testing and treatment cascade, by age and sex, Asia and the Pacific, 2022



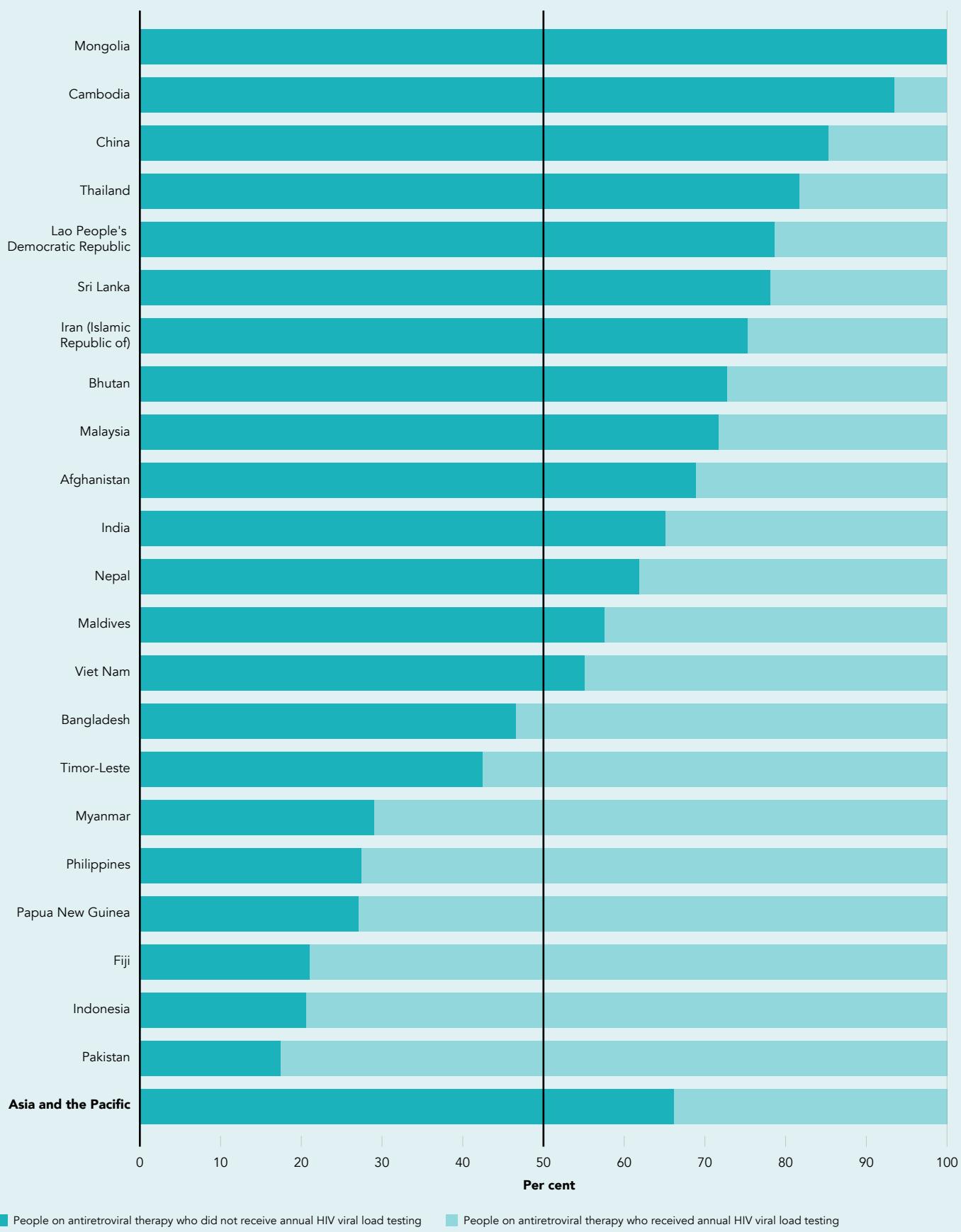
Source: UNAIDS special analysis of epidemiological estimates, 2023.

Figure 4.5 Distribution of people living with HIV by recent infection, knowledge of status, treatment and viral load suppression, adults (aged 15+ years), Asia and the Pacific, 2017–2022



Source: UNAIDS special analysis of epidemiological estimates, 2023.

Figure 4.6 Viral load testing coverage among people living with HIV who are on treatment, selected countries in Asia and the Pacific and regional, 2022



■ People on antiretroviral therapy who did not receive annual HIV viral load testing ■ People on antiretroviral therapy who received annual HIV viral load testing

Source: UNAIDS Global AIDS Monitoring, 2023 (<https://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>).

Table 4.2 Laws and policies scorecard, Asia and the Pacific, 2023

Country	Criminalization of transgender people ^a	Criminalization of sex work ^b	Criminalization of same-sex sexual acts in private	Criminalization of possession of small amounts of drugs ^c	Laws criminalizing transmission of, non-disclosure of or exposure to HIV transmission	Laws or policies restricting the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV ^d	Parental consent for adolescents to access HIV testing
Afghanistan	1	1	1	1	1		1
Australia	12	51	22	16	20		
Bangladesh	1	1	9	1	1		3
Bhutan	2	2	10		20		
Brunei Darussalam	12	11	22		20		3
Cambodia	2	2	2	2	1		2
China	2	2	2	1	1		7
Cook Islands		13	14		21		
Democratic People's Republic of Korea		15	22		21		
Fiji	6	19	22	6	18		2
India	1	1	1	8	20		1
Indonesia	12	1	23	1	1		1
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	1	1	1	1	1		2
Japan		43	22		21		
Kiribati	3	24	25	3	3		2
Lao People's Democratic Republic	1	1	1	1	1		1
Malaysia	1	26	1	1	27		
Maldives	12	28	22		21		
Marshall Islands	6	30	22	33	29		6
Micronesia (Federated States of)	6	17	22	6	6		6
Mongolia	1	1	1	1	1		3
Myanmar	3	3	31	3	3		3
Nauru	6	34	22	6	6		6
Nepal	1	1	1	1	1		1
New Zealand	1	1	1	1	1		1
Niue	6	6	6	6	6		6
Pakistan	1	1	1	1	35		2
Palau	6	36	22	39	6		6
Papua New Guinea	2	2	37	2	2		2
Philippines	2	2	1	2	1		42
Republic of Korea	3	3	40		3		3
Samoa	6	41	22	32	21		5
Singapore	3	3	38	3	1		2
Solomon Islands		44	22		21		
Sri Lanka	2	2	45	2	2		2
Thailand	1	1	1	1	1		1
Timor-Leste		47	22		21		
Tonga	6	48	22	6	6		6
Tuvalu	6	49	22	6	6		6
Vanuatu	6	2	22	6	6		6
Viet Nam	3	46	3		50		3

Country	Mandatory HIV testing for marriage, work or residence permits or for certain groups	Laws protecting against discrimination on the basis of HIV status	Constitutional or other non-discrimination provisions for sex work ^d	Constitutional or other non-discrimination provisions for sexual orientation ^d	Constitutional or other non-discrimination provisions for gender identity ^d	Constitutional or other non-discrimination provisions for people who inject drugs ^d
Afghanistan	1	1	1	1	1	1
Australia						
Bangladesh	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bhutan	2	2				
Brunei Darussalam	3					
Cambodia	2	2	2	2	2	2
China	2	1				2
Cook Islands						
Democratic People's Republic of Korea						
Fiji						6
India	1	1			1	2
Indonesia	1	1	1	1	1	1
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	1	1	1	2	2	2
Japan	2					
Kiribati	3	3				3
Lao People's Democratic Republic	1	1	1	1	1	1
Malaysia	1		1	1	2	2
Maldives						
Marshall Islands	6					6
Micronesia (Federated States of)	6					6
Mongolia	1	1	1	1	1	1
Myanmar	3	3				3
Nauru	6					6
Nepal	1	1	1	1	1	1
New Zealand	1	1		1	1	1
Niue	6					6
Pakistan	1	1	2	2	2	2
Palau	6					6
Papua New Guinea	2	2	2	2		2
Philippines	1		2	2		2
Republic of Korea	3					3
Samoa	5					6
Singapore	3	3				3
Solomon Islands	3					
Sri Lanka	2	2	2	2	2	2
Thailand	1	1	1	1	1	1
Timor-Leste						
Tonga	6					6
Tuvalu	6					6
Vanuatu	6					6
Viet Nam	3	3				3

Criminalization of transgender people

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Criminalization of sex work

- █ Any criminalization or punitive regulation of sex work
- █ Sex work is not subject to punitive regulations or is not criminalized
- █ Data not available

Criminalization of same-sex sexual acts in private

- █ Death penalty
- █ Imprisonment (14 years–life, up to 14 years) or no penalty specified
- █ Laws penalizing same-sex sexual acts have been decriminalized or never existed, or no specific legislation
- █ Data not available

Mandatory HIV testing for marriage, work or residence permits or for certain groups

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Laws protecting against discrimination on the basis of HIV status

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Criminalization of possession of small amounts of drugs

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Laws criminalizing transmission of, non-disclosure of or exposure to HIV transmission

- █ Yes
- █ No, but prosecutions exist based on general criminal laws
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Laws or policies restricting the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV

- █ Deport, prohibit short- and/or long-stay and require HIV testing or disclosure for some permits
- █ Prohibit short- and/or long-stay and require HIV testing or disclosure for some permits
- █ Require HIV testing or disclosure for some permits
- █ No restrictions

Parental consent for adolescents to access HIV testing

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Constitutional or other non-discrimination provisions for sex work

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Constitutional or other non-discrimination provisions for sexual orientation

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Constitutional or other non-discrimination provisions for gender identity

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Constitutional or other non-discrimination provisions for people who inject drugs

- █ Yes
- █ No
- █ Data not available

Notes: ^aLaws criminalizing transgender people refers to laws that criminalize the gender expression of transgender and gender diverse people, including laws against cross-dressing or impersonating the opposite sex.

^bCriminalization of sex work refers to criminalization of any aspect of sex work, including buying sexual services, selling sexual services, ancillary activities associated with buying or selling sexual services, and profiting from organizing or managing sex work.

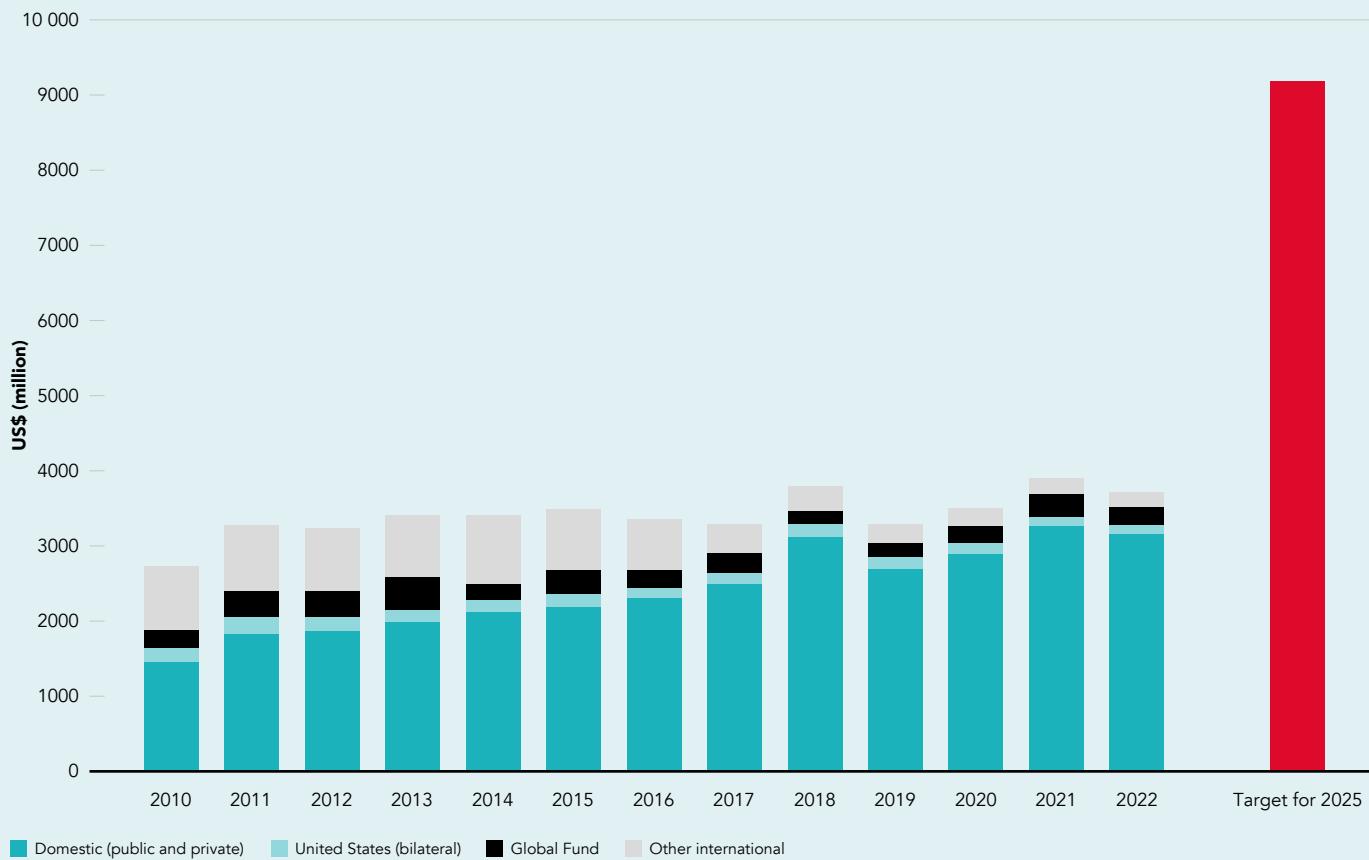
^cCriminalization of possession of small amounts of drugs refers to the criminalization of possession of any quantity of drugs, including possession of a quantity of drugs sufficient only for personal use. A country is still considered to criminalize possession of small amounts of drugs, even if use or possession of marijuana has been decriminalized.

^dConstitutional or other non-discrimination provisions refer to whether constitutional prohibitions of discrimination have been interpreted to include discrimination on the grounds of sex work/sexual orientation/gender identity/drug use or dependency by courts and/or government policy, and/or whether there are other legislative non-discrimination provisions specifying sex work/sexual orientation/gender identity/drug use or dependency.

Source:

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- 13 Cook Islands Crimes Act 169: Articles 160–163. Avarua: Government of Cook Islands (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/ed378f/pdf>, accessed 6 July 2023).
- 14 Crimes (Sexual Offences) Amendment Bill 2023. Avarua: Government of Cook Islands (<https://parliament.gov.ck/parliamentary-business/bills/>, accessed 6 July 2023).
- 15 The Criminal Law of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Articles 18 and 261. Pyongyang: Democratic People's Republic of Korea (https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/The%20Criminal%20Law%20of%20the%20Democratic%20Republic%20of%20Korea_2009_%202011.pdf, accessed 6 July 2023).
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Figure 4.7 Resource availability for HIV, Asia and the Pacific, 2010–2022, and estimated resource needs for HIV by 2025



Source: UNAIDS financial estimates and projections, 2023 (<http://hivfinancial.unaids.org/hivfinancialdashboards.html>); Stover J, Glaubius R, Teng Y, Kelly S, Brown T, Hallett TB et al. Modelling the epidemiological impact of the UNAIDS 2025 targets to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. PLoS Med. 2021;18(10):e1003831.

Note: the resource estimates are presented in constant 2019 US dollars.

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Country Profiles

ASIA

	Afghanistan	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/afghanistan	
	Bangladesh	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/bangladesh	
	Bhutan	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/bhutan	
	Cambodia	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/cambodia	
	China	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/china	
	India	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/india	
	Indonesia	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/indonesia	
	Iran	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/iran	
	Japan	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/japan	
	Lao PDR	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/lao-pdr	
	Malaysia	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/malaysia	

ASIA			
	Mongolia	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/mongolia	
	Myanmar	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/myanmar	
	Nepal	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/nepal	
	Pakistan	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/pakistan	
	Philippines	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/philippines	
	Singapore	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/singapore	
	Sri Lanka	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/sri-lanka	
	Thailand	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/thailand	
	Timor-Leste	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/timor-leste	
	Viet Nam	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/viet-nam	
PACIFIC			
	Fiji	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/fiji	
	Papua New Guinea	https://www.aidsdatahub.org/country-profiles/papua-new-guinea	



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