

Romania - time to act 2025 – where are we?

Mariana Mărdărescu MD PhD
Coordinator of Compartment for Monitoring and Evaluation of HIV
In Romania

Short history of HIV in Romania 1985-2024

Patching the history of the HIV epidemic in Romania

○ **1985- 1989: 69** reported AIDS cases: 16 in adults, 53 in children

○ Jul. 1989- Dec. 1990 →

- **1090 pediatric** AIDS cases identified
- **97% <3 years**;
- 62% living in institutions at that moment

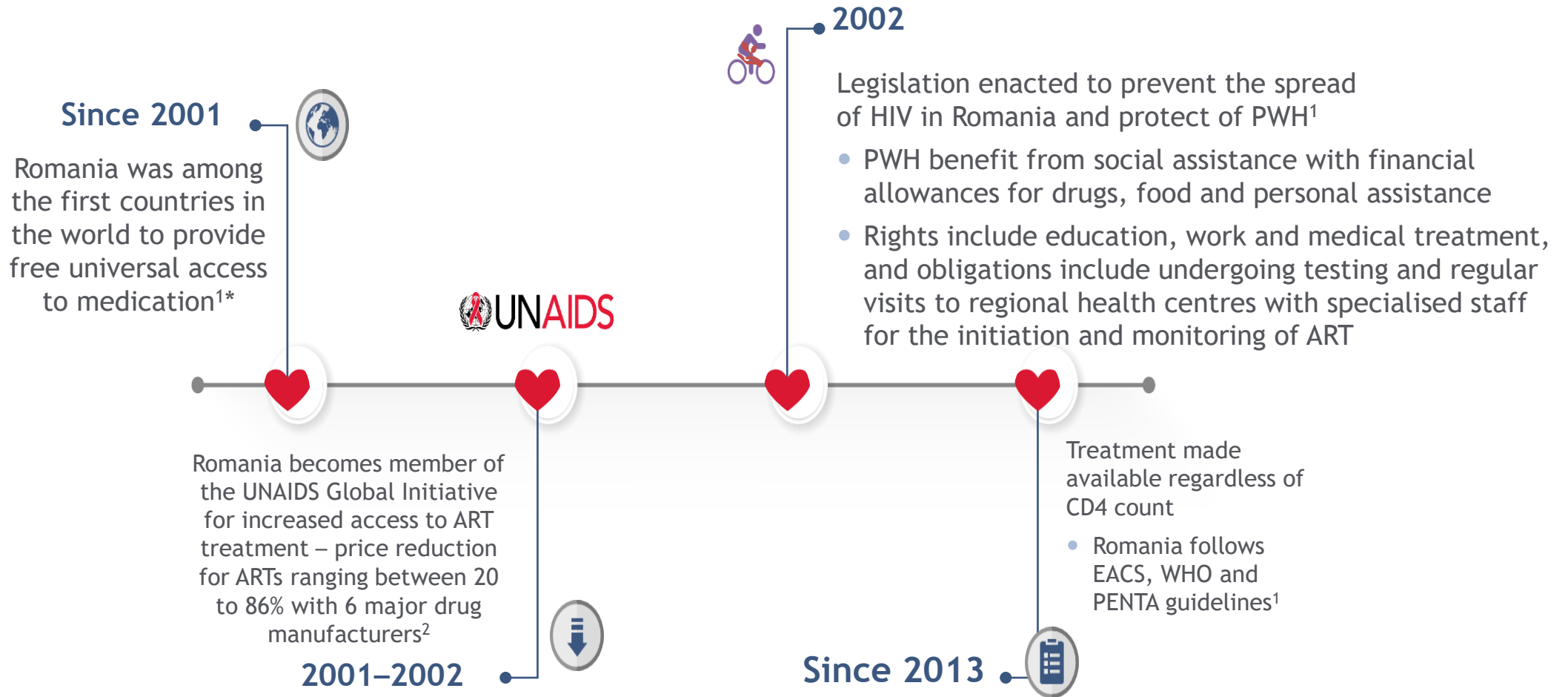
○ An estimated **10,000-14,000 children** infected

(via *non-perinatal transmission*), of whom 9287 registered in the National Data Base and cared by the HIV Pediatric wards, between 1990-2000.



Dec 1990- the cumulative number of AIDS pediatric cases in Romania > cases reported from all the other countries in the WHO European region combined

Romania pioneering the HIV fight



*Universal access achievement was confirmed in 2003 by a WHO assessment.
ART, antiretroviral therapy; EACS, European AIDS Clinical Society; PENTA, Paediatric European Network for Treatment of AIDS; UNAIDS, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; WHO, World Health Organization.
1. HIV Outcomes. Good practices in the long-term care of people living with HIV: learning from country experiences Germany and Romania. Available at: https://hivoutcomes.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/191128HIV-Outcomes-country-reports-GER-and-ROM_input-from-RO.pdf Last accessed: April 2020; 2. Mardarescu M, 5th International Workshop on HIV & Women. Available at: http://regist2.virology-education.com/2015/5thHIVwomen/02_Mardarescu.pdf Last accessed: April 2020.

Epidemiological trends in Romania

Distribution of ages of PLWHIV 31 December 2024 1985-2024

Total no. of HIV/AIDS cases (1985-2024):
28793

PLWHA 31 December 2024: **18768**

Age groups:

➤ 0-14 years: 141

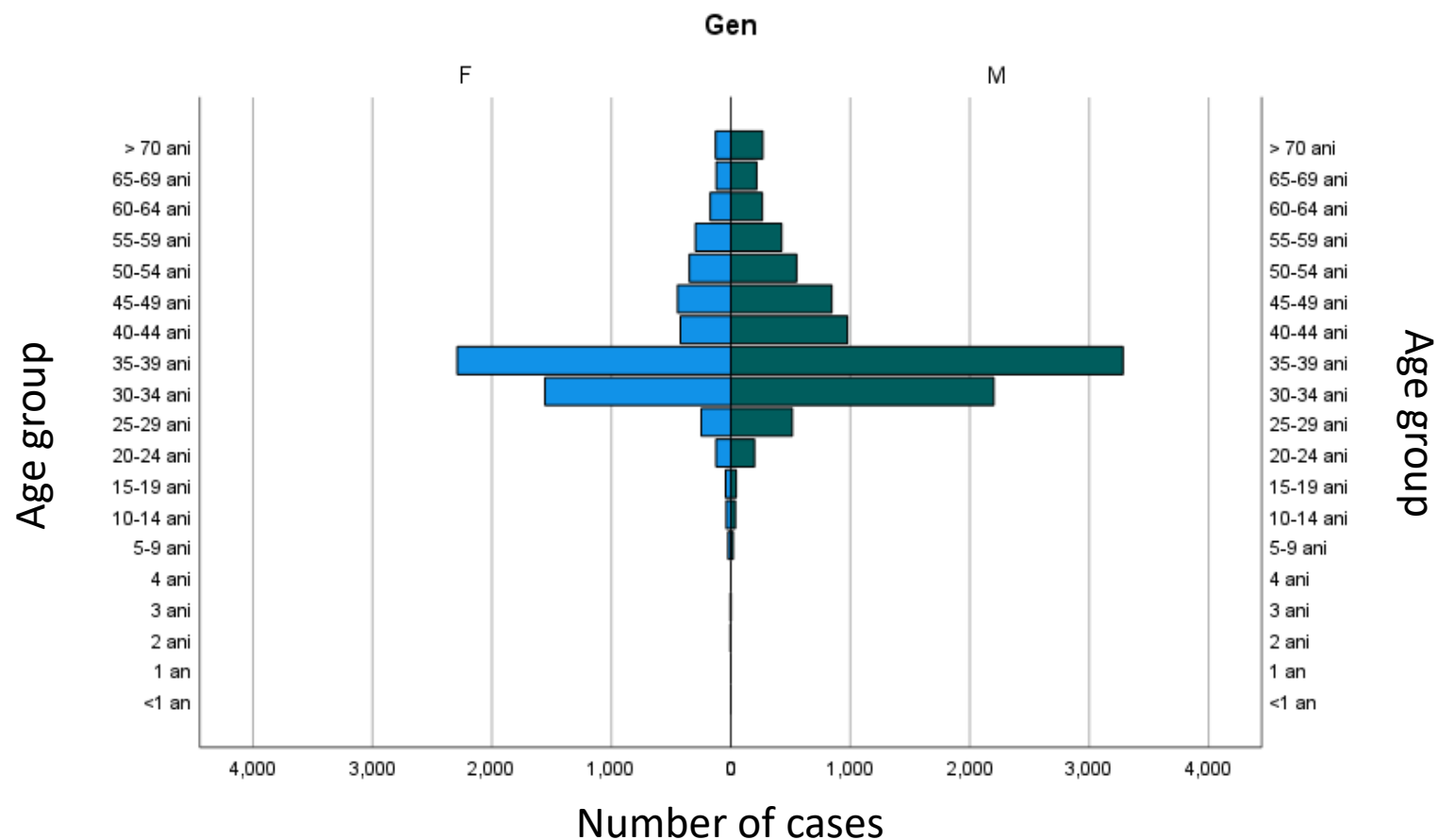
➤ 15-19 years: 132

➤ 20 years: 18009

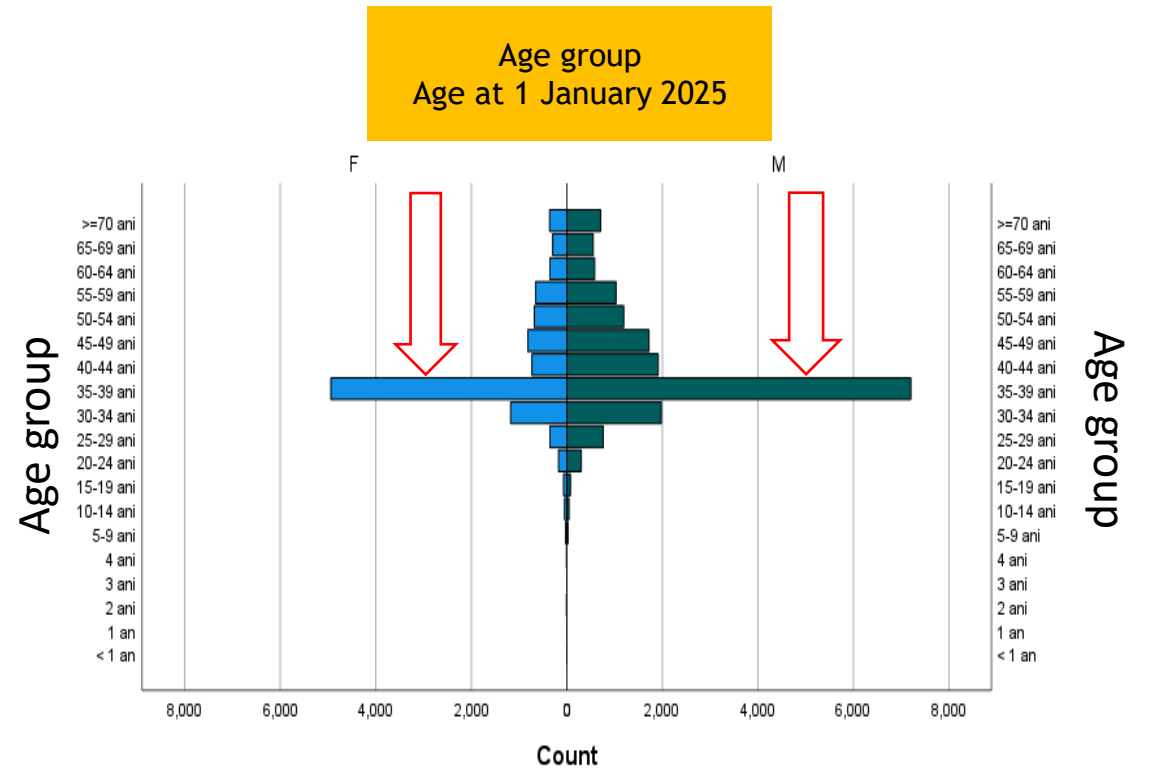
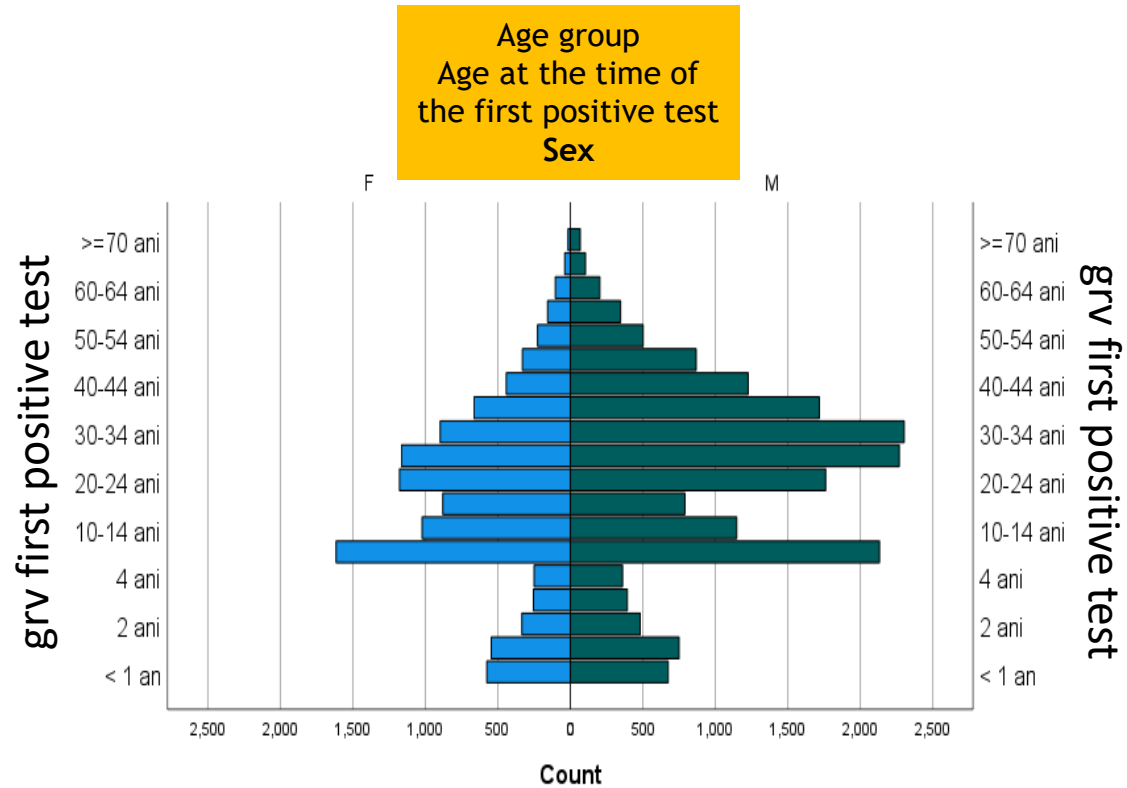
(>6000 from the Romanian Cohort)

WLWH:

➤ 20-39 years: **4062 (>60%)**

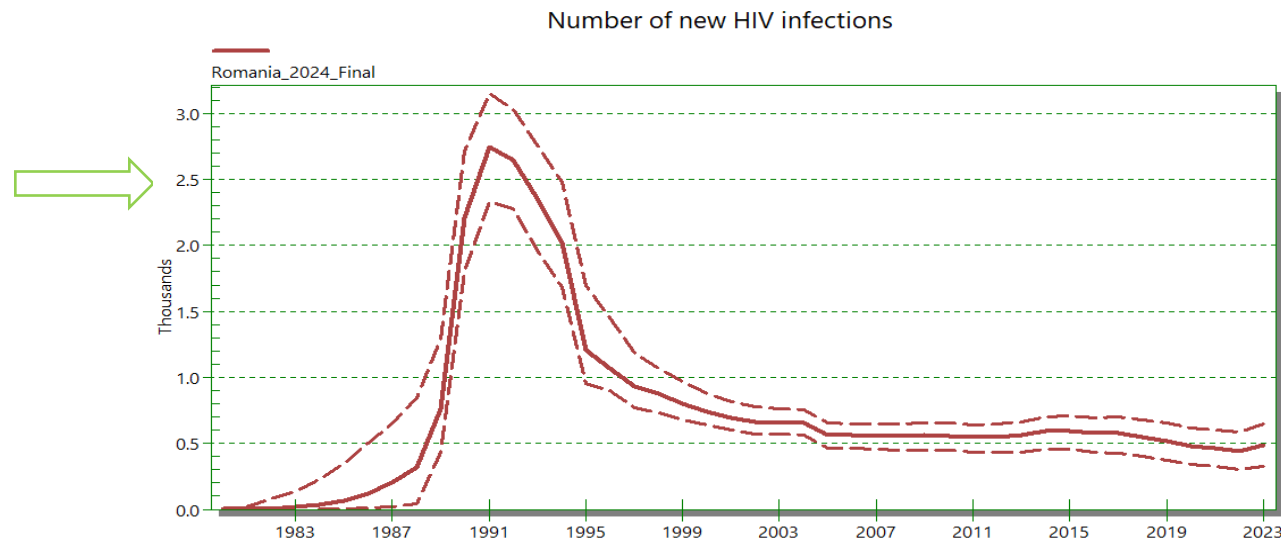


Distribution of ages 1985-2024



UNAIDS Estimates:

- ✓ HIV incidence rate for adults, aged 15–49 years, 2010-2023: <0.01%
- ✓ HIV incidence (new HIV infections per 1000 uninfected population), 2010-2023:
 - ✓ Estimate: 0.04 (2010)- 0.03 (2023)
 - ✓ Low: 0.03 (2010)-0.02 (2023)
 - ✓ High: 0.05 (2010)-0.03 (2023)



Romanian children's cohort, non-vertically infected, born between 1988-1990

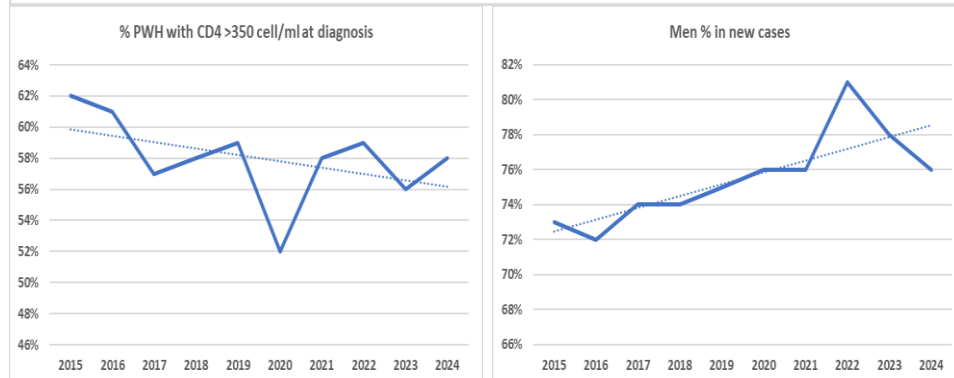
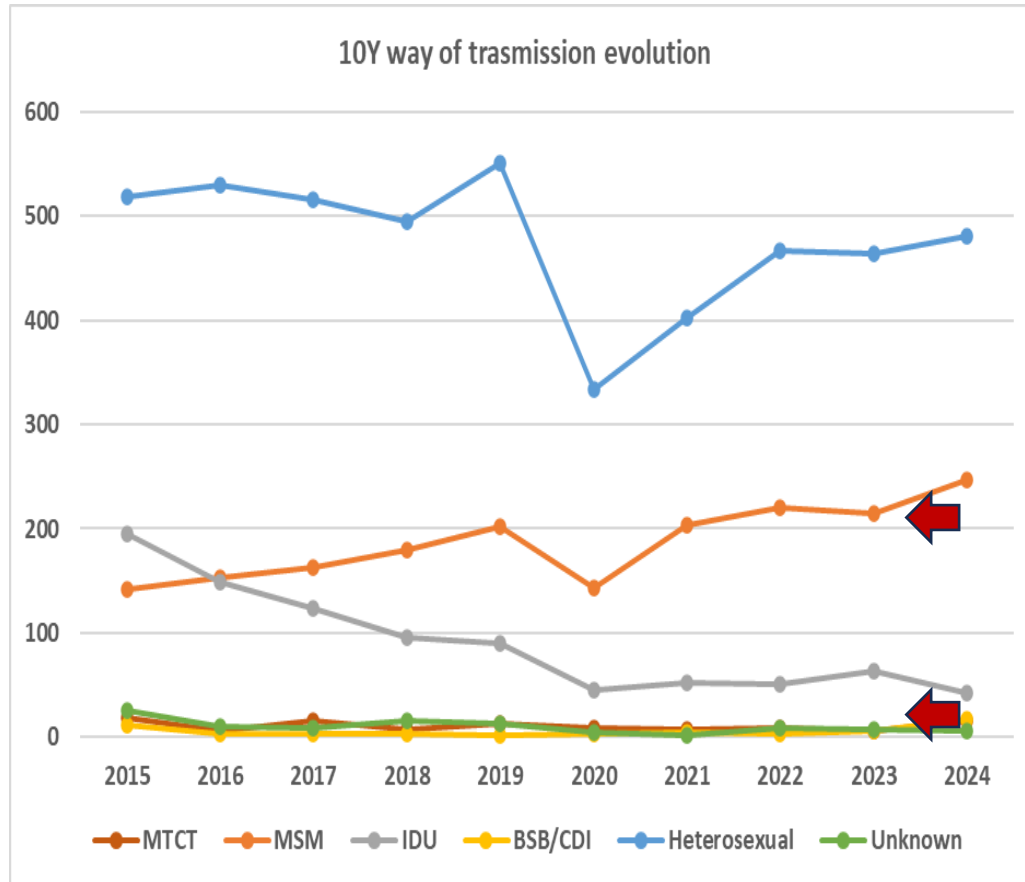
Last 10 years – what's the story about?

Epidemiological Trends

Healthcare System

PWH Perspective – QoL & Stigma

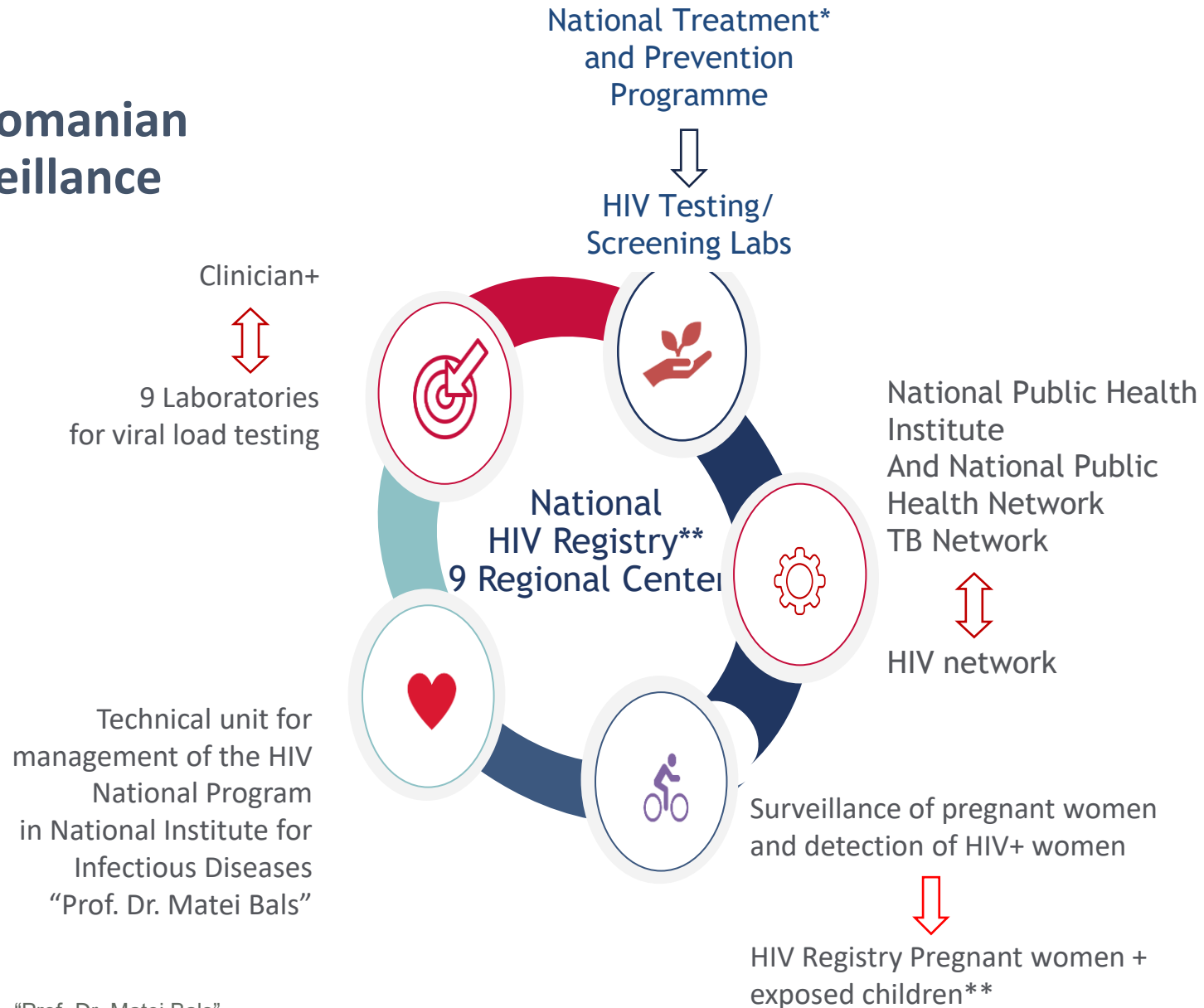
Last 10 years – Epidemiological Trends



New Cases

- Overall decreasing trend in new infections' detection – impact also from COVID pandemic-decline in testing
- Maintenance of heterosexual transmission at the same level
- Increase in MSMs and decrease in IDU detection
- High level of late presenters: average 58% (similar with the European trends)
- MTCT: stable, <2%
- Predominance of men in new diagnosed PWH

Challenges in the Romanian System of HIV Surveillance



*53 hospital units

** National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Prof. Dr. Matei Bals"

Special categories to be considered



Therapeutic fatigue

Approach for the cohort 1988-1990?

HIV viral suppression



When do we obtain it?
How do we obtain it?
How do we maintain it?
For how long?
What happens once we obtain it?



Interdisciplinary network

Rapid access to all medical specialties
Management of drug-drug interactions
Increasing age of HIV detection (>40 years)
Menopause

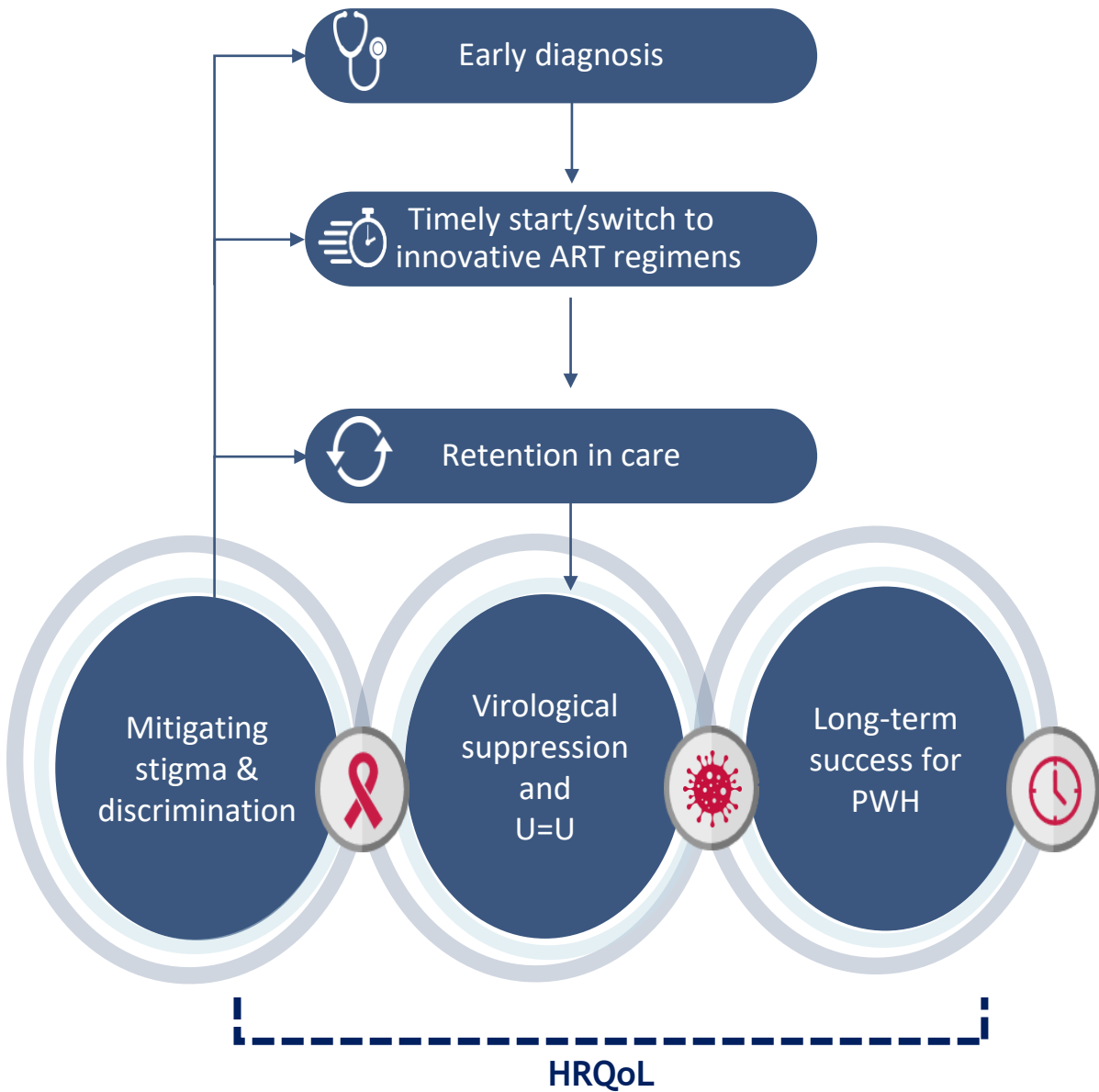
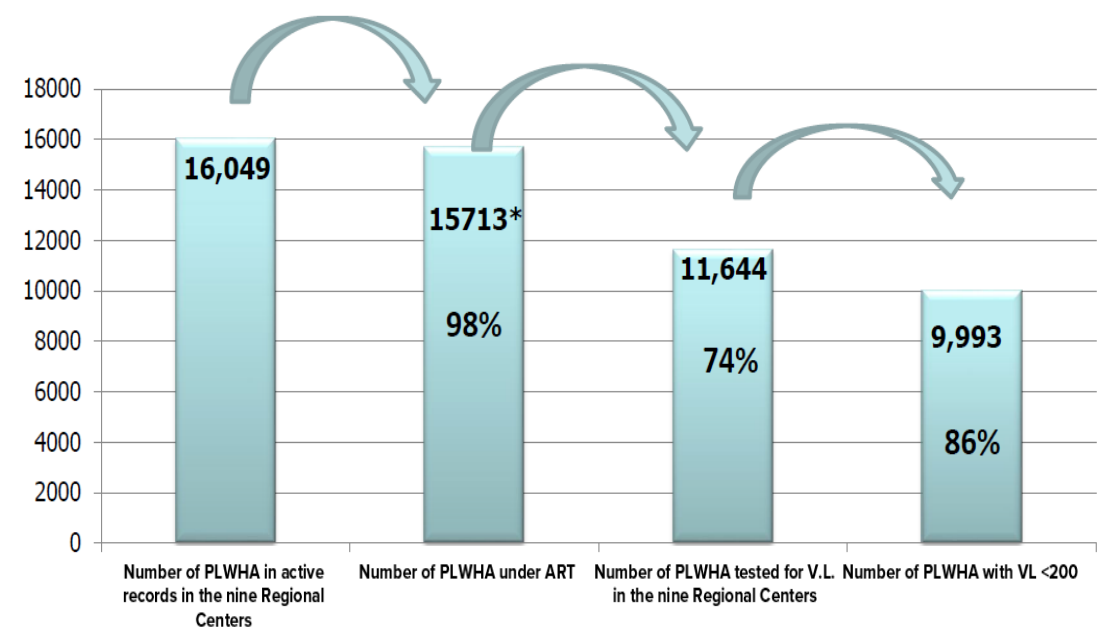
Comorbidities & Co-infections

Access to other specialties



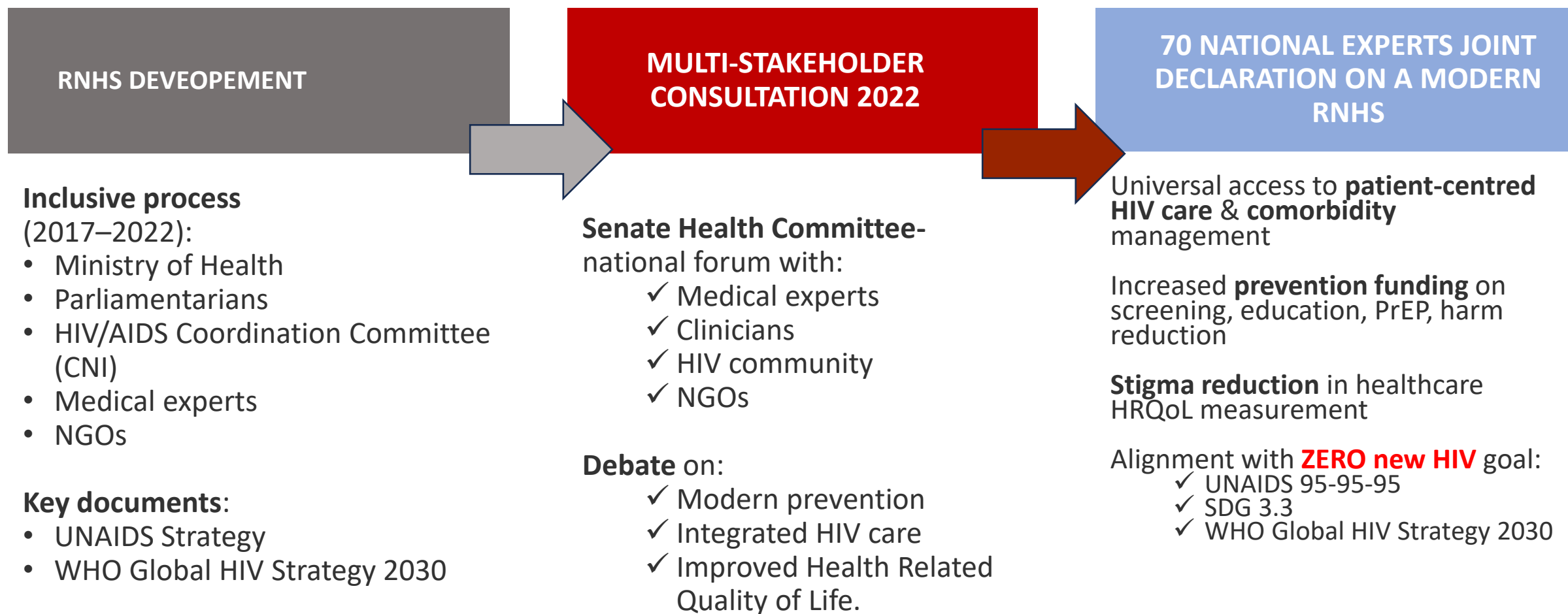
Continuous progress towards the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets in Romania 2024

LINKING PWH TO THE CARE CASCADE THROUGH
REDUCING STIGMA AND EXPANDING ACCESS
TO INNOVATIVE THERAPIES¹⁻⁴



ART, antiretroviral therapy; PLWHA, people living with HIV; U=U, undetectable=untransmittable.
1. National HIV Curriculum. 2017 [online]. Available at: www.hiv.uw.edu/go/screening-diagnosis/linkage-care/core-concept/all. Last accessed: April 2020; 2. Robertson M, et al. AIDS Care 2014;27:260-7; 3. UNAIDS Confronting discrimination 2017. Available from: <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2017/confronting-discrimination> Last accessed: April 2020; 4. Compartment for Monitoring and Evaluation of HIV/AIDS Data in Romania, <https://www.cnlas.ro/images/doc/2025/ROMANIA%20LA%2031%20DECEMBRIE%20-2024%20-%20site.pdf> accessed Apr 2025

National policies



**The RNHS
2022-2030
integrates
ambitious
objectives**

Committed to go beyond viral suppression, for healthy aging with HIV:

“Ensuring a good Health Related Quality of Life, complementing existing work in the field of HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, by developing sustainable approaches – including improving the prevention, detection and diagnosis of comorbidities – that meet the specific long-term needs of people with HIV” (Guiding Principles- Art 10)

A new vision:

Zero new HIV cases by 2030

Vulnerable groups access to prevention, person-centred medical care and social services

updated **unaids targets** for testing, treatment, suppression: 95-95-95

Infectious and **non-infectious comorbidities** and **mental health**

Multidisciplinary approach for HIV care

Zero HIV related stigma and discrimination in medical services and in society

Psycho emotional problems, priority for prevention

Immigrant reception centers, prisons and re-habilitation centres- prioritised category

Sterile syringes/ needles for injecting drug users

Update of the **National guide on HIV/AIDS treatment**

Introduction of PrEP- starting with 2023



RNHS: 2025 implementation status

Viral suppression & integrated care:

Free access to ARV treatment for all people living with HIV (since 2001)

Requires sustained funding for ARV treatment %& early management of comorbidities (incl. mental health).

Testing & early diagnosis:

Universal free access to HIV testing via GPs, for all individuals covered by the state's health insurance.

Scaling up free community HIV testing will save lives and reduce costs from late HIV diagnosis.

Goal Achieved- UNAIDS 95% target – 95% of people living with HIV know their status.

Rising number of new HIV cases

No decline over the last three years: 2024 → 757 cases

Driven, partly, by reduced prevention/testing activities during the COVID-19 crisis.

Prevention in high-risk groups:

At least 40% of new cases could have been prevented.

Most affected: MSM, people who inject drugs (PWID), sex workers, prisoners, refugees.

UNAIDS recommends prioritized funding for prevention and access to modern therapies.

Next steps:

Prioritize implementing RNHS measures on: HIV prevention, community testing, modern treatment access, increased free-stigma education, and multidisciplinary & patient-centered HIV care.

RNHS supported by the Study on QoL – 1,050 people living with HIV in Romania

A c t i o n s t o b e t a k e n

Coordinated by INBI & the Romanian HIV care network

Policy Recommendations emerged from the study

Organized on 4 Key areas, featuring 19 policy recommendations:

- Education, Awareness and Prevention
- Medical Care, Psychosocial Support and Social Inclusion
- Protection of Rights, Confidentiality and Legislation
- Research, Innovation and Government Initiatives

Study provides support for the RNHS implementation

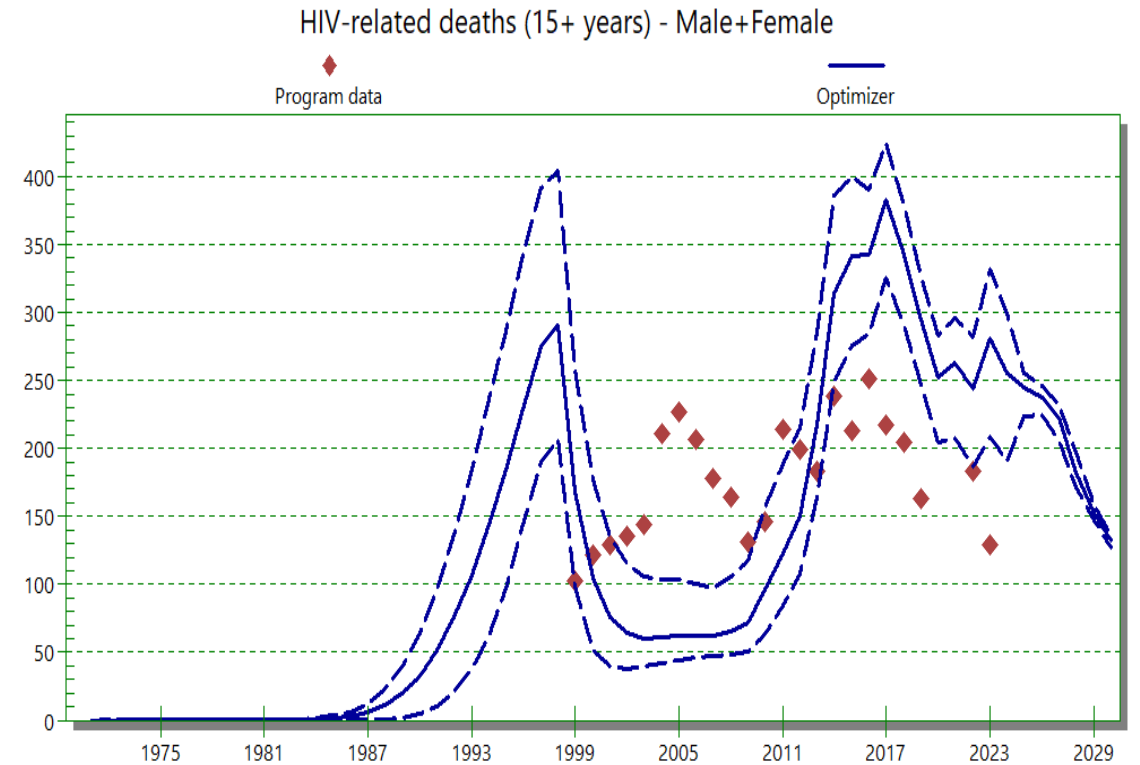
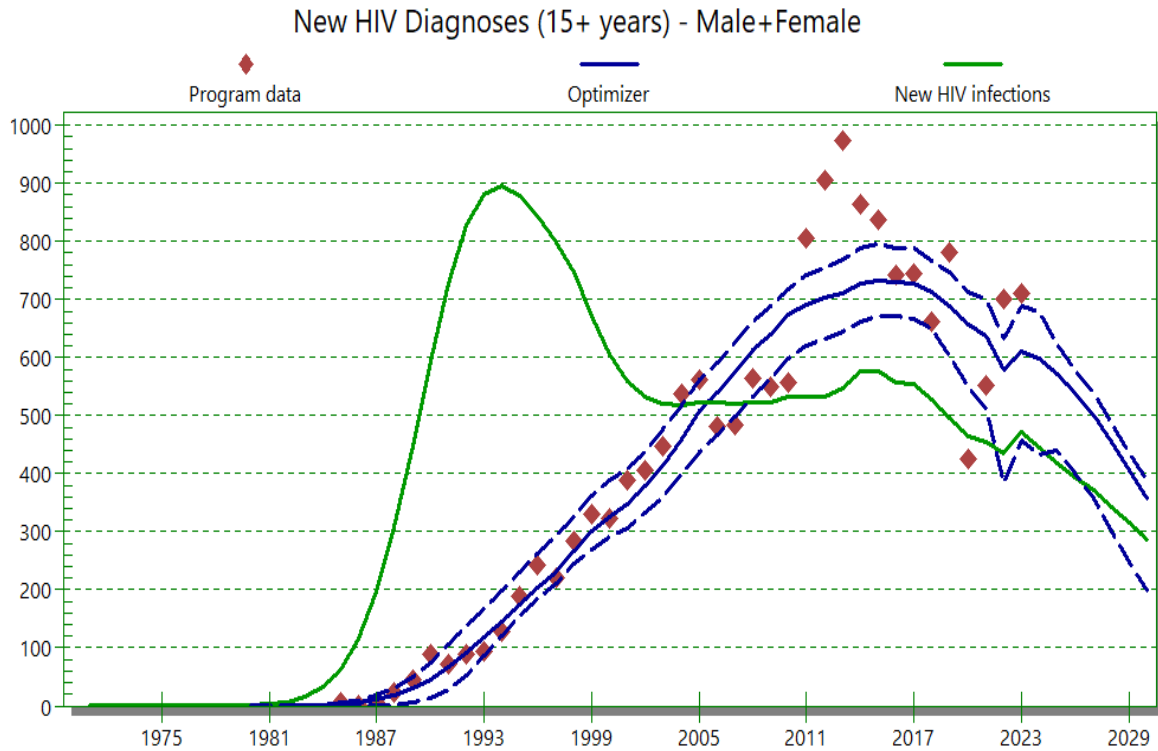
- Fuel HIV related legislation through policy briefs
- Support Cross-institutional Council for HIV Monitoring- CNI (under MoH), to accelerate RNHS implementation.
- Shared in policy events with KOLs & the HIV community, for RNHS implementing priorities

Annex 1. Data availability and progress towards UNAIDS 2025 targets in the EU/EEA, at country and regional level

| Country | Prevention | Incidence | Testing and treatment | | | | Mortality | Supportive policy environment | |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| | Number of people receiving PrEP in the last 12 months | 75% reduction in new HIV cases by 2025 from a 2010 baseline | 95% of people who are living with HIV know their HIV status | 95% of people who are living with HIV and know their HIV status are on antiretroviral therapy | 95% of people who are living with HIV on antiretroviral therapy have suppressed viral loads | 86% viral suppression among all people living with HIV | 50% reduction in new AIDS-related deaths by 2025 from a 2010 baseline | <10% of people living with HIV report experiencing stigma and discrimination in healthcare and community settings* | Countries reporting punitive laws and policies** |
| Austria | 2181 | | 97% | 96% | 89% | 83% | | | |
| Belgium | 8727 | -35% | 93% | 95% | 98% | 87% | -25% | | |
| Bulgaria | | 35% | 87% | 71% | 95% | 59% | -48% | | |
| Croatia | 686 | -52% | 86% | 99% | 100% | 84% | -54% | | |
| Cyprus | 22 | | 99% | 99% | 99% | 97% | | | |
| Czechia | 1874 | | 87% | 95% | 97% | 81% | | | |
| Denmark | 5193 | -64% | 96% | 98% | 97% | 91% | -52% | | |
| Estonia | | -77% | 92% | 79% | 95% | 69% | -27% | | |
| Finland | | | 95% | 95% | 98% | 88% | | | |
| France | 59 326 | | | | 97% | 88% | | | |
| Germany | 40 000 | -17% | 92% | 99% | 96% | 87% | -19% | | |
| Greece | 26 | -20% | 91% | 73% | 94% | 62% | 128% | | |
| Hungary | | | | | | | | | |
| Iceland | 300 | 37% | 90% | 99% | 99% | 89% | 34% | | |
| Ireland | 6126 | -44% | 90% | 99% | 99% | 88% | -34% | | |
| Italy | 16 222 | -11% | 95% | 94% | 93% | 83% | 17% | | |
| Latvia | | -69% | 100% | 52% | | | -14% | | |
| Liechtenstein | | | | | | | | | |
| Lithuania | 20 | -33% | 72% | 71% | 95% | 49% | -51% | | |
| Luxembourg | 681 | 5% | 95% | 88% | 87% | | -29% | | |
| Malta | 267 | 45% | 77% | 81% | | | -28% | | |
| Netherlands | 11 934 | | 94% | 95% | 96% | 86% | | | |
| Norway | 3453 | | 93% | 100% | 99% | 92% | -15% | | |
| Poland | | | 81% | 90% | | | | | |
| Portugal | 6931 | -46% | 94% | | | | -82% | | |
| Romania | 211 | -38% | 89% | 98% | 82% | 71% | -53% | | |
| Slovakia | | 143% | 85% | | | | 1% | | |
| Slovenia | 550 | -28% | 86% | 92% | 98% | 78% | 18% | | |
| Spain | 34 247 | -9% | 92% | 97% | 90% | 81% | -65% | | |
| Sweden | 4246 | | 96% | 99% | 98% | 93% | | | |
| EU/EEA | 203 223 | -20% | 93% | 95% | 94% | 83% | -47% | | |

¹ National level PrEP coverage data are not available. ECDC will work with countries to improve estimates for the percentage of people in need of PrEP who are accessing it.

Predictions...until 2029



Conclusions & Future Directions

**The evolution of the Romanian Cohort: Children with non-perinatal HIV, young by age but old by treatment and care:
Long-term survivors defined as: > 35 years of life and >30 years of treatment**

In this context...

- Notable progress in reducing infections and improving care
- National policies aim to expand long acting therapy in our epidemiological situation as well as prevention programmes
- Focus on eliminating stigma
- Focus on adherence and obtaining and maintaining viral suppression
- Continued investment in targeted education, services needed and prevention programmes

We would like to thank the families of all children touched by HIV who fought alongside our medical and care staff in order for these children to lead a normal life...!

References

- M. Mărdărescu. *Mental health and retention in care- Romania's experience from real life, from childhood to maturity*. 3rd International HIV meeting in Novi Sad Quality of life, May 2024.
- M. Mardarescu. *Infecția HIV pediatrică – între prevenire și tratament . Enhancing HIV care in paediatric patients. Prevention comes first!* Conferința Națională de Pediatrie. Ghiduri și protocoale în pediatrie. București, 3-6 aprilie 2024.
- M. Mardarescu. *Assessing progress to reaching the SDGs by 2030: Country progress Romania*. ECDC HIV Network Meeting, 16-17 April 2024, Stockholm, Sweden.
- EACS Guidelines 2024. Version 12.1, November 2024.
< <https://eacs.sanfordguide.com/> >
- M. Mărdărescu. *Curs pre-congres. Principii generale de profilaxie post-natală și alimentație a nou-născutului și sugarului expus perinatal*. Zilele Științifice ale Institutului Național de Boli Infecțioase "Prof. Dr. Matei Balș", 20-23 noiembrie, 2024, București.
- Compartiment for Monitoring and Evaluation of HIV Data in Romania- The National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Prof. Dr. Matei Bals"- www.cnlas.ro
- Strategia Națională pentru Supravegherea, controlul și prevenirea cazurilor de infecție cu HIV/SIDA în perioada 2022 –2030 (Romanian National HIV Strategy-RNHS)
< <https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ANEXA-PLAN-NATIONAL-STRATEGIA-HIV-SIDA.pdf> > - accessed on 9 November, 2025