

Success Stories

The Institute for Students Health of Belgrade (ISH), Serbia



HIV in Serbia

In 2015, a reported 3,312 persons were living with HIV in Serbia and of those newly diagnosed, 66% were aware of their HIV status. The main reported mode of transmission in Serbia is through sex between men (MSM), who make up 73% of the diagnosed population. Though the HIV prevalence is relatively low, the biggest challenge in Serbia is a high rate of AIDS diagnoses and people with a CD4 count less than 350cells/ml, who constitute about 25% of all new diagnoses each year.¹

The Institute for Students Health of Belgrade (ISH) is a medical institution located in Belgrade, which focuses on providing primary and secondary healthcare services to a population of over 120,000 students. ISH offers a wide range of health services within several different departments including general medicine, gynaecology, dentistry, public health improvement and is linked to a hospital infirmary that offers high-quality secondary healthcare and specialist services. The HIV and STI Prevention Centre (VCCT Centre) is a department within ISH and is one of the biggest institutions in the country that offers voluntary confidential HIV testing and counselling.

European Testing Week 2017

For European Testing Week 2017, the ISH VCCT Centre targeted all citizens with their outreach programmes and activities. The main aim was to increase HIV and STI testing coverage, by offering testing services to the general public who would, otherwise, avoid healthcare institutions. Under the slogan, "Get tested – it is important to know," numerous activities were implemented in Serbia; however, the main event took place in Belgrade.

Innovation during European Testing Week

In an effort to increase the Institution's visibility and raise awareness on the importance of getting tested, ISH along with numerous partners and stakeholders including the Institute of Public Health of Serbia "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut," Institute of Public Health of Belgrade, NGO



Specially designed tram car for the
'VCCT at the Tramway' project

¹ Ministry of Health of Serbia, I. o. (2015). Republic of Serbia. Belgrade: Ministry of Health of Serbia, Institute of Public Health of Serbia "Dr. Milan Jovanovic Batut".

Rainbow and Association of Medical Students IFMSA with the support of the city of Belgrade and GSK Company (GlaxoSmithKline) helped to organize the main ETW event, the 'VCCT at The Tramway' project.²

Through this project, a tram was specifically designed and adapted to act as a mobile HIV counselling centre to provide rapid HIV testing and counselling. This tram drove on a common route in Belgrade and was designed with three separate sections for counselling, testing and a waiting space for test results. Anyone who wanted an HIV test could access the tram at five pick-up points where volunteers from local NGOs provided educational materials and invited citizens to get tested.



Volunteers at a pick-up point providing information on HIV testing

In total, over the course of five days, 242 individuals were tested through the 'VCCT at the Tramway' project. There were 2 persons who had reactive tests and they were referred to ISH Belgrade and Institute of infectious and tropical diseases of Clinical Centre of Serbia.

Impact of European Testing week 2017

In Serbia, this event has symbolically shown that HIV counselling and testing should be accessible to everyone and highlights the importance of getting tested. Authorities from the City of Belgrade recognized the exclusivity of this community activity and the importance of early HIV diagnostics and provided full support.

Additionally, the ISH team was able to establish key stakeholder partnerships; particularly with the city authorities, resulting in them committing to supporting ISH for ETW 2018.

The innovation and hard work of the Institute for Students Health of Belgrade and the HIV and STI Prevention Centre (VCCT Centre) have proven that creating visibility and increasing access to HIV testing can successfully reach populations that would not normally access testing services in traditional settings.

² Video produced by the project team: <https://youtu.be/RjDoJpMuyMM>