

Situational review of Self-testing availability in Europe

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BACKGROUND

HIV self-testing (HIVST) has a crucial role in HIV epidemic as we move towards elimination. Despite progress in adopting HIVST across Europe, there are still significant gaps in implementation of HIVST. It was estimated that 14 % of all people living with HIV in Europe remain unaware of their HIV status (1). HIVST has been shown to help increase uptake and frequency of testing especially among key HIV risk populations. While HIVST has been available globally since 2012, there is a lack of evidence of the availability of HIVST in Europe.

We carried out a desk review as part of INTEGRATE, an EU funded Joint Action, to understand access and implementation of HIVST in Europe.

METHODS

We compiled data in November 2019, from a review of several published reports and online resources about HIVST, for the 32 European Union/European Economic Area (EU/EEA) countries. Information on current HIVST in individual European countries was extracted into an Excel spreadsheet and reviewed by two scientists. The primary publications and data sources used are described in **Table 1**.

In addition, due to the rapidly changing landscape of HIVST, a grey literature search was carried out in July 2019 to identify recent news articles or press releases about HIVST. This data was used to validate results from previous sources and update where newer information was available. Information in the final excel database was synthesised and categorised into either legal, policy, barriers and implementation.

Table 1: Primary data sources used to gather information on HIVST

Source	About	Year & Owner
HIVST website (2)	Information on HIVST which monitors country-level policy and regulatory data	Continuously updated/Collaborative
Dublin Declaration monitoring (3)	An annual survey of all 55 countries in EU/EEA to monitor health systems and political progress toward ending the HIV epidemic	2018/ ECDC
Legal barriers website (4)	Database of the most common legal and regulatory barriers to HIV testing, linkage to care and treatment across Europe and in individual European countries, including key populations.	2016/ OptTEST by HIV in Europe
Integrate Partner Survey (5)	A survey of 29 partner organizations from 16 countries ¹ participating in the INTEGRATE joint action	2017/ INTEGRATE Joint Action

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RESULTS

Legal situation of HIVST

- Overall **22 (69%)** countries in EU/EEA have legalised the use of HIVST (Figure 1). Of these:
- 11 (50%)** countries have authorised it for use, sale and distribution.
- There are **6** countries in Europe where HIVST is only available for use which means they are not available for private use.
- 7** countries have no legislation on HIVST use.

Policy and Implementation of HIVST

- Over half** of countries in Europe (n=18, 56%) did not include HIVST in their national HIV testing policy/strategy.
- Only 4 (13%)** countries reported having HIVST policy in development.
- Less than half** of countries in Europe (47%, 15/32) reported to have fully implemented HIVST as a national programme.
- A further **3** countries have reported that HIVST implementation is being piloted.

HIVST Availability and barriers

- HIVST kits were available for purchase online or through pharmacies in **18 (59%)** European countries overall, even in countries (n=4) with no official HIVST policy.
- Of the **13** countries where HIVST was not available, most were countries (n=9) in Eastern or Northern Europe

Progress towards implementing HIVST in Europe was driven by different factors (Figure 2).

- While, most countries (12, 63%) allow testing to be carried out by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), However, **22** countries of all countries in Europe require clinical supervision to administer HIV tests.

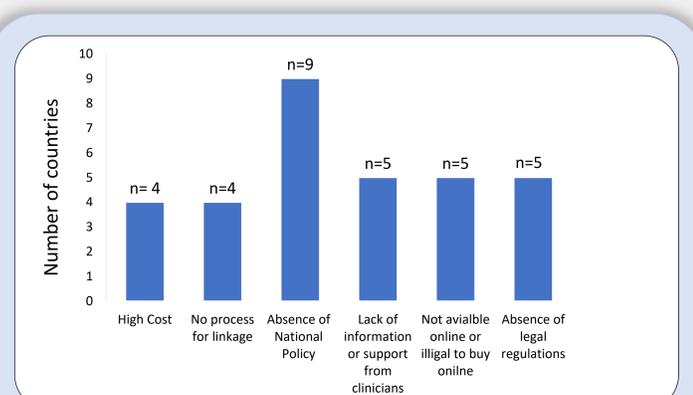


Figure 2. Barriers towards availability of HIVST in Europe

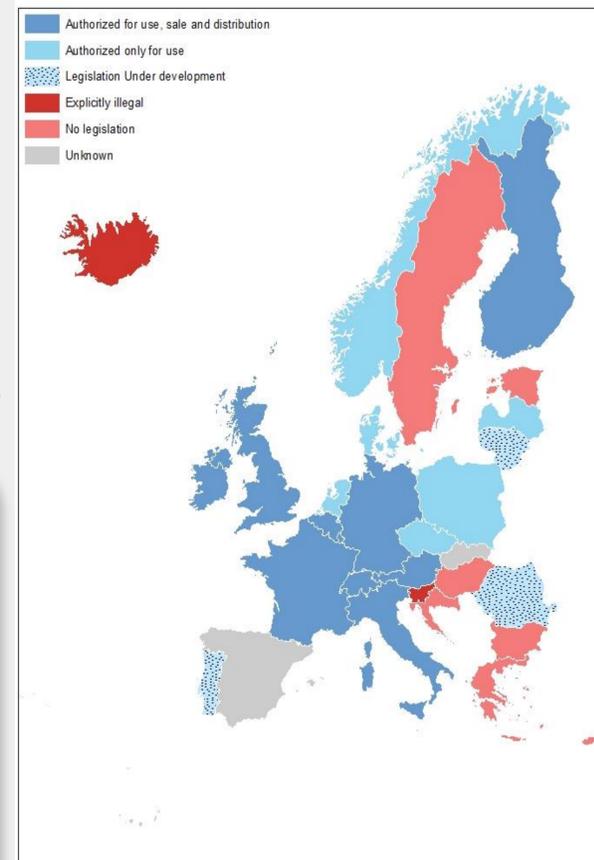


Figure 1. Map of countries in Europe classified according to their legal situation for the provision of HIV self-tests

DISCUSSION

- This review found that majority of EU/EEA countries have legalised HIVST and most are implementing HIVST to some extent either as a national programme or available for private purchase. However, HIVST has not been fully implemented in terms of widespread access and coverage in most countries.
- There are still several countries in Europe that have not adopted HIVST and are not currently planning its introduction.
- Moreover, while it may be legal in some countries there is poor uptake due to both structural and individual level barriers. This includes high cost of the test and limited availability to access or purchase.
- Access to HIVST can be improved by;
 - Encouraging HIVST policy creation and amending any legislation to legalise HIVST in countries where it is currently unavailable.
 - Enabling their sale online, in shops and vending machine.
 - In addition, reviewing any structural barriers that may hinder HIVST implementation, such as laws that prohibit an individual performing a test on themselves.

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