

# Status of the HIV epidemic in key populations in the Middle East and North Africa

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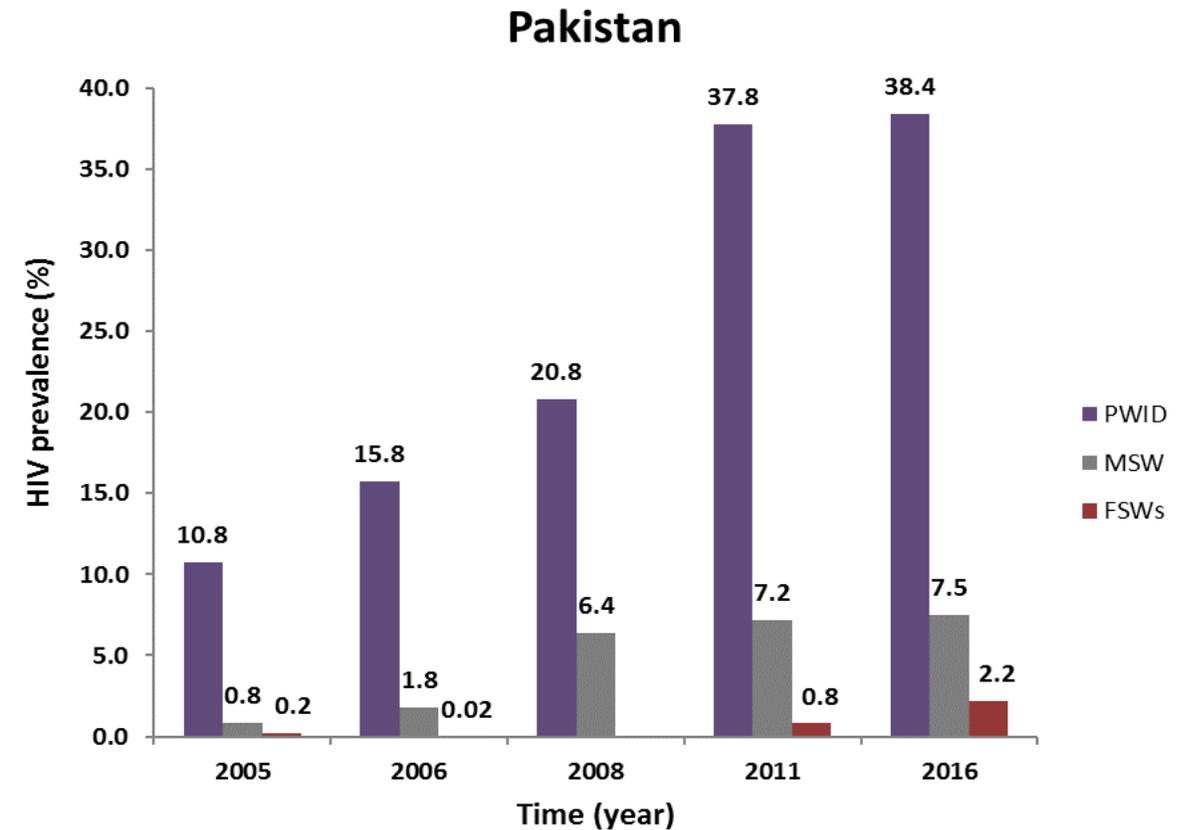
**October 3, 2022**

What is the current status of the HIV epidemic in key populations the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)?

# Overall picture: A trend of emerging epidemics

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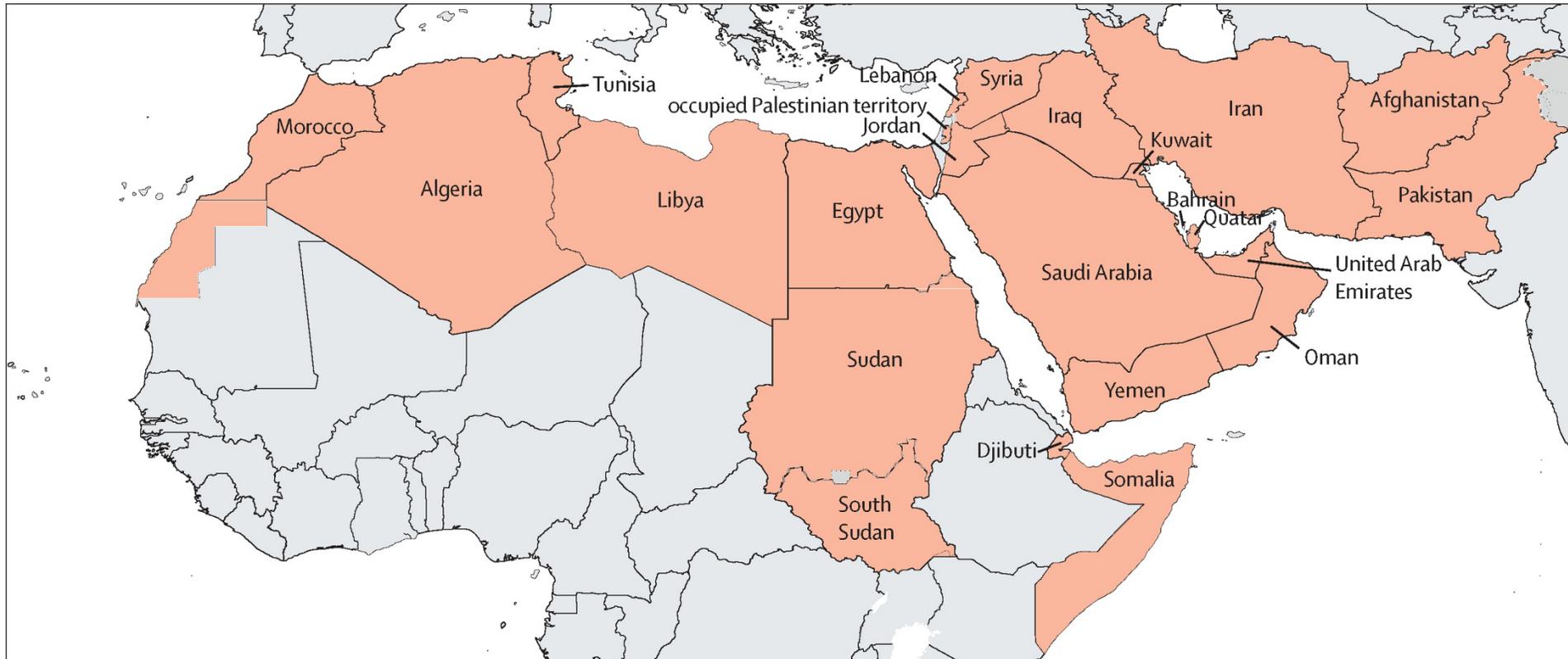
- A trend of emerging HIV epidemics among the key populations at risk including **PWID, MSM, and FSWs**



National AIDS Control Program, *HIV integrated bio-behavioral surveillance (IBBS) in Pakistan: Round I (2005), Round II (2007), Round IV (2011), and Round V (2016)*

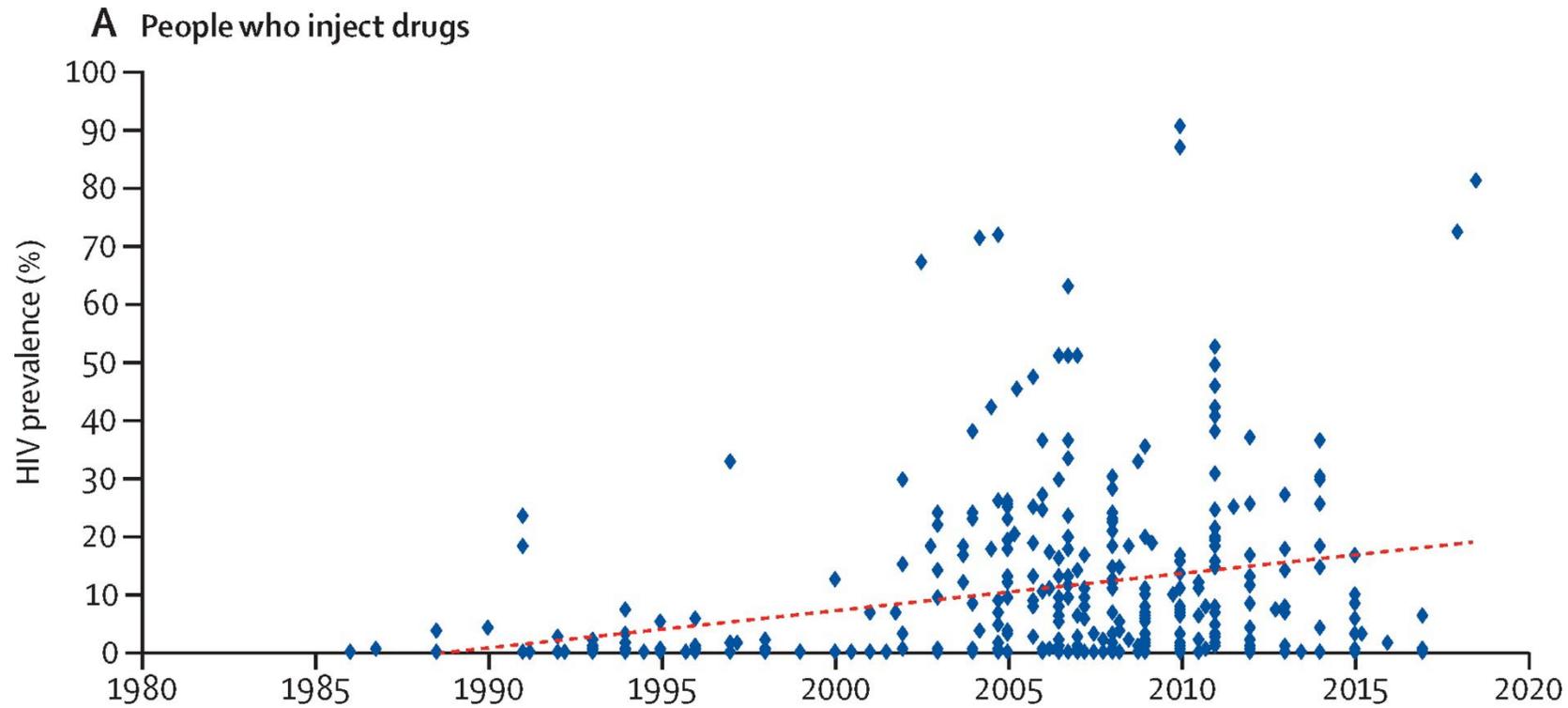
# Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

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# People who inject drugs & HIV

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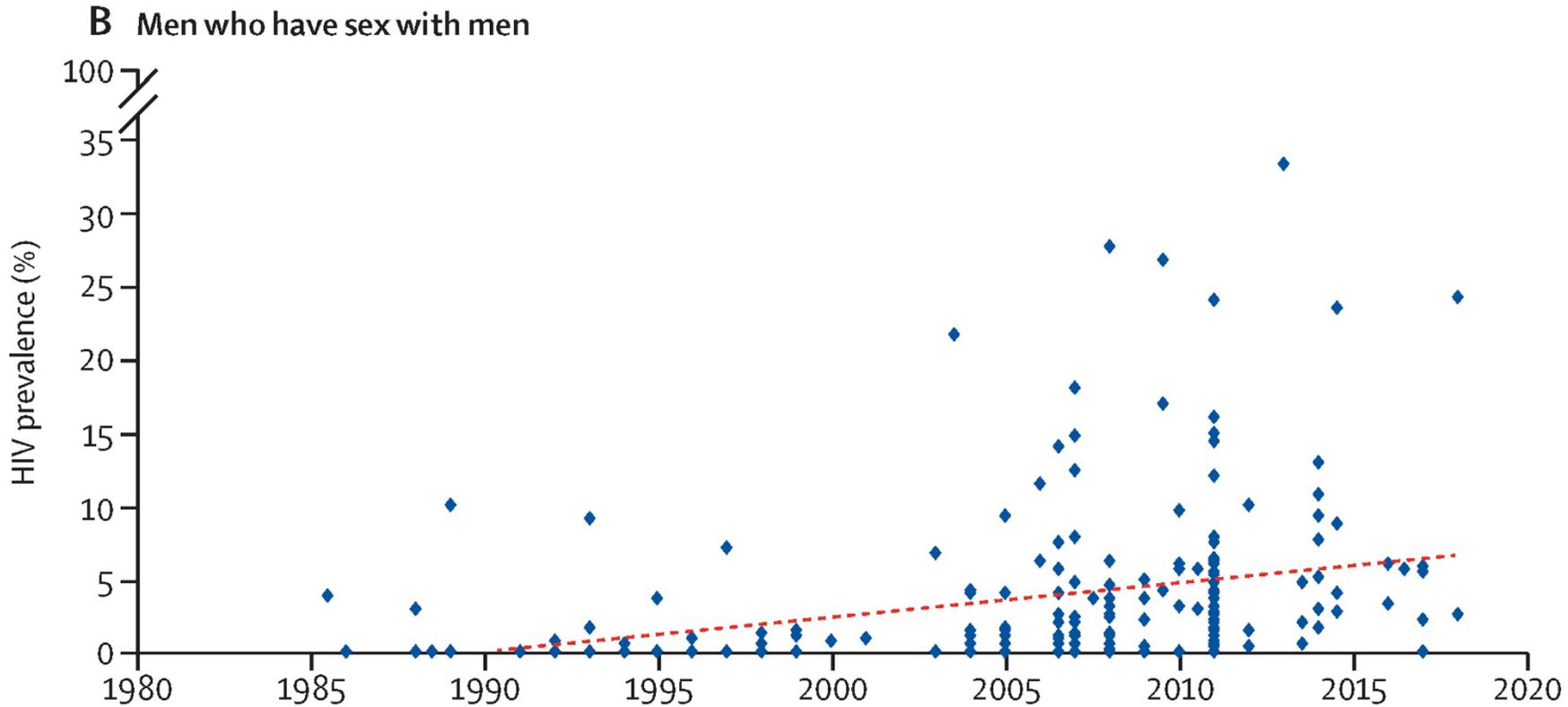
# People who inject drugs & HIV

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- MENA is home to **638,602 PWID** (range: 459,345-1,270,101).
- There is a trend of **increasing HIV prevalence among PWID** across countries starting from around the year 2003 and continuing to present day.
- There is evidence for emerging and/or concentrated HIV epidemics among PWID in **8 out of 24 MENA countries**.
- The median HIV prevalence among PWID was **9% (IQR: 3%-21%)** after the year 2010. This is lower than the estimated prevalence of HIV among PWID globally.
- In **6 countries** the epidemic is at low level. No data were identified for the remaining **9 countries**.
- Behavioral data indicate **substantial injecting and sexual risk behaviors**, which suggests that there is potential for further HIV spread.

# Men who have sex with men & HIV

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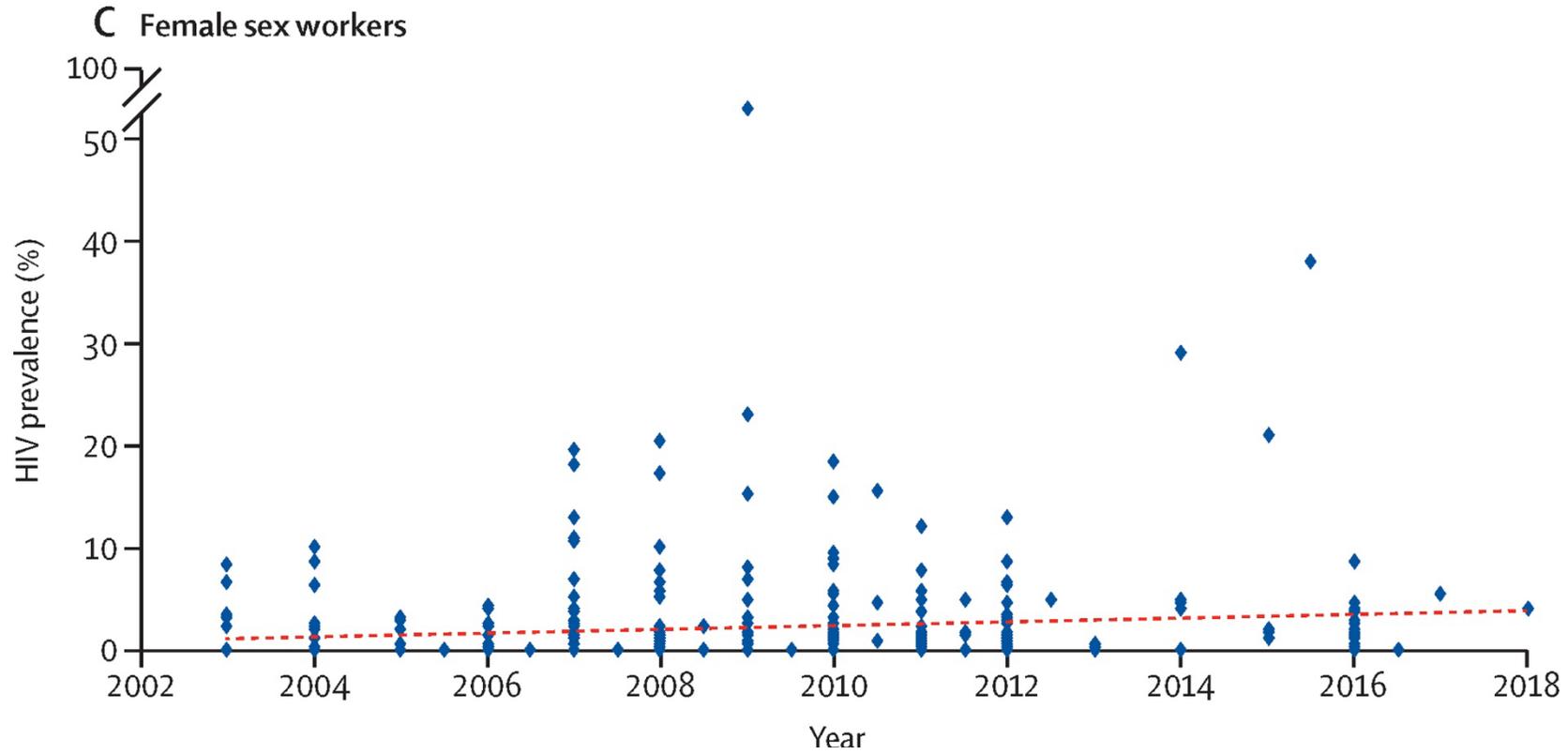
# Men who have sex with men & HIV

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- Scattered evidence suggests that **1-3% of men in the region have sex with other men**, which is comparable to global figures.
- A **trend of increasing HIV prevalence is observed among MSM**, with the increase starting near the same time of the emergence of the epidemics among PWID - around the year 2003.
- In **7 out of 24 countries**, there is evidence of emerging and/or concentrated HIV epidemics among MSM and transgender people.
- The median HIV prevalence is **4% (IQR: 1%-7%) after 2010**. However, HIV prevalence among MSM in these countries has exceeded 5% in the most recent good quality surveys.
- In **6 countries** there is evidence for HIV outbreaks and/or the epidemic appears at low-level. In **11 countries** there were no data to characterize the status of the epidemic.
- Behavioral data suggest an environment of **high sexual risk behavior** with large reported numbers of sexual partners and overall low condom use.

# Female sex workers & HIV

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# Female sex workers & HIV

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- FSWs constitute a median of **0.6%** (range: **0.2%-2.4%**) of reproductive-age women in MENA, but serve a much larger client population that constitutes a median of **6%** (range: **0.3%-13.8%**) of men in the general population.
- In **3 out of 24 countries**, the HIV epidemic among FSWs is concentrated and established.
- In **12 out of 24 countries**, the HIV epidemic among FSWs is at low level, with evidence of endemic transmission at around 2-4% HIV prevalence.
- In remaining countries, **evidence is lacking** or suggests **low HIV transmission** among FSWs.
- HIV prevalence reveals high heterogeneity ranging from **0% in close to half** of FSW populations to **40% in some countries**.
- Although the median HIV prevalence among FSWs in MENA remains **overall low at only 0.1%**, HIV prevalence appears to be growing over the last two decades at **a rate of 15% per year**, starting from very low levels.
- Behavioral data suggest **a lower risk environment among FSWs in MENA**. Condom use at last sex, though considerable, is still suboptimal with a median coverage of **44% (IQR: 25%-62%)**.

# Status of epidemiological evidence

	People who inject drugs		Men who have sex with men		Female sex workers	
	Epidemic state classification	Strength of evidence	Epidemic state classification	Strength of evidence	Epidemic state classification	Strength of evidence
Afghanistan	Concentrated, emerging	Good	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited
Algeria	No evidence	--	No evidence	--	Low level, endemic transmission	Limited
Bahrain	Concentrated, emerging	Poor	No evidence	--	No evidence	--
Djibouti	No evidence	--	No evidence	--	Concentrated, established	Limited
Egypt	Concentrated, emerging	Good	Concentrated, emerging	Good	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited
Iran	Concentrated, established	Conclusive	At least outbreak-type	Limited	Low-level, endemic transmission	Good
Iraq	No evidence	--	No evidence	--	Low level, no sustained transmission	Poor
Jordan	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited
Kuwait	Low level, no sustained transmission	Poor	No evidence	--	No evidence	--
Lebanon	Low level, no sustained transmission	Good	Concentrated, established	Good	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited
Libya	Concentrated, no clear trend	Limited	At least outbreak-type	Limited	At least outbreak-type	Limited
Morocco	Concentrated, emerging	Limited	Concentrated, emerging	Limited	Low level, endemic transmission	Good
Occupied Palestinian territory	Low level, no sustained transmission	Good	No evidence	--	No evidence	--
Oman	At least outbreak-type	Poor	No evidence	--	No evidence	--
Pakistan	Concentrated, established	Conclusive	Concentrated, emerging	Conclusive	Concentrated, emerging	Conclusive
Qatar	No evidence	--	No evidence	--	No evidence	--
Saudi Arabia	Concentrated, emerging	Poor	No evidence	--	No evidence	--
Somalia	No evidence	--	No evidence	--	Concentrated, established	Limited
South Sudan	No evidence	--	Low level, no clear trend	Poor	Concentrated, established	Good
Sudan	No evidence	--	Concentrated, no clear trend	Limited	Low level, endemic transmission	Limited
Syria	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited	Low level, no sustained transmission	Poor
Tunisia	Low level, endemic transmission	Limited	Concentrated, no clear trend	Limited	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited
United Arab Emirates	No evidence	--	No evidence	--	No evidence	--
Yemen	No evidence	--	Concentrated, no clear trend	Poor	Low level, no sustained transmission	Limited

Classification was based on the level of and trend in HIV prevalence and on the quality of available supporting evidence. The definitions under this classification are described in panel 1. The data to generate these findings were provided through the updated databases of the earlier systematic reviews<sup>31-34</sup> among the three key populations in the Middle East and north Africa. The citations of all studies and reports they include are listed in the appendix.

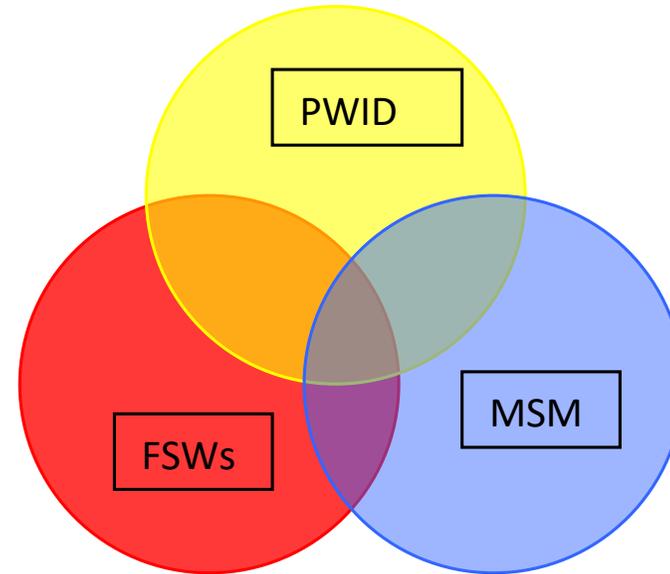
**Table: HIV epidemic state classification among key populations in countries of the Middle East and north Africa**

# Key observations on these epidemics

# Overlap of risk behaviors among high-risk populations

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Considerable overlap of risk behaviors in MENA among PWID, MSM, and FSWs



# Conclusions

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- MENA is **one of only two world regions where HIV incidence is on the rise**, with the vast majority of infections occurring among key populations.
- While the epidemic continues at low level in some countries or localities within a country, there is evidence for **emerging and concentrated epidemics among PWID and MSM in half of countries in the region with data, and among FSWs in several countries**.
- The status of the epidemic in key populations **remains unknown in several countries** due to persistent data gaps.
- The HIV response in MENA remains far below **global targets for prevention, testing, and treatment**. It is hindered by under-funding, poor surveillance and stigma, all of which are compounded by widespread conflict and humanitarian crises, and most recently, the advent of COVID-19.
- **Investment is needed to put the region on track** towards the global target of eliminating HIV/AIDS as a global health threat by 2030.

# THANK YOU

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Mumtaz GR, Chemaitelly H, AlMukdad S, et al. Status of the HIV epidemic in key populations in the Middle East and north Africa: knowns and unknowns. *Lancet HIV* 2022; 9(7): e506-e16.

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