

# **A conceptual framework for analysis of HIV testing policies in Europe**

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## **Background**

In the absence of treatment and in the context of discrimination, the use of the HIV test was marginalized and embedded within exceptional procedures. As treatment improved, early HIV diagnosis became important, calling for normalization of testing procedures. HIV testing policies in Europe were mapped to examine promotion of scaled up access to HIV testing.

## **Methods**

In 2008, a contact person of health authorities in all EU/EEA countries was questioned on HIV testing regulations, target groups, provider and client initiated testing modalities. Policies were assessed and exceptionalism was scored based on characteristics such as pre-test counselling, anonymous testing, dedicated testing centres. Normalization was scored on characteristics like provider initiated testing, opt-out and partner notification.

## **Results**

Out of 31 countries, 24 replied. Regulations tended to support confidential voluntary testing, informed consent and counselling. Sixteen countries recommended partner notification as a testing requirement; referral of diagnosed HIV positive patients was less specified (13/24). Pregnant women (21/24), persons with suggestive clinical signs (20/24) and groups at increased risk (19/24) were targeted in provider initiated testing. Iceland and France targeted also the general population attending primary health care. Twelve countries had the highest score on exceptionalism while only 3 countries scored highest on normalization. Italy and Romania had primarily exceptional procedures; Norway leaned more towards normalization; the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Denmark scored high in both.

## **Conclusions**

In the majority of countries, policies are in place to make HIV testing routine in health care settings through voluntary and selective testing strategies. Current HIV testing policies exhibited a high level of exceptionalism with varying degrees of normalization. This policy mapping provides a framework to assess HIV testing policies, which, once validated should aid countries in policy and programme planning and European institutions in assisting member states to increase access to HIV related services.