

Protect marginalised communities from Human Monkeypox (mpox)

In the summer, the WHO Director-General declared the escalating mpox outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. ¹ Now, six months have passed since the beginning of the monkeypox outbreak in Europe, and as of 8 November 2022, 20 744 confirmed cases of mpox have been reported from 29 EU/EEA countries². While the number of cases is decreasing, it is important to evaluate which measures were successful and where public health responses were not strong enough.

While anyone can become infected with monkeypox, not everyone is at equal risk. People in close contact with someone infected, including intimate or sexual contact, are at higher risk for infection. Cases have been identified in, but not limited to, communities of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men who have had recent sexual contact with a new partner or partners. ³

As often the case with other public health emergencies, such as COVID-19, the impact of mpox has proven to be disproportionate on marginalised individuals and communities. This could be further explained by the fact that marginalised individuals and communities:

- Are highly affected by the social determinants of health, such as living wages, housing, access to healthy and affordable food, health insurance.
- Experience unequal access to health and social care and sometimes lack information on their healthcare rights;
- Face discrimination and stigma due to their identity, sexual orientation and work which translates into poorer access to healthcare and a weak public health response
- Do not seek care due to their prior experiences of discrimination from health and social care service providers and authorities
- Do not seek care for fear to disclose all relevant information to providers (e.g. migration status, their sexual orientation and gender identity, drug use or sex work), limiting the efficiency of care.

As a result, the inequities experienced by marginalised individuals and communities lead to chronic stress and impacts overall health outcomes and recovery.

¹ World Health Organisation; WHO Director-General's statement at the press conference following IHR Emergency Committee regarding the multi-country outbreak of monkeypox - 23 July 2022, [accessed 23.11.22](#)

² European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Monkeypox situation update, as of 8 November 2022, [accessed 23.11.22](#)

³ World Health Organisation; Public health advice for gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men on the recent outbreak of monkeypox, [accessed 23.11.22](#)

NLO recommendations

The challenges faced by marginalised communities, in particular the detrimental impact of rampant discrimination and stigma, calls for strong public health action. It is crucial to remember the lessons from COVID-19 and the HIV/AIDS epidemic to ensure that all individuals and communities have access to the care they need.

For this aim, NLO recommends:

- Facilitate early identification of cases through ready access to testing care, and treatment. Ensure access to comprehensive treatment and care for those with mpox, including management of other infections. The [NLO Service Design Checklist](#) helps service providers, policymakers and community representatives to design targeted and equitable health services;
- Public health services should work directly with community-led and community-based organisations in their decision-making to ensure policies and services are fit for purpose;
- Increase access to vaccination programmes by prioritising people living in crowded housing, sex workers, men who have sex with men, trans people, and other groups at higher risk. Contact tracing and exposure limitation are among other important measures;
- Develop clear, inclusive, non-judgemental and non-stigmatizing communication in prevention and information strategies and actions. Communication strategies should incorporate the use of targeted channels and communities themselves that directly reach marginalized individuals.
- Be mindful of the negative impact of criminalisation, stigmatisation and other discrimination on population health.
- Improve data collection to inform equitable health efforts. Closely evaluate possible reasons why mpox cases are decreasing, understand the different factors of this development and identify successful measures to be able to answer with a strong public health response to future health emergencies

About NLO: [Nobody Left Outside](#) initiative is a collective of organisations representing people in some of the most marginalised communities in Europe, who are underserved with respect to healthcare. These communities include people experiencing homelessness, LGBTI people, people who use drugs, prisoners, sex workers and undocumented migrants. People in these communities are at a significantly higher risk of poor health than the general population, are often in highly vulnerable situations, and face significant challenges in accessing healthcare. The NLO initiative provides a European-level platform for organisations to collaborate to identify shared challenges, exchange lessons and good practice, seek innovative solutions, and speak with a unified voice to offer guidance to improve healthcare access for the communities of people they represent – on the basis that nobody should be left outside.

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