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## What's Your Excuse?

HIV/AIDS is spreading faster in Eastern Europe than anywhere else in the world. But sophisticated young people, like many adults, can give any number of reasons for not wearing condoms to protect themselves. (See press release: Education, Access to Information and Services Are Key to Protecting and Empowering Young People.)

"I'm embarrassed," admits one tough-looking hipster.

"I like it natural," says a guy dressed in black with tattoos running up his arm.

"We trust one another," say young lovers, holding each other close.

Confronting such attitudinal barriers head on is the thrust of a new ad campaign supported by UNFPA and produced by Washington-based Population Services International (PSI).

"What's your excuse?" is the slogan of the campaign. Its tag line: "There is no excuse. Wear condoms."

The campaign, aimed at 15-25 year olds, includes ads, posters, T-shirts, television and radio commercials and condom packaging. All use dark, edgy photography and sexy, sombre models. The campaign was launched at a sports and music event at Lake Ada in Belgrade in April, with some 100,000 young people attending, and in Sofia, Bulgaria, in May. It will also reach Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"I do what I want, but I know what I'm doing" is the slogan of another UNFPA-supported campaign to promote safer behaviour among Albanian youth.

Convincing young people to avoid risky sexual behaviour is UNFPA's priority focus for the region. "Right now the window of opportunity in Eastern Europe is closing and HIV is reaching epidemic proportions," says Dr. Aleksandar Bodiroza, an adolescent reproductive health and HIV/AIDS specialist for UNFPA. "By focusing on and bringing to scale behaviour change interventions, we may be able to save hundreds of thousands of young lives," Currently only 40 per cent of in-school and 3 per cent of out-of-school youths in the region are reached by behaviour change programmes.

Marketing campaigns like "What's Your Excuse?" represent one behaviour change strategy. Peer education—getting trained and credible young people to talk to one another—is another. Making sure that "youth-friendly" reproductive health services are available is the third part of the comprehensive approach that UNFPA supports to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS.

**Above excerpt is from *The State of World Population 2003* report, *Making 1 Billion Count: Investing in Adolescents' Health and Rights*, published by UNFPA, page 36.**

**Additional resources in reference to this News Feature:**

Moving Beyond Excuses: Eastern European Ad Campaign Promotes Condom Use

<http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=326>

<http://www.unfpa.org/news/multimedia.htm#excuse>