

COSTA RICA

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNFPA, WHO-PAHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Team made efforts to catalyse improvement of HIV and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information dissemination and access to services among adolescent girls and women. The achievements mainly focused on capacity building of healthcare workers and civil society organizations (CSOs) on violence and HIV prevention; and the development of a technical guidance for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education, which includes HIV prevention. Assessments were conducted to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sexual and reproductive health and sexual and gender-based violence services; and the needs of people from key population groups living with HIV. In response, food packages and condoms were distributed among vulnerable and key populations, including people living with HIV.

HIV PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Technical support was provided to strengthen institutional capacities for the implementation of national policies, strategies, and programmes aimed at achieving universal access to quality sexual and reproductive health information. In collaboration with the National Institution on Women Affairs (INAMU), six civil society organizations and 11 institutions from rural, border and coastal areas were trained on adolescent pregnancy and violence against women prevention toolkits, which includes a specific component on HIV prevention. The Ministry of Education was also supported to develop a technical guide for comprehensive sexuality education in collaboration with indigenous communities in the Southern Caribbean coast of Costa Rica.

The Joint Team supported a national assessment on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services and implementation of mitigating actions in Costa Rica. Findings revealed significant decrease in male condom supply from the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) resulting in reduced dispensing of condoms in health facilities and civil society organizations-led HIV prevention programmes. Data also showed a worse situation in the availability and accessibility of female condoms among women and that efforts made to mitigate the challenges around supply of female condoms have not been effective.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hivos América Latina—a nongovernmental organizations working for human rights of all people—was supported to complete an assessment to identify the health and socioeconomic needs of people living with HIV and persons from the lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community in Costa Rica, including in terms of the access to HIV prevention commodities and treatment services. The study included responses from 762 people who were mostly transgender persons and 35% of the respondents confirmed they earned below the poverty line. The participants also confirmed disruption of antiretroviral treatment (ART) and care services due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures during the first few months of the pandemic. With these results, Hivos, with UN support, advocated to include the LGBTI community in the national economic and social programmes to help them overcome the effects of the pandemic.

The Joint Team successfully advocated for the inclusion of condoms in the food and supplies packages distributed National Commission for Risk Prevention and Emergency Response to 800 families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Five female condoms were also included in each of the food and supply packages delivered by INAMU to 160 identified women at risk of violence during pandemic.

In coordination with INAMU, a virtual sexual and reproductive health campaign was developed and implemented to sensitize communities, including people living with HIV on the urgent need for the continuity of sexual and reproductive health and HIV services and adherence to antiretroviral treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Campaign materials were published on various social media platforms, including Government and development partners web-based outlets reaching more than 5000 people.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

The Joint Team continued to provide technical support for the development of the United Nations Cooperation Framework for Sustainable Development (UNSDCF) 2023-2027 and the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV prevention as an integral component of the “health pillar”. Contributions were also made to ensure inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education, including HIV prevention, and human rights approaches in the Common Country Analysis.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted challenges of health and social services in effectively responding to specific populations in Costa Rica. For example, state financial assistance programmes did not recognize or provide support to transgender women engaging in sex work who were exposed to discrimination, loss of income, and high risks of COVID-19 infection due to pandemic-related lockdown measures. Lessons learned show the need for concerted advocacy for access to stigma-free health and social protection programmes among vulnerable and key populations.

Technical and financial support is also needed to scale up awareness campaigns and communications initiatives on HIV prevention and active participation of network of people living with HIV through the National AIDS Commission–Country Coordination Mechanism (CONASIDA/MCP).

Lack of data on key populations, including people from the LGBTI+ community limits the ability to quickly map and implement targeted HIV programmes that respond to their needs. The Government must be supported to strengthen management of information from alternative data sources. This includes capacity building of civil society organizations in data collection and generation, and advocacy efforts that integrate strategic information from the National Institute of Statistic and Census (INEC) as well as other information sources.

Condom demand and use are on the decline across Costa Rica. The Government must strengthen HIV prevention efforts and promote condom use and access, particularly female condom, to maintain current gains in the national HIV response.

Report available on the
UNAIDS Results and Transparency Portal

open.unaids.org