

CUBA

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

PROGRESS TOWARDS THE FAST-TRACK TARGETS

COUNTRY PRIORITIES/ TARGETS BY END OF 2021	STATUS	RESULTS, END OF 2020
Ensure HIV prevention, care and treatment and for people living with HIV and their families as well as contribute to its sustainability. Reach key populations (men who have sex with men, transgender women, and sex workers) with HIV testing services.	WITHIN REACH	By the end of 2020, of an estimated total of 30 000 people living with HIV, 85% know their HIV status and 89% of them are receiving ART. Nearly 138 000 people accessed HIV testing (including 90 415 men who have sex with men, 1180 transgender women, and 46 402 sex workers) (UNAIDS epidemiological estimates, 2021).
By the end of 2021, 46 814 adolescents from eight municipalities of Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Granma, Cienfuegos and Villa Clara had increased their knowledge, skills and tools as health promoters.	ON TRACK	In partnership with civil society organisations, 18 900 adolescents and young people were reached with information and education on sexual and reproductive health messages through social media. Online country-wide training on using social media to promote comprehensive adolescent health reached 56 promoters and leaders of the young persons' telephone-counselling service <i>Jóvenes por la Vida</i> , and a further 80 accessed information about the impact of COVID-19 on adolescents, and the importance of social media in health promotion.
By the end of 2021, 1600 people selected from the key groups of two provinces must be reached by pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and 70% (1120) of these people who have started PrEP remain in PrEP.	SLOW PROGRESS	Health facilities and community-based organisations reached more than 201 000 people with prevention service packages (148 958 men who have sex with men, 1669 trans women and 50 529 sex workers). PrEP service began in two municipalities in the country during 2019 (in Matanzas and Cárdenas). However, due to delays in procurement of medicines, only 60 people from key populations remained on PrEP by end of 2020.

JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WHO-PAHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

Cuba is fast approaching the 90-90-90 targets in 2020, with increased testing and treatment supported through new equipment, updated guidance and improved infrastructure for pharmacies and laboratories. Online platforms, tele-counselling and social networks have been used to expand coverage of prevention services for young people in the country, whilst standards have been raised in the delivery of youth-friendly health services through the provision of training and resources. Although delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, advances have been made in PrEP initiation for key populations, and additional PrEP programmes are ready for implementation when pandemic restrictions allow. Finally, Cuba's Gender Strategy 2020-2024 has been developed, and virtual awareness campaigns on human rights, gender-based violence and HIV-related stigma and discrimination took place.

TESTING AND TREATMENT

TECHNICAL SUPPORT; FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS

Through the reprogramming of financial resources from the Global Fund, the Joint Team supported the procurement of ARV drugs for adults and children, contributing to 25 694 people receiving ARV treatment in 2020. The Joint Team also provided financial support to strengthen 106 community pharmacies with new equipment and furniture to provide better quality integrated services.

Seven laboratories received support for the procurement or renovation of their equipment for monitoring viral load and CD4 count; four of them are located in polyclinics that will offer differentiated services to people living with HIV. In addition, the infrastructure for the transfer of samples from three regional molecular biology laboratories was strengthened, with benefits for priority health programmes, including the HIV programme and the response to COVID-19.

Disseminated through primary health facilities and civil society organisations, information materials on HIV prevention, diagnosis and care were developed to promote adherence to treatment among key and vulnerable populations.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (SRH) AND COMPREHENSIVE HIV SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

POLICY ADVICE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A first draft of the new National Programme for Comprehensive Adolescent Health Care 2021-2025 was prepared, identifying cultural, social and organisational barriers to access SRH services, STI and HIV prevention, and other informative resources for adolescents. In four municipalities, support was provided to implement quality standards in HIV and STI prevention in adolescent health services; this included the training of 18 key health personnel from these municipalities on the implementation of standards and their evaluation.

In close collaboration with the National Centre for Sexual Education (CENESEX) and civil society organisations (CSOs), online platforms and social networks containing information materials were developed, disseminating health promotion and HIV/STI prevention messages to key populations, youth and adolescents, and promoting behavioural change; about 18 900 adolescents and young people were reached, including through online concerts with popular artists.

Fifty-six promoters and coordinators across the country of the 'Youth Line' telephone counselling service benefited from a training programme designed to promote comprehensive adolescent health through virtual workshops, developed jointly by the Joint Team, the CSO ProSalud, and the University of Havana. They engaged with 80 additional 'Youth Line' promoters to further disseminate information about the impact of COVID-19 on adolescents, and the importance of social networks in health promotion for this population group; evidence and case studies were presented by first-line health professionals.

HIV PREVENTION FOR KEY POPULATIONS **POLICY DIALOGUE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS**

Through partnership with the Global Fund, the Joint Team supported the first two facilities offering PrEP service since 2019 in Cárdenas and Matanzas, through the conceptualisation of a PrEP monitoring system, and the production of promotional materials for dissemination by the service, including a mobile application with information about PrEP intended for use by men who have sex with men.

11 052 doses of PrEP medication were procured, to initiate PrEP in key populations in the province of Havana. However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international trade, the expansion of the PrEP programme is delayed until 2021, when 6 new sites in Havana and other provinces will start offering this service. PrEP training kits for health professionals are available and ready for use when the programme starts.

GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS **TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

To further address human rights and gender barriers to accessing HIV services, the participatory development of the Gender Strategy of the National HIV Response 2020-2024 was completed. In addition, a booklet with theoretical and methodological consensus on gender, gender identities and sexual diversity was published, as well as training materials to better inform key populations of their rights.

Awareness campaigns, concerts and educational materials launched through digital platforms, social networks, the press and television delivered messages on intergenerational equity and rights, the prevention of gender-based violence, and the promotion of behavioural change in conditions of isolation and reduction of the risk of HIV and COVID-19 transmission, reaching over 55 000 people.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, CENESEX, the NGO ProSalud, and other civil society organizations, information materials on gender-based violence were developed and widely disseminated using social networks. A total of 6824 women received information on gender-based violence, and 73 520 women received family planning services and contraceptive methods.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE **TECHNICAL SUPPORT; CAPACITY BUILDING**

The Joint Team supported the national response to COVID-19 by procuring PCR diagnostic kits and reagents, virological transport equipment, drugs for the treatment of severe cases in intensive care units and protective equipment for health personnel, facilitating continuity of health services. In partnership with the Global Fund, US\$1.5 million were mobilised to procure urgent supplies including PCR diagnostic kits, equipment, reagents, consumables and personal protective equipment (PPE), while ensuring continuity of other services, strengthening health systems, empowering community responses and promoting digital solutions. With this funding,

additional quantities of ARVs, 682 000 condoms, 325 000 units of lubricants and 24 425 rapid HIV tests were also purchased to ensure an uninterrupted supply. Besides, sample transport infrastructure was strengthened for three of these laboratories, with benefits for priority health programmes, including HIV.

Support was provided for the printing of communication materials for borders control facilities, health personnel and the education system. Educational materials for social networks aimed at preventing gender-based violence during confinement were designed, with technical assistance from the Joint Team, reaching 6824 people, along with material aimed at adolescents on preventing COVID-19, protecting mental health and promoting co-responsibility in the family, which benefitted 12 681 people. Additionally, an educational campaign aimed at teachers and adolescents was designed to ensure a safe return to school; leaflets were distributed to teachers in 2496 secondary and vocational-technical schools.

Through printed and digital media, information was shared among people living with HIV to promote their rights, strengthen their resilience, provide information on COVID-19 prevention, and inform on initiatives and strategies for social protection, with a reach of 19 971 people, including 1500 transgender persons.

Finally, in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health, a study was conducted on the socio-psychological effects of COVID-19 on 126 children and adolescents who became ill with COVID-19. Preliminary results show that 81.8% of participants have been emotionally affected.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

During 2020, the Joint Team's activities and resources were fully aligned with the key areas defined in the country's Economic and Social Strategy, such as confronting COVID-19 and sustaining other health services, including HIV services, and contributed substantively to SDGs 3, 5 and 10. All these results are reported as part of Outcome 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2020-2024.

Progress is also being made in updating the National Strategy for the Social Integration of Transgender People, comprising the development of comprehensive sexuality education for transgender people, a monitoring and evaluation plan, and the generation of statistical data on this population.

PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
Lack of differentiated HIV testing modalities to reach hard-to-reach populations.	Provide technical support and capacity building to intensify case-finding at the community level, and introduce new testing modalities such as self-testing. Support initiatives towards increasing demand for HIV testing and other services by key populations and other vulnerable groups, including through intersectoral actions at the community level and the use of internet and social media.
Viral load testing coverage in people living with HIV on ART is low and virological suppression does not reach levels similar to those obtained in the first and second 90s (knowing status and receiving ART).	Provide financial and operational support to ensure availability of WHO-recommended ARV regimens. Continue efforts to improve access to viral load testing, e.g. through further progress in decentralisation of this service, including the provision of viral load monitoring sites.
Condom use in key populations is not high enough to impact on the occurrence of new cases.	Provide technical and financial support to scale up the provision of evidence-based prevention services such as PrEP, condoms and lubricants provision, and assisted partner notification, both in primary health care facilities and in community settings by peer promoters from key population organisations and other vulnerable groups.
Despite the favourable context in terms of equality and non-discrimination, obstacles and inequities have been documented that limit full and quality access to HIV services. These include stigmatisation and discrimination based on HIV, gender, sexual orientation, and practices and norms that show stereotypes and prejudices.	Continue to provide policy advice and support to address the social determinants that cause stigma and discrimination towards key populations and other vulnerable groups through comprehensive sexuality education programmes in and out of school; training health staff and volunteer advocates on gender and rights issues; implementing communication campaigns to promote changes in health staff attitudes and behaviours; and promoting inclusive and sensitive environments in health facilities and communities.
The COVID-19 epidemic, together with social isolation measures, quarantines in specific territories, and the prioritisation of medical services, personnel and health resources, imposes limitations on the implementation of community activities, trainings, the expansion of PrEP and the implementation of surveillance surveys.	Further explore the use of online platforms and social media for trainings and dissemination of behaviour change messages and improve access to devices mobile data plans for health providers and health promoters at the community level.
The national and international epidemiological situation generated by COVID-19 has aggravated the country's external financing constraints and further reduced the capacity to import key health resources.	Mobilise additional resources to support the uninterrupted supply of key commodities such as condoms, lubricants, ARV drugs, consumables and reagents.

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