

# EL SALVADOR

*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
Reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	Mother-to-child transmission of HIV rate in El Salvador remained stable, at 27% in 2020 (GAM 2021).
Improve access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for adolescent and young people.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a telecentre was established to ensure continuity and improve access to SRH services for adolescent and young people, such as consultations and referrals to laboratory test, care, and treatment services, including home delivery of medicines.
Capacity building for women living with HIV and food assistance for vulnerable people living with HIV to ensure adherence to treatment and better health outcome.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	In 2020 a cash transfer for food assistance programme worth US\$ 150 000 was implemented reaching 96 pregnant women living with HIV and 300 sex workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. 83 HIV-exposed children also received highly nutritious food assistance.
Improve access to HIV information and care services, including mental health services, to returnees and migrants living with HIV.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	The UN Joint Team in collaboration with USAID designed information, education, and communication (IEC) materials on HIV and mental health for use in refugee and migrant shelters and COVID-19 pandemic quarantine centres. A flow chart was created to improve HIV treatment services for people living with HIV, and mental health care services were provided in shelters.

### JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UN WOMEN, WHO-PAHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT, IOM

## JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

*In 2020, the Joint Team's efforts in El Salvador were predominantly geared towards supporting the Government to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the continuity of HIV services and reduce the vulnerability of people living with HIV during the pandemic. Telemedicine services were implemented offering remote services to pregnant women living with HIV. Information materials on HIV, sexually transmitted infections, sexual violence, and COVID-19 prevention were developed and disseminated to populations at high-risk and key populations improving their understanding and promoting uptake of services. Analyses were conducted to examine impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people living with HIV, vulnerable and key populations, and results were used to rollout actions, such as cash transfers, nutritional support, and procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) to address the some of the gaps. Hundreds of women and girls displaced by hurricanes Amanda and Critóbal were also supported with PPE and dignity kits along information materials on gender-based violence prevention and services.*

### PREVENTION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION OF HIV AND SYPHILIS POLICY DIALOGUE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS

With support from the Joint Team, a telecentre was established to ensure continuity of SRH, prenatal care, and PMTCT services and promote HIV, viral load, and syphilis testing among pregnant and lactating mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic—reaching 21 291 clients by the end of December 2020. IEC materials were developed and distributed in maternal and child health care facilities promoting safe sexual practices, access to diagnostic and follow-up testing services, prevention of maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality. The Joint Team also procured and distributed 11 000 personal protective equipment (PPE) and oximeters worth US\$ 293 466 to guarantee the safety of healthcare workers and pregnant women in healthcare facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support was provided to update the care cascade for pregnant women and HIV-exposed children that identified gaps and limitation of integrated programmes aimed at eliminating of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and congenital syphilis in El Salvador. Evidence from the updated cascade revealed fragmentation in the data collection systems and lack of linkage between HIV and syphilis testing. This evidence was used to inform mitigating plans and activities.

### SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS AMONG ADOLESCENT PEOPLE

#### ADVOCACY; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS

The Joint Team, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other governmental and non-governmental entities, developed a guidance document on the care pathway for girls and adolescents who were or are victims of sexual violence. Technical and financial support was also provided to implement a mentor training programme targeting adolescent girls and young women, who experienced or are at higher risk of sexual violence aiming to empower them with the necessary knowledge and skills to protect themselves and seek help when needed. In 2020, an estimated 300 adolescent girls and young women grouped into 25 persons per group were enrolled on the programme, which is led by Medicos del Mundo. Each of the participants were provided with a tablet computer enabling them to attend the virtual training, facilitated by mentors, observers, and parents.

To improve the quality of government led youth-friendly services for adolescent and young people, 26 health facilities received technical support and medical equipment. A total of 100 healthcare workers (77 female and 33 male) from these facilities were also trained on delivery of quality youth-friendly services.

Healthcare providers from 10 hospitals across the country were trained to prevent sexual abuse by health providers within health facilities. Another 10 hospitals were supported with personal protective equipment to ensure continuity of services for survivors of sexual abuse, including HIV and STI screening and treatment services.

Additional health facilities were equipped with educational tools, such as training guides for comprehensive sexuality education and pedagogical methodologies that include MAVEX games, to reduce sexual violence, early sexual debut, and unintended pregnancies among adolescent girls and young women in 10 municipalities prioritized in the National Intersectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Girls and Adolescents (ENIPENA) 2017-2027 strategy.

Support was provided to update and virtualize the *Cambia tu Vida* curriculum of the Salvadoran Institute for Children and Adolescents (ISNA), which serves girls, boys and adolescents who are victims of sexual violence. Seventy-five technical staff were also trained to teach the revitalized curriculum and apply accompanying fun and youth-oriented learning tools.

### **SOCIAL PROTECTION AND FOOD ASSISTANCE** **POLICY ADVICE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Joint Team-led assessment on food security among people living with HIV affected by the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that they a) are highly vulnerable to food insecurity, b) use coping strategies, such as spending their savings and selling productive assets, which affect their ability to generate income in the long-term, and c) suffer from inadequate access to education and decent jobs, which predominantly affects women.

To address the lack of inclusion of people living with HIV within the national social protection programme, the Joint Team provided US\$ 150 000 worth of food assistance—in the form of US\$ 100 basic food basket and US\$ 150 cash transfers— over a period of three months for 150 people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community affected by the pandemic.

The Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Joint Team, National HIV Program, and civil society organizations (CSOs) distributed 1500 small bags of food for vulnerable people living with HIV, and people from key population groups, including sex workers, men who have sex with men, and transgender persons throughout El Salvador. Support from the Joint Team included financial assistance to cover transportation and distribution costs of CSOs that were providing the services.

### **HIV AND SRH SERVICES FOR MIGRANTS AND RETURNEES** **TECHNICAL SUPPORT; ADVOCACY; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Joint Team, in partnership with the PASMO/USAID Association, produced IEC materials on COVID-19 and HIV prevention and care protocols to raise awareness among people living with HIV in quarantine centres and migrants living with HIV returning to El Salvador using air and road transportations. These materials were delivered to Ministry of Health and the Management of Migrant Care (GAMI) for distribution.

In addition, 139 young people (98 female and 41 male) attended a virtual course on migration and young people, improving their knowledge and skills around prevention of HIV infection, scams, human trafficking, and fraudulent hiring.

Hurricanes Amanda and Critóbal hit El Salvador escalating the health, economic and social crisis in the country. In response, the Joint Team provided 500 migrant girls and women in 27 emergency shelters with personal protection equipment, dignity kits, and IEC materials on gender-based violence prevention measures and support services.

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

As a result of financial and technical support provided to the Ministry of Health, personal protective equipment, and other supplies were procured to support the national HIV and tuberculosis programmes. Technical support was also provided to the Government in procuring US\$ 400 000 worth of antiretroviral drugs and reagents for laboratory tests— which still constituted a 40% decrease in volume compared to 2019 due to pandemic-related drug and commodity shortages and disruption in transportation of goods. In partnership with the Ministry of Health and a USAID-funded care and treatment project, the Joint Team implemented a community-led multi-month ART dispensing service to minimize barriers to care and improve treatment adherence among people living with HIV.

The Joint Team provided technical support for a study conducted by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) El Salvador to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's access to and used SRH and HIV services. About 64% of the women who participated in the study stated that they could not access an HIV test or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) screenings due to service disruptions, while 5.4% of participants stated that they did not know if they have been tested for HIV or STIs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Detailed results from the study were submitted to the Ministry of Health to assist COVID-19 response planning and programming in case of a second wave.

The Joint Team conducted a study analysing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the immediate needs of people living with HIV, vulnerable and key populations, including indigenous women and female sex workers. In response, 125 indigenous women were trained improving their knowledge about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV. 300 female sex workers, whose incomes were impacted due to the pandemic also benefited from cash transfers.

Personal protective equipment and other medical supplies were donated to the National Directorate of Prisons to ensure safety of staff and 23 000 prison inmates, including 350 people living with HIV and 480 people affected by tuberculosis. In addition, 1323 prison inmates received food support and COVID-19 prevention and self-monitoring materials, including masks, alcohol gel, thermometers, and oximeters.

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

Guided by the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2016-2020), the Joint Team continued to make valuable contributions to El Salvador's development efforts and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

Support was provided for the establishment of the National Council for Sustainable Development, which is contributing to the monitoring of actions and goals, and the preparation of a voluntary progress report. With the National Council, the Joint Team also provided technical assistance to develop and include integrated and coherent actions that leave no one behind in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2022-2026).

The Spotlight Initiative is being implemented in El Salvador, focusing on reducing femicide and addressing violence against women and girls by 2022. In 2020, a survey on gender-based violence led by the Joint Team, underscored poor case reporting mechanisms and inadequate programmes to support survivors of violence. Support was also provided to distribute basic food baskets for 750 women survivors of gender-based violence.

PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
<p>The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in travel restriction, scarcity of raw materials and inputs for production of HIV medicines and commodities, closure of borders disrupting movement of medicines, and inadequate cold chain management necessary to ensure safe storage and transportation of perishable drug stocks.</p> <p>The pandemic has also caused the Government, development partners, and civil society to postpone, reschedule or cancel implementation and monitoring of HIV programmes throughout 2020.</p>	<p>Continue providing technical support to a) explore alternative ART drugs, new partnerships, and suppliers b) strengthen the supply chain management to minimize drug and commodity shortages or stockouts during emergencies.</p> <p>Continue coordination with the Government, development partners, and civil society for the implementation of earlier planned activities to support HIV programme implementation and monitoring.</p>
<p>During the pandemic, attention to the migrant returned by air was carried out at the airport facilities, which made it difficult to provide HIV testing, referral and care services for returnees living with HIV.</p>	<p>Support the Government to strengthen HIV testing, treatment referral, and follow-up services for migrant people living with HIV, who return to the country with aim of restoring their right to health.</p>
<p>In 2020, the Government had to redirect budget for HIV and PMTCT services towards the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>While the Office of the First Lady is fully committed to raising awareness and supporting efforts around early childhood and prenatal healthcare services as part of HIV prevention, there is still a need to leverage concerted efforts to support PMTCT programmes and reach eliminations.</p>	<p>Continue technical support and coordination with the Ministry of Health to expand PMTCT services.</p> <p>Intensify high-level advocacy to secure commitment of the Office of the First Lady to actively promote and engage in PMTCT programmes.</p>
<p>People living with HIV, and in particular women, suffer from inadequate access to education and decent work. The COVID-19 pandemic-related economic slowdown further increased this vulnerability, including food insecurity.</p> <p>The recent restructuring of the social protection system in El Salvador presents certain challenges in enrolling people living with HIV into the programme.</p>	<p>Increase advocacy and technical support to include people living with HIV in the social protection programme.</p> <p>Provide technical and financial support to expand income generating programmes to improve the livelihood of people living with HIV, particularly women.</p>

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