

# ERITREA

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
An increased number of sex workers in hotspot areas are capacitated on their use of condoms, economically empowered, and have access to counselling services.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	In 2020, HIV prevalence among sex workers in Eritrea was at 14.8% and condom use among sex workers was at 99.50% (IBBS, 2020). In 2020, health facilities providing youth-friendly HIV health services in Eritrea increased from 5 in 2019 to 12 in 2020; around 5000 adolescents and young people, including young sex workers accessed these services in 2020.
Scale up access to HIV services among prison inmates and create an enabling legal and policy environment.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	No data available for 2020. Activities led or supported by the Joint Team are scheduled for 2021 to strengthen HIV services in closed settings and improve the legal environment in Eritrea.

### JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, WHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

## JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

*In 2020, the Joint Team focused its support on continuity of HIV prevention and treatment services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mobile clinics were established reaching thousands of pregnant and breastfeeding women in areas of nomadic populations with HIV prevention and treatment services. Community health workers were trained to provide home-based integrated maternal and child health, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) services. Media professionals and communities were sensitized, improving their understanding of HIV prevention and promoting uptake of testing and treatment programmes. The Joint Team supported an HIV drug resistance survey to inform treatment programmes and advance progress on the national HIV drug resistance prevention strategy. Significant contribution was also made in procuring and distributing personal protective equipment to support healthcare workers and ensure the continuity of HIV services during the pandemic.*

## **HIV PREVENTION FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS** TECHNICAL SUPPORT; CAPACITY BUILDING; SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

The Joint Team, development partners and civil society organization provided technical and financial support to the Ministry of Health for the development and dissemination of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials, including leaflets, radio and TV messages on HIV prevention and services during the 2020 World AIDS Day commemoration. The initiative reached over 1 million people, improving their understanding on HIV testing and prevention mechanisms and services.

The National Condom Programming Strategic Plan (NCPSP II) 2021-2026 was developed and aligned with the Eritrea National AIDS Strategic Plan (ENASP) 2021-2026 to improve access and consistent use of condoms. As a result of financial and technical support from the Joint Team, 1 million male condoms were distributed in 2020—a considerably lower volume than in previous years due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **ELIMINATION OF VERTICAL HIV TRANSMISSION** TECHNICAL SUPPORT; CAPACITY BUILDING; SENSITIZATION

As a result of technical support provided to the Ministry of Health, three rounds of mobile clinic HIV services were implemented in areas of nomadic populations with limited access to health care in Gash Barka, Anseba and Northern Red Sea Region and four rounds of mobile services in Southern Red Sea Region. These mobile clinics reached 1810 pregnant and lactating women living with or at risk of HIV with PMTCT services.

Capacity building was provided to 116 community health workers and 87 advanced community health workers from the Barefoot Doctors programme to improve their skills on the provision of basic home-based maternal and child health care service package, including antenatal care and PMTCT. In 2020, 97 252 (98%) pregnant women enrolled on antenatal care services were tested for HIV nationwide due to the integration of HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, maternal, and other health services.

Technical support was provided to sensitize 25 media professionals on promotion of HIV and maternal health services. As such, several radio and TV programmes were produced and disseminated encouraging communities to access and adhere to these services. Under the Communication for Development programme led by the United Nations, 35 members of health promotion teams at sub-national level also improved their knowledge on maternal, new-born, child, and adolescent health and nutrition services (RMNCAHN).

Logistical support was provided to the Ministry of Health to conduct joint HIV and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) supportive supervisions improving the quality of integrated HIV and SRH services in 40 health facilities.

## **SUSTAINING THE NATIONAL HIV RESPONSE** TECHNICAL SUPPORT; STRATEGIC INFORMATION; RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

With the resources mobilized from the Global Fund, the Joint Team supported the HIV end-term review of the 2017-2021 strategic plan, which provided evidence for the development of the new ENASP 2021-2026 and its alignment with the Global AIDS Strategy. Findings from the review were also used to complete the Global Fund grant proposal for 2021-2023, securing US\$ 21 312 156 for the national HIV response. In addition, the second National Condom Programming Strategic Plan 2021-2026 along with a costed operational plan was developed in 2020 to reduce new HIV infections in Eritrea, and support was also provided for the development of the community-based health service (CBHS) policy and strategic plan for 2021-2023 to scale up these services across the country.

The Joint Team technically assisted the Ministry of Health in collection, compilation, and validation of quality HIV data to support planning, implementation, and monitoring of national HIV programmes. Several assessments, including a survey on comprehensive sexuality education and the impact of COVID-19 on sex workers, were conducted to improve planning and implementation of programmes targeting vulnerable populations.

With technical assistance from the Joint Team, an HIV drug resistance study was conducted to support the National HIV Drug Resistance Monitoring and Prevention Strategy which was implemented since 2014. The result showed that the overall prevalence of HIV drug resistance was 7.1%, with no significant difference observed by gender; the prevalence of HIV drug resistance was significantly higher among ART initiators with prior exposure to ARV (42.4%) compared to the ART initiators without prior ARV exposure (3.9%).

### CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

The Joint Team provided financial and technical support to the Ministry of Health to promote safety measures on the COVID-19 pandemic among communities and ensure continuity of HIV and other essential health services in the country. US\$ 60 000 worth of personal protective equipment and medical supplies, including 144 000 units of examination gloves, 20 000 pieces of filtering facepiece (FFP2) masks, and 10 000 pieces of surgical gowns, 10 000 face shields, and 3000 goggles were procured and delivered to the Ministry of Health.

Support was provided to scale up government-led public awareness initiatives on prevention of the intersecting HIV and COVID-19 pandemics. For example, 86 000 leaflets on access to maternal, new-born, child, and adolescent health and nutrition services during the COVID-19 were disseminated improving public confidence in HIV and other essential health services.

The National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students also received US\$ 17 000 from the Joint Team allowing the Union to procure and distribute personal protective equipment and produce IEC materials promoting healthy choices and safe practices among young people in Eritrea.

### CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

Over the last two decades, Eritrea has been grappling with high levels of malnutrition and the Government has prioritized it a major public health issue to be addressed in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Although efforts to address child and maternal nutrition issues in Eritrea had gained momentum, the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the current progress. COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdown, social, and travel restriction measures disrupted food supply chains and affected associated livelihoods. In March 2020, the Government with support from the Joint Team adapted global and regional guidance on implementation of nutrition programmes to ensure continuity of services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several guidelines on Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM), Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF), food safety, and Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) were translated into Tigrigna language, packaged in different formats with quality messages and distributed widely.

As a result, encouraging results have been recorded despite limitations in monitoring and assuring quality of the data. For example, there was no significant difference recorded in the numbers of acutely malnourished children reached with lifesaving interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the first half of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. An increased number of children with moderate acute malnutrition and severe acute malnutrition cases were also reached between January and June 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

<b>PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS</b>	<b>KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS</b>
<p>The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures presented substantial challenges for programme support in 2020. Supervision missions, field level technical assistance, capacity building programmes were delayed or cancelled. Poor internet infrastructures also affected the quality and effectiveness of remote support.</p>	<p>Continue to support the Government and communities to scale up multi-month drug dispensing programmes to ensure continuity of treatment services for people living with HIV and combination HIV prevention services for adolescents and young people, men, and key populations and their partners during and after the end of COVID-19 restrictions in 2021.</p>
<p>In Eritrea, adolescents, young people, and people from key population groups continue to face disproportionate barriers, including stigma and discrimination impeding their ability to access HIV services.</p>	<p>Provide technical support to reduce inequality in access to HIV services among adolescents and young people and key populations.</p>

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