

GABON

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
By 2021, the percentage of people living with HIV who know their HIV status has increased from 70% in 2018 to 90%, people living with HIV enrolled on antiretroviral therapy (ART) rose from 77% to 90%, and 90% of those on ART achieved viral load suppression, with particular focus on addressing the specific needs of men, women, children.	SLOW PROGRESS	By the end of 2020, an estimated 78% people living with HIV knew their HIV status in Gabon, of whom 52% were on treatment, and 14% of those on treatment had access to viral load tests (National report 2020). Access to viral load testing remains low and does not allow for estimation of viral load suppression.
By 2021, at least 75% of young people and key populations, including men who have sex with men, female sex workers and people who inject drugs, adolescent girls and young women, and other vulnerable groups have access to HIV combination prevention services.	SLOW PROGRESS	No data available. The Joint Team continues to provide support to prevention initiatives among young people and key populations.
By 2021, civil society organizations have strengthened capacity to actively address stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV and key populations; and gender inequalities are addressed.	ON TRACK	In September 2020, the Gabonese Senate passed a new law decriminalizing same-sex relations in the country. Also, the Gabon Égalité Strategy was launched to address gender-based violence, ensure equal access to education for girls and boys, and empower women economically and politically.
By 2021, the country has better quality data (disaggregated by gender, age, and region) to develop responsive HIV programmes, measure progress, and promote public, private and community leadership.	SLOW PROGRESS	Collection and analysis of disaggregated data for the HIV response remains a challenge in Gabon.

By 2021, a more coordinated, inclusive, and participatory HIV response with at least a 10% increase in resources for implementation of HIV programmes in the country.

SLOW PROGRESS

The Joint Team increased financial support to the national AIDS response from US\$ 50 000 in 2019 to more than US\$ 275 000 in 2020. However, public health expenditure in Gabon declined from US\$ 6.3 million in 2019 to US\$ 3.6 million in 2020 and majority of this funding was allocated for HIV testing and treatment programmes with little resource allocation for HIV prevention efforts (Direction Générale de Prévention du SIDA).

JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, WHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT, FAO, IOM, UNRCO

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

In 2020, the Joint Team in Gabon provided critical support to improve prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT), including overseeing training and formative supervision for healthcare providers in PMTCT service sites. A Points of Care (PoC) roadmap was completed to scale up early infant diagnosis and viral load testing for HIV-exposed infants. Efforts were also made to expand access to viral load testing services for people living with HIV. Heightened advocacy resulted in the adoption of a new law decriminalizing same-sex relations in Gabon. Mobile phone application groups and platforms were also established to boost information sharing among people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community and encourage them to participate in critical confidential surveys. Representatives from civil society organizations were trained to increase their capacity on prevention of HIV, COVID-19, gender-based violence (GBV), stigma and discrimination as well as on the provision of sexual and reproductive health services. Technical and financial support was provided to improve the quality of collection and use of HIV data necessary to plan, implement, and monitor effective programmes.

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ADVOCACY; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS

The UN Joint Team provided advocacy and technical assistance to include viral load testing and CD4 counting services in the national health insurance scheme and increase access to viral load testing among people living with HIV with very low income. Support was also provided to healthcare workers to reduce lost to follow up among people living with HIV enrolled on ART services. Financial support was also provided to strengthen social protection mechanisms, scale up support for young girls living with HIV, support continuity of services for people living with HIV through community health workers, and boost the capacity of two national laboratories.

HIV PREVENTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND KEY POPULATIONS POLICY ADVICE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Joint Team supported awareness creation and training sessions on HIV prevention in Lambarene and Franceville cities—two of the ten cities in Gabon where more than 80% of the people living with HIV in Gabon live; 60% of people reached were young women.

A WhatsApp group—with more than 90 people from the LGBTI community—was created for collaboration and information sharing via smartphones around human rights, peer support, and HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services, including services tailored for the LGBTI community. The platform will also be used to conduct confidential surveys to identify issues affecting people from the LGBTI community.

ELIMINATION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION OF HIV POLICY DIALOGUE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS

In support of the national elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (eMTCT) plan, the Joint Team provided formative supervision to healthcare workers who were trained on PMTCT service delivery in 36 health facilities (26 public and 10 private). The supervision revealed that PMTCT data were wrongly entered or incomplete on the register in 90% of the PMTCT sites, which impacted the quality and validity of data in programme monitoring, needs assessment, and planning efforts. With technical and financial support to the Ministry of Health, PMTCT data collection registers were implemented in all PMTCT sites to improve the quality of data collection and use.

Additionally, the Joint Team supported the development of a roadmap for the implementation of the Points of Care (PoC) testing in Gabon. A laboratory assessment and a quality assurance plan for the PoCs were also completed and validated. Furthermore, 70 GeneXpert early infant diagnosis (EID) cartridge kits, 70 GeneXpert HIV viral load cartridge kits, and other inputs were procured to improve EID and viral load testing among infants using PoC sites.

HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND STIGMA ADVOCACY; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS

The Joint Team led a strong and well-coordinated advocacy effort in Gabon, which resulted in the revoking of the 2019 penal code that criminalized same-sex relations in September 2020. This included technical support for the generation of strategic information and coordination with relevant ministers, parliamentarians, senators, and civil society.

More than 120 representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) were trained to strengthen their capacity on prevention of HIV, SRH, gender-based violence (GBV) and COVID-19 pandemic. These trainings also covered challenges around HIV-related stigma, discrimination, and self-esteem, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, in September 2020, more than 200 representatives from CSOs, including networks of LGBTI communities and people living with HIV, were trained on stigma and discrimination, and received tools to train others on these topics.

STRATEGIC INFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY DIALOGUE; ADVOCACY; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS

The Joint Team provided technical and financial support to improve HIV data collection process and train more than 40 data managers of all HIV treatment programmes. A training on Spectrum and other tools was also completed for 12 data managers in health facilities to improve regular and timely reporting in the national HIV response.

As a result of technical support provided to the Ministry of Health, US\$ 1 666 333 was mobilized from the Global Fund COVID-19 Response Mechanism to support the Gabon's COVID-19 response and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the national HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria programmes. This grant has also been allocated to sustain community-led services and support programme—around 23% of the approved budget was allocated to CSOs.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

In 2020, the Joint Team supported an assessment on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV and tuberculosis services engaging people living with HIV as data collectors. The survey revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions abridged the quality and access to HIV services among people living with HIV. Results from the survey were used to inform advocacy efforts aimed at scaling up multi-month dispensing (MMD) of ART during the pandemic to ensure continuity of services for people living with HIV.

The Joint Team provided technical and commodity support to the Ministry of Health to ensure continuity of HIV and other essential healthcare services in the country. For example, 250 pieces of personal protective equipment were procured and donated to healthcare works at the Libreville town hall. Support was also provided to train 90 representatives from peoples from CSOs improving their understanding of HIV and COVID-19 prevention, care, and treatment to enhance uptake and continuity of services.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

Within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the Joint Team is contributing to the realisation of the SDGs in Gabon. For instance, support is provided to prepare and implement the Education Plus Initiative (2021-2025) in order to empower adolescent and young women and achieve gender equality in Gabon using secondary education as a strategic entry point.

Following the “Leaving no one behind” principle, the Joint Team also provided support for the development of a two-year joint programme which seeks to promote access to social protection schemes among hard-to-reach populations, especially autochthon communities, including through sustained birth registration. The programme also includes capacity building for peer educators from these communities for outreach and awareness-building.

PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
<p>In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created tremendous challenges in the healthcare system, which impacted HIV services. Pandemic-related travel restrictions and other social measures are expected to pose difficulties in facility- and community-based HIV service provision and programme implementation.</p>	<p>Provide technical and financial support to scale up community-led HIV services, including covering phone and transport costs of community health workers to improve access to ART services among people living with HIV.</p>
<p>The 75% HIV prevention coverage target was difficult to measure as the size estimation among young people and key population is unknown.</p>	<p>Intensify advocacy and provide technical and financial assistance to secure government commitment and complete size estimation for young people and key populations groups, which is critical to support the national HIV response.</p>
<p>At 10% in 2020, the mother-to-child transmission rate in Gabon remains high and a concern in the national HIV response.</p>	<p>Continue technical support and resource mobilization efforts for the implementation of the PoC strategy to improve EID and viral load testing services for infants in the country.</p> <p>Assist with development, production and distribution of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials on PMTCT to increase knowledge and uptake of services.</p> <p>Continue technical supervision of trained healthcare providers to improve delivery of PMTCT service.</p>
<p>Insufficient investment in community-led HIV programmes remains a persistent challenge in the country.</p>	<p>Provide technical assistance to scale up community-led HIV prevention, care, treatment, and support programmes.</p> <p>Support resource mobilization efforts through the Africa CDC Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT) initiative to support community-led COVID-19 and HIV programmes.</p>

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