

HAITI

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN WOMEN, ILO, UNESCO, WHO-PAHO, WORLD BANK, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT, FAO, IOM, OHCHR

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

The Haiti Joint UN Team on AIDS contributed to the country's progress towards elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis (EMTCT) amidst the numerous challenges facing the country, notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the current socio-political and security concerns. Efforts to increase knowledge around HIV, sexually transmitted infections, breastfeeding and to boost uptake of HIV testing and syphilis screening were some of the key elements of the Joint Team's support to the national HIV response in 2020-2021. Building on the rapid assessment that identified gaps in the access to HIV vertical transmission prevention services, several mitigating actions, such as establishing network of health facilities, training of healthcare providers, and procurement of various HIV and syphilis test kits were implemented in high burden departments. Technical support was also provided to the Government for the implementation of differentiated service delivery models, such as the multimonth dispensing and community delivery of antiretroviral treatment to improve the health outcome for people living with HIV. Thousands of workers in the formal and informal sector as well as adolescents and young people were trained on HIV prevention, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, and stigma to promote healthy lifestyle and reduce discrimination and human rights violations. Capacity building of civil society organizations working on the protection of key populations was supported with a focus on mental health and suicide prevention. The Joint Team also supported several post-earthquake programmes in the affected Great South of Haiti, including HIV services and capacity building for women traders living with HIV. Valuable contributions were made to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as decentralization of COVID-19 responses, procurement of personal protective equipment and hygiene kits, and sensitization of workers in the textile sector, vulnerable communities and at most at-risk groups, including detainees on COVID-19 prevention.

HIV TESTING AND TREATMENT

In 2020, the Joint Team collaborated with various development partners, such as the United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) and PEPFAR to support the Ministry of Health in the implementation of the differentiated service delivery models, including multimonth dispensing (MMD) of ART and community drug distribution to ensure continuity of treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Joint Team further assisted the Ministry of Health and the National AIDS Programme to transition all eligible people living with HIV to Dolutegravir-based first line treatment regimen, through the training of 25 healthcare providers and formative supervision visits to 12 targeted sites. Healthcare workers across Haiti received personal protective equipment to ensure their safety and the continuity of HIV and essential healthcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Twenty-five representatives of civil society organizations from the Artibonite, Centre, North, and West departments were trained on HIV self-testing to improve access to HTC services among key populations.

PREVENTION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION OF HIV

The Ministry of Health was supported to conduct a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) services across Haiti. The survey highlighted significant disruption and lack of access to HIV care and treatment services. Key recommendations included the need to create a network of maternity hospitals to improve PMTCT services and facility-based child delivery. In response, the Joint Team supported the establishment of a network of 25 government health facilities that offered integrated maternal, neonatal, and child health (MNCH) services in the Nippes, Grand'Anse, South-East, and South (Great South) departments. This network seeks to strengthen the quality, accessibility, and continuity of PMTCT services; and monitor progress, identify missed opportunities, and programmatic gaps towards the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (EMTCT).

The Joint Team provided technical and financial support to the Government to scale up HIV testing and counselling (HTC) and syphilis screening services for pregnant and lactating women and newborns and close the 50% gap in the national HIV programme in the Grand'Anse, Nippes, South, and South-East departments. This included procurement of 600 rapid plasma reagin (RPR), Biorline HIV/syphilis duo rapid test, and Determine HIV-1/2 Ag/Ab combo point-of-care test kits; and 2000 OraQuick HIV self-testing kits and distribution to departmental depots. Coordinated support further secured 9500 HIV, 13 000 syphilis, and 12 000 hepatitis B test kits, strengthening the national stock for EMTCT programmes in the three departments in the northern region.

The technical and financial support provided by Joint Team resulted in increased capacity of 52 healthcare providers, including doctors, nurses, and midwives from the Nippes and South departments to deliver PMTCT services. Supportive supervision and post-training follow up visits of healthcare workers were also conducted in 23 maternity hospitals offering PMTCT services. These visits also sought to evaluate the quality of PMTCT services in the Nippes and North-West departments. Ten community support groups and 14 mothers' clubs were established, and mentors were trained to support women, including pregnant women living with HIV and promote uptake of PMTCT services and adherence to treatment in targeted areas of the North-West Department. As a result, 515 vulnerable pregnant and lactating women were able to access PMTCT services.

In the Nippes and South departments, 305 pregnant women in Profamil clinics were sensitized to the importance of breastfeeding, prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and 270 pregnant women accessed prenatal care services, including routine tests and ultrasound scans. Furthermore, 305 low-income pregnant women working in SONAPI industrial park received HTC and 19 331 male and female textile workers were sensitized on HIV, STI and COVID-19 prevention.

The Joint Team assisted the populations affected by the earthquake in August 2021, including 150 pregnant women living with HIV who were in the third trimester of pregnancy, and previously or newly enrolled in antenatal care to have hospital deliveries in disaster-affected areas. In addition, emergency food and monetary assistance was provided to 652 eligible pregnant and lactating women and girls living with HIV and 156 children living with HIV enrolled on ART and who were assessed to be food insecure in the Artibonite and Central departments. Beneficiaries also received text messages on COVID-19 prevention, antenatal and postnatal consultation, and nutritional guidance on preparation of super cereals.

HIV PREVENTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND KEY POPULATIONS

Over 500 young people from the Grand'Anse department and 1145 adolescents and young people from North-East department were engaged in discussions around modes of HIV transmission and prevention, triple advantages of consistent use of condoms, early and unintended pregnancy, safe sexual behaviour, and elimination of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). During these awareness sessions, 36 900 condoms and 550 dignity kits were distributed, and 645 young people received counselling on HIV testing, of whom 39 received HTC services.

In 2020, nearly 4000 adolescents and young people from extremely marginalized areas, including Duvivier, Martissant, and Sun City in the capital, were sensitized on HIV and COVID-19 prevention and services. Similarly, financial and technical support ensured dissemination of SRH and HIV information via the civil society organization Promoteurs Objectif Zéro SIDA (POZ) blue hotline reaching 971 adolescents, young people, and adults in all departments.

In partnership with the Ministry of Education, a telemedicine service, facilitated by 20 counsellors, was established to provide medical consultation and psychological support for young people on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), HIV, COVID-19, and gender-based violence (GBV). In addition, a hotline was also established in collaboration with Ministry of Education, with 20 responders and advisors to providing psychological support and counselling on various health-related topics, including SRH, HIV, GBV, and COVID-19 services, for young people.

The Community Action for the Integration of Vulnerable Haitian Women (ACIFVH) and AREV received technical and financial assistance to reinforce the management of the Kay Trans Shelter hotline—one of the few shelters established to address the needs of young transgender men and women in Port-au-Prince. Staff from the hotline service were trained to improve their skills on HIV prevention and referral to care and treatment services, suicide prevention, telephone counselling, and data collection services. In 2021, an estimated 238 people accessed support services, 122 clients received psychological and referrals services, 204 survivors of family violence/rejection from families had multifaceted support and referrals, and 11 people were given accommodation at the shelter.

With Joint Team support, 200 sex workers and 100 people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community working in Port-au-Prince and Saint-Marc received hygiene kits and information related to SRH and HIV prevention, care, and treatment services. In Grand'Anse, 145 people from the LGBTI community were sensitized on HIV prevention and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) while dignity kits and 2900 condoms were distributed among participants of various awareness sessions.

Five television programmes aimed at raising public awareness on HIV prevention were produced and eight radio programmes on the same topics were developed and broadcasted for audiences across the country. In Grand'Anse, three public awareness campaigns and three outreach tours on HIV and COVID-19 prevention reached 28 000 people. As part of these campaigns, 80 000 condoms and 10 500 face masks were distributed to communities.

Training was provided for 48 healthcare workers working in CARACOL, SONAPI and CODEVI industrial parks, and 50 medical personnel from the textile industry improving their capacity on work-related risks of COVID-19 infection and prevention. Meanwhile, awareness raising sessions on prevention of HIV and COVID-19 in the workplace engaged around 9406 workers, including 7250 women in Port-au-Prince and the Caracol Industrial Park and 275 pregnant women who participated in the sessions benefited from a wide range of prenatal services, including HTC.

GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Joint Team, in collaboration with development partners, conducted two separate rapid gender assessments to identify the impact of COVID-19 and the effects of the August 2021 earthquake on women. Results showed a disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women with 23.8% of women reporting to have lost their income-generating activities. GBV also increased between 5%-40% during the pandemic according to records by GBV service providers. Similarly, the post-earthquake assessment indicated that 68% of social service providers stated that women experienced extremely limited access to health services and confirmed that adolescent girls and young women were left increasingly vulnerable to sexual violence and assault.

In 2020, the Joint Team in partnership with the Directorate for the Penitentiary Administration (DAP), and the civil society organization, *Perspectives pour la Santé et le Développement* established an SRH programme for women prisoners at the Cabaret Prison. The programme included information, education, and communication (IEC) on prevention of HIV, COVID-19, and sexual violence; HIV testing, treatment, and care services, including PMTCT; and STI prevention and treatment. A total of 32 people, including 20 detainees, two social assistants, one nurse, seven police officers, and four personnel from DAP were selected and trained to support the SRH programme. The trained prisoners, who serve as peer educators replicated the training to at least 120 other detainees.

Moreover, nearly 5000 merchants in the informal sector operating in the public markets in Croix-des-Bouquets, Kokoye, and Solomon, were trained on HIV prevention, discrimination, and gender equality in 2020, and 500 street vendors and petty traders from the Kenskof and Furcy informal markets were sensitized on HIV prevention. An estimated 36 800 condoms were also distributed during these engagement sessions.

In 2021, support was provided for the launch of the HeForShe Campaign aimed at mobilizing men, young men, and boys across Haiti to increase their awareness and commitment for gender equality and elimination of SGBV against women and girls, stigma and discrimination and sexist behaviours. Following the launch, 220 people from public and private universities in North, West, and South departments participated in a one-day training and signed on the Charts of Engagement to act on these issues.

Through the Joint Team's COVID-19 recovery project, 70 women traders living with HIV from the Great South department were trained on development and management micro-enterprises and prevention of HIV in the workplace.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

In 2020-2021, almost all support initiatives of the Joint Team, particularly those related to HIV testing and treatment, contributed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3 and 10—good health and well-being and reduced inequalities. These activities included supporting people living with HIV to lead healthy lives, increasing access to HIV services, and closing the gap among target populations, and ensuring the continuity of services for vulnerable populations despite multiple challenges the country faced recently, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and other natural and socio-political predicaments.

Technical support provided to the Ministry of Health significantly contributed towards Haiti's accomplishment of reaching 90% of eligible people from key population groups with PrEP services by the end of 2021. An estimated 90% of adolescents and young people also received comprehensive information on HIV prevention and SRH, in line with SDGs 1, 3, 5, and 10.

The Joint Team also contributed towards women empowerment through diverse mechanisms, including training in business creation, sensitization on SRHR, HIV and GBV prevention, nutritional support, contributing to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 11.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the ongoing difficult and worsening socio-political environment, continued to severely impede the continuity of HIV services and the overall progress in the national HIV response. These challenges included an increased level of insecurity in the capital and subsequent gang rivalries, violence, kidnappings, and displacements in some neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince.

The August 2021 earthquake in the Southern region caused an additional humanitarian crisis, displacing thousands of people and further disrupting HIV and other essential health services. Finally, the fuel crisis paralyzed the country for weeks in October and November 2021.

Specific challenges to the HIV response were shortages of healthcare workers for the delivery of HIV services, including in maternity wards, and stockout of HIV testing commodities related to delays in the global supply and lack of availability in the local market. Scarcity of national- and agency-level financial resources for HIV programming continued to threaten the progress made in the past several years.

Lessons learned include the importance of building great collaboration with the Ministry of Health and reinforced partnerships with the Global Fund and PEPFAR to increase impact of health services, including HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and COVID-19, and support the response to emergency situations. For instance, a Joint Emergency HIV/TB continuity plan was launched by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Joint Team and civil society organizations to effectively respond to the earthquake that struck Haiti in 2021.

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