

PARAGUAY

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNFPA, UNDP, WHO-PAHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Team in Paraguay sought to reinforce the country's progress towards the national HIV targets and ensure the sustainability of the national HIV response. Besides mobilizing international resources, the Joint Team provided technical support to guarantee a smooth and eventual transition from the Global Fund to domestic financing of the national HIV response. As a result of technical and financial support, the first social study was conducted to assess the impediments facing transgender people from accessing HIV and other essential health and social services in Paraguay. Community change agents were trained to improve case finding and management of COVID-19, HIV, and other sexually transmitted illnesses and the continuity of HIV services among vulnerable people living with HIV and key populations. Additionally, personal protective equipment, food and nutrition supplies, and shelter were provided for vulnerable transgender people, including people who survived violence or made homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic.

INVESTMENT AND REDUCING BARRIERS TO HIV SERVICES

The Joint Team made a significant technical contribution for the development of the Global Fund concept note with focus on social contracts mobilizing US\$ 33 724 563 for the national HIV and tuberculosis responses for the 2021-2024 grant period. The funds will be used to scale up community-led services, including mental health services for people living with HIV and key populations; and strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations for social contracting and programme implementation.

Technical assistance was further provided to finalize an action plan which was approved by the Government of Paraguay and the Global Fund to ensure a smooth transition and sustainability of the national HIV response funded through public expenditures, including salaries and supplies.

In 2020, Panambí—an organization working with the transgender community—was supported to conduct the first social study aimed at identifying and addressing barriers to access, health, education, labour, and social protection benefits, including housing among transgender people. The study revealed significant barriers to impeding access to basic social services. In the absence of a gender identity law, the trans population does not have access to recognized decent work, the only option being sex work or small businesses such as hairdressing or housework. Sex workers are frequently victims of violence by law enforcement. Access to education is also extremely limited and more than 70% of the population only studied primary school. These findings informed the 2021-2023 advocacy action plan which seeks to mobilize

various stakeholders and civil society for policy change and implementation of effective programmes to end inequalities, stigma, and discrimination against transgender people in Paraguay.

The Joint Team in partnership with the National Programme for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and the Centre for Information and Resources for Development (CIRD), supported the nongovernmental organization, CIES Ñepyrú to train 50 community agents to improve their capacity of active case finding and case management of HIV, STIs, and COVID-19 among key populations. The training focused human rights and scaling up access and uptake of HIV testing and treatment services and retention in care.

Technical and financial support was provided to train 15 women living HIV to serve as HIV and COVID-19 lay counsellors to improve the quality of information and access to HIV and COVID-19 prevention services. The trained lay counsellors further helped to distribute personal protective equipment to ensure the continuity of services and the safety of vulnerable and key populations, including people living with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address the needs of vulnerable transgender people during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Team procured and donated food and personal hygiene items to Casa Diversa—a shelter for people of sexual diversity who survived violence or became homeless.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

In 2020-2021, the Joint Team's contributions towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on the implementation of the five pillars outlined in the United Nations Framework for the Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19.

Under Pillar 1 (Protect health systems and services during the crisis), the Joint Team supported various efforts to ensure the continuity of HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services, including implementation of the multimonth dispensing (MMD) of antiretroviral treatment for eligible people living with HIV in Paraguay.

Under Pillar 2 (Protect people: social protection and basic services) and Pillar 5 (Social cohesion and community resilience), the Joint Team supported civil society networks to undertake community-led monitoring of human rights violations and expand social protection services for vulnerable and key populations, particularly people living with HIV and persons from the lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, and intersex (LGBTI) community.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions disrupted in particular the livelihoods of sex workers and transgender people who make a living of sex work, leaving them unable to cover the costs of their basic needs such as food and housing.

National social protection schemes also left behind key populations, specifically sex workers and transgender people increasing their vulnerabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic-related social restrictions and lockdown periods.

Lessons learned showed the need to continue monitoring and addressing inequalities and human rights violations against key populations through capacity building of civil society organizations and scale up access to justice.

Poor internet connection and access to communication technologies presented significant challenges for the implementation of virtual outreach initiatives targeting key populations residing outside big cities in Paraguay during the COVID-19 pandemic. Disruption of HIV and other essential health services also led to the reduction of HIV, STIs, and other sexual and reproductive health (SRH) service coverage in the country.

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