

THAILAND

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

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

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

In Thailand the Joint Team worked with development partners in supporting the Government to scale up HIV self-testing services, especially among populations that are hard to reach. Significant contribution also went into improving access to HIV prevention, treatment, and care services for vulnerable and key populations that got international recognition for Thailand. A community-led workforce was established to with trained community leaders and peer educators that included people living with HIV to support the COVID-19 response in Bangkok and nearby provinces. Intense advocacy and technical support led to the inclusion of pre-exposure prophylaxis in the Universal Healthcare system. Evidence-based family skill development programme was rolled out to prevent drug use and promote responsible decision making among children and adolescents aged 10-14 years old juvenile detention centres. Sexually transmitted infection services were integrated in combination HIV prevention services and over one hundred hospitals were certified to deliver youth-friendly services to improve access to services among this group. The Joint Team supported the establishment of one-stop community-based health services and facilitated training of community health workers to improve access and skills of service delivery among people who use/inject drugs. Transgender sex workers were empowered to start income generating activities to support themselves and stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. A national multisectoral and costed action plan to end all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination was developed, the number of public health facilities offering stigma and discrimination reduction service package were augmented by more than four folds; and 20 000 healthcare providers were trained on stigma and discrimination using e-learning modules. The network of young people living with HIV was supported to strengthen its capacity in implemented public and social media advocacy strategies reaching close to three million views in 2021.

HIV PREVENTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND KEY POPULATIONS

As a result of evidence-based advocacy and technical support by the Joint Team and national partners, the Government approved financial support for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) services through the Universal Healthcare system, thus allowing full reimbursement of selected health care services. Technical assistance was provided to update the 2022 national guidelines on the provision of PrEP, comprising specific details on PrEP service delivery among adolescents. The Joint Team also supported the implementation of one-stop community-based

health services, focusing on the integration of PrEP as part of the comprehensive HIV prevention package and increase demand among people who use drugs.

In partnership with the Raks Thai Foundation, the Joint Team organized a four-day workshop for 43 community health workers and programme management staff from 19 organizations to improve their skills of HIV prevention, treatment, and care service delivery among people who use drugs, particularly amphetamine-type stimulants.

Technical assistance was provided to scale up STI services as part of the combination HIV prevention services in Bangkok that target most marginalized young people. Additionally, 112 hospitals in the country were certified to provide services for young people based on the revised national guidelines for youth friendly health services.

The Joint Team facilitated the training of 13 trainers from the Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection to support the family skills development programme which seeks to prevent drug use and promote healthy and responsible behaviours among vulnerable children and adolescents aged 10-14 years. Since then, eight young people who were under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection and their families received the family skills development training and confirmed their satisfaction with the programme.

In 2021, the Joint Team conducted an online survey among 5300 teachers and educators to assess their experience and practical application of the Office of the Basic Education Commission's (OBEC) comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) e-learning teachers' course, which is supported by the Joint Team. The participants stated that they were able to apply the knowledge and skills gained from the course to deliver comprehensive sexuality education. They also confirmed they were able to improve their understanding of violence in schools, including gender-based violence.

HIV TESTING AND TREATMENT

In 2021, Thailand's Food and Drug Administration approved over-the-counter sales of HIV self-testing (HST) kits. Following this development, the Joint Team collaborated with the Bureau of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and national partners on the development of the national guidelines on HIV self-testing aimed at strengthening the availability and accessibility of this service throughout the country, particularly among hard-to-reach populations.

Bangkok was recognized with the Circle of Excellence Award at the 2021 Fast-Track Cities Initiative Conference for the persistent effort, commitment, and innovations in the HIV response, including the scale up of PrEP, same-day initiation of antiretroviral treatment, and Key Population-led Health Services (KPLHS) with the strong partnership of stakeholders. The Joint Team supported the documentation of lessons learned from Bangkok and strategic recommendations for moving forward in the next five years, which will be used to scale up the Fast-Track cities initiative in other provinces.

The Joint Team supported the establishment of a community-led workforce to support the COVID-19 response in Bangkok and surrounding provinces, and Chiang Mai. Under this initiative, the Joint Team trained 241 community leaders, including people living with HIV and peer educators and worked with 136 communities to manage COVID-19 outbreaks. It supported vulnerable populations and promoted self-care among people diagnosed with COVID-19 and people who are at higher risk of infection. A total of 156 771 people were tested for COVID-19 through this initiative and out of the 16 493 people who tested positive, 7366 received Favipiravir while 2793 had herbal medicines.

HUMAN RIGHTS, STIGMA, AND DISCRIMINATION

The Government was supported to develop the 2022-2026 national multisectoral and costed action plan to end all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination in Thailand. The plan which was endorsed by the National Sub-committee on HIV-related Human Rights Promotion and Protection seeks to accelerate multisectoral responses towards the 90-90-90 targets across six settings—healthcare, workplace, education, justice, community, and humanitarian settings.

In collaboration with the Department of Rights and Liberties Protection of the Ministry of Justice, the Joint Team trained 98 frontline law enforcement officers to improve their skills in addressing the human rights violations, stigma, and discrimination towards sex workers from the LGBTI community. The participants were drawn from the Royal Thai Police, the Immigration Bureau, the Department of Corrections, and the Office of Juvenile Justice System Development.

As a result of advocacy and technical assistance from the Joint Team, the Thai Network of Youth Living with HIV (TNY+) became an official member of the National Crisis Response System (CRS)—a mechanism established to record human rights violations towards people living with HIV, and the National Sub-Committee on AIDS Rights Protection and Promotion on AIDS.

The Joint Team also facilitated capacity building sessions, mentorship, and training for 40 members of TNY+ to improve their understanding and skills in planning, developing, and executing public and media advocacy strategies. Hence, members of TNY+ worked more visibly in the public sphere, presenting their stories through social media and key public events during the 2021 World AIDS Day commemoration generating 2.7 million views of the advocacy materials.

The Joint Team continued its support to increasing the number of healthcare facilities providing the stigma and discrimination reduction service package. A total of 599 public health facilities in 75 provinces offered the package at the end of 2021—from 123 in 2019. Technical and financial assistance was also provided to enable 20 000 healthcare personnel to successfully complete e-learning modules on stigma and discrimination.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

The Government endorsed Thailand's United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022-2025, which was developed with substantial contribution from the Joint Team. The framework supports the Government's efforts to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in line with the principle of *leaving no one behind*.

Under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2017-2021, the Joint Team continued advocacy and evidence gathering to inform policies and programme implementation to increase access of HIV services among young key populations, including people who use drugs; ensure sustainable financing for community-led health services through the Universal Health Coverage scheme towards the attainment of the SDG 3; and promote gender equality (SDG 5) and human rights, including access to social protection among sex workers and people from the LGBTI community and other key population groups.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Joint Team identified three key challenges/inequality gaps that are driving the HIV epidemic and hindering access to essential HIV services among people at higher risk of HIV infection and populations left behind. These are:

1. Low coverage of innovative interventions and lessons learned showed the need to maximize equitable and equal access to HIV services and solutions, including PrEP, HIV self-testing, syphilis, hepatitis C, and same day treatment initiation, among vulnerable and key populations, particularly people who use/inject drugs.

2. Stigma and discrimination remain critical barrier and there is a need to break down barriers to achieving the intended HIV-related outcomes by empowering young people, women, people living with HIV and key populations to lead HIV service delivery, advocate for and assert their right to health, and address the social and structural enablers/drivers of the HIV epidemic. These include activities to support law reform, reduce stigma and discrimination, address gender equality, reach young key populations with evidence-informed design, innovative digital interventions, and facilitate a national multi-sectoral mechanism to address the specific needs of vulnerable young people.
3. Ineffective social contracting mechanism is the main challenge that hinders scale up of community-led HIV services. Support to the Government must be accelerated to ensure a fully resourced, sustainable, and efficient HIV response through robust financing of national budget and community responses; scale up of integrated and people-centred facility- and community-led services; improved access to HIV services in emergency settings; and effective pandemic preparedness and response.

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