

UKRAINE

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN WOMEN, ILO, WHO, UNAIDS
SECRETARIAT, IOM

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

With support from the Joint Team, multimonth dispensing of antiretroviral treatment programmes were implemented throughout Ukraine to ensure the continuity of HIV treatment services among people living with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data on HIV testing and treatment was collected and analysed to improve strategic information for the national HIV response and streamline referral pathways and testing algorithms. National guidelines were also developed to strengthen integration of prevention of mother-to-child transmission services. HIV and other essential health services, and psychosocial and food support were provided to infants, children and families living with or affected by HIV in non-government-controlled areas in Donetsk. Pre-exposure prophylaxis services were expanded reaching more than 5000 people who are at higher risk of HIV infection in 2021, while healthcare providers were trained to scale up harm reduction programmes among people who use new psychoactive substances. Intensive advocacy and technical support by the Joint Team resulted in the withdrawal of the new draft bill which criminalizes promotion of same sex relationships and transgenderism, and the elimination of a policy that prevented people from the LGBTI community from donating blood in Ukraine. Furthermore, a parliamentary platform was established to facilitate high-level discussion on HIV, tuberculosis, and other health-related issues, policies, and legislations. Gender-responsive programmes were implemented in pilot communities to address gender inequalities and women living with HIV were trained on human rights, activism, advocacy, and leadership, including in the context of COVID-19. Monitoring and evaluation and finance specialists from all regions in Ukraine were trained on the collection and reporting of data on HIV spending by the end of 2020. The Joint Team also provided technical support for the mobilization of more than US\$ 172 million for the national HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, and COVID-19 response.

HIV PREVENTION AMONG KEY POPULATIONS

Intensive advocacy and technical assistance provided by the Joint Team and the funding from the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) contributed significantly to the expansion of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) services in Ukraine in 2021. The number of people enrolled on PrEP services increased from 2258 in 2020 to 5711 in 2021. An estimated 4800 people received PrEP for the first time in their lives in 2021.

The Ministry of Health was supported for the development of a tailored protocol for healthcare services among users of new psychoactive substances (NPS) and stimulant drugs which aims to improve access to HIV services and boost adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART). The Joint Team also supported training of 12 virtual outreach harm reduction service providers and health specialists to scale up services for people who use NPS in Dnipro, Kyiv, and Odesa.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Team significantly contributed to the continuity of opioid agonist therapy for 300 people who use drugs in Kramatorsk, Krivyi Rig, Mariupol, Sieverodonetsk, and Sloviansk, and through the provision of car rental services for their daily trips to clinics.

Technical assistance was provided for an assessment of the internet illicit drug market during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results of the study helped to understand the scope and variety of illicit drugs sold online and will contribute to the creation of appropriate HIV prevention and harm reduction programmes.

HIV TESTING AND TREATMENT, AND EMTCT

The Joint Team assisted the Government to scale up multimonth dispensing (MMD) of ART during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the continuity of ART services for people living with HIV in Ukraine. In 2021, 37% (47 564) of all registered people living with HIV were accessing treatment through 3-6 months MMD. Technical support was also provided for the further development and strengthening of standards for the delivery of HIV testing and treatment services, and procurement of ART, including to mitigate the challenges presented by COVID-19.

Technical support was provided for the systematic collection and analyses of HIV testing and treatment data at the regional, district and site levels to strengthen evidence and simplify referral pathways and testing algorithms aimed at optimizing access to quality services. In 2021, the Joint Team supported 85 ART sites across the country's 25 regions, with site-specific assessment, mentoring and technical assistance on HIV testing and treatment. The Joint Team also organized regional meetings strengthening the knowledge and capacity of over 800 healthcare providers on the presentation and analysis of HIV treatment profiles, HIV cascades and testing and treatment performance indicators.

As a result of technical support, a national Elimination of HIV mother-to-child transmission (EMTCT) Action Plan and EMTCT validation monitoring and surveillance system were developed to accelerate and monitor progress towards elimination of vertical transmission. National guidelines on prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) were also developed and implemented.

The Joint Team facilitated access to HIV services, psychosocial and food support, and school stationary kits for more than 1100 children and families affected by HIV in non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs) in Donetsk. A total of 297 infants born to mothers living with HIV and children living with HIV in NGCAs further benefited from medical services rendered by multidisciplinary clinical teams.

HUMAN RIGHTS, STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION, AND GENDER EQUALITY

The Joint Team provided technical and financial support for Ukraine's fourteenth National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) Conference entitled *Nation's health: dignity, equality, and right*. Heightened advocacy strengthened by outcomes of the conference led to the withdrawal of the new draft bill No.3917, which criminalizes promotion of same sex relationships and transgenderism in Ukraine. The current restriction that prevents people from the LGBTI community from donating blood was also lifted following the concerted advocacy efforts.

In collaboration with the National Agro-Industrial Workers' Union, the Joint Team further advocated for the development of a policy aimed at preventing and addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination in the workplace. After the successful adoption of the policy in November 2021, the Joint Team provided support to the Union in advocating for the inclusion of HIV non-discrimination provisions in collective bargaining agreements, as well as for the inclusion of HIV in the agenda of training activities for union members.

The Joint Team supported the establishment of a parliamentary platform for high-level discussion on HIV, tuberculosis, and other health-related issues, policies, and legislations. The platform has been used as a channel for community-based organizations to reach parliamentarians and bring to their attention HIV and other health challenges and proposed solutions. The Joint Team further collaborated with the School of Judges to conduct a workshop for 45 judges (22 women) to build their capacity on HIV and human rights.

Intensive advocacy by the Joint Team ensured a meaningful participation of women living with HIV in decision-making and drafting of the State Strategy on Equal Rights and Opportunities of Men and Women (2030) and its implementation plan for 2022-2024. Technical assistance was also provided for 74 civil society organisations to consolidate gender-responsive recommendations made through the Positive Women, a nongovernmental organization, and networks of women living with HIV and submit them to the government to guide decision-making. As a result of these advocacy efforts, 32 gender-responsive programmes were implemented in 13 pilot communities. A total of 260 women living with HIV were also trained on human rights, activism, advocacy, and leadership, including in the context of COVID-19.

INVESTMENT AND EFFICIENCY

The Joint Team provided technical support to Ukraine's Public Health Centre (UPHC) for the development of the country's National Strategy on HIV, Tuberculosis and Hepatitis Response 2021-2030 and a three-year operational plan. Following sustained advocacy from the Joint Team, Dnipro and Kryvyi Rig signed the Paris Declaration on Fast Track Cities, and technical support was provided to the Kyiv health care administration to develop the municipal Public Health Programme for 2022-2025.

Support was also provided to the Ministry of Health to institutionalize a National AIDS Spending Assessment. This included conducting training for more than 50 monitoring and evaluation and finance specialists from the 25 regions in Ukraine on the collection and reporting of data on HIV spending by the end of 2020.

The Joint Team supported the National Coordination Council on Tuberculosis, HIV and Hepatitis in submitting a successful Global Fund concept note mobilizing more than US\$ 137.7 million for the national HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria responses for the 2021-2023 grant period. Additionally, US\$ 35 million was secured from the Global Fund COVID-19 Response Mechanism to ensure the continuity of HIV and tuberculosis services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

Under the National Strategy on HIV, Tuberculosis and Hepatitis Response (2021-2030), the Joint Team continued to actively contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing). The Joint Team also contributed to the United Nations Country Common Assessment to ensure that HIV is prioritized as a public health challenge in Ukraine and addressed through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2027.

In 2020-2021, the Joint Team focussed on the empowerment of women living with HIV to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes at the national level for the integration of HIV and gender-based violence (GBV) services. Additionally, technical, and financial support was provided to extend HIV testing and treatment services and psychosocial support for more than 1400 survivors of GBV, in line with SDG 5 (Gender equality).

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the implementation of planned HIV programmes and support activities. In response, the Joint Team responded quickly during the pandemic to shift to online events where possible and ensure the continuity of services for people living with HIV and key populations.

HIV testing services are still not integrated into GBV support services in the healthcare system at all levels. Experiences show that integration of GBV services at the national and municipal levels would ensure access to coherent and holistic services among survivors of GBV.

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