

UZBEKISTAN

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 the end of 2021, 90% of all people living with HIV know their HIV status and 90% of them are on treatment.	SLOW PROGRESS	By 2020, 76% of people living with HIV know their status, 71% of those who know their status are on treatment, and 96% of them are virally suppressed. 54% of all people estimated to be living with HIV are on ART, and 51% of all estimated number of people living with HIV are virally suppressed (Spectrum 2021).
By the end of 2021, elimination of MTCT is validated in Uzbekistan.	ON TRACK	Criteria for monitoring and evaluating eMTCT of HIV and Syphilis achievement, indicators and targets have been adopted by the country. The road map activities towards validation of eMTCT are implemented.
By the end of 2021, 70% of key populations (disaggregated by men who have sex with men, sex workers, people who inject drugs) will be covered with comprehensive prevention programmes.	ON TRACK	No recent data available. In 2020, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and HIV self-testing were introduced in the draft new guidelines on HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care among key populations.

JOINT TEAM

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

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

During 2020, the Joint Team in Uzbekistan has supported the development of updated guidelines, a revised testing strategy, and improved treatment regimens. High coverage for prevention of maternal HIV and syphilis transmission has been sustained, and work with government, NGOs and other partners has continued towards national validation for eMTCT, despite the challenges of COVID-19. Prevention coverage for young people, key populations and people living with HIV has made progress, through working in partnership with networks and NGOs across the country; a particular focus has been on increasing coverage among men who have sex with men. Work on reducing gender inequality and violence against women has been addressed through the national campaign '16 Days of Activism', with strong community involvement.

HIV TESTING, TREATMENT AND CARE TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS; CAPACITY BUILDING

Facilitated by the Joint Team, the national HIV testing policy was revised, with significant transition to patient-oriented and simplified models. Through community-led services, this strategy is expected to expand HIV testing among key populations, particularly among sex workers, men who have sex with men, and people who inject drugs.

In consultation with the Republican AIDS Centre, a national survey has been conducted in order to build an evidence-based approach to HIV treatment coverage, determining the main ART coverage challenges and gaps, and identifying the causes of low rates of HIV treatment and adherence.

With technical assistance from the Joint Team, four modules on psycho-social support for children and adolescents living with HIV were designed to support trainers/leaders among adolescents living with HIV and their parents; training for primary health care paediatricians, general practitioners and AIDS specialists on care and medical-psychological and social support for HIV-positive children; and training on health, education and social protection for managers/staff of children's institutions. These modules were integrated into pre- and post-graduate curricula for over 150 service providers of day-care centres, health practitioners at AIDS centres, primary health care providers, and psychology and social work faculties from National University of Uzbekistan and Tashkent Institute of post-graduate medical education.

Between 2015 and 2020, the Joint Team provided support to more than 6000 children and adolescents living with HIV, who received regular psychosocial support and services, including individual consultations, counselling, treatment adherence, and planning for their future in terms of education and employment in nine day-care centres for children and families affected by HIV in Uzbekistan.

Three focus groups with young people were conducted to help prepare the design of information materials for children living with HIV. Two types of information/education/communication (IEC) materials 'Positive Diary' (5300 copies) and 'Stories of positive adolescents' (5300 copies) were developed, translated into Russian and Uzbek, and printed and distributed in day-care centres among adolescents living with HIV, and used as a consultation tool.

PMTCT COVERAGE POLICY DIALOGUE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS

Through assistance from the Joint Team in procuring ARV treatment, supporting the supply chain and forecasting/planning for the programme, high PMTCT indicators were maintained: an average of 99% of HIV-positive pregnant women and children have been involved in the PMTCT programme.

In 2020, technical support was provided to the Ministry of Health in the development of the road map towards eMTCT validation. The Joint Team also supported the national validation technical working group (TWG), which comprises specialists from the Ministry of Health, relevant government stakeholders and NGOs working with people living with HIV. As a result, criteria for monitoring and evaluating eMTCT of HIV and Syphilis achievement, indicators and targets are expected to be adopted by the country early 2021.

HIV PREVENTION FOR KEY POPULATIONS AND ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) CAPACITY BUILDING; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS; ADVOCACY

Technical assistance was provided to update the national guidelines on HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care among key populations. Technical working group members (including representatives of key populations and the national AIDS centre) revised all related documents for the updated guideline to be validated by stakeholders and printed out for distribution in 2021. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and HIV self-testing were introduced in revised documents to further reach key populations with HIV prevention and testing services.

The funding request to the Global Fund for US\$ 44 million was approved for the 2021-2024 period, and work has been carried out to scale up the HIV prevention programme among key populations, particularly focusing on increasing coverage among men who have sex with men, by expanding the programme into two more regions in 2021.

In 2020, the Joint Team organized a virtual Central Asia-wide conference for NGOs working in HIV-related programmes, to share experience and best practice on different approaches and tools in HIV prevention among key populations, as well as approaches to partnership and collaboration with government and local authorities. Twelve NGO representatives participated in the conference and learned about successful practices and effective partnerships.

During the “16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence” international campaign, more than 40 representatives of local NGOs participated in a forum to mobilise local capacities to respond to GBV and prevent HIV, gaining knowledge and skills to reach out to vulnerable women and strengthen the national HIV response. Technical assistance was provided in disseminating information about the forum through social networks aimed to increase awareness of women living with HIV, as well as among the general population, about the relationship between GBV and HIV. Women living with HIV told their stories about the challenges they faced due to their HIV positive status, and how these issues became the starting points in their empowerment and readiness to support other women, getting involved in advocacy activities to revise country policies on people living with HIV and violence.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 21 maternity hospitals in the Andijan region (the area in Uzbekistan with the highest population density and most affected by HIV and COVID-19) received 75 000 masks, 2900 disinfectants, 50 000 pairs of sterile gloves and 50 000 pairs of non-sterile gloves, ensuring a safer environment for patients and medical staff in maternity facilities. Personal protective equipment (PPE) was also provided for 500 children and adolescents living with HIV (305 boys, 195 girls) in the day-care facility of Tashkent AIDS Centre; and 4689 items of PPE were provided to drop-in staff working in harm reduction services for people who use drugs.

Working with an NGO in Samarkand from July to September 2020, support was provided to 170 low-income families with children living with HIV—providing food packages, necessary psychosocial support and consultation on COVID-19 prevention among people living with HIV; NGO management was in touch with families on a daily basis. Dissemination of essential information on COVID-19 prevention was supported through distribution of information cards in Russian and Uzbek languages to people living with HIV (taking universal precautionary measures; maintaining physical and mental health and supporting healthy relationships and communication without discriminating against those affected by COVID-19).

The Joint Team supported a number of surveys conducted on the impact of COVID-19, including an assessment of children and adolescents living with HIV in orphanages in eight regions during lockdown. The analysis showed that ART for children in that context was sustained; interruptions in ARV supply were noted in only one institution in Tashkent. A rapid needs assessment was also conducted among 247 people living with HIV and key populations; its findings showed continued access to ARV treatment, and that the majority of respondents understood basic measures for COVID-19 prevention, although access to medical services (especially to key services during pregnancy) and psychosocial support were insufficient. Similarly, assessments were also made to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on drug use and services for people who use drugs, and on the impact of COVID-19 on internet drug trade in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; analyses are in process.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Team also supported requests from NGOs including the community of people living with HIV and key populations to provide psychological support and prevent burn-out among outreach and social workers; around 35 people were supported during November-December 2020.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

A learning session on SDGs was provided to 20 young people living with HIV. Moreover, the Joint Team also supported the participation of young people living with HIV in focus group meetings at global and regional levels during the Global AIDS Strategy development. The Joint Team further supported three young people living with HIV to actively participate in the UN Youth Advisory Board, which was established to ensure regular and open dialogue between youth and the UN family in Uzbekistan.

The Joint Team contributed to the inclusion of HIV-related programmes in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Three of the five outcomes include HIV-related outputs and activities: prevention, treatment, care and support; public awareness and knowledge sharing; gender equality and human rights.

PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
<p>The share of people living with HIV on treatment is low. There are no formal platforms to increase treatment literacy among people living with HIV. HIV-related health services are not integrated into the primary health care or any other national vertical healthcare system.</p>	<p>Continue to support the national initiative to increase ARV coverage, and promote modern HIV prevention methods (i.e. PrEP and HIV self-testing) through advocacy and communication.</p> <p>Continue promotion of integrated HIV-related services and promotion of the one stop shop model of care (for HIV/TB/STI services) at national level.</p> <p>Continue to support the network of adolescent and young people living with HIV, build capacity and develop leadership skills, and involve leaders of the network into decision-making processes. Create and promote safe spaces for young people and promote opportunities to develop skills and competencies for self-realisation and healthy lifestyle.</p>
<p>The COVID-19 outbreak and associated restrictions had severe implications on the performance of the delivery of health services, and also delayed implementation of programmed HIV response activities. The process of eMTCT validation for Uzbekistan has been delayed, and most activities were postponed to 2021.</p>	<p>Advocate with the national institutions for sustained and integrated services, and provide technical support to implement delayed activities towards achieving eMTCT validation in Uzbekistan.</p>
<p>There are reports of rather high levels of stigma and discrimination in the society towards people living with HIV and key populations.</p> <p>The legal environment is not fully conducive for CSOs to promote and strengthen HIV-related programmes and activities.</p>	<p>Conduct Stigma Index survey at national level and organize and conduct communication activities to decrease discrimination against people living with HIV, self-stigmatisation, and motivate them to start and continue treatment by sharing personal success stories, link them to available services and disseminate relevant information.</p> <p>Further empower NGOs working with key populations and people living with HIV to scale up HIV prevention services, support and care.</p>

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