

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

In Equatorial Guinea, the Joint Team made efforts to improve and scale up HIV prevention and treatment services among adults, pregnant women, and children. These included decentralization of community-led antiretroviral treatment services that reached thousands of people living with HIV in most remote areas, tracking and re-enrolling people living with HIV who were lost to follow-up, and training health care workers to strengthen the delivery of quality HIV services. Advances were also made in improving the knowledge of adolescents and young people around prevention of HIV and COVID-19, and sexual and reproductive health.

STRENGTHENING THE HIV RESPONSE

In Bata and Malabo cities, the Joint Team held HIV prevention workshops in schools for more than 1000 adolescents and young people to improve their knowledge on voluntary HIV testing and proper and consistent use of condoms. As part of these workshops, all participants were tested for HIV and those found positive were linked to treatment.

In 2020, the Joint Team conducted a survey that gathered and analysed the barriers preventing people living with HIV from accessing HIV and other essential healthcare services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key findings of the survey revealed various challenges, in particular the financial barriers that prevent people living with HIV from accessing prevention commodities, antiretroviral treatment and psychological support. In response, the Joint Team provided technical and financial support to civil society organizations and communities to implement key mitigating actions, including decentralization of community-led antiretroviral treatment delivery services using district health teams, which reached 4672 people living with HIV predominantly from the Continental Region and other remote districts in the country. Other actions included programmes to track people living with HIV who were lost to follow-up and re-enrol them back on treatment; and food distribution initiatives targeting people living with HIV to improve adherence to treatment.

A training workshop was conducted for seven nongovernmental organizations to build their capacity on implementing, monitoring, and evaluating HIV programmes. This initiative contributed to efforts to build the capacity of civil society organizations delivering HIV prevention services, including to young people and key populations. The seven organizations are based in Bata and Malabo cities which are home to almost half of the country's population.

The Joint Team provided financial and technical support, including supervision missions to scale up prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) services, which resulted in increased PMTCT coverage—from 33% in 2020 to 42% in 2021 (GAM data). Antiretroviral treatment coverage among children aged 0-14 years also increased from 28% in 2020 to 39% in 2021. The number of centres that provide early infant diagnosis among children born to mothers living with HIV using the GenXpert technology has also increased from two in 2019 to five in 2020. The Joint Team procured more than 1200 GenXpert cartridges to strengthen the capacity of early infant diagnosis centres. In 2020, an estimated 490 children received HIV testing, of whom 41 tested HIV positive and were linked to treatment services.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

Under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2019-2023, the Joint Team continued providing financial and technical assistance to reinforce Equatorial Guinea's progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda and the principle of leaving no one behind.

The Joint Team supported the Government to develop and validate the Strategic Plan for the Elimination of HIV, Hepatitis, and Syphilis 2022-2026, and the National Plan for the Elimination of Vertical Transmission of HIV, Hepatitis and Syphilis in line the World Health Organization's recommendations and the Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026.

Contributing to SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and 10 (Reduced inequalities), the Government was actively supported in 2020-2021 to decentralize HIV care, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment services, strengthen ownership of the HIV response at district level, and build the capacity of healthcare providers to scale up access to quality HIV services for all people in Equatorial Guinea.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the provision of healthcare and community support services in Equatorial Guinea. Series of pandemic-related lockdown and travel restriction measures hindered access to prevention, testing and treatment services, and strongly disrupted adherence to treatment among people living with HIV. Public outreach and school campaign initiatives on HIV prevention were also affected by the pandemic restrictions. Prioritization of the COVID-19 response and vaccination programmes shifted funding, human resources, and attention away from the HIV response and threatened the progress made in recent years. Actively supported by the Joint Team in 2020-2021, the decentralization of HIV services and the scale up of community-led service delivery initiatives were essential in mitigating these challenges.

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