

GUATEMALA

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN WOMEN, UNESCO, WHO-PAHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT, IOM

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

The Joint Team supported the government to scale up HIV prevention, testing, and treatment services, through implementation of community-led programmes, procurement of HIV medicines and commodities, capacity building of healthcare providers, and provision of nutritional support for vulnerable populations. Awareness raising initiatives reached millions of young people and persons from key populations, including men who have sex with men, and transgender women with information of HIV prevention and care services. Programme assessment and monitoring identified bottlenecks in various parts of the HIV response and informed subsequent programming and mitigating actions. Collaborations with legal and nongovernmental organisations ensured access to pro bono legal consultations for people living with HIV and persons from key populations with cases of HIV-related human rights violation. Updated strategic information including HIV spending, informed a new Global Fund funding request and efforts towards more sustainable HIV financing.

HIV TESTING AND TREATMENT

The Joint Team provided technical assistance to the National HIV Estimates Committee for the completion of the 2020 and 2021 national HIV estimates which were essential to measure progress and identify gaps. Similarly, the Ministry of Health received technical support for the completion of the 2020 and 2021 Global AIDS Monitoring (GAM) reporting exercises, and for the implementation of the HIV Services Tracking Tool to monitor disruption of HIV services over the biennium.

The Joint Team, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and HIV clinics, provided financial support and capacity building to ensure the health and wellbeing of people living with HIV and key populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, 240 people living with HIV enrolled in antiretroviral treatment (ART) services in two clinics, and three neighbouring departments received food assistance for three months each. A total of 405 dignity kits were also distributed among women living with HIV attending government HIV clinics in 2020. From October to December 2020, home delivery of ART programme reached 169 people living with HIV enrolled on the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS) from 17 departments in Guatemala, thanks to a collaborative project with the civil society organizations (CSO) Asociación Lambda and Asociación Vida, showing the feasibility and benefits of innovative delivery models.

To improve treatment services for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the Joint Team provided nine STI clinics across the country and the CSO Colectivo de Amigos contra el Sida (CAS), with various medical supplies to save lives and management support. Personal protective equipment was procured and distributed to 16 HIV clinics to ensure continuity of HIV services across the country.

HIV PREVENTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND KEY POPULATIONS

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the second version of *the Live, Inform Yourself Today* (Avívate, Infórmate Hoy) campaign was launched to sensitize young people about HIV prevention, sexual reproductive health and rights, and services. Revised 157 digital information materials and 25 radio spots on these issues were produced and disseminated in seven Mayan languages on various social media platforms. Between 2020 and 2021, an estimated 4 791 273 people were reached with these messages via Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube.

Technical support and provision of educational toolkits for teachers and students in 57 schools managed by the Fe y Alegría civil society organization resulted in the integration of comprehensive sexuality education in the school curriculum benefiting 15 000 students.

The Joint Team provided technical assistance to the CSO Colectivo de Amigos contra el Sida (CAS) and the CSO Organización Trans Reinas de la Noche (OTRANS) for the development of HIV combination prevention cascades to strengthen implementation of HIV prevention programmes targeting men who have sex with men, female sex workers, and transgender women. The first round of assessment, conducted in 11 Sentinel Surveillance of Sexually Transmitted Infections (VICITS) clinics across the country, revealed low coverage of HIV testing and counselling (HTC), including self-testing and linkage to prevention services; limited access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and STI treatment; and high prevalence of syphilis among these three populations.

Colectivo de Amigos contra el Sida CSO received technical and financial assistance to disseminate digital information on HIV prevention, care, and treatment services, with emphasis on key populations in VICITS clinics. These messages were viewed by 600 clients at the clinic every month raising their awareness around these issues while an additional 881 people received these messages through a digital campaign. The organization was also supported to scale up its community-led PrEP services for men who have sex with men through synergy with the Global Fund and CDC programmes. This effort helped increase the number of people accessing the PrEP services from 148 in 2019 to 1227 in 2021.

As a result of technical support to the Ministry of Health, the Practical Guide for Health Promotion, prevention, and comprehensive care for internal migrants in transit and returnees with STIs, HIV, Syphilis, Hepatitis B and C was developed to scale up tailored services among this group. The Joint Team also established a partnership with migrant shelters in Guatemala City, hiring social educators which led to improve migrant's knowledge around HIV, STI and COVID-19 prevention and available services. COVID-19 prevention kits were also distributed to 23 713 migrants and people at risk of migration.

The CSO Grupo de Apoyo Xela (GAX) was assisted to help address the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the health and safety of vulnerable and key populations. As a result, 140 people living with HIV from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community received hygiene and prevention kits. An additional 500 people were sensitized on HIV and COVID-19 prevention and services while 160 teachers from Quetzaltenango city were trained on prevention of sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV), with a focus on LGBTI persons.

GENDER INEQUALITIES AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Joint Programme supported the CSO Red Multicultural de Mujeres Trans de Guatemala (REDMMUTRANS)—a civil society organization working on protecting the rights of transgender women—to conduct community-led monitoring in Guatemala, Escuintla, Izabal, Quetzaltenango, Peten, Suchitepéquez and San Marcos departments. Results showed the need to improve access to information and HIV prevention and care services as well as on COVID-19 prevention, care, and vaccination among populations at risk, including transgender women. As a result of the monitoring process, a strategy was developed to strengthen services to address the need of young transgender women in Guatemala, including care during harmonization phase.

In 2020, the Joint Team established a partnership with for garifuna and afro-descendant women's civil society organizations to address stigma and discrimination and scale up gender sensitive and equitable HIV prevention and SGBV services. Another partnership with the CSO Asociación Lambda contributed to better protection, care, and inclusion of people of concern, including refugees, asylum seekers, and persons in-transit with international protection needs using a gender and diversity approach.

Technical support to the Food and Nutrition Security Secretariat (SESAN) led to the reactivation of its Gender Unit; implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy; and inclusion of gender and HIV in the updated National Food and Nutrition Security Policy.

HUMAN RIGHTS, STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Under a Joint Team's strategic partnership with the CSO Lideres Profesionales Guatemala to ensure equal access to justice among people living with HIV and key populations, 220 free legal consultations were offered to people living with HIV and people from the LGBTI community living with HIV with human rights violation cases related to their HIV status and/or gender identity. The partnerships further led to the establishment of five new Lideres Profesionales branches in five departments across the country.

In 2021, the Joint Team's collaboration with the CSO Somos Jóvenes Diversos en Acción (SOMOS) contributed to minimize disruption of HIV services among vulnerable and key populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included training of 15 local health promoters improving their knowledge on HIV prevention and services with special focus on gender and human rights issues; connecting 20 gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men living with HIV to ART and care services; and developing and implementing a communication strategy which promoted human rights for people living with HIV and people from the LGBTI community living with HIV—the campaign reached more than 10 000 users.

In 2021, the Joint Team in coordination with the Ministry of Health and VICITS clinics in Coatepeque, Huehuetenango, Retalhuleu, and Zacapa, conducted three micro-enterprising workshops for 250 people living with HIV from rural areas. Tenacious advocacy with the Secretariat of Social Work of the Presidency of the Republic (SOSEP) resulted in the inclusion of elderly people living with HIV in two of the four government social protection programmes.

INVESTMENT AND EFFICIENCY

The Joint Team provided financial and technical assistance for the development and submission of Global Fund funding request, mobilizing US\$ 26 870 644 to support the HIV response for 2021-2023. An additional US\$ 10 697 477 was secured from the Global Fund COVID-19 Response Mechanism to support the COVID-19 response in Guatemala.

Technical and financial support was provided for completion of the National Aids Spending Assessment (NASA) reports for the 2016-2018 and 2019-2020 reporting periods. In 2020, estimated total HIV spending was US\$ 52.84 million, with 53% from domestic-public sources, 16% domestic-private, and 31% international donors. The finding will inform efforts for more sustainable HIV financing.

HIV AND HEALTH SERVICES INTEGRATION

The Asociación para la Investigación, Desarrollo y Educación Integral (Asociación IDEI)—a civil society organization advocating for human development—was supported to develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy to promote HIV prevention services, including pre-and post-exposure prophylaxis, safe HIV testing, and access to condoms and lubricants. Information materials, available in K'iche, Kakchiquel and Spanish languages, were disseminated to reach population from six municipalities of Quetzaltenango. Communities also received information on access to HIV and STIs tests and treatment at the Kabawil health facility, using an appointment system, which led to a 40% increase in clinical appointments at the facility.

The International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC – LATCA) was assisted to rollout the HIV Community Treatment Observatory initiative to improve linkage and access to ART, care, and support services in Guatemala. Findings revealed that only 62% of the 281 interviewed people living with HIV started ART on the same day and 76% of the people living with HIV benefitted of a three-month multi-month dispensing (MMD) of antiretroviral medicines.

The Joint Team, in collaboration with ITPC-LATCA and the International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW) in Guatemala, completed a community-led monitoring of HIV, sexual and reproductive health, and COVID-19 services in 2021. Results showed that 26% of people living with HIV that participated in the survey confirmed interruption of treatment, which was reported to the National AIDS Programme for urgent action.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

The Joint Team guaranteed the inclusion of HIV response in the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2025. Technical support was also provided for the development of the Socio-Economic Response Plan and Multi-Partners Trust Fund proposals, especially in the social cohesion component that included actions focused on women including women living with HIV, transgender women, and female sex workers in the COVID-19 response—contributing towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5, and 10.

In 2022-2021, extensive technical and financial support was provided for the Ministry of Health and civil society organizations for public awareness through the commemoration of the World AIDS Day, 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, and the Zero Discrimination Day. A seminar entitled *Human Rights of Women Living with HIV – Activism on Stigma and Discrimination* raised awareness and galvanized commitment to asserting basic rights among this group. As part of the “Soy Clave” initiative, two seminars raised the need to address stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and transgender people in health settings during the COVID-19 pandemic—in line with SDGs 3, 5 and 10.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Structural inequities, including poverty, food insecurity, gender inequality and SGBV are the greatest barriers in the HIV response. Consorted commitment and effort are needed to scale up HIV services targeting key populations, such as migrants, refugees, displaced people, and transgender women; eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination in health and other social services; ensure HIV-related legal and political frameworks are updated with focus on gender and human rights; and expand gender responsive comprehensive sexual education and school curriculums.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted HIV and health services and programme implementation affecting progress in the HIV response. The Join Team implemented various strategic working mechanism, including virtual programme support, and assistance to community-led services to continue addressing to the needs of people living with HIV during the pandemic. However,

severe limitations of the national HIV and STIs information system, including lack of unique identifier code for users of health services and limited registration of COVID-19/HIV co-infection, as examples, continue to prevent the representativeness, completeness, and quality of HIV data needed to ensure effective national HIV response.

Despite Guatemala's progress towards the 95-95-95 targets, low HIV testing and ART coverage remain key challenges in the national HIV response. There is also slow progress in transition to Dolutegravir-based regimen and expansion of sustained MMD. Community-led HIV responses are not effectively supported by key state stakeholders and HIV service coverage is low in rural areas and should be decentralized.

Mother-to-child transmission of HIV remains high, and the country continues to face challenges in implementing the national EMTCT of HIV, syphilis and Hepatitis B plan and the Elimination of Mother-to-child Transmission of HIV, Syphilis, Hepatitis and Chagas Disease (ETMI-PLUS) operational strategy supported by the Global Fund. Some of the main challenges include weak coordination between HIV and sexual and reproductive health services, and between the Ministry of Health structures and other institutions, including the Guatemalan Institute for Social Security. Absence of capacity building plans, limited sensitization and result-oriented monitoring of health care staff, and scarce and outdated training processes of health care staff add to the challenge. Similarly, suboptimal estimation of needs and supply chain for HIV tests and other commodities, absence of a quality control culture, low provider-initiated HIV testing and counselling (HTC) among pregnant women, and lack of integration of community partners such as midwives in HTC and health promotion initiatives continued to hamper progress.

Absence of an official operative multisectoral governance national entity to lead the HIV response, including integration harmonization and coordination of the national HIV response, lack of adequate human resources, and delays in the activity approval process impede progress towards global and national targets. Efforts should be made to reactivate the HIV governance body. Extensive support is needed to strengthen technical skills of staff from the Ministry of Health working on HIV and other healthcare services and programming, including sexual diversity, youth participation, and SGBV prevention.

Technical and financial support to the Ministry of Health is needed to strengthen the supply chain management and the estimation of ART, HIV testing kits, condoms, and other supplies. Accelerated efforts are also needed to increase domestic funding and ensure the sustainability of the HIV response in Guatemala. A reformed HIV law is needed in Guatemala as the current law was established in 2000.

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