

# ARGENTINA

*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, coverage of HIV, Syphilis, Chagas and Hepatitis B testing and treatment services for pregnant women are aligned with the Regional Elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (eMTCT) Strategy focused at sub-national level.	<b>SLOW PROGRESS</b>	In cooperation with the Joint Team, planned activities of the Ministry of Health for the prevention of Syphilis, Hepatitis B, and Chagas could not be carried out due to COVID-19. Prevention of HIV mother-to-child transmission services remained active and received technical support from the Joint Team to minimize interruptions. In 2020, HIV mother-to-child transmission rate was at 4% (GAM 2021).
By the end of 2021, capacity of the public health sector is enhanced to prevent loss of follow-up within the treatment cascade and to reduce HIV-related mortality.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	A survey on ART was developed by the Joint Team, along with an action plan to guide the transition process to more efficient ARVs. Self-testing algorithm and online patient monitoring are being strengthened in cooperation with the National AIDS Programme, and multimonth dispensing of ARVs was introduced to support access to treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Epidemiological Bulletin on HIV, Hepatitis and STIs, of an estimated 136 000 people living with HIV in Argentina in 2019, 83% of these knew their diagnosis (113 000); 53% (60 000) of these were under treatment in the public sub-system (which covers only 67% of all diagnosed people living with HIV). According to the latest available data (2018), the AIDS mortality rate is 3/100 000 inhabitants.

<p>By the end of 2021, HIV combination prevention programmes among key populations are scaled-up in regions of greater prevalence and incidence of HIV and STIs.</p>	<p><b>ON TRACK</b></p>	<p>Currently, an average of 4500 new infections are reported per year nationwide (Epidemiological Bulletin on HIV, Hepatitis and STIs). There are testing centres in all the provincial capitals and in most important municipalities. In 2020, the guidelines for combined prevention were updated, supplies were secured and four centres were selected to begin the implementation of combination programmes in 2021 in municipalities committed to signing the Paris Declaration. Research on acceptability of female condoms was carried out and will be shared in 2021.</p>
<p>By the end of 2021, capacity of governmental institutions and networks of key populations and people living with HIV is built to address and prevent all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination.</p>	<p><b>ON TRACK</b></p>	<p>Civil society was supported to advance political agendas and monitor social protection actions and human rights violations in the context of COVID-19, especially among vulnerable populations. The Stigma Index survey was carried out in 2020 with a broad gender perspective.</p>

## JOINT TEAM

UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, ILO, WHO-PAHO, WORLD BANK, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT, IOM, OHCHR

## JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

*The Joint Team provided technical assistance to advance the work in preventing vertical transmission of HIV/STIs, improvements in antiretrovirals (ARVs) prescriptions and dispensing; and the work on developing self-testing protocols. All these contributed to moving the HIV response forward in Argentina in 2020, despite the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Joint UN Team's engagement with civil society has made progress in prevention strategies for key populations and women, including the development of a volunteer network. Efforts to build the capacity of civil society organizations, health providers and networks of people living with HIV made an impact on stigma and discrimination in the country, through influencing political agendas, building evidence, and training those providing services to key populations, to ensure greater recognition and observance of human rights and access to services for all.*

## HIV TESTING AND ACCESS TO TREATMENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE; CAPACITY BUILDING

The development of the new eMTCT diagnosis and treatment guide was supported by monitoring the progress of the response towards eMTCT validation in the priority provinces of Córdoba, Jujuy, Santa Fe and Corrientes. A distance training capsule on rapid HIV and syphilis tests was produced by the Direction of the Response to HIV, STIs, Viral Hepatitis and Tuberculosis of the Nation (Ministry of Health), in coordination with the Joint Team.

The Joint Team provided support to the Ministry of Health to develop HIV self-testing protocols. In addition, the online monitoring information system for patient retention was strengthened, as well as the country's capacity to implement the multimonth dispensing (MMD) of ARVs, through standardizing the process with the National AIDS Programme. MMD reached all patients on treatment in the public system (60% of diagnosed people living with HIV), guaranteeing provision of two to three months of treatment.

The Joint Team supported the implementation of a survey to improve understanding of the current situation of the ARV prescription in the different jurisdictions and designed an action plan that will guide and monitor the transition process towards modern and more efficient ARVs.

Technical support was provided to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Health for Argentina's effective participation in the Quito Process (Chile Chapter) meeting promoting communication and coordination between countries receiving Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Argentina is acknowledged as a champion country in advocating for and modelling good practices to improve the migrant population's access to HIV services.

## PREVENTION

### CAPACITY BUILDING; TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Joint Team provided support to the civil society organization Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM) to carry out a study on the acceptability of female condoms, in cooperation with the Secretariat of Sexual Health, HIV and AIDS from Buenos Aires City. The female condom acceptability study was carried out via virtual tutoring, apps and video conferencing tools. Preliminary results showed an overall percentage of acceptability at 68%. The final report will be published in 2021 to guide a specific policy of the Ministry of Health towards including female condoms among the HIV prevention methods provided by the government.

The civil society organization Ciclo Positivo was supported in the implementation of a monitoring framework for a pilot initiative for the referral and retention of people from key population groups to preventive services. The Joint Team also supported the update of the guide and protocol for the implementation of combination prevention and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), with a focus on combination prevention tailored to each key population. Technical and training needs were identified, and support was provided to build capacity of the civil society organization accordingly, including on the use of the prevention cascade.

## HUMAN RIGHTS, STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

### POLICY DIALOGUE; ADVOCACY; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; CAPACITY BUILDING

Stigma and discrimination due to positive HIV status is still prevalent in Argentina, especially among key populations. The Stigma Index was conducted and completed between September 2018 and July 2020, by a youth network with technical support from the Joint Team. This comprised 948 surveys in four assigned regions and across age ranges, covering analysis of the determinants and barriers to adherence to ART and ensuring a broad and inclusive gender perspective. Disclosure of HIV status is the main indicator of stigma and social discrimination and self-stigma: 16% of participants negatively perceived the disclosure of their serological status to close people (family, friends and partners), and 66% reported not disclosing their serological status to others. The Stigma Index survey also revealed that 30% of participants had doubts about taking an HIV test for fear that other people would know.

Support was provided to the Cuyo University (Province of Mendoza) to develop a curriculum for an online postgraduate diploma within the faculty of Medicine to train future medical staff and other professionals, including educators and civil servants, on comprehensive medical responses to HIV/STIs with a focus on human rights and gender.

Training of trainers' sessions on the prevention and reduction of stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV, adolescents, migrants and key populations were supported in selected provinces (Federal District, Salta, Jujuy, Tucumán, Chaco, Formosa, Misiones). These training sessions had an average of 35 people per session, including health providers, civil society activists, teachers, and are expected to cover 210 people in total in the first semester of 2021.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE**

#### **ADVOCACY; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; CAPACITY BUILDING; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The Joint Team actively participated in developing and implementing a national socio-economic recovery plan, ensuring that the response to HIV and the inclusion of key populations in social protection actions were part of the agenda. Through strong advocacy carried out with the Ministry of Health and in partnership with civil society, a technical standard note was issued and a monitoring system was established to strengthen the ARVs distribution and supply chain in the country. This allowed the implementation of a three-month MMD programme for strengthened adherence to ART for people living with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, civil society organizations working with key populations were empowered and equipped with tools to monitor social protection actions and human rights situations, and to demand social protection and access to personnel protective equipment against COVID-19.

The Joint Team also supported the Direction of AIDS, STIs, Hepatitis and Tuberculosis of the Nation (Ministry of Health) to conduct transparent handling of human rights complaints from people living with HIV and key populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 1875 inquiries and complaints were received from March to September 2020.

During the COVID-19 emergency and associated restrictions, the Joint Team provided support to empower women living with HIV, sex workers and transgender people on HIV prevention, social protection, human rights, and ART treatment adherence. For example, in partnership with an international non-governmental organization, support was provided to distribute food and hygiene products to women living with HIV to prevent COVID-19 infection and ensure good adherence to ART during compulsory social isolation; 170 women received hygiene kits, and 55 food kits were distributed.

The #TejeSolidario Project of the Mocha Celis transgender high school was supported to provide food assistance to 650 people from the transgender and non-binary community, and a community home for children, youth and adolescents living with HIV was assisted to inform and empower its residents on prevention, testing, treatment and care. The Joint Team also built the capacity of a community-based organization to promote access to testing and treatment services and ensure the provision of psychosocial and legal assistance, food assistance and basic hygiene products for young people living with HIV and from the LGBTI community.

The Bonaerense network of people living with HIV was supported technically and financially to develop a national volunteer network in the context of the COVID-19 emergency, engaging 800 people to collect food and hygiene donations, refer people to a medical appointment or treatment, and support victims of gender-based violence (GBV) to seek help and assistance. Over 1300 requests for assistance were received from all over the country using online tools: 59% for food, 24% expressed problems getting their ARV treatments, 11% reported other situations like GBV or drug abuse, and 6% requested psychological support.

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

In 2020, through its joint activities to ensure access to health and protection services for most vulnerable people, the Joint UN Team on AIDS in Argentina directly contributed to the “Leaving no one behind” principle and realization of the 2030 Agenda, under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2016-2020.

The Joint Team continued its support for the decentralization of HIV care to primary health services at the national level, guaranteeing the continuity of services in times of COVID-19 as part of the road map to reach Universal Health Care (UHC) by 2030. The commitment of a greater number of provincial and municipal governments to the signing of the Paris Declaration and the design of action plans further advanced the progress towards the end of AIDS and improving health outcomes in Argentina, with greater horizontal coherence and strengthened involvement of civil society in the monitoring and delivery of services.



PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
<p>COVID-19 has compounded the severe financial crisis Argentina has been facing since mid-2018, and resources have been diverted from the HIV response; HIV and tuberculosis services have not been interrupted, but access in some areas of the country has been difficult.</p>	<p>Advocate for keeping HIV on the agenda and participate in the implementation mechanisms of the socio-economic recovery plan.</p> <p>Support participation of Argentina and civil society networks in high-level meetings on HIV and in the implementation of the new Global AIDS strategy.</p>
<p>Although Argentina has access to generic products, the prices of key ARVs remain high, limiting the stock and affecting the supply chain and delivery of ART services.</p>	<p>Continue discussions with the Ministry of Health and civil society to seek solutions related to the acquisition of more affordable treatments, using mechanisms such as the PAHO Strategic Fund.</p>
<p>Mother-to-child transmission of HIV persists, at 5% between 2011 and 2019, and slightly reducing to 4% in 2020 (GAM data).</p>	<p>Strengthen national capacities in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission and continuing to support initiatives aimed at eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis, hepatitis B and Chagas at the national and sub-national levels. Continue to work with the HIV Directorate and provincial governments to identify barriers to access services and challenges in service delivery.</p>
<p>Low investment on prevention has become more acute and evident with the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in high levels of HIV in key populations, who are initiating treatment at a later stage of the HIV infection.</p>	<p>Strengthen combination prevention in key populations, with the inclusion of PrEP and self-testing; support the implementation of combination programmes in 2021 in the Provinces of San Juan and Tucuman, the Municipality of Mar del Plata, and in the City of Buenos Aires.</p> <p>As part of the Quito Process, support the country in its work to address the challenges related to HIV and migration, especially among women and LGBTI persons.</p>
<p>High levels of HIV-related stigma and discrimination were recorded in Argentina through the 2020 Stigma Index survey, especially among key populations, constituting a major barrier to accessing services.</p>	<p>Provide support to civil society organizations for the monitoring of human rights situations, access to social protection measures and ART for most vulnerable populations.</p>
<p>Health services access different health information systems, depending on the private, semi-private and public health sectors, hindering the generation of reliable strategic information.</p>	<p>Support the national authorities for the integration of private, semi-private and public sectors' strategic information systems on health and HIV, for strengthened monitoring.</p>

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