

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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
Reaching 90–90–90, and 51.9% of adolescents and young people with HIV interventions in target areas.	ON TRACK	75–74–20, with large differences between national and provincial data, in particular in conflict, post-conflict and mining areas. Of an estimated 505 000 people living with HIV, 378 000 knew their status; 546 000 people diagnosed with HIV infection were on ART; and 110 000 people had access to viral load testing, of whom 81 000 had suppressed viral loads (Spectrum 2021).
19 health zones in the provinces of Maniema, Kasai, Kasai Oriental and Kasai Central offer a complete eMTCT and paediatric care package.	SLOW PROGRESS	Nationally, HIV services were available in 4,790 sites in 446 health zones, representing coverage of 25% in 2020 (up from 280 sites in 276 health zones in 2012). The percentage of children living with HIV on treatment in 2020 varies per province: 13% in Maniema, 17% in Kasai, 16% in Kasai Oriental, and 10% in Kasai Central.
70% of female survivors of sexual violence receive holistic care.	ON TRACK	No data available. Gender is integrated across all six pillars of the national HIV Strategy. Pillar 6 calls explicitly for “Support for the implementation of the revised national strategy to combat sexual violence and promotion of the empowerment of survivors of sexual violence in relation to HIV and AIDS”.
At least 90% of young people and adolescents aged 10-19 years have access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, including HIV prevention, testing and care in the 19 target health zones.	ON TRACK	2020 data not available. HIV new infections stood at 23 200 in 2019 (representing a 28% reduction at national level compared with 2015 data).

JOINT TEAM

UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UN WOMEN, ILO, UNESCO, WHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT, FAO, MONUSCO HIV DIVISION

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

Significant progress has been made against the 90–90–90 targets, although there are regional variations in gains across the country. Paediatric care and PMTCT coverage are increasing and are benefiting from partnerships and community-led responses. New HIV infections in young people are gradually decreasing, and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health and comprehensive sexuality education activities are supporting that trend. Consultation and community engagement are building on Joint Team partnerships with government to enforce laws addressing gender inequality, gender-based violence, and stigma and discrimination. Capacity building and direct assistance were also provided to survivors of sexual violence and exploitation, including psychosocial and legal support.

90-90-90 TARGETS**TECHNICAL SUPPORT; POLICY ADVICE**

The Democratic Republic of Congo has made significant progress in the response to HIV, although the 90–90–90 targets were not met by the end of 2020. There is significant variability in programme performance between the 26 provinces and within provinces, especially in mining and conflict-affected areas, where HIV/STI prevalence is higher (e.g. reported treatment coverage ranges from as high as 100% in Tshopo and 95% in Haut-Katanga and Ituri, to as low as 7% in Nord Ubangi, an area with the largest number of people living with HIV).

Guides were developed to support national strategies such as targeted testing and person-centred surveillance, improving case finding at health facilities and in advanced sites among key populations. Support was also provided to increase the geographical coverage of HIV services in areas that received internally displaced persons, refugees and Congolese returnees from neighbouring countries.

Technical assistance was provided for the development of a Concept Note for the Global Fund, which led to a grant of US\$ 657 935 787 for 2021–2023 to support HIV, TB, malaria and health system strengthening activities, including the procurement of drugs and supplies for HIV prevention, testing, treatment and viral load monitoring; capacity strengthening for service quality improvement and civil society engagement; COVID-19 mitigation; enhanced monitoring and oversight.

EMTCT**TECHNICAL SUPPORT; CAPACITY BUILDING; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

All providers in maternity clinics in 156 health zones have had their capacities for paediatric care strengthened. In Maniema province, 58 health facilities are implementing HIV activities in six health zones, with 238 children newly enrolled on ARV and 106 HIV-positive mothers newly enrolled in PMTCT. A Community Mentor Mother programme is led by 60 health agents partnering with peer-mothers, supporting HIV-positive mothers through follow-up home visits to pregnant and breastfeeding women and male partners on ART. An additional 28 HIV-exposed children were introduced to care services through the Community Mentor Mothers programme. In Kasai Central province, 156 health facilities are implementing HIV activities in 13 health

zones, with 63 HIV-exposed children born to HIV-positive mothers, 33 of whom received early infant diagnosis support in the past year. Through the Global Fund-supported PMTCT programme, 3,379 pregnant women in Kasai and Kasai Central were tested for HIV, and everyone who tested HIV-positive began treatment.

Supervision of the National AIDS Programme HIV monitoring in provincial health divisions was organized in health zones with support from the Joint Team, while provincial management teams were supported at the national level. An online platform was enabled to improve paediatric care in two hospitals and four maternity clinics in Kinshasa. It was used to train 85 health staff and sensitize 107 pregnant women to improve PMTCT outcomes. A nutritional status assessment revealed that 10.7% of pregnant women were suffering from acute malnutrition, and 7,167 pregnant women treated at antenatal care clinics in three provinces were sensitized and tested for malnutrition.

PREVENTION IN YOUNG PEOPLE **CAPACITY BUILDING; TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

In 2019, about 23% of people living with HIV in the country were aged 10–24 years (SPECTRUM 2020 estimates); new infections among them are declining slowly. Harnessing new technologies for effective interventions, a chatbot and a youth-friendly "Kitumalni" mobile app were developed, reaching 200 000 adolescents and young people with sexual and reproductive health information, including on HIV prevention.

Teachers from 160 schools were trained to provide comprehensive sexuality education, and equipped with manuals; 25 000 adolescents and young people benefited from this initiative and about 9 500 of them also accessed HIV services near their schools.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND PROTECTION **CAPACITY BUILDING; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS**

The capacity of 542 people (141 health-care providers, 107 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, 56 people living with HIV, 68 community relays, 61 community leaders, 25 key persons, and 84 adolescents/young people) was strengthened in the areas of human rights and HIV, sexual and reproductive health, gender and nutrition. In addition, 109 survivors of sexual violence and other human rights abuses benefited from psychological and legal support from lawyers and social workers at the legal clinic, which is supported by the Joint Team. An online and mobile app "YEBA MIBEKO" is enabling access to legal information and advice, and facilitating the collection and management of user qualitative and quantitative data.

In Goma, 140 girls living on the street and exposed to sexual exploitation received psychosocial support, alternative shelter options, health education, nutritional support, resilience kits including personal hygiene items. More than 300 street children (including 161 girls) agreed to join foster families or specialized institutions, or return to their own families for protection.

Working in collaboration with the Ministry in charge of Social Affairs and Gender, partnerships were created with women's groups, youth, media and local authorities to advocate for stronger action, the enforcement of protective laws and to ensure support for women and families affected by gender-based violence.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

A successful application was made to the Global Fund, resulting in a US\$ 55 million grant to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on people living with HIV, TB and malaria. Support was provided for the development of HIV contingency plans for COVID-19 at national level and in some provinces. Gender and HIV sensitivity was integrated into the COVID-19 contingency plan in North Kivu.

MMD of ARVs was implemented for all people living with HIV. This strategy was introduced in early 2020, prior to COVID-19. It will continue to be expanded, given its effectiveness in preserving continuity of access to treatment among stable patients.

Awareness-raising sessions on prevention were conducted by community relays, and COVID-19 prevention kits were distributed to key populations, people living with HIV, people living with disabilities, legal clinics and prisons. In Goma, 2,165 street children (including 530 girls) were sensitized on HIV and COVID-19.

Support was provided for COVID-19 preparedness and response in nine health zones that received refugees, including equipping five laboratories with GeneXpert machines for biological testing, cascade training/briefing of 565 service providers, 1,208 community relays, 46 media personnel and 2,267 radio spots for COVID-19 and HIV communication. Fifteen thousand HIV tests were procured for provider-initiated testing and counselling and PMTCT, 879 500 masks were produced, and 15 800 COVID/HIV leaflets and 23 000 posters were distributed. Combined HIV/COVID-19 awareness reached almost 1.7 million people (over 544 000 refugees, 1.1 million internally displaced people and over 39 000 people in the local population).

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

Across the country, community groups played a key role in responding to the COVID-19 epidemic, many of which initiated income-generating activities producing and selling protective masks. In addition, 1,260 girl-mothers received vocational training for socioeconomic reintegration at centres in Goma, Kinshasa and Lubumbashi.

Recurring humanitarian and other crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo (insecurity, Ebola epidemics, measles, cholera) were exacerbated in 2020 by COVID-19 and sociopolitical tensions. Work of the Joint Team in Kasai enabled the implementation of HIV-sensitive humanitarian population integration into provincial development programmes through workshops, and technical and financial assistance and capacity building, under the leadership of local government.

PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
<p>COVID-19 restrictions delayed or prevented planned activities and reduced the availability of authorities, implementing partners and resources. Additionally, activity implementation in some areas was hindered by insecurity, inter-community conflicts, movement restrictions and road conditions/flooding, all of which led to low coverage of HIV and COVID-19 services in affected areas.</p>	<p>Focus on the inclusion of key populations and most vulnerable groups in the implementation of interventions, particularly in areas prone to recurrent humanitarian crises.</p> <p>Advocate for the integration of HIV in humanitarian contingency plans and anticipate/prepare for potential crises.</p> <p>Strengthen collaboration with CSOs at community level for service planning, management and monitoring to enhance resilience and durability of programmes.</p>
<p>Only about 37% of children born to HIV-positive mothers were receiving ARVs at the end of 2020.</p> <p>Low resource mobilization due to priority changes (COVID-19, Ebola and other crises) reduced the number of children receiving protection resilience kits from 390 (the original figure in 2020) to 140.</p>	<p>Accelerate paediatric care by expanding PMTCT, index-testing and family-based care, including opportunities for adolescent HIV testing to find more missing children living with HIV.</p>
<p>Conflicts and the pandemic exacerbated cases of sexual violence, especially domestic violence, the persistence of rights violations, and ongoing stigmatization and discrimination.</p>	<p>Promote equal access to integrated services, with a particular emphasis on countering gender-based violence, and the revision of sections of the HIV law that hinder the empowerment of women and young girls.</p>
<p>Targeted testing, although effective, has not led to wider increases in access to testing for adolescents and young people in provinces, other than those targeted.</p>	<p>Promote combination prevention and the use of new information and communication technologies to reach young people and adolescents at high risk. Promote acceleration of viral load testing, which is a weak link in the HIV national response. Support the scale up of strategies that have had a positive impact (targeted testing, person-centered surveillance, PrEP, self-testing, etc.).</p>

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