

# EGYPT

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

## JOINT TEAM

UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNODC, UN WOMEN, WHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT, IOM

## JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

*Injecting drug use remains one of the major drivers of the AIDS epidemic in Egypt. Thus, the Joint Team's catalytic contributions and results predominantly focused on improving and expanding HIV services among key populations; sensitizing communities most at risk on HIV prevention and reproductive health; and building the capacity of facility- and community-based healthcare providers on provision of quality services. Opioid agonist therapy and needle and syringe exchange programmes were introduced for the first time in the country to minimize the risk of HIV infection among people who inject drugs. Integrated HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and harm reduction services were further scaled up in prisons reaching inmates from key population groups. HIV testing and prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) services were integrated into regular maternal and child health services strengthening access to HIV services among pregnant and breastfeeding young girls and women. Various programme monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and capacity building on quality data collection and reporting were conducted to ensure evidence-based HIV programming in the country.*

## HIV TESTING AND TREATMENT

Under the 'leaving no one behind' principle, Egypt continued to scale up voluntary HIV testing and counselling (HTC) services for key populations and other vulnerable groups at higher risk of HIV infection. Subsequently, access to HTC services increased from seven prisons in 2020 to 10 in 2021. Through the technical assistance from the Joint Team, the Comprehensive National Opioid Substitution treatment guidelines, and a minimum package of prison health services for communicable disease were developed. Further, the comprehensive package of HIV prevention, treatment and care services in prisons and other closed settings was translated into Arabic to strengthen accessibility to these services for high-risk populations. Additionally, 4333 people from key population groups accessed HTC and all people diagnosed HIV positive were referred for government-led confirmatory tests and antiretroviral treatment (ART) services.

In 2021, the National AIDS Programme at the Ministry of Health and Population was supported in organizing sensitization initiatives that reached 320 people who inject drugs in rehabilitation facilities. They were provided with comprehensive information on HIV prevention and harm reduction, and subsequent referral to HTC services.

To ensure the safety and health of people vulnerable to COVID-19, including people living with HIV, 37 healthcare professionals were trained on prevention of COVID-19 in closed settings. Personal protective equipment worth US\$ 10 000 was also provided to frontline workers and staff to minimise infections and ensure the continuity of HIV and other essential health services. An estimated 6000 people living with HIV, including vulnerable mothers and children received personal hygiene kits comprising alcohol, chlorine, and hand soap.

### ELIMINATION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION OF HIV

The Joint Team led the establishment of a systematic referral and service pathway between the national HIV screening initiative targeting maternal and child health, and HIV service centres in nine priority governorates of Egypt— Alexandria, Cairo, Dakahliya, Fayoum, Gharbiya, Giza, Minya, Qalyoubia, and Sharqia. This linkage ensured better access to HIV testing and targeted PMTCT services among girls and women during regular antenatal care visits—solidifying sustainability through institutionalized referral mechanisms and interlinkage with civil society organizations (CSOs). The technical guidelines for PMTCT services in prisons were also translated into Arabic and distributed to all PMTCT service sites.

Towards improving access and uptake of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services among women living with and affected by HIV, more than 260 healthcare providers from antenatal care centres and representatives of CSOs across nine governorates were trained to improve their skills on HIV prevention and SRH services, and linking to PMTCT service delivery, pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis packages, and stigma and discrimination in health settings. The trainees collectively reached 6970 young girls and women, including women living with HIV providing them with 10 676 different services, including HIV testing, PMTCT, sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening and treatment, family planning, peer group support, psychological services, legal consultations. and awareness sessions.

Twenty-one workshops were also conducted in 20 governorates reaching 420 maternal and child health focal persons to ensure the implementation of quality PMTCT services in primary health care units.

### HIV PREVENTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND KEY POPULATIONS

Technical support provided to the National AIDS Programme resulted in the introduction of the first targeted harm reduction programmes focussing on opioid agonist therapy (OAT) and needle and syringe programmes (NSP). The programmes aim to reduce the risk of HIV infection among people who inject drugs, which is one of the key drivers of the AIDS epidemic in Egypt. Furthermore, a complete monitoring and evaluation tool has been developed to analyse progress on the implementation of the NSP, including uptake of services, quality of service delivery, and needs assessment; and to scale up evidence-based programmes.

Training was conducted for 24 representatives of non-governmental organizations and 28 community outreach team members to improve their understanding of COVID-19 prevention and providing support services for key populations, including people who inject drugs. The trainees mobilized 380 people from high-risk populations to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Twenty-five staff members at national addiction treatment facilities were also trained on HCT and referrals to care and treatment service delivery for people who inject drugs.

Technical support from the Joint Team in the implementation of the Global Fund national grant supported the harmonization of prevention interventions and methodologies. As a result, peer outreach by CSOs reached 5487 (4276 males and 1211 females) persons from key populations in four governorates, improving their access to HIV prevention packages, including condom distribution and information on integrated services.

In addition, the Joint Team donated 15 480 condoms to the four CSOs in Alexandria, Cairo, Giza, and Minya to support their HIV prevention programmes and improve access to HIV prevention commodities among at risk populations.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS, STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION, AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

The Joint Team led successful virtual and face-to-face advocacy initiatives during the 2021 World AIDS Day and Zero Discrimination Day commemoration reaching an estimated 272 230 young people in 15 governorates with information on HIV transmission and prevention, and the realities of living with HIV, and stigma in the health care system and social settings.

A two-day workshop was conducted for 130 women migrants and refugees enhancing their knowledge on SRH, HIV prevention, care, and treatment services. Participants also built their capacity around prevention of HIV, gender-based violence (GBV), stigma and discrimination and accessing these services. Another workshop mobilized frontline healthcare service providers from 23 governorates improving their capacity on deliver of stigma and discrimination free services using real life scenarios. Stigma-focused capacity building trainings were carried out for 35 medical team members in three main hospitals to enhance the quality of services with a focus on stigma.

### **INVESTMENT, EFFICIENCY, AND INTEGRATION**

In 2021, the National Programmes were supported by the Joint Team in the development and submission of the Global Fund grant proposal for the 2022-2025 period, mobilizing US\$ 5 270 000 to support the national HIV response, including harm reduction, stigma elimination, capacity building, and strategic information efforts. The Joint Team also provided extensive support to the COVID-19 mitigation response in the country, including through the Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism.

In collaboration with the National AIDS Programme, the Joint Team developed a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for HIV prevention programmes to improve the quality of strategic information to support planning, implementation, and evaluation of the national HIV response. This will provide the Government, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and development partners with integrated data collection, measuring and reporting tools, indicator definitions which are a prerequisite for an integrated and evidence-based health delivery system. Meanwhile, a series of workshops were organized to strengthen standardization of data collection and reporting among all national stakeholders. The workshops built critical skills of 54 representatives from CSOs and the National AIDS Programme, including on data collection tools, indicator calculation tools, reporting forms, and linkages with partner service providers in different governorates.

Technical assistance was also provided in designing the monitoring and evaluation framework for the national maternal and child health programme to strengthen integrated services, including HIV and SRH services, thereby emphasizing the importance of taking HIV out of isolation, while integrating national health delivery initiatives.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA**

The Joint Team in Egypt continued to actively execute its country support under the United Nations Partnership Development Framework (UNPDF) 2018-2022, which is anchored on four pillars—economic inclusive growth, social justice, environmental sustainability, and women's empowerment. The UNPDF had been developed to support the Sustainable Development Strategy: Egypt Vision 2030 that aims to ensure the health, wellbeing, and prosperity of Egyptian people and attain the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda focussing on economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Through the UNPDF, the Joint Team provided pertinent technical and financial support reinforcing Egypt's progress

towards the 95-95-95 targets aimed at ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. These included strengthening of health systems and supply chain, capacity and knowledge development, and resource mobilization resulting in scale up of HIV, SRH, and opioid agonist therapy services for all citizens, particularly key populations, in line with the leave no one behind principle and SDGs 3, 5, 8, 10, and 17.

People living with HIV have been prioritized in the UNPDF and the Egypt Vision 2030 and results of this inclusion have been demonstrated in several areas including the implementation of the COVID-19 response where the Joint Team supported expansion of health and social protection services for vulnerable populations—in line with SDG 10.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic brought considerable challenges to the HIV programming. Large scale outreach initiatives targeting vulnerable and key populations, including prison inmates were delayed due to the pandemic. Inadequate funding for the HIV response remains a challenge, and prioritization of funds towards the COVID-19 response further strained the already scarce human and financial resources for HIV programmes in the country.

A lack of updated national-level surveys, such as Integrated Bio-Behavioural Surveillance (IBBS) continue to hinder the provision of evidence-informed services. Weak data collection in prison health clinics impedes implementation of policy and programmes backed by strategic information to improve the health of people at higher risk of HIV infection and reduce the spread of the virus.

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