

INDIA

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
An estimated 93% of all people living with HIV know their status, 87% of all people living with HIV who know their status are on antiretroviral treatment (ART); 95% of pregnant women living with HIV are receiving ART for life.	ON TRACK	By end 2020, about 78% people living with HIV knew their HIV status, of whom 84% were on treatment; 88% of those on treatment achieved viral suppression. 53% of pregnant women living with HIV were receiving ART to reduce the risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV—a slight decline from 68% in 2019 due to challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic (GAM 2021).
Increase HIV prevention coverage to 93% among female sex workers, 76% for people who inject drugs, and 60% among men who have sex with men and transgender people.	ACHIEVED	In 2020, an estimated 96% of female sex workers, 85% of men who have sex with men, 90% of people who inject drugs, and 77% of transgender people received HIV prevention services (GAM 2021).
Domestic resources cover 80% of the annual national budget for the HIV response.	ACHIEVED	The Government of India covered 80% of the total budget for the HIV response during the 2020/21 fiscal year (National Aids Control Organization (NACO) and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), 2020).

JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO, WORLD BANK, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

In 2020, the Joint Team in India made extensive contributions to the overall national HIV response and expansion of HIV services at states level, especially in Gujarat. Strong advances were made in scaling up HIV testing and treatment services using decentralized, community led, and Differentiated Services Delivery Models—in Gujarat alone more than 70 000 people living with HIV were receiving their ART through these models during the COVID-19 pandemic. Intense advocacy and technical assistance resulted in the adoption of Dolutegravir as a preferred first line of treatment. Thousands of maternal and child healthcare providers were trained to improve prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and keep mothers alive and healthy. The Joint Team supported expansion of HIV prevention and mental health counselling services among young people and key populations, reaching over four million young people from the LGBTI community online. Technical assistance was provided for the implementation of a pilot pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) programme tailored for men who have sex with men in Delhi and Maharashtra states. Specific support has also been provided to strengthen strategic information to guide the national HIV response, which included completion of the 2019 HIV estimates and the Behavioural Surveillance Survey-Lite 2020.

HIV TESTING AND TREATMENT

ADVOCACY; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS

In 2020, the Joint Team collaborated with the Gujarat State AIDS Control Society (GSACS), and the Gujarat State Network of Positive People (GSNP+) to expand community-based HIV testing services among workers in the diamond, textile, and transport sectors. As a result, 4500 workers were sensitized about HIV testing and 1123 opted for HIV community-based screening services while 35 workers chose facility-based testing. Out of these tests, a total of 166 people were found positive for HIV, and all were linked to ART services. Support to the Gujarat AIDS Awareness and Prevention Unit allowed for 8054 migrant workers (6363 male and 1691 female) and 3116 daily wage labourers (2697 male and 416 female) to test for HIV in 78 health camps and 11 workers who tested positive were linked to treatment services.

Following extensive advocacy and technical support, Dolutegravir (DTG) was adopted as a preferred first line treatment regimen. Support was also provided for the development of a transition plan comprising DTG forecasts and rollout of community-led consultations to improve knowledge of DTG among people living with HIV; its implementation under the leadership of the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), the Joint Team and civil society organizations, is well underway.

To improve the HIV treatment programme in India, detailed national guidance and plans for AIDS-Defining Malignancies (ADM) and Differentiated Service Delivery Models (DSDM) were developed and submitted for approval in 2021. The Joint Team also supported the state-level review of the Care, Support and Treatment programme on HIV in Gujarat, which highlighted the need for more decentralized and community-led service delivery. In response, new differentiated models are being put in place to address these issues and ensure continuity of care with greater treatment adherence among people living with HIV. Capacity building was provided for 1800 state and regional colleges in Gujarat and other states improving their proficiency in running and monitoring online trainings on HIV Care Support and Treatment.

In Gujarat, the state AIDS authority was supported to scale up HIV counselling and testing for pregnant women. As a result, around 1 001 422 pregnant women were tested for HIV—more than 95% of annual target—and the 300 pregnant women who tested positive for HIV were linked to prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) services. Nationwide, more than 6000 private gynaecologists and paediatricians received online training improving their capacity on eMTCT and early infant diagnosis, thanks to the support from the Joint Team, the Global Fund primary recipients, and other professional associations in the country. Social and behaviour change communication tools on eMTCT were prepared with technical and financial assistance from the Joint Team and used to develop public messages, including social media and communication strategies.

HIV PREVENTION

ADVOCACY; POLICY ADVICE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In February 2020, the Joint Team provided technical and financial support to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) for the national launch of the School Health Programme (SHP)— which includes comprehensive information, psychological support, commodities, and services, including HIV prevention and care module tailored for adolescents in schools. A training guideline and e-learning packages were completed for the SHP, and a national SHP master training of trainers was initiated in 30 States and Union Territories and 191 districts. So far, 90 national and 1800 state resource group master trainers were trained on SHP thematic modules. To support the SHP, 56 animation videos in Hindi and English based on 11 case studies, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV issues were developed and disseminated aiming to benefit 1.5 million schools across the country.

Meanwhile, support was provided to the Humsfar Trust enabling four million young people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex community to benefit from online HIV counselling and information on prevention, care, and mental health.

A collaborative advocacy with Directorate of Health and Gujarat State AIDS Control Society (GSACS) resulted in improved integration of community led SRH and HIV services. In 2020, HIV and SRH services were integrated within the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) programme and the Link Workers Scheme serving vulnerable village populations in rural areas in nine districts of Gujarat. 6833 outreach workers from ASHA, Link Workers Scheme and Targeted Intervention programmes were trained on integrated HIV and SRH service delivery and 226 outreach workers from Targeted Intervention received SRH commodities. So far, 1346 people from key populations and people living with HIV benefitted from integrated HIV and SRH services in Gujarat.

The roll out of PrEP is well underway thanks to technical assistance and advocacy from the Joint Team. PrEP national guidelines were developed in partnership with communities and health providers, and a pilot PrEP project targeting men who have sex with men is being implemented in Delhi and Maharashtra states by the Indian Council of Medical Research and with support from the Joint Team.

In 2020, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment with technical assistance from the Joint Team initiated an impact assessment across 12 States and documentation on the progress of the National Drugs Free Campaign in 272 districts. Support was also provided for the development of a training manual on drug use and HIV for law enforcement officials to build their skills in handling harm reduction mechanisms. The IBBS in prisons of Gujarat was finalized and results were disseminated to advocate for the implementation of harm reduction services in prisons in the Gujarat State.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

POLICY DIALOGUE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS

The Joint Team provided technical assistance for NACO to integrate HIV in the National Health Mission, maternal and child health, SRH, tuberculosis, and hepatitis programmes and ensure sustainability of HIV services. NACO was also supported to scale up access to social protection schemes for people living with HIV and key populations. Capacity building of states officials working on HIV improving their skills on social protection measures in 15 states of India is underway.

The Joint Team provided technical and financial support for the development of a successful Global Fund grant proposal 2021-24 which includes a) HIV, tuberculosis, hepatitis and STI interventions for prisons and closed settings across India; b) a differentiated prevention outreach model; and c) HIV testing virtual outreach models for key populations. The grant proposal mobilized US\$ 500 000 to support the national HIV response.

To ensure successful implementation of the Strengthening Overall Care for HIV project (Project SOCH), the Joint Team, supported training for 15 000 users of the platform that is expected to benefit 1.5 million beneficiaries. Project SOCH is a single HIV monitoring, evaluation and future surveillance platform funded by the Global Fund that facilitates patient follow-up across facilities and services and undertake cross analysis of data.

In 2020, the Joint Team provided technical and financial support NACO, the Indian Council of Medical Research and the National Institute of Medical Statistics to strengthen strategic information for the HIV response in India. Results from this assistance included, i) publication of the 2019 HIV estimates, the 2019 HIV Sentinel Surveillance (HSS), the Behavioural Surveillance Survey-Lite 2020, and the 2020 Sankalak reports; ii) development and publication of an operational manual for the Programmatic Mapping and Population Size Estimation (p-MPSE) of key populations; iii) facilitation of training workshops for 60 professionals on the 2020-21 HSS Plus and the p-MPSE; and iv) development and dissemination of 11 technical briefs translating primary research data and secondary data analysis into programmatic recommendations to improve HIV response in India.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Advocacy by the Joint Team and civil society organizations led to the development and implementation of new guidance and policies ensuring continuity of HIV services during the COVID-19 pandemic. These included scale up of community-based HIV testing and multi-month dispensing of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs); decentralization of ARV dispensation, including community delivery of ARVs and establishment of community refills initiative—in Gujarat alone more than 70 000 people living with HIV were receiving ARVs through this method; procurement and delivery of personal protective equipment for people living with HIV and key populations; expansion of infection prevention services at ART centres; and scale up of take home doses services for people enrolled in opioid substitution treatment (OST) programmes.

In April 2020, the Joint Team supported the network of people living with HIV to conduct a rapid assessment on the implementation of these new policies and availability of ARVs. The survey revealed that 88% of people living with HIV received their ARVs through the multi-month dispensary programme and 91% said they had some support enabling them to obtain their ARVs.

As a result of technical support provided for the National Coalition of People living with HIV in India (NCPI+), a ten-point advocacy charter targeting government decision-makers was developed based on the COVID-19 pandemic related challenges faced by people living with HIV, and their possible solutions. The advocacy effort led to the implementation of the HIV Act and the establishment of Ombudsman offices. Moreover, technical support to networks of people living with HIV and key populations in the development of the Global Fund grant proposal secured US\$ 10 million to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of people living with HIV and persons from various key population groups, including female sex workers.

Technical assistance was provided to enroll 31 101 people living with HIV and persons from key populations to a newly establish COVID-19 social protective schemes. In addition, around 400 unemployed people living with HIV in six targeted States received dry food, allowance for transportation to ART services, and capacity building training to initiate income generating activities during the pandemic, thanks to a collaboration between the Joint Team, GSNP+ and NCPI+. The Joint Team also supported the establishment of a self-help group of 20 people living with HIV mostly women, who were trained and provided with seed money to start small businesses.

In Gujarat, community sensitization campaigns were supported to reach 6300 people from key population groups and 8802 people living with HIV improving their knowledge around HIV, SRHR, and COVID-19. Information, education, and communication materials on HIV, SRH, and COVID were developed to create awareness among key populations.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

The Joint Team participates actively to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, the UN Business Operating Strategy, and the Joint UN COVID-19 response. The Country Team is using the UN INFO dashboard for joint reporting towards achievement of the SDGs.

Following the adoption of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, the Joint Team supported the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and facilitated extensive multisectoral consultations to finalize the Transgender Persons Rights Rules. A National Transgender Council was also established to empower transgender people and protect their health and wellbeing through increased access to social protection schemes and skills building programmes.

PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
<p>In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacted the HIV response in India, including HIV prevention, care, and treatment service delivery, retaining people living with HIV on ART, and access to HIV counselling and testing services—in areas with low HIV testing progress. Livelihoods of people living with HIV and key populations have also been gravely affected by the pandemic.</p>	<p>Support the social entrepreneurship projects among people living with HIV and key populations to mitigate impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods.</p> <p>Continue technical support to improve HIV and mental health services through Differentiated Service Delivery Model and livelihood projects; and strengthen social safety networks.</p> <p>Strengthen the capacity of networks of people living with HIV and key populations to respond to COVID-19 waves of infection, including increasing awareness and access to personal protective equipment, food, and transportation, and capacity building on testing, tracing, and treatments.</p>
<p>High rates of lost to follow up and low access to viral load testing impede the HIV response, especially among children and adolescents.</p>	<p>Provide technical support to implement the advanced disease management and DSDM strategy.</p> <p>Continue supporting the Government to implement the new DTG transition guidelines and provide technical assistance to strengthen and expand access to viral load testing.</p> <p>Technically assist the revision of the food and nutrition guidance for the national HIV response.</p>
<p>Stagnating budget for NACO and increasing HIV services coverage remain a challenge in sustainability of the HIV response.</p>	<p>Provide technical support to improve integration of HIV, SRH, adolescent health, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and mental health and OST services in the National Health Mission and prison system.</p> <p>Support the scale up of community systems strengthening efforts, including community-led monitoring.</p> <p>Provide technical support to generate and use more granular strategic information, to guide HIV programming, particularly among key populations at district level; continue to support the SOCH project.</p>
<p>Progress towards reduction of new HIV infections remains slow. There is also a lack of national HIV prevention coalition to advance efforts around prevention.</p>	<p>Support the national initiative on District Strategic Interventions Approach to fast-track HIV prevention coverage in high HIV burden districts.</p> <p>Advocate and provide technical support for a reduction of the age of consent for HIV testing from 18 to 15 years.</p> <p>Provide coordinated and systematic technical support to strengthen the national HIV prevention strategy, including scale up of virtual prevention interventions, PrEP, HIV self-testing, community-based and partner's testing, and differentiated prevention strategies.</p>

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