

JAMAICA

Report prepared by the Joint UN Team on AIDS

JOINT TEAM

UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UN WOMEN, WHO-PAHO, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020-2021

In Jamaica, the Joint Team contributed to the national HIV response through a wide range of collaborative efforts with the Government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and communities. Technical support was provided to enhance strategic and evidence-based planning, monitoring and evaluation of HIV programmes and ensure access to innovative services among key populations, including adolescent and young people and transgender persons. Standard operating procedures and a referral pathways protocol were developed to scale up the multisectoral response to gender-based violence (GBV), that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Intense advocacy and technical assistance led to the establishment of Jamaica's first shelter for women and children who are survivors of domestic abuse and GBV with a range of support and referral services. An online scorecard was launched to ensure an enabling environment for promotion of human rights and monitor progress towards elimination of stigma and discrimination+. Strategic partnerships were formed with networks of people living with HIV and public and private institutions to create stigma-free spaces in Kingston City.

HIV PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

The National Family Planning Board (NFPB) was supported to complete and validate the Comprehensive Condom and Lubricant Programming National Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and implementation plan to improve access to prevention commodities and reduce sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and unintended pregnancies in Jamaica. Anchored on a ten-step approach, this strategy will reinforce the country's progress towards the global and national targets and the pursuit of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) that provides differentiated and patient-centered, rights-based health care.

In partnership with NFPB, a Chatbot is being developed to improve access to HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and referrals to existing counselling, care, and support services for adolescents and young people.

Networks of people living with HIV were supported to conduct a series of online surveys, key informant interview and service mapping to identify the impact of COVID-19 and the needs and among people living with and affected by HIV in Jamaica. One of these surveys focused on gathering information about the main perceptions, willingness, and concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine among people living with HIV. Results revealed that approximately 20% did not feel they were informed at all about the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, only 27% reported that they would take the vaccine if offered, 18% reported that they would not take the vaccine,

3 in every 10 people living with HIV said they were undecided, and 1 in every 4 people living with HIV confirmed they needed more information to make decision. The results of the survey informed ongoing community-led COVID-19 vaccination promotion initiatives.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Standard operating procedures, referral pathways protocol were developed and validated; and a Memorandum Understanding was signed between the UNFPA, the Bureau of Gender Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Education and Youth, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and the Child Protection and Family Services Agency to support implementation of a multisectoral GBV response through rigorous consultations with government stakeholders, civil society organizations, and women's rights advocates.

The Government was supported to develop a national shelter strategy, comprehensive guidelines, and tools with lessons from the Essential Service Package implementation across the region. The first national shelter for women and children who survived gender-based and domestic violence was inaugurated in 2021. The women survivors of GBV and their children who have been housed here started accessing holistic in-house support and referrals to external services at the shelter. Operationalization of a second shelter was completed to start accepting clients from January 2022.

HUMAN RIGHTS, STIGMA, AND DISCRIMINATION

Persistent advocacy resulted in the Government of Jamaica, through the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoHW), formally joining the Global Partnership for Action to Eliminate All Forms of HIV-Related Stigma and Discrimination (Global Partnership).

Technical support was also provided for the development of an online scorecard for Enabling Environment to Promote Human Rights (EEHR) to strengthen compiling, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of stigma and discrimination indicators.

Transwave Jamaica—the first nongovernmental organization (NGO) in the country solely dedicated to promoting the right to health services among transgender and gender non-conforming communities in the country—was supported to actively participate in the development of the National Transgender Health Strategy and advocate for its implementation. A desk review of existing legislation and needs assessment were also conducted to identify the needs of transgender people, including social determinants of access to health services. Key findings indicated low literacy, high unemployment and low paying jobs, fragile relationships, low access to health and social services, unsteady living arrangements and urban migration due to stigma and discrimination. These results were used to inform the National Transgender Health Strategy that seeks to promote evidence- and rights-based healthcare, education, research, public policy, and dignity for transgender and gender non-conforming people.

The Joint Team further supported the Government and civil society partners by providing technical guidance on human rights programming, monitoring, and evaluation, including multi-partner platforms such as the National Family Planning Board (NFPB) Technical Working Group on Enabling Environments, the Legal and Policy Review Committee, and the Civil Society Forum. Support was further provided to Members of Parliament to convene a first dialogue session aimed at creating a bipartisan parliamentary caucus that would prioritize human rights.

Under the Fast-Track Cities initiative in Kingston, the Joint Team established a partnership with the Jamaican Network of Seropositive (JN+) to create stigma-free spaces in the city. The stigma-free space programme entailed certification of public places, including health, education, business, services, entertainment, culture, sports, and worship centres through a revision of internal policy to ensure responsiveness with principal guidelines of non-discrimination, sensitization of the workforce, and public declaration of commitment against stigma and discrimination. The Kingston and Saint Andrew Municipal Corporation (KSAMC) became the

first entity to be certified as a stigma-free space. As part of its commitment, the Municipal Councillors at KSAMC approved a city resolution declaring World AIDS Day as a day of public interest and mobilized public and private buildings to participate in the “Lighting Kingston Red” initiative, and a place a mural titled “Living Positively with HIV” on a building in downtown.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

In 2020-2021, the Joint Team made significant contributions towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 17, and 18. These included the inclusion of people living with and affected by HIV in government- and community-led programmes. For example, through the Spotlight Initiative, the capacity of civil society organizations was strengthened to better respond to GBV cases and address the needs of most marginalized communities, including women living with HIV, sex workers, transgender people, and gender non-conforming persons in the context of HIV. A mobile app was developed and launched to provide survivors of violence with life-saving information, services, and referrals to local government and NGO services.

Collaborative support was provided to integrate activities addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination in the broader human rights agenda through technical assistance for the Universal Periodic Review, and advocacy to the Legal and Policy Review Committee chaired by the NFPB for the revision of government briefs on human rights related priority policy issues.

Intense advocacy and technical support also led to the development of the National Comprehensive Transgender Health Strategy. Efforts are needed to ensure the implementation the strategy aimed at addressing the needs of the target population beyond the HIV and health realms and tackle the social, economic, and political determinants to poor health outcomes, while recommending innovative interventions.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 pandemic elevated health and social expenditures, and decreased inflows of tourism and remittances—putting a significant strain on the Jamaican economy. This led to disruption of HIV services, programme implementation and monitoring and shifts in human and financial resources negatively impacting the HIV response and wider social development. Experiences showed that collaborations with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and community-based organization to monitor service delivery, reprioritize critical interventions, and reprogramming, contributed to overcoming the challenges and reinforcing the progress made in the HIV response.

National HIV response data continue to be unreliable. The level of implementation of HIV-related public policy is also unknown in most cases, presenting a knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of current policies.

Stigma and discrimination continue to affect uptake and adherence to HIV services in Jamaica. In 2021, the Joint Team supported civil society organizations to develop and gather public perceptions on a draft anti-discrimination legislation. Some laws and policies continue to exacerbate stigma, discrimination, and violence often going beyond HIV-related discrimination. The lack of a National Human Rights Institute and weak mechanisms to access the judicial system pose significant challenges to implementing catalytic interventions that can have an impact on the broader human rights situation in Jamaica.

The leadership in the HIV response remains fragmented, with limited coordination, coherence, and collaboration overall. HIV prevention and treatment programmes, and monitoring and evaluation activities continue to be led by different units within the Ministry of Health and Wellbeing, while cross-cutting and pilot initiatives are led by the Office of the Permanent Secretary. In response, the Ministry of Health and Wellbeing has proposed to harmonize the national HIV response by re-establishing the National AIDS Council and relocating the HIV prevention and treatment units within the Ministry.

Report available on the
UNAIDS Results and Transparency Portal

open.unaids.org