

# KAZAKHSTAN

*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
Over 60% of key affected populations in Kazakhstan reached with prevention programmes by 2021.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	Prevention coverage of key populations at 53%; (sex workers, 89%; gay men and other men who have sex with men, 15%; people who inject drugs, 55%). (GAM 2021).
By the end of 2021, the national HIV response features specific actions, dedicated resources and monitoring framework to address unequal gender norms as a means to reduce new HIV infections among women and girls, and to enhance access to HIV services for women and girls affected by the epidemic.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	Using the Gender Assessment Tool, the HIV epidemic, context and national response were assessed from a gender perspective, to support the development of the NSP 2021–2025 and the submission to the Global Fund in 2020.
By 2021, 80% of adolescents living with HIV will have their HIV-related health and education needs met, and will be equipped with knowledge to reduce HIV-related stigma and discrimination.	<b>ON TRACK</b>	Government's New Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On population health and health-care system", was approved in July 2020, guaranteeing further rights to people living with HIV, including for testing and treatment, and protection against workplace discrimination.

### JOINT TEAM

UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN WOMEN, UNESCO, WHO, WORLD BANK, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

## JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

*Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Kazakhstan has maintained progress in increasing prevention coverage for key populations, and the UN Joint Team strongly advocated for increased representation and engagement of community-based organizations in dialogues on the national HIV response and its financing. Advocacy, policy advice and technical support further reinforced efforts to address stigma and discrimination and uphold gender equality in the country, with a focus on zero-tolerance for gender-based violence. Through capacity building initiatives, the Joint Team also worked towards delivering quality comprehensive sexuality education for adolescents and building leadership and entrepreneurship skills of young people, including living with HIV and disabilities to increase their employment prospects.*

### HIV PREVENTION

#### UPSTREAM ADVOCACY; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; CAPACITY BUILDING

Technical support was provided to update national standards for STI testing, treatment and care, and support was provided for unit costing, resulting in a 14% budget increase for the National AIDS Programme for the provision of prevention commodities (e.g. syringes, condoms and lubricants) and services for key populations, including LGBTI.

An AI-powered chatbot, "Aspan", was developed in the Kazakh and Russian languages to encourage young people, including young key populations, to access sexual and reproductive health, HIV and STI services for early testing and treatment and PrEP. Currently being tested with over 100 volunteers, the chatbot is expected to reach over 30 000 young people annually once it is launched in August 2021.

Capacity building support and test kits were provided for a newly launched HIV avidity-testing pilot, which complements routine surveillance systems by identifying where newly registered HIV infections occur. It is especially helpful for populations with reporting avoidance due to high levels of homophobia. About 2,600 tests were conducted by the end of 2020.

### GENDER INEQUALITIES AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

#### TECHNICAL SUPPORT; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Technical assistance has been provided to Kazakhstan Union of People Living with HIV to develop a national plan devised from recommendations arising from the 2019 national review by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The National HIV Gender Group, comprising 15 NGOs, was established and supported to meet, aiming to ensure a better representation of women living with HIV and women from among key affected populations in national decision-making bodies.

Technical support was provided to develop a clinical protocol on providing comprehensive health-care services (medical, social, and psychological counselling) to survivors of gender-based violence. In addition, a step-by-step guide for survivors of domestic violence was developed in partnership with the National Commission on Women, Family and Demographic Policy, and disseminated across 17 regions of the country through local police services.

A full training package on sexual and reproductive health and rights, family planning and gender equality, prevention of early marriages and zero-tolerance towards gender-based violence was produced in collaboration with religious leaders. It was submitted for approval by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan for use in the education system of madrasas nationally. It is currently being used in six madrasas for boys.

## ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

### POLICY ADVICE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS; ADVOCACY

Capacity strengthening for comprehensive sexuality education has been delivered through several online training programmes, covering information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and HIV/STIs. Almost 400 secondary school and college teachers, 50 psychologists and 54 professionals from regional youth health centres were reached through these programmes, and more than 6,000 young people are expected to be reached. A total of 4,000 young people across the country received direct online training on their awareness of on sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV, stigma and discrimination, gender equality and violence against women, and to develop leadership skills on these issues.

Advocacy, policy advice and technical support contributed to the Government's new health and health-care system law. It guarantees the right of people living with HIV to adoption on an equal basis with other citizens, protection against discrimination in the workplace, provision of free PrEP and ART, and provision of HIV treatment in prison settings. It also expands free HIV testing to stateless persons, refugees and asylum seekers residing in Kazakhstan.

Technical support was provided for the development of a study protocol and questionnaire for the Stigma Index survey in Kazakhstan. In partnership with the Central Asia Association of People living with HIV, a one-day training was delivered on the Stigma Index for the 17 district AIDS Centres of Kazakhstan to improve the representation and involvement of people living with HIV in the survey.

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

US\$ 899 457 was mobilized from the Global Fund to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations, including for the provision of personal protective equipment for health-care workers and about 30 CSOs delivering harm-reduction services. A rapid needs assessment was conducted among people living with HIV and key populations in the context of COVID-19 to identify communities' most urgent needs.

An online platform for key populations dedicated to HIV and COVID-19 was launched, providing answers to questions related to mental and physical health, and offering free online psychological counselling and support. The service has had 6,000 users. In addition, 64 information cards in the Kazakh and Russian languages were developed and widely promoted, providing learners, parents and educators with tips on how to talk to children and adolescents about COVID-19, particularly for maintaining their physical and mental health and continuing with their education.

Financial support was also provided for a needs-assessment study, conducted by the NGO Revansh, which provides life-saving and gender-sensitive services for women living with HIV. The study reviewed access to health and social services by women affected by HIV during the COVID-19 lockdown. Capacity building support was also provided to train over 250 women as peer consultants on sexual and reproductive health in Almaty and in the Revansh Centre.

Support was provided for an impact study on COVID-19 and its effect on the internet drug trade in the region, which also provided information on popular social platforms in Kazakhstan that can be used for HIV, harm reduction and medical services. Harm reduction and OST sites were supported to mitigate impact of COVID-19 on their activities and patients, including people living with HIV. For example, grocery supplies were provided to 300 OST programme patients. In addition, 32 000 items of personal protective equipment were provided to 388 frontline medical personnel of the Republican Mental Health Centre and its Pavlodar affiliation, which provides emergency medical help to people with the mental health issues and drug use disorders.

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRATED SDG AGENDA

In coordination with the National TB Programme, the Kazakhstan Union of People Living with HIV were facilitated to present their findings on social barriers for women and key populations to accessing quality TB services, in the context of the country's legal environment. Discussions were held on the importance of gender in the context of TB control and the need to improve this aspect of the National TB Programme.

UP-SHIFT skills-based training was organized for 100 adolescents, including adolescents living with HIV (10-19 years), preparing them for employment through the use of advanced learning methods. National leadership and entrepreneurship training was also provided for 31 adolescents, including several living with HIV and disabilities.

PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
<p>Because of the COVID-19 related restrictions, there was reduced access to OST for people who inject drugs; the methadone programme was at highest risk.</p>	<p>Scale up and improve the quality of the methadone substitution programme. Undertake advocacy for procurement of tableted forms of methadone instead of the liquid version. Diversify the regimens of the drugs to be used for OST, and advocate for MMD in OST.</p>
<p>NGO capacity to support PrEP implementation for gay men and other men who have sex with men is very weak, both in terms of service delivery and geographic distribution.</p>	<p>Build capacities of NGOs working with gay men and other men who have sex with men to develop innovative and customized digital solutions to promote testing and PrEP, and increase treatment adherence.</p> <p>Develop and roll out communication activities to decrease discrimination against and self-stigmatization of people living with HIV and key populations, motivating treatment and PrEP initiation and adherence.</p>
<p>The Kazakhstan system for diagnosis and treatment of syphilis is not aligned to WHO recommendations. The national protocol, reporting forms and the database for monitoring and evaluation need revising. Protocol-aligned training and procurement will be required.</p>	<p>Support alignment of the Kazakhstan system with WHO recommendations, including the production of new HIV testing and treatment guidelines. This will support the preparation of a report for certification of eMTCT of syphilis and hepatitis C.</p>
<p>Children and adolescents are unaware of their rights and options: the age of consent (currently 16 years, but 18 years for abortions) to access HIV services and reproductive health services remains an impediment for young people.</p>	<p>Develop a Y-PEER online course to reach more young people with sexual and reproductive health and rights information. Create and promote safe online spaces for young people, educating them on healthy lifestyles and well-being.</p> <p>Further expand to all regions of the country leadership and entrepreneurship trainings for adolescents living with HIV.</p> <p>Further expand UP-SHIFT skills-based training for vulnerable adolescents by including those living with other chronic conditions, disabilities and those left without parental care.</p>
<p>HIV health-services are not integrated into primary healthcare or other national, vertical health-care systems.</p>	<p>Conduct national study on integration of HIV services (AIDS centres) into primary healthcare to promote coherent and holistic services.</p>

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