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Key strategies and approaches to integrate HIV into broader agency mandate

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) promotes human rights-based, public health-focused and gender-responsive HIV prevention, treatment and care services for people who use drugs and people in prisons. It provides technical assistance to Member States on HIV in full compliance with the relevant declarations, resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Commission on Crime Prevention and the Criminal Justice and the PCB of UNAIDS.

UNODC is the Joint Programme's convening agency for HIV prevention, treatment and care for people who use drugs and for ensuring access to comprehensive HIV services for people in prisons and other closed settings. The strategic approach of UNODC is based on focusing efforts and programme delivery in high-priority countries selected in consultation with national stakeholders, including civil society and community-based organizations. The selection process takes into consideration several criteria, including epidemiological data and country readiness to support policy and legislative environments. This allows for essential services, including needle and syringe programmes, opioid substitution therapy (OST), condom programmes and ART, and addresses the resource environment, including international and domestic funding and human resources.

In 2020, UNODC supported 24 high-priority countries in the development and implementation of comprehensive evidence-informed, and gender- and age-responsive strategies and programmes among people who inject drugs based on the WHO, UNODC and UNAIDS comprehensive package of HIV prevention, treatment and care services. UNODC also supported 35 high-priority countries in developing, adopting and implementing strategies and programmes on HIV prevention, treatment and care in prisons, as well as in improving linkages of prison health facilities with community health-care centres. The approach is based on the UN Standards Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and in line with the UNODC, ILO, UNDP, WHO, UNAIDS and UNFPA *Technical brief on HIV prevention, treatment and care in prisons and other closed settings: a comprehensive package of interventions*, which was updated in 2020.

In 2020, UNODC and its partners continued to engage national policymakers, drug control agencies, prison administrations, public health authorities, justice authorities, CSOs (including representatives of people who use drugs), and the scientific community in an evidence-informed dialogue on HIV, drug policies and human rights. This multistakeholder dialogue helps to identify ways in which drug policies can be strengthened to protect the right of people who use drugs for HIV-related health care, including in prisons and other closed settings. UNODC advocated for the removal of legal barriers hindering access to HIV services, including needle and syringe programmes, OST and condom distribution programmes in

prisons, and supported the adaptation of national standard operating procedures for HIV testing services in prison settings. Targeted training and technical assistance for the review, adaptation, development and implementation of relevant legislation, AIDS strategies, policies and programmes was also provided.

Jointly with national and international partners, UNODC supported Member States in effectively addressing HIV at the sixty-third sessions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and the twenty-ninth session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. During these sessions and intersessional meetings, efforts were focused on removing legal and COVID-19-related barriers hindering access to key HIV harm reduction services—particularly needle and syringe programmes and OST, as well as condom programmes in prisons.

In 2020, UNODC continued to contribute to the work of the Global HIV Prevention Coalition, contributing to organizing and participating in the “HIV Prevention with Key Populations, Deep Dives Series”, and chairing the session on “Planning for sustainable HIV prevention responses with Key Populations”.

As the Joint Programme’s convening agency for HIV among people who use drugs and people in prison, UNODC engaged in the development of the *Global AIDS strategy 2021–2026*. In this context, UNODC organized a focus group discussion on HIV in prisons and, jointly with UNDP, WHO, UNFPA and UN Women, a focus group discussion on justice and law enforcement responses.

Contributing to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

UNODC supports the development and implementation of public health-centred, nondiscriminatory HIV programmes for people who use drugs and people in prisons. This is achieved through the promotion of regional and international cooperation towards more equitable drug policies and a concerted, evidence-based response to HIV prevention, treatment and care.

UNODC aligns with the objectives outlined within the SDGs, particularly SDG 3 and its target 3.3, which focuses on ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030. In 2020, UNODC continued to fast-track its global HIV responses across a number of SDG areas, including: implementing HIV services which are gender responsive (SDG 5); advocating for equal access to HIV services for people who use drugs and people in prisons that are human rights and public health-based (SDG 10); promoting the elimination of all forms of discrimination against people who use drugs and people in prisons (SDG 16); and,

teaming up with governments and communities to achieve major reductions in new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths among the key populations (SDG 17).

UNODC and its partners continued to advance global dialogue on, and advocacy for, gender-responsive HIV programmes and equitable access to HIV prevention, treatment and care services for women who use drugs, women in prisons, and for female sexual partners of men who inject drugs. In 2020, UNODC, in collaboration with its partners, initiated the development of measures for monitoring epidemiological trends in vertical transmission in prisons as well as the availability of services provided to prevent such transmission. These joint efforts contribute to improving country capacity for the implementation and provision of the prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) services for women and their children in prisons, and allowing women in prison settings to get access to essential preventative and care services.

UNODC developed the *Technical guide on prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in prisons* jointly with WHO, UNFPA, UN Women, and the UNAIDS Secretariat, and supported its dissemination through the implementation of Train the Trainer workshops in 21 countries from July 2019 to November 2020—including prison populations in their efforts to eliminate vertical transmission of HIV. The training activities strengthened national commitments to identifying and addressing gaps in health-care provision for women in prisons, including PMTCT, and improved collaboration between prisons and public health systems.

UNODC, jointly with WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, UNAIDS Secretariat, and the International Network of People who use Drugs, developed a technical brief entitled *HIV Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis among women who use drugs*¹. This technical guide supports countries in providing high quality HIV and sexual and reproductive health services to women who use drugs and to ensure the elimination of new HIV infections among women and their children.

UNODC, in partnership with ILO, WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS Secretariat and UNDP, published a 2020 updated technical brief—*HIV prevention, treatment, care and support in prisons and other closed settings: a comprehensive package of interventions*—which is designed to support countries in mounting an effective response to HIV in prisons and other closed settings. The brief features updated interventions, including sexual and reproductive health and prevention and the management of drug-related overdose among people in prison and upon release. It was launched at a global virtual event organized jointly with co-sponsors, on “Promoting the Right to Health for People in Prison”, which was held to commemorate World AIDS Day 2020.

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¹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/hiv-aids/publications/People_who_use_drugs/21-01324_PMTC_ebook_rev.pdf

Jointly with WHO and UNAIDS Secretariat, UNODC published a Technical Guide entitled *HIV prevention treatment care and support among people who use stimulant drugs* to provide guidance on implementing HIV, hepatitis C and hepatitis B programmes for people who use stimulant drugs. To support the rollout of the guide in 2020, UNODC adapted training packages to provide workshops virtually in Viet Nam, Afghanistan and central Asia.

UNODC studied the area of new psychoactive stimulant use in six countries of eastern Europe and central Asia to develop a comprehensive HIV response that respects the health needs of this population and that improves reach of HIV testing and ART services. A needs assessment study and an e-guide on HIV prevention were developed on treatment targeting people who use NPS and service providers, to increase awareness and extend their capacity.

UNODC continued to provide technical support to Member States and civil society in implementing comprehensive human rights-based, public-health focused and gender-responsive HIV services for people who use drugs. In Pakistan and Egypt, after years of sustained UNODC advocacy with government agencies, implementation of OST was approved in 2020. This led to the development of an implementing action plan and the design of OST pilot interventions. In Viet Nam, UNODC in cooperation with UNAIDS Secretariat, successfully advocated for the initiation of the take-home OST programme (methadone) after securing Ministry of Justice approval in April 2020. Subsequently, further joint support to the Ministry of Health led to the development of standard operating procedures and training materials to guide the implementation of take-home dose methadone in three provinces. It is anticipated that other provinces will follow.

Jointly with WHO, UNAIDS Secretariat, World Bank, the Global Fund, PEPFAR, and other partners, UNODC contributed to strengthening the existing database on people who inject drugs, including further harmonizing methodological guidance for data collection, monitoring and evaluation of HIV services for this population. The established interagency collaboration in strategic information and production of jointly reviewed estimates have improved global understanding of the quality of current prevalence estimates of injecting drug use and prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs. This collaboration further helped to identify country-specific technical assistance needs. The joint estimates were published in the *UNODC world drug report 2020*.

Across all sectors of the HIV response, community empowerment and ownership have resulted in a greater uptake of HIV prevention and treatment services, as well as a reduction in stigma and discrimination and the protection of human rights. Communities are central to ending AIDS, and community-led successes must be sustained and extended in most parts of the world, based on assessments of needs and gaps. With the objective of cultivating a mutually supportive network of CSOs devoted to HIV prevention, treatment and care among people who use drugs and for prison populations, UNODC Global Programme continued to

support the long-standing civil society groups on drug use and HIV and established the first-ever informal global network of CSOs working on HIV in prisons in 2020.

To empower CSOs, including community-based organizations, to develop and implement quality HIV prevention, treatment and care services for people who use drugs and people in prison, UNODC initiated a grants programme in 2020. Through this programme, UNODC provided funding support to nine proposals from organizations worldwide, to implement projects in three thematic areas: HIV among people in prison; HIV among people who use drugs; and HIV and law enforcement. Activities funded by these grants will be implemented in 2021.

Contribution to the COVID-19 response

People who use drugs are vulnerable to COVID-19 due to underlying health issues, stigma, social marginalization and increased economic and social vulnerabilities—including a lack of access to housing and health care. Prison environments are highly conducive to the transmission of certain diseases. COVID-19 transmission risk is heightened in overcrowding settings with poor ventilation. Despite international standards stating that people in prison have the right to health following the same standards as other members of society—and access to health-care services without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status—infection control measures and health services in prisons in some countries are inadequate.

UNODC, in consultation with WHO, UNAIDS Secretariat and civil society, developed technical guidance documents and infographics on prevention and care for HIV, TB, viral hepatitis and COVID-19, for people who use drugs and people in prison. These materials are publicly available and have been translated and adapted to the national contexts of all UNODC high-priority countries for drug use and HIV and people in prisons.

In collaboration with WHO and UNAIDS Secretariat, UNODC conducted five regional webinars for decision makers and stakeholders to share their experiences and best practices on providing continued access to life saving HIV services for people who use drugs and people in prison, while also implementing COVID-19 prevention and control measures. In collaboration with WHO and Medicines du Monde, UNODC organized five thematic webinars for service providers to support their efforts to operate the HIV services for people who use drugs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNODC supported countries in their efforts to prevent and control COVID-19 in prisons and other closed settings through the procurement of hygiene materials and personal protective equipment for people living and working in prisons—for example, in Moldova, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uganda and Zambia. In addition, to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission in prison settings, UNODC advocated for reducing overcrowding and




promoted alternatives to incarceration measures—for example, in Malawi, Moldova, Myanmar and Zambia—in line with the national policies governing public health and safety.



Jointly with WHO, UNAIDS and the OHCHR, UNODC issued a Joint Statement on COVID-19 in prisons and other closed settings. This called on Member States to ensure at all times the security as well as the health, safety and human dignity of people deprived of their liberty and of people working in places of detention.

UNODC assisted countries to ensure continued access to harm reduction services, including OST, through the implementation of innovative alternatives to traditional harm reduction services—for example, in Belarus, Kenya, Nigeria, Ukraine and Viet Nam—and the implementation of OST take-home dosages—for example, in Kenya, Moldova, and Viet Nam.

UNODC provided technical assistance to law enforcement agencies and respective ministries in the context of COVID-19, emphasizing the necessity to continue providing services and commodities for people with specialized needs. Efforts were made to sensitize lawmakers and law enforcement officials to human rights-related barriers associated with accessing HIV services, for example in Myanmar and Tajikistan.

Knowledge products

	<p><u>Technical Guide on Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV in Prisons.</u> UNODC developed this technical guide jointly with WHO, UNFPA, UN Women and the UNAIDS Secretariat which provides guidance on implementation of HIV services for women and their children in prisons towards ensuring access to high-quality HIV and SRHR services in prisons.</p>
	<p><u>Technical Brief 2020 Update. HIV prevention, treatment, care and support in prisons and other closed settings: a comprehensive package of interventions.</u> <u>This technical brief is designed to support countries in mounting an effective response to HIV and related infections in prisons and other closed settings.</u></p>
	<p><u>UNODC, WHO, UNAIDS and OHCHR Joint Statement on COVID-19 in Prisons and Other Closed Settings.</u> The leaders of global health, human rights, and development institutions, come together to urgently draw the attention of political leaders to the heightened vulnerability of prisoners and other people deprived of liberty to the COVID-19 pandemic, and urge them to take all appropriate public health measures in respect of this vulnerable population that is part of our communities</p>

	<p>COVID response: Technical guidance materials developed by UNODC are available on UNODC web site and are translated and adapted in all UNODC High Priority Countries for drug use and HIV</p>
	<p>Addressing the specific needs of women who use drugs: Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis: The purpose of this technical brief is to provide guidance for the provision of equitable, evidence-informed and human-rights-based services for PMTCT of HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis among women who use drugs, and to support countries in their efforts towards EMTCT.</p>

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