

# URUGUAY

*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
By the end of 2021, HIV combination prevention programmes among key populations scaled-up in regions with higher prevalence and incidence of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).	<b>SLOW PROGRESS</b>	In 2020, initial dialogues were held with the National AIDS Programme (NAP) and civil society organization to identify priority areas and possible actions. However, no further progress was made due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced redirection of resources and personnel to respond to the emergency.
By the end of 2021, capacity of governmental institutions and networks of key populations and people living with HIV built to address and prevent all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination.	<b>SLOW PROGRESS</b>	In 2020, the Joint Team provided support to the Gender Policy Division of the Ministry of Interior, the Secretary of Diversity of Montevideo Municipality, and the Centre for Affirmative Psychology for LGBTI Community to strengthen their capacity to address stigma and discrimination and respond to the needs of LGBTI persons.
By the end of 2021, capacity of governmental institutions built to monitoring prevention strategies and treatment cascades in key populations.	<b>SLOW PROGRESS</b>	Technical support was provided in 2020 to strengthen national surveillance systems and promote their interconnectedness.

### JOINT TEAM

UNFPA, UNAIDS SECRETARIAT

## JOINT PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESULTS IN 2020

*Uruguay accelerated its efforts in scaling up HIV prevention and treatment programmes to achieve the fast-track targets with meaningful gender inclusiveness and inter-sectoral engagement of key populations. The Joint Team continued to strengthen its contribution to the national HIV response by strengthening capacities and enhancing coordination between Government bodies, development partners, civil society organizations, and networks of people living with HIV and key populations. Key programmatic support and achievements included evidence gathering on HIV and sexuality among men who have sex with men to influence public policies and services; capacity building of law enforcement officers on human rights and gender-based violence; and awareness creation among adolescent and young people on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV prevention services. The first survey on social and epidemiological characteristics of migrant people living with HIV was also completed in 2020. The Joint Team's catalytic efforts also extended to the development, implementation, and monitoring of the business continuity plan in the context of COVID-19, and the socio-economic recovery programme which was anchored on the five pillars of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.*

### HIV PREVENTION AMONG KEY POPULATIONS TECHNICAL SUPPORT; STRATEGIC INFORMATION; SENSITIZATION

As a result of support provided to the Infectious Diseases Department of the Universidad de la República (University of the Republic), a digital guide comprising ten main points on sexual exposure to HIV and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) was published and disseminated to healthcare professionals across the country. The guide aims to strengthen knowledge and clinical skills of first level healthcare workers on initiation and management of PrEP among people at risk of HIV infection.

The University of the Republic was also assisted to conduct a behavioural study on sexual health and HIV among gay persons and men who have sex with men, with a focus on young people (14-19 years old). The study analysed the role of impulsivity, self-regulation, and risk-taking in the sexual and reproductive decision-making process among more than 370 adolescents aged 12-20 years (55% female). The results highlighted that the average age of sexual initiation is 15 years; and 9 out of 10 used a condom during their first sexual intercourse. However, 20% declared not having used contraceptive methods in the last six months or in their last sexual intercourse. Preliminary findings were launched, and the virtual launch event shared the study results with strategic stakeholders, including a better understanding on the sexual practices and social representations of men who have sex with men, and key recommendations for HIV-related public policies. These results will inform HIV prevention campaigns and programmes targeting young people. It will also serve as evidence for advocacy to scale up tailored and integrated HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health services in this group.

Awareness-raising initiatives on HIV and COVID-19 prevention were developed and launched reaching an estimated 2500 people, especially young people aged 15-24 years from key population groups, and 5000 people from the general population, particularly from peripheral neighbourhoods of Montevideo on social media and digital platforms on the commemoration of the National HIV Response Day.

Support for community-led activities promoting free and confidential HIV testing and counselling (HTC) services during the World AIDS Day commemoration resulted in 500 people undertaking an HIV test. A total of 215 000 HTCs were conducted in 2020, including during World AIDS Day, which is a 57% decrease from an estimated 500 000 tests carried out in 2019. Despite this decrease in HTC, there was an alarming increase in the positivity rate—from 0.20% in 2019 to 0.40% in 2020 (880 tests yielded positive results in 2020) (data from the National AIDS Programme of the Ministry of Health).

## STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION REDUCTION POLICY ADVICE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) people in Uruguay continue to face stigma and discrimination in their family homes, communities, public places, and service sites. In 2020, the Joint Team provided support to the Gender Policy Division of the Ministry of Interior strengthening its capacity to implement human rights, gender equity and sexual diversity approach in human security public policies. During three training sessions, 150 police and prison officers from Montevideo and sub-national level were fully trained on integrating human rights, gender, and sexual diversity perspective in daily police good practices. The trainees also improved their skills on the promotion of empathetic and violence-free social relationships, including the prevention and response to gender-based violence and hate violence against LGBTI persons.

The Centre for Affirmative Psychology for LGBTI Community (CAPA) at the University of the Republic was assisted to strengthen the capacity of health providers, educators and social workers to address the health, social, and personal development needs of LGBTI people in Uruguay. Supported activities included: virtual trainings focusing on the experience of LGBTI people in terms of identity, childhood, coming out, and access to sexual health and HIV services, including the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and social restriction measures; the finalization of an academic article entitled, "Trying to understand the (not so) unexpected: affirmative accompaniment for mothers and/or fathers of LGBTI young people facing their children's coming out"; and the creation of a video repository with materials to aid future trainings, including reference documents and supporting materials.

The Secretary of Diversity of Montevideo Municipality was supported to produce two publications on the limitations on accessing public spaces at local level, particularly among transgender people. The publications are guidelines that include analyses of the importance of accessible public spaces in a human rights perspective and proposed recommendations for municipal policies that promote social inclusion and assert the basic rights of all people to use public spaces free of stigma, discrimination, and violence.

Technical and financial support was provided to "*Jóvenes Alentando a la vida*"—the network of adolescents and young people affected by HIV/AIDS—resulting in the dissemination of a series of educational multimedia pills on sexuality education and HIV through various social networks and on the Montevideo Municipality Health Division web page reaching 24 first level healthcare centres. The educational pills focused on HIV testing, treatment adherence, U=U concept, human rights, and stigma and discrimination reduction. The network also held expert-facilitated virtual training sessions for healthcare providers, social workers, and activists from civil society organizations improving their knowledge around sexual and reproductive health (SRH), HIV and human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL HIV RESPONSE POLICY DIALOGUE; TECHNICAL SUPPORT; PARTNERSHIPS

The Joint Team continued to provide technical support to the Ministry of Health strengthening national capacity to lead the HIV response and deliver on domestic and global targets. Through this support, the remote longitudinal epidemiological surveillance system was updated and strengthened to improve the quality of data around new infections, access to treatment, and AIDS-related mortality. The system was also interconnected to vital (birth, morbidity, and mortality statistics) databases, within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Financial and technical support was also provided for the compilation of key data from the National Integrated Health System (private and public providers) to assess consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV care continuum and treatment cascade. Preliminary results showed a significant decrease in HIV testing from 2019 due to the pandemic.

In 2020, the first study on social and epidemiological characteristics of migrant people living with HIV was finalized and proposed key recommendations for more effective health care actions. The main findings revealed that 375 migrant people living with HIV (75% male) from Cuba, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil have been integrated into the health system and are currently enrolled on antiretroviral treatment (ART). The report also made recommendations on the need to increase access to HIV prevention, testing and ART services for migrant people. The final report is currently being reviewed by authorities at the Ministry of Public Health prior to publication.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO THE COVID-19 RESPONSE**

The Joint Team supported the Government to ensure the continuity of HIV services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Temporary suspension on non-essential services, re-scheduling of non-emergency clinical procedures, implementation of telemedicine, and early planning of medical supplies, helped maintain critical HIV treatment and care services throughout 2020. Support was provided to ensure timely delivery of ARTs for people living with HIV using home and mail delivery and pick up at a pre-arranged pharmacy. Additionally, 620 female inmates received personal hygiene kits to help prevent COVID-19 infections.

Global scientific guidelines and updates on COVID-19 pandemic prevention and management among people living with HIV, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people with disabilities as well as information on other critical issues, including safe sexual debut, human rights, and violence were distributed to relevant personnel at Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development, and people living with HIV, persons with disabilities, and their families.

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

In 2020, through its joint activities to ensure access to health and protection services for most vulnerable people, including migrants and LGBTI persons, the Joint UN Team on AIDS in Uruguay directly contributed to the “Leaving no one behind” principle and realisation of the 2030 Agenda, under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2016-2020.

PERSISTING AND EMERGING CHALLENGES AND BOTTLENECKS	KEY FUTURE ACTIONS TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND UNBLOCK BOTTLENECKS
<p>The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures resulted in significant social and economic issues, including increased gender-based violence, diversion of public funding for the pandemic response, and reduction of HIV prevention and testing services. Several community-led and facility-based initiatives targeting vulnerable and key populations were cancelled due to social restrictions and lack of funding, increasing their risk of HIV and COVID-19 infections.</p>	<p>Continue to support the Government, civil society organizations and networks of people living with HIV and key populations to ensure continuity of STI and HIV prevention, care, and treatment services and address gender-based violence and human rights violations.</p> <p>Increase advocacy for implementation of the multimonth dispensing (3-6 months) of antiretroviral medicines in all HIV treatment sites to improve access and adherence to ART services.</p>
<p>Recent changes in political leadership required increased advocacy and promotion efforts to secure commitment for scale up of right-based HIV, STI and SRH services for vulnerable and key populations and comprehensive sexuality education for adolescent and young people to reduce early and unintended pregnancy and encourage safe life choices.</p>	<p>Continue to engage senior leadership and high-level authorities to strengthen the national HIV response based on a human rights, gender, and sexual diversity approach.</p> <p>Support civil society organizations in Montevideo and the metropolitan region to strengthen their capacities for political advocacy on the 90-90-90 targets and ensuring the rights of people with HIV and key populations.</p> <p>Provide a joint strategic support to develop and maintain a South-South cooperation between Argentina and Uruguay to scale up right-based and equitable HIV, legal, and social protection services for key population.</p>
<p>There is a gap in the integration of the public and private information subsystems to support the HIV response in Uruguay.</p>	<p>Continue supporting the generation of strategic information to allow more efficient and evidence-based national HIV response.</p>

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