

HEALTH RESULTS 2021

HIV AND AIDS

unicef 
for every child

Lynel, who lives with HIV, with her baby girl Hannah (name changed). She is assisted by SWEAT, a local NGO which advocates for and delivers services to South African sex workers in Cape Town.

CONTEXT

Children living with and affected by HIV are among the most vulnerable individuals in many societies, but we have failed to keep them healthy despite having found the solution to mitigate the virus' impact. Protecting children and their ability to thrive has always been the guiding principle behind UNICEF's mission. The HIV Programme aims to ensure that every child receives equitable access to life-saving HIV prevention and treatment.

Although the HIV response has enjoyed remarkable successes, growing inequalities are leading to far too many preventable deaths. Gender discrimination, the paediatric treatment gap and regional disparities have all contributed to inequalities in access to essential HIV services.

UNICEF WORK AND RESULTS IN 2021

UNICEF's 2018–2021 Strategic Plan for the HIV Programme concentrated on 35 priority countries experiencing the highest HIV burden. UNICEF committed to working with all countries to:

1. Accelerate the provision of treatment and care for pregnant and breastfeeding women, children and adolescents living with HIV.
2. Expand access to HIV prevention services for adolescents.

UNICEF's contribution to results



1.24 million deaths averted among children over the two decades from 2000



54% of children with HIV on treatment in 2020



70% drop in annual number of new infections among children aged 0-9 years from 2000 to 2020



57% drop in annual number of new infections among adolescents aged 10-19 years from 2000 to 2020



More than 48 countries received some forms of technical and financial support from UNICEF to address COVID-related challenges



590,000 COVID-19 testing cartridges procured to integrate testing using HIV POC machines

Reasons for stalled progress in 2021: inequalities that are leaving too many behind



63%
Women and girls

37%
Men and boys

Gender inequality: new infections in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020



54%
Children living with HIV

85%
Pregnant women living with HIV

73%
Adults living with HIV

Antiretroviral treatment inequality

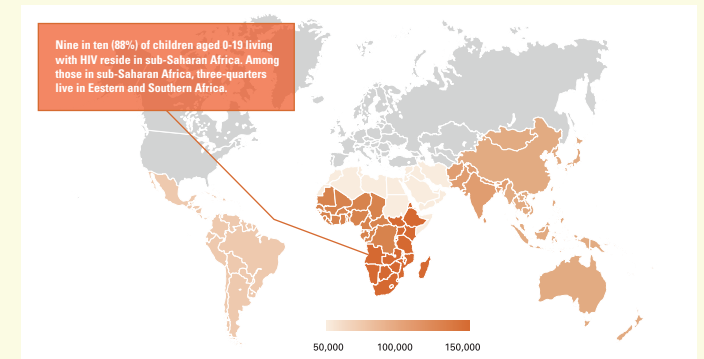


27%
West and Central Africa

74%
Eastern and Southern Africa

Regional disparities: coverage of early-infant diagnosis (EID) of HIV in Africa

Number of children and adolescents aged 0-19 living with HIV, by region, 2020



UNICEF 2021 World AIDS Day Report presents the state of play. UNICEF has supported the global AIDS response for over 25 years.



UNICEF is working to address inequalities in HIV treatment among children and adolescents.

TREATMENT AND CARE

INTENSIFYING EFFORTS TO TRAVEL THE 'LAST MILE' TO ELIMINATE VERTICAL TRANSMISSION

Eliminating the vertical transmission of HIV is a key strategic goal for UNICEF, and its country offices are driving efforts to end this threat to children's health and rights. The organization is leading conversations with countries to understand gaps in the response, provide technical support, and identify how to achieve elimination goals.

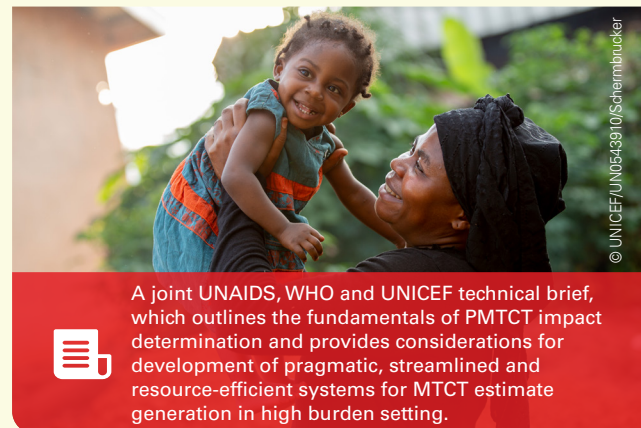
Landmark achievement: Botswana becomes the first high-burden country certified as on the path to the elimination of mother-to-child transmission

With the long-standing support of UNICEF and other partners, in 2021, Botswana became the first country with a high HIV burden in sub-Saharan Africa to be certified by WHO as being on the path to EMTCT of HIV. UNICEF provided much-needed technical support for Botswana's HIV policies,

guidelines and strategic plans, especially in the effective implementation of an integrated PMTCT service delivery model.

The Government of Botswana relied on UNICEF's expertise when preparing for certification. This involved data collection, validation and analysis. As the regional lead for data validation, UNICEF was further involved in developing strategies to remotely collect data and navigate the circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

With this milestone achieved, Botswana is nearing the highest overall standard of WHO validation for EMTCT. This status has only been awarded to 14 countries and territories globally, all of which have far lower HIV prevalence.ⁱ



RAPID AND INNOVATIVE RESPONSES TO NEW CHALLENGES

Throughout much of 2021, most priority countries for UNICEF’s HIV work continued to face repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF’s efforts contributed to new interventions to address the challenges posed by COVID-19. They included addressing child and adolescent mental health, ensuring continuity of treatment for pregnant and breastfeeding women, children and adolescents, and enhancing HIV-sensitive social protection.

Psychosocial support services for children and adolescents living with HIV in Kazakhstan

Many children and adolescents living with HIV in Kazakhstan are unaware they have the virus. A significant proportion of those who know their status is reluctant to disclose it to friends, teachers, or others in their lives who could provide important support.

Over the last Strategic Plan, UNICEF collaborated with Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Healthcare and the UK-based Children’s HIV Association to develop standards for psychosocial support services for children and adolescents living with HIV. The standards enhanced AIDS centre health workers’ capacity to provide confidential and non-judgmental treatment, care and support services to children and families affected by HIV. This intervention also helped strengthen multisectoral collaboration between AIDS centres, primary health care, education and social protection.

In 2021, in collaboration with the Central Asian Association of People Living with HIV, UNICEF provided clear, practical guidance to the Government of Kazakhstan on preventing HIV-associated stigma in 30 schools in 6 regions with the highest HIV burdens.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ANTIRETROVIRAL TREATMENT ADHERENCE AMONG ADOLESCENTS LIVING WITH HIV
EVIDENCE ON RISK PATHWAYS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

KEY MESSAGES

- Adolescents living with HIV are likely to experience mental health challenges, interfering with their ability to adhere to antiretroviral treatment (ART).
- Bullying and stigmatisation impact on the mental health and ART adherence of adolescents living with HIV.
- Social support and caregiver-adolescent relationships can protect better mental health.

BACKGROUND

Good mental health and psychosocial wellbeing is especially important for adolescents during their transition to adulthood. It can support resilience, help initiate healthy behaviours, and shape long-term positive health outcomes. Mental health is influenced by a range of biological, social, psychological, and cultural factors, all of which may contribute to an adolescent’s ability to function independently and contribute positively to society.

Adolescents living with HIV are more likely to experience mental health challenges, interfering with their ability to adhere to antiretroviral treatment (ART).

A joint UNICEF and partners policy brief builds on research findings and effective interventions in low- and middle-income countries, and identifies key risks, including bullying and stigma, and facilitators, such as positive parenting.

Study design: A longitudinal study of 170 adolescents (11-17 years old) living with HIV in Kazakhstan. The study explored the link between mental health and HIV treatment outcomes.



© Sembehale/2020



UNICEF is highlighting the persistent impacts of COVID-19 and related lockdown measures on the HIV response. This support has enabled governments across the ESA region to implement interventions to sustain progress.



Baurzhan, 14 years old, first teenager in Kazakhstan to share he is HIV positive, now a powerful advocate for other teens.

SCALING UP HIV TREATMENT THROUGH INTEGRATED AND DIFFERENTIATED PROGRAMMING

The lack of progress on scaling up treatment for children and adolescents living with HIV has been one of the enduring inequities in the global response. UNICEF’s work in this area has focused on increasing the availability of testing options through innovation and integration and enhancing the quality of treatment and care to improve retention and overall outcomes. Much of this work has relied on building partnerships to ensure that efforts can be sustained.



A joint UNICEF and WHO implementation brief examines the current efforts in Eastern and Southern Africa to accelerate and scale up evidence-based PrEP delivery platforms for adolescent girls and young women.



Former UNICEF Executive Director Fore calls for stronger global action on HIV.

Finding the missing children: Family-based index case testing in the WCA region

Diagnosing children living with HIV remains a persistent challenge for the global response. In the West and Central Africa (WCA) region, only 36 per cent of children living with HIV have access to lifesaving ART. A major factor in such poor results is the large proportion of children living with HIV who are not being diagnosed, even if they have parents who know they are HIV-positive.

UNICEF has contributed to numerous innovations to address this issue, including family-based index testing.

This strategy has demonstrated notable success in finding children living with HIV in such households. To help identify missing children, UNICEF, with WHO and UNAIDS, developed operational guidance for national rollouts of the strategy to expand and scale-up family-based index testing in the WCA region. UNICEF provided technical assistance for implementation and regularly tracked progress through a dashboard.

Overall, in the 15 months through the second quarter of 2021, implementation of the strategy was directly responsible for a total of 3,405 children and adolescents living with HIV being newly diagnosed, of whom 99 per cent were initiated on ART.



Boris Ngueeyeube, 26 years old, smiles when he learns he's HIV negative at his home in Ndjamena, Chad.

ADOLESCENT PREVENTION

INTEGRATED, MULTISECTORAL APPROACHES FOR PREVENTION THAT LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND

UNICEF has made concerted efforts to integrate HIV prevention into broader services to promote adolescent health and well-being. This multisectoral strategy reduces HIV risk by addressing a range of economic, educational and social factors. In 2021, UNICEF promoted comprehensive adolescent health and well-being policies, directly supported facilities and front-line workers, improved data quality, generated demand for prevention, and addressed social determinants of risk.



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Taiane Silva, 29 years old, from Bahia volunteers in a support group and shares her experience so that the HIV diagnosis is not a limiting factor in the lives of many young people living with HIV in Brazil.

Promoting comprehensive adolescent health and well-being

In the United Republic of Tanzania, UNICEF provided technical support for the development and launch in April 2021 of the National Accelerated Action and Investment Agenda for Adolescent Health and Well Being – a three-year, cross-sectoral operational plan for adolescents that includes HIV prevention targets. Through UNICEF's direct support and in partnership with PEPFAR and the Global Fund, 54 districts (32 per cent of the country's total) were reached with at least three HIV combination interventions for adolescents and young women, an increase from 33 districts in 2020.



Adolescent girls and young women resource guides aim to strengthen national responses by building a renewed HIV-prevention platform to increase investment for advancing gender equality across all domains of health.

Engaging adolescents and young people with HIV prevention and support services

Much of UNICEF's work in generating demand for HIV prevention services among adolescents and young people has included efforts to improve access to targeted information, with particular attention often given to reaching populations that are highly marginalized and difficult to access. In Bolivia, UNICEF's support helped more than 85,000 adolescents in six priority health networks to access information on the availability of services to prevent HIV and unintended pregnancy, and to receive care for gender-based violence.



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Lyneal, 21 years old, sex worker and mother, lives in Cape Town South Africa.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

UNICEF encourages and supports adolescents in being more proactive and involved in designing and delivering services intended to reduce their vulnerability to HIV. UNICEF’s support for their regular, direct and influential engagement covers areas such as communication and social mobilization and leadership to set the HIV and AIDS agendas that affect them.

U Test: Reimagining HIV prevention for young people in Côte d'Ivoire



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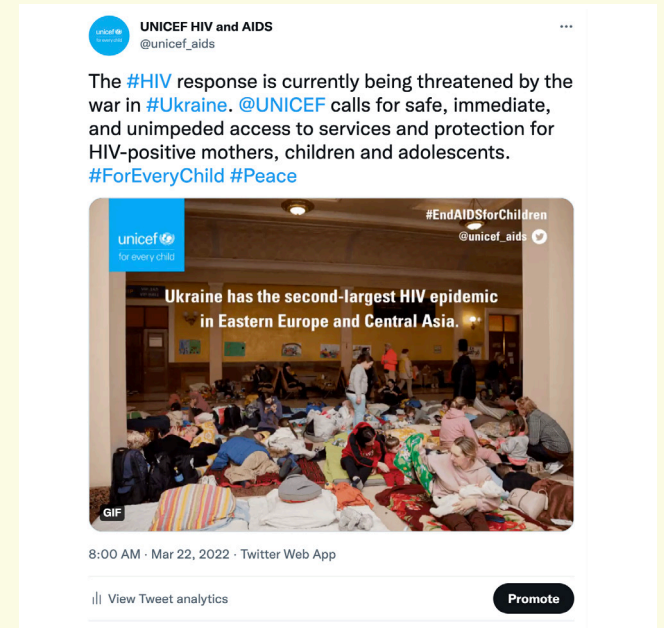
A young man is tested for HIV at the Adolescent and Youth School Health Service Centre in Odienné, in the northwest of Côte d'Ivoire.

“ I am 20 years old and I am gay. I was afraid to go to the health centres in the neighborhood for fear of being judged or having my results disclosed by people with bad intentions. Through a U-Test community worker, I discovered a health centre where I felt comfortable. The doctor told me about PrEP and self-testing. I then invited my friends to get tested and also told them that if they are negative, they can do PrEP”

Kouassi, a young man from Côte d'Ivoire.

UNICEF’s U-Test initiative is re-imagining traditional approaches to HIV prevention. It uses the latest technology to provide young people with easy-to-understand information about HIV and AIDS while linking them to support and care. The goal is to connect at-risk youth with testing and services that prevent the spread of HIV. Social media is then used as a mitigation tool — WhatsApp, SMS, and Facebook campaigns deliver HIV prevention ads and messaging to the most at-risk groups.

U-Test has had a tremendous impact in Côte d'Ivoire, where it has reached over a million young people in the past two years. In just one year, more than 10,000 young Ivorians self-tested for HIV thanks to U-Test. In 2021, UNICEF supported the government to scale up the initiative to five new health districts as a model integrated into the work plan of the National AIDS Control Programme for 2022. The organization now plans to introduce the U-Test model in Cameroon and Nigeria by the end of 2022.



UNICEF engages extensively with the global AIDS community through its social media channels.

LOOKING AHEAD

The 2022–2025 Strategic Plan articulates UNICEF’s vision for implementing people-centred responses which reduce the inequalities that drive the AIDS epidemic. We will work closely with governments and other partners to consistently reach children, adolescents and pregnant women living with or at risk of HIV. Even greater emphasis will be afforded to the effective employment of disaggregated data and differentiated programming. UNICEF is expanding its support for better progress in the WCA region. As part of this effort, the organization is collaborating with local partners to scale up the paediatric service delivery framework to ensure the optimal provision of services across the continuum of care.

UNICEF is also working to rapidly introduce dolutegravir as the preferred first-line treatment option for all children and adolescents with HIV. This drug is the first in a class of new ARVs that possess a high genetic barrier to resistance, are remarkably well-tolerated, and are very effective at controlling viral replication. UNICEF has led the way in promoting greater investment in programmes that comprehensively address vulnerabilities across all relevant sectors. As the body of evidence on the effectiveness of these programmes has grown, countries are adopting proven approaches that combine structural, behavioural and biomedical interventions.

UNICEF is also meaningfully engaging adolescents in programme development and empowering them to lead their interventions. This is critical to reaching the most vulnerable and addressing gender inequality. The organization has supported

the development of the Adolescent and Young Key Populations toolkit, expanded its U-Report platform, and introduced numerous youth-led programmes across all regions. UNICEF’s support to the Global Fund has enabled partners at the country level to identify and address critical prevention gaps for the most vulnerable adolescent girls and young women.



Lusanda, 25 years old, faces the daily prejudice, inhumanity, and stigma that comes with working on the streets as sex worker.

Link to the full 2021 Global Annual Results Report:



Follow UNICEF’s HIV and AIDS Section on Twitter:
https://twitter.com/unicef_aids?lang=en



ⁱ Those validation targets include a population case rate of new pediatric HIV infections due to MTCT of fewer than 50 cases per 100,000 live births; an MTCT rate of HIV of less than 2 per cent in non-breastfeeding populations or less than 5 per cent in breastfeeding populations; and greater than 95 per cent coverage of ANC, HIV testing of pregnant women, and coverage of pregnant women living with HIV.)



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Fatima, 14-year-old, looks at materials presented by a peer educator on how to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, in Barangay Apelo, a slum area in Pasay City near Manila.

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UNICEF expresses its deep appreciation to its resource partners for their support to health results in 2021, particularly to those that were able to provide thematic funding. Thematic funds are critical to ensuring holistic health programmes that deliver sustainable results. UNICEF wishes to thank its many partners at global, regional and country levels – including national and local governments, Gavi, other United Nations agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations and academia – that have made these results possible.

[Link to the full report](#)