



UNITED NATIONS Office on Drugs and Crime

How UNODC deals with **HIV/AIDS**

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, a cosponsor of UNAIDS since 1999, focuses its HIV/AIDS work on three specific and particularly vulnerable populations: injecting drug users, prisoners and potential and actual victims of human trafficking.

UNODC provides support to governments and civil society organizations in developing and implementing comprehensive and evidence-informed HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes for injecting drug users as agreed upon by governments in the UNAIDS Policy Position Paper and in the Political Declaration of the UN General Assembly of June 2006.

UNODC provides similar support with regard to prison settings. The Office is the custodian of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and assists governments in implementing international standards and UN resolutions that stipulate that all prisoners have the right to receive health care, including HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

In addition, UNODC, as the custodian of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Girls, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, strengthens the capacity of governments to provide potential and actual trafficking victims with essential HIV/AIDS prevention and care services.

Young people and women who are also injecting drug users and/or in prison settings and/or potential or actual victims of human trafficking are among the most vulnerable groups within UNODC's mandate. Specific evidence-informed interventions are being put in place to help protect them from HIV infection.

Partnering with UNAIDS co-sponsors and key partners, including civil society organizations and organizations of people living with HIV/AIDS within the GIPA context, is seen as particularly important. UNODC believes that civil society organizations in particular play a vital role in HIV/AIDS prevention and care among these vulnerable groups.

A quick overview: the state of play

Injecting drug use

HIV infection is often associated with unsafe drug injecting practices—the use of contaminated injecting equipment is a major route of HIV transmission. Once the virus is introduced into an injecting drug user community, prevalence can rise up to 90 per cent in less than two years.

Prison settings

Overcrowding, unsafe sexual activities and drug injecting, violence, gangs, lack of protection for the youngest, female and weakest prisoners, corruption and poor prison management, create an environment that increases vulnerability of prisoners to HIV infection and other diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis and other sexually-transmitted infections.

Human Trafficking

Little reliable data exist about the exact scale of this crime. However, thus far it is clear that women and girls are most at risk, but so too are young boys. Many girls and women are being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation and it seems highly likely that coercing or forcing trafficking victims into unprotected sexual acts with multiple partners is a significant factor in the spread of HIV.

What can UNODC do about these problems?

Prevention and care interventions need to be comprehensive and multi-sectoral to address the needs of these very diverse vulnerable populations. To prevent a new wave of HIV/AIDS epidemics, UNODC considers it essential that such interventions are evidence-informed and scaled-up immediately. UNODC's role is to encourage countries to adopt a comprehensive package of prevention and care interventions as outlined in the UNAIDS Policy Position Paper and to help build the capacity of government agencies and civil society organizations to implement these interventions.

Injecting drug use:

The goal is to increase the scale and improve the quality of evidence-informed HIV/AIDS prevention and care services (the comprehensive package) for injecting drug users in countries where the use of contaminated injecting equipment can be a major means of transmission. To do so, the specific drug use situation and the socio-cultural and political context need to be assessed.

UNODC's role is in:

- Helping countries to develop legislation, policies and standards of prevention and care that enable them to put in place effective services for injecting drug users;
- Assisting countries to establish comprehensive outreach interventions, covering at least 35 per cent of all injecting drug users by 2008, and providing them with HIV/AIDS information, education and the means of reducing their risk behaviour; the overall goal is to reach as close as possible of universal access to prevention by the year 2010;
- Facilitating diversification and expansion of drug dependence treatment services, including substitution treatments;
- Creating awareness among drug dependence treatment services regarding the need to address HIV/AIDS prevention and care issues;
- Helping countries to develop interventions to prevent the transition from non-injecting drug use to injecting drug use, particularly with regard to young people; and
- Encouraging the proactive involvement of law enforcement agencies in HIV prevention and care, as well as more collaboration among health, criminal justice sectors, and community-based and civil society organizations;

In addition, UNODC also promotes access to voluntary HIV counselling and testing, treatment of sexually-transmitted infections, antiretroviral therapy and interventions for specific vulnerable groups—including prisoners, sex workers who inject drugs and injecting drug users who may also exchange sex for drugs or money.



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Prison settings:

Every prisoner must have access to HIV/AIDS prevention and care. The goal here is, therefore, to develop evidence-informed national strategies on HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support in prison settings, and establish national HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes, which reach all prisoners.

Policies to prevent HIV in prisons are often hampered by the denial of the existence of the factors that contribute to the spread of HIV (e.g. unsafe sex, drug use, gangs, violence) inside these institutions. An essential first step in developing a strategy is to create awareness among policy makers on the HIV/AIDS situation in prisons. A comprehensive strategy must address structural issues such as overcrowding and corruption; raise awareness among prison staff; provide prisoners with preventive measures (including the means of prevention), counselling and drug dependence treatment (including substitution treatment) and rehabilitation opportunities.

UNODC's role is in:

- Promoting the right to health care and HIV prevention in prisons, ensuring that these are equivalent to that available in the general community;
- Assisting countries to provide HIV/AIDS information and education to prisoners, wardens and other staff;
- Encouraging countries to offer confidential and voluntary HIV counselling, testing and psychosocial support, education about HIV/AIDS, and to provide the means to prevent HIV infections;
- Facilitating monitoring of general prison conditions, both internal and external, and to operate secure, safe and orderly prisons in order to reduce violence and the spread of HIV;
- Encouraging countries to classify and separate juveniles from adult prisoners, and use maternity wards;
- Assisting to organize meaningful rehabilitation activities in prisons, including pre-release reintegration programmes;
- Helping countries to train prison staff on HIV/AIDS management and on the needs of HIV infected prisoners.
- Promoting provision of antiretroviral therapy and improved hygiene, sanitation and diets for HIV-infected prisoners;
- Actively involving civil society organizations in the development of prison and post-release programmes; and
- Promoting drug dependence treatment as an alternative to imprisonment.

Human trafficking:

The goal is to provide potential and actual trafficking victims with comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

Generally, governments are unaware of either the extent of human trafficking in their countries or of the connection between human trafficking and HIV/AIDS. While many national HIV/AIDS plans include policies and programmes addressing sex work, issues such as foreign sex workers, trafficking in persons, coercion into sex work, rape and sexual violence are usually not addressed. More focused action needs to be urgently developed and implemented.

UNODC's role is in:

- Setting in place large-scale awareness campaigns and advocacy on the nature and extent of trafficking in persons and the related HIV/AIDS risks;
- Encouraging countries to provide at-risk groups with information on how to protect themselves from entering a trafficking situation and being infected with HIV (safe mobility packages);
- Promoting provision of appropriate, culture and gender sensitive HIV/AIDS prevention and care services for potential and actual trafficking victims. This includes information and education, voluntary and confidential HIV testing and counselling, promoting safe sexual behaviour (through, e.g., consistent condom use), treating sexually transmitted infections, and providing anti-retroviral treatment and palliative care for persons with AIDS;
- Encouraging civil society organizations to provide health, social and legal assistance services.
- Assisting countries to strengthen legislation to counter stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS, particularly victims of human trafficking;
- Assisting countries in reviewing their repatriations policies with the view of providing victims of human trafficking with the best possible HIV/AIDS prevention and care services, and
- Encouraging countries to provide repatriated victims of human trafficking with comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention and care services, and to assist them in reintegration, particularly with a view to avoiding re-victimization.

For more information on the UNODC HIV/AIDS Programme:

UNODC
HIV/AIDS Unit
Tel.: (+43-1) 26060-5549, E-mail: AIDS@unodc.org
www.unodc.org