

Beat: Health

International Organization for Migration (IOM) Supports UNAIDS

Right to Health Campaign in South Sudan

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USPA NEWS - Earlier this month, UNAIDS launched the “Right to Health” campaign on HIV testing and treatment for uniformed forces in Jonglei, South Sudan. Already supporting this group to know their status and access HIV/AIDS treatment, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a key operational partner in the campaign. Five years of conflict in South Sudan has massively halted the development of the young country’s health system. Access to services has been interrupted for those who had been lucky enough to receive them in the first place. Due to lack of information on HIV in the country, the stigma against those who test positive is high.

The joint UN campaign is carried out in coordination with the Government of South Sudan, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior and the South Sudan AIDS Commission (SSAC). Earlier this month, UNAIDS launched the “Right to Health” campaign on HIV testing and treatment for uniformed forces in Jonglei, South Sudan. Already supporting this group to know their status and access HIV/AIDS treatment, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a key operational partner in the campaign.

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The joint UN campaign is carried out in coordination with the Government of South Sudan, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior and the South Sudan AIDS Commission (SSAC). The campaign targets 100,000 people in the South Sudanese armed and uniformed forces and Ministry of Interior “” which includes the military, police and prisons, fire brigade and wild life services “” as well as their families and communities living near military barracks in Jonglei.

Prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, is much higher among uniformed forces than the South Sudanese public, as is also seen in other sub-Saharan African countries. For HIV specifically, the rate is nearly twice the national average, according to a 2015 Modes of Transmission study carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO).

IOM kicked off the campaign this week in Bor, Jonglei, supporting outreach teams from within the uniformed forces and Ministry of Health. Jointly trained by the Ministry of Health, WHO and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) HIV Department, these teams will set up temporary voluntary and counselling sites throughout Jonglei over the next few weeks. They will provide pre- and post-counselling and referrals for HIV positive cases to nearest Ante-retroviral Therapy (ART) facility. On the first day of the campaign (26/09), some 60 personnel in the military forces (55 men and 5 women) were tested.

In collaboration with the gender-based violence sub-cluster, IOM will ensure the integration of referral pathways within the outreach teams through a partnership with Intersos. Following a decision from the Ministry of Health, the “Right to Health” campaign has also been expanded to include people living with disabilities in South Sudan.

The “Right to Health” campaign will support the Government of South Sudan in reaching uniformed forces and ensure that they get to know their HIV status and can access treatment, if positive,” said Salma Taher, IOM South Sudan Project Officer, Migration Health Unit. “The integration of referral pathways in this campaign is crucial so that survivors of gender-based violence and people with a HIV positive status can access crucial services,” Taher added.

Last year, IOM conducted a gender-based violence knowledge, attitudes and practices survey in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and gender-based violence sub-cluster and supported by the Global Fund. It found that “survivors are not aware of health services; nor of importance of seeking medical services in 72 hours of a rape.”

Since 2014, IOM has been providing HIV/AIDS services to vulnerable groups in South Sudan such as displaced people, female sexual workers and their clients, “boda-boda” (motorbike taxi) and truck drivers and men who have sex with men. The Organization began working with uniformed forces in 2016.

IOM’s support to the “Right to Health” campaign is currently funded through the UNAIDS Unified Budget Review and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) and the Organization’s wider work in HIV and AIDS sensitization, testing and treatment is also funded by the UNDP as the Principal Recipient of the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

With apo on behalf of International Organization for Migration (IOM).

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