

Term of Reference

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is seeking for an independent research team for assessment of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and available, accessible, acceptable, and quality health service access among women living with HIV in Malaysia.

Assignment Title

Qualitative assessment on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and health service access¹ among women living with HIV in Malaysia.

Background

The Global Plan towards the elimination of new HIV infections among children by 2015 and keeping their mothers alive², WHO recommendations to move to lifelong treatment for pregnant women living with HIV (“Option B+”), and more recently, treatment for all persons living with HIV³, laid the ground for global elimination goals and country-led efforts. As a result, 14 countries were validated for elimination of mother-to-child transmission (EMTCT) of HIV and/or syphilis globally by the end of 2020 of which 4 countries are from Asia and the Pacific region – Thailand, Malaysia, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

The first global guidance on the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis was published by World Health Organization (WHO) in 2014 and, among other standard criteria, a key requirement for EMTCT validation of a country is that the interventions have been implemented in a manner consistent with international, regional and national human rights principles and standards. This includes the rights related to sexual and reproductive health, autonomy in decision making, right to bodily integrity, non-discrimination, informed consent, respect of privacy and confidentiality, freedom from violence, abuse and coercive practices.

In September 2018 Malaysia has been successfully validated as a country that has achieved elimination of mother-to-child transmission (EMTCT) of both HIV and syphilis. Along with the validation, the Global Validation Advisory Committee (GVAC) of elimination of mother-to-child transmission made recommendations for maintenance of validation of EMTCT of HIV and syphilis. One recommendation to Malaysia was the undertaking of an independent assessment of current practices in relation to sexual

¹ Health service access here means available, accessible, acceptable, and quality health service access

² UNAIDS (2011). Global Plan towards the Elimination of New HIV Infections among Children by 2015 and Keeping Their Mothers Alive

³ WHO (2016) Consolidated guidelines on the use of antiretroviral drugs for treating and preventing HIV infection

and reproductive health and rights of women living with HIV in PMTCT setting. In one-year progress review to GVAC recommendations, WHO acknowledged the progress made on several issues raised during the validation. GVAC proposed a country visit to take stock of the progress made on human rights and community engagement related issues and concerns. The regular schedule for GVAC review on the maintenance was due in June 2020 but the unprecedented COVID-19 situation rendered the GVAC review to postpone to the fourth quarter of 2021. In light of planned maintenance review of EMTCT of HIV and syphilis validation, UNAIDS Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in partnership with International Community of Women Living with HIV-Asia Pacific (ICWAP), HIV, STI and Hepatitis Section of Ministry of Health of Malaysia, women living with HIV community, and representatives from national platform of non-governmental organizations, academia, are preparing to organize an independent research that will provide additional and scientifically sound information⁴ to support the country's preparation for the maintenance review, and to better understand sexual and reproductive health and rights related issues among women living with HIV in Malaysia. A multi-stakeholder advisory committee⁵ will oversee the research process and provide strategic direction, and technical advice on the implementation and operational issues that might come up during the research.

Purpose of consultancy

The purpose of the assignment is to conduct a qualitative research and assess sexual and reproductive health and rights, and available, accessible, acceptable, and quality health service access among women living with HIV in Malaysia – with particular attention to PMTCT settings and EMTCT process. The assessment will also focus on past GVAC recommendations that were made at the time of validation and mid-term review in 2019. Malaysia is scheduled to have GVAC country mission to take stock of the progress made on human rights related issues, and review on maintenance of validation of EMTCT of HIV and syphilis in the fourth quarter of 2021 and the findings from this qualitative research will be of great benefit to the maintenance review.

Tasks/responsibilities of the consultancy team (organization)

In consultation with UNAIDS Human Rights Advisor and Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee, the research team will:

- 1) Develop the research methodology and protocol for qualitative assessment of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and health service access among women living with HIV
- 2) Develop detailed workplan and timeline for the implementation of the qualitative assessment taking into consideration of potential challenges and barriers that might be encountered due to COVID-19 pandemic
- 3) Design and develop structured questions for focus group discussions and informant interviews for SRHR and health service access - with reference to WHO EMTCT validation assessment tool on human rights, gender equality and civil society engagement

⁴ results based on scientifically sound survey methodology – such as sample size, appropriate selection criteria, probability sampling, representativeness, minimising bias etc.

⁵ See Terms of reference of multi-stakeholder advisory committee in annex 1

- 4) In collaboration with community members and local NGOs who are working with women living with HIV, engage and recruit the community members (i.e. women living with HIV), to make sure a strong community engagement, including women living with HIV from different networks, and women who are not within the networks, throughout the research process.
- 5) Attend the advisory committee meetings and report the progress and challenges to the committee, track record on the action points and follow up
- 6) Train the women living with HIV community members or relevant interviewers on qualitative research methodology, including conducting focus group discussions and key informant interviews, and support during implementation.
- 7) Implement the qualitative assessment with participation of women living with HIV ensuring equal and appropriate representation of women living with HIV from within and outside the networks.
- 8) Conduct the analysis of qualitative findings and prepare the assessment report

Deliverables

- 1) research methodology and protocol developed and approved by advisory committee.
- 2) Inception report with detailed workplan and timeline for implementation of the assignment
- 3) A short course 2-days training on qualitative research methods provided to the women living with HIV community members to engage, support and implement the research activities, and follow-up support with the trainees during the research implementation.
- 4) with full engagement with women living with HIV, civil society organizations, key stakeholders and health service providers, a qualitative research implemented with a series of focus group discussions, key informant interviews and other qualitative research methodologies.
- 5) qualitative assessment report on the sexual and reproductive health and rights, and health service access among women living with HIV in Malaysia - with clearly outlined methodology, implementation process, major findings and recommendations.

Supervision and Reporting Requirements

The selected consultant team/organization will be guided by Regional Multistakeholder Advisory Committee and report to UNAIDS Asia Pacific Regional Office

Selection of the research consultant team

UNAIDS, in consultation with the advisory committee, is responsible for selecting the research consultant team.

Approach and Methodology for implementing the assignment

Overall approach: In consultation and working with women living with HIV community, civil society organizations, multi-stakeholders, and health service providers, this assignment will implement and develop the situation assessment of sexual and reproductive health and rights and health service access⁶ – with particular attention to EMTCT process - among women living with HIV in Malaysia. The assessment will focus on the GVAC recommendations for maintenance of validation of EMTCT that was made subsequently after certification of EMTCT validation and during the mid-term review. Qualitative research methodologies such as focus group discussions, informant interviews and structured questionnaire interviews will be implemented with participation of multiple stakeholders. The research team will have regular consultations with the advisory committee during advisory committee meetings and as necessary, and report on the progress and challenges in the research implementation process.

Detailed scope of work:

- Prepare a working timeline to conduct a qualitative assessment in consultation with key stakeholders.
- Review related documents and develop the research methodology and protocol for the qualitative assessment that outline details on research design, methodology, processes, and expected results, and receive ethical approval.
- In collaboration with community network and local NGOs who are working with women living with HIV, engage and recruit at least 4 community members of women living with HIV from different networks, women who are not within the networks or women who are working with local NGOs (eg. SRH organizations) as community supporters; facilitate a short course 2-days training workshop for recruited community members on qualitative research methodology including conducting focus group discussions and key informant interviews; and lead the research implementation.
- Conduct qualitative data collection through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and key informant interviews with women living with HIV, civil society organizations, key stakeholders and health service providers that are implemented virtually or in-person at community, ANC clinics and local health facilities. etc., where the participants are comfortable and safe to share the information.
- Analyse the qualitative data collected and prepare the first full draft of the report with clear indication on methodology, implementation process, major findings and recommendations, and present results to the advisory committee, national team, community, and key stakeholders.
- Review and address the issues and concerns raised by advisory committee after reviewing the first draft, and finalize the assessment report.

Qualifications and Requirements

⁶ Health service access here means available, accessible, acceptable, and quality health service access

UNAIDS Asia-Pacific regional office is recruiting a team of research consultants from a public health, social sciences or equivalent institute based in Malaysia with team members composed of:

- ❖ Middle to Senior Level Research, Training and Evaluation Specialists
- ❖ Minimum 7-year experience in conducting Research, Training and Evaluation on HIV or Health, and Gender
- ❖ Postgraduate qualification in Social Sciences, Public Health, or equivalent educational preparation.
- ❖ Demonstrated experience in conducting relevant health-related research and assessment in Malaysia.
- ❖ Experience in working with community and civil society organizations, and experience in conducting participatory research.
- ❖ Evidence of contemporary knowledge and understanding of the technical updates related to sexual and reproductive health and rights related issues, and elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis in Malaysia, regionally and internationally and the ability to apply to the Malaysia context.
- ❖ Able to demonstrate adequate understanding of commitment to HIV issues and intersecting forms of discrimination including gender, and HIV and gender equality as a development issue
- ❖ Excellent communication skills; working with diverse communities; cultural competence; proficiency in both spoken and written English.
- ❖ Strong analytical skills with an ability to communicate technical information clearly and effectively to both technical and non-technical colleagues both orally and in written format.
- ❖ Ability to engage, manage and motivate key stakeholders.
- ❖ Demonstrated evidence of exceptional editorial and writing skills for a range of technical and non-technical audiences.

The UNAIDS Asia-Pacific Regional Office is responsible for selecting the research team in consultation with the Advisory Committee.

Timeframe

Maximum 50 working days during 1st July to 30th September 2021

	May 2021	June 2021	July 2021	August 2021	September 2021
1 st meeting of the advisory committee	4 th week				
Approval of term of reference of independent consultants (or) research team		1 st week			
Selection of the research group		4 th week			

Approval of research methodology			3 rd week		
Implementation of the assessment				1 st – 4 th week	
Analysis and report					1-2 nd week
Review the report and validation of the results					3-4 th week

Proprietary Rights

Any data, information or documents generated during the period of this consultancy will be treated as strictly confidential, and the rights of dissemination and/or publication will reside with the UNAIDS.

Application Closing Date

Interested applicants are requested to send their application letter, proposal including CVs with references and financial proposal with costs itemized by technical (professional) fees for each respective activity to rstap@unaids.org the closing date is **30 June 2021**. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

ANNEX 1

Terms of reference of multi-stakeholder advisory committee

Purpose of the Advisory Committee

The purpose of the Regional Advisory Committee is to provide clear strategic direction, technical assistance and advice to the key steps of the independent assessment on SRHR and health service access of women living with HIV. The Committee will provide advice as needed, and as a support to the research team in their research planning, design, implementation, and analysis.

The Committee will be made up of key stakeholders of the HIV response at the national and regional levels, comprising, civil society, women living with HIV community members, UNAIDS, the academia and the Ministry of Health of Malaysia.

The Committee will guide the research process adhere to the Meaningful Involvement of People with HIV/AIDS (MIPA) and Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV (GIPA) , guiding principle that calls for the active and meaningful participation of people living with HIV in the inception, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes and ensuring that the communities most affected by HIV are involved in decision-making, at every level of the response.

The Regional Advisory Committee:

- Involves relevant partners including women living with HIV regional networks, civil society, UN, government, academia, and community members; and
- Provides guidance and support to the implementation and operational issues of the independent assessment.

Specifically, the Advisory Committee will:

- 1.Support the development of the term of reference of the research group (or) consultant/s and lead the selection process.
- 2.Provide technical inputs to the research processes such as planning, design, implementation, and analysis - as necessary and as appropriate.
- 3.Guide and advise the lead consultant (or) research group in development of research concept note and methodology to ensure the research is participatory, working with women living with HIV community research outreach workers, and reaches to all women living with HIV networks.
- 4.Hold virtual meeting biweekly or as necessary to identify areas in which research implementation can / should be improved.
- 5.Guide the research implementation process, address the issues and impediments throughout the research process, and review the analysis.
- 6.Ensure that women living with HIV, civil society and other parties concerned, through the Advisory Committee members, have the safe space to provide ongoing technical support and input into the research implementation.

Membership and Governance:

The Advisory Group will have a maximum of 10 members.

- The Advisory Group will be Chaired by a designated staff member of the UNAIDS Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific;
- One designated representative of regional network of women living with HIV (ICWAP);
- There will be at least 2 representatives from 2 organizations of women living with HIV in Malaysia;
- One representative from the national platform of NGOs;
- One designated representative from HIV/STI/Hepatitis Sector of Ministry of Health;
- One representative from the academia,
- UNAIDS focal point for PMTCT and
- One representative from Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

The committee will monitor and guide the development of the research process and will provide advice, suggestions, and possible solutions to address the issues and challenges that the research team might encounter during planning, design, and implementation of the research process. The research team will report the progress and challenges to the committee during the advisory committee meetings and track record on the action points and follow up.

UNAIDS technical staff will be involved as needed.