

VCT@WORK

Voluntary Confidential Counselling and HIV Testing for Workers

*Close to **5 million** workers reached...**3 million** tested...
...over **85,000** HIV positive workers referred to
treatment.*

BACKGROUND

To enhance the access to HIV testing through the world of work and to contribute to the target of putting 15 million people living with HIV on anti-retroviral treatment (ART) by 2015¹, the ILO, in partnership with UNAIDS, launched the VCT@WORK Initiative during the International Labour Conference in June 2013. The Initiative was implemented in 34 countries² through strategic partnerships and alliances formed between the key world of work actors, the private sector, networks of people living with HIV and national AIDS programmes.

STRATEGY

The strategy of the VCT@WORK Initiative involved the following five fundamental pillars:

- **Rights-based approach:** The Initiative was implemented in countries/workplaces which had developed a non-discriminatory HIV and AIDS workplace policy, following their national guidelines or the guidelines of the ILO's HIV and AIDS Recommendation, 2010 (No. 200). Further, the ILO and the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), in consultation with the Inter-Agency Task Team on HIV and AIDS Workplace Policy/Programmes and Private Sector Engagement, developed an operational guideline called "[Respecting human rights in the implementation of the VCT initiative: operational guidelines](#)". These guidelines provide guidance to partners on respecting human rights in the implementation of the VCT@WORK Initiative, particularly the principles of consent; confidentiality; counselling; connection to care;

¹ UN General Assembly, *Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS*, Resolution 65/277 (adopted 10 June 2011) A/RES/65/277.

² Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroun, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Togo, Thailand, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

gender equality; meaningful engagement of people living with HIV; and inclusion of key populations.

- **Multi-disease testing:** HIV testing was promoted through an integrated and multi-disease initiative in order to de-stigmatize HIV testing and facilitate increased uptake of VCT services. Several enterprises implemented HIV testing under the wellness approach.
- **Strategic partnerships:** [Partnerships](#) were forged between the world of work actors (ministries of labour, employers'/private sector, trade unions) and ministries of health, national AIDS programmes, VCT providers, ART centres, Networks of People Living with HIV (PLHIV), civil society organizations and others.
- **Advocacy and Communication:** The initiative built on the ILO's ongoing communication campaign: [Getting to Zero at Work](#), highlighting the contribution of the world of work in getting to the goal of zero new HIV infections, zero HIV-related discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. Over 400 messages from leaders and celebrities were received and promoted through different media channels, including the social media. In a carefully crafted communication strategy, messages were built around the 'benefits of early HIV testing' backed by the 'protection of rights of workers' in case they are found to be living with HIV. The initiative was supported by a strong behaviour change communication effort at workplaces, using the peer education approach.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** A monitoring and evaluation system was developed to capture data/reports from countries and partners. Technical assistance was provided to national AIDS programmes to help them collect and analyse the HIV testing results of workers under the national system. Good practices were collected and disseminated.

The VCT@WORK Initiative tracked progress on the following five indicators:

- Number of women and men workers reached with HIV information;
- Number of women and men workers counselled;
- Number of women and men workers who took the HIV test;
- Number of women and men workers who tested HIV positive; and
- Number of HIV + women and men workers who were referred to treatment.

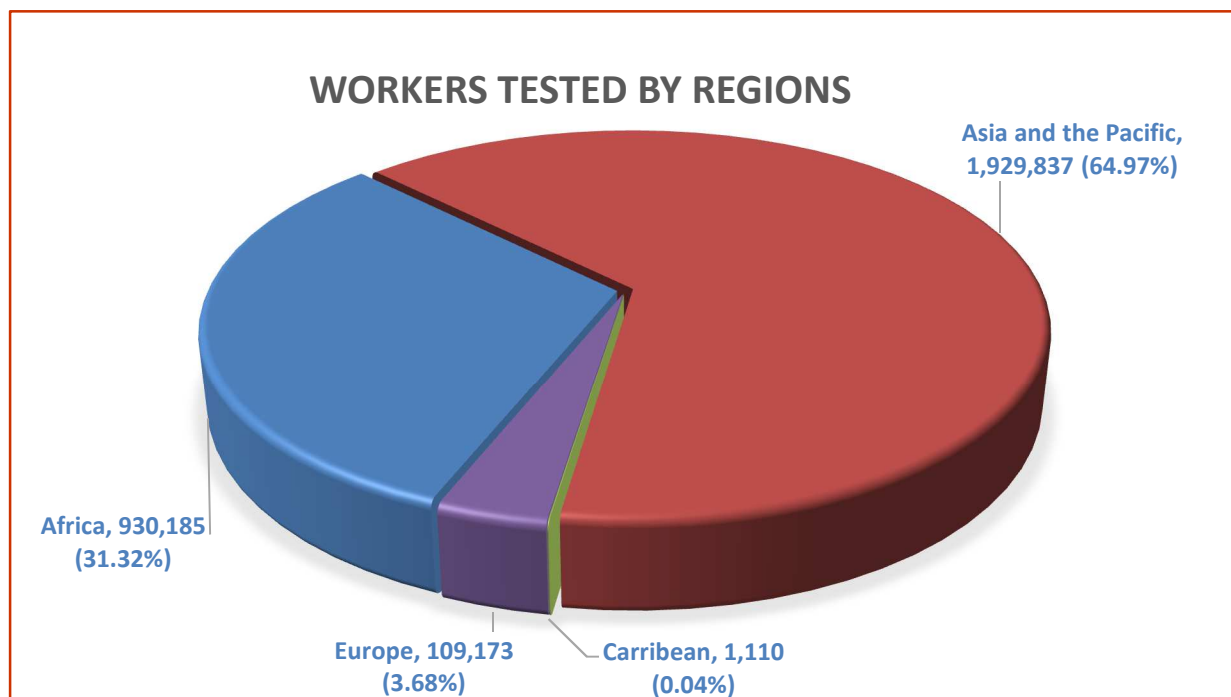
SUMMARY RESULTS

Results Summary (June 2013 – December 2015)

TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS REACHED:	4,819,240
TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS COUNSELLED:	2,993,567
TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS TESTED:	2,970,305
TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS TESTED POSITIVE:	87,153
TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS REFERRED TO TREATMENT:	85,671

Gender Breakdown (June 2013 – December 2015)

	Gender breakdown (%)		
	Male	Female	Other genders
WORKERS REACHED:	60.4	39.0	0.7
WORKERS PRE/POST-TEST COUNSELLED:	59.7	39.4	0.9
WORKERS TESTED	59.8	39.4	0.9
WORKERS TESTED POSITIVE:	62.3	37.0	0.7
WORKERS REFERRED TO TREATMENT:	62.4	36.8	0.8



Analysis:

- Close to 5 million workers (60% male, 39% female and 0.7% others) were reached in 34 countries under the VCT@WORK Initiative. Close to 3 million workers (59.8 % male, 39.4 % female, and 0.9% others) took HIV counselling and testing. Over 85,000 HIV positive workers (62.4% male, 36.8% female, and 0.8% others) were referred for treatment.
- Gender analysis of all indicators (reached, counselled, tested, found positive and referred to treatment) shows that the initiative reached more men than women. This shows that workplaces have a huge untapped potential of reaching out to men with HIV services.
- 62 per cent of those reached with HIV information accessed HIV testing services. This shows the efficacy of advocacy, awareness and behaviour change communication carried put in the targeted workplaces. This also shows that workplaces provide an ideal platform for reaching out to women and men with HIV information and creating demand for HIV testing.
- The maximum number of workers — around 65 per cent— were tested in the Asia and the Pacific region. This is primarily due to the partnerships of the world of work actors (ministries of labour, employers’ organizations, public and private sector companies, and trade unions) with national AIDS programmes, particularly in India and Indonesia.

The ILO mobilized its partners, undertook advocacy and capacity building efforts, and facilitated partnerships with the government's testing and treatment centres. The workers were referred to access HIV testing at the government centres. The ILO assisted the national AIDS programmes in analysing the national and provincial level HIV testing data for workers. This analysis, validated through national level workshops, provided very useful insights that helped in repositioning the workplace programme in economic sectors that showed higher HIV positivity. The analysis also provided recommendations on how to improve the national monitoring system with regards to HIV testing. In India, [over 1.3 million workers](#) underwent the HIV test at government centres in five states (Delhi, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh). Following the same approach, in Indonesia during 2014-2015, over 314,000 workers took the HIV test in three provinces (Jakarta, Banten and Papua). The data included here is only from the provinces where the ILO and its partners worked intensely over the last two and half years.

SOME GOOD PRACTICES

Reaching out to workers in the informal economy:

- In Zimbabwe, the ILO worked with the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperatives Development and the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economies Association - an affiliate of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU). Workers were mobilized through informal sector operators using local structures in partnership with the local government and city councils. HIV testing and counselling sessions were organized at 22 informal sector work sites (car repair shops, food processing units, flea markets, vegetable markets etc.) in eight locations in Harare which have high concentrations of informal sector workers. Mobile units provided VCT services to workers.
- In the United Republic of Tanzania, the informal economy workers were reached with VCT services at open markets, their place of work. Over 3,000 workers, with a majority being young workers, received counselling and took the HIV test in the events organized in open markets. 188 workers were found to be living with HIV and were referred to health facility for seeking the necessary treatment, care and support services.

Working in the retail sector:

- In South Africa, the ILO partnered with five Retailers Unite members (The Foschini Group, Pick n' Pay, Click Group, Cape Union Mart and Mr Price) to scale up the VCT@WORK Initiative. The logic behind this partnership was that these retail companies employ more than 150,000 men and women, of whom 80 per cent are young people and 70 per cent are women aged between 20 and 35 years old. The Retailers Unite collaborated with private service providers and public health clinics to conduct HIV counselling and testing and other tests, including cardiovascular screening. The initiative managed to reach 1,500 stores around the country. Following HIV awareness

sessions, HIV Counselling and Testing Days were scheduled within the shopping malls, where employees are located. Testing events were repeatedly organized to ensure maximum coverage. Over 35,000 employees were reached through HIV and AIDS awareness and over 15,000 underwent the HIV test. The ILO has also developed [HIV and AIDS: Guidelines for the retail sector](#) to help stakeholders in the retail sector to strengthen their response to HIV and AIDS.

Promoting VCT through Public Private Partnerships (PPP):

- In Mozambique, the ILO collaborated with partners from the public and private sector, including the Business Coalition on HIV and AIDS (ECoSIDA), Mozambique Railways Company (CFM), sugar industries, Mozambique Airlines, the Ministry of Health through its Provincial Directorates, the National AIDS Council (NAC), the Ministry of Transport, and the Ministry of Labour. In 2014, over 30,000 men and women workers and community members (10,987 women and 18,454 men) were tested for HIV, thanks to this PPP approach. Persons found to be living with HIV were referred to health centres for advice, care, support and treatment services. Encouraged by the successful response, the National AIDS Council integrated the VCT@WORK Initiative as a component in its annual work plan and decided to collaborate with ECoSIDA and the ILO to expand the programme and integrate the workers' testing data into the national system.
- In Indonesia, the ILO worked closely with its tripartite constituents to strengthen the workplace programmes with a focus on the VCT initiative in line with the Ministerial Decree No. 68 of 2004 on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Countermeasures in the World of Work and the ILO's HIV and AIDS Recommendation, 2010 (No. 200). In 2013, a partnership was established between the ILO and Pertamina, one of the biggest state-owned enterprises with more than 14,000 workers and 25,000 subcontracted workers throughout Indonesia. Pertamina developed workplace policy to ensure a non-discriminatory working environment for PLHIV and initiated HIV information, counselling and testing for workers in all worksites across the country. HIV awareness-raising sessions were integrated into its routine safety and health briefings. The company trained its doctors in company clinics to deliver VCT services to workers. Over 15,000 workers were reached and over 1,500 workers underwent HIV testing. The company is providing treatment to 20 workers found to be living with HIV.
- In Russian Federation, the ILO partnered with the biggest Russian mining company, the Siberian Coal Energy Company (SUEK) and the territorial AIDS centres. The ILO undertook advocacy and provided awareness raising activities, and the company implemented the programme in all eight locations, reaching out to workers, their families and communities. In 2015, a total of 154,726 persons were reached with awareness, while the territorial AIDS centres provided counselling and HIV testing to

104,556 persons. 461 workers found to be living with HIV were referred to the territorial AIDS Centres to access treatment, care and support services.

Collaboration with National AIDS programmes:

- In India and Indonesia, the ILO assisted the national AIDS programmes in analysing the HIV testing data related to workers from the government testing centres. The sector-wise, gender-wise and state-wise analysis of data was presented in national workshops involving key stakeholders. The analysis of the selected states, where the ILO partners implemented the initiative and referred workers to take the HIV test at the government centres, provided very useful information. For example, in Indonesia, analysis of the three provinces showed that construction and transport sectors had higher HIV positive results (1.8 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively). In India, the data analysis for two consecutive years provided a better understanding of HIV infections by sector, state and gender. It showed high HIV positive results amongst truck drivers (2.65 per cent); other transport workers (1.92 per cent) and hotel workers (1.80 per cent). This analysis was presented and discussed in national workshops and used by stakeholders to reposition their workplace HIV initiatives in economic sectors having higher HIV positivity. The analysis also provided recommendations on strengthening the national data collection and monitoring system.

The role of communication and advocacy:

- Communication and advocacy with top leaders were undertaken. Messages offering the benefits of HIV testing were developed. Celebrities living with HIV³ were engaged and their messages were promoted through social media. VCT was promoted in key events: Africa CEO Forum, AIDS Day, Labour Day etc. Communicating benefits of HIV testing was found to be effective and so was the aspect of involving celebrities and organizing CEO testing events.
- In India, ILO, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, and the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) developed and implemented a communication campaign called, [The Earlier, the Better](#), involving people living with HIV who shared their testimonies emphasizing the benefits of knowing your status early.
- The ILO in collaboration with its partners integrated HIV testing in events such as Labour Day which has proven to be effective. Nearly 6000 workers (including 1.300 young people) underwent HIV test in Nigeria and over 1000 workers in Nairobi on the International Labour Day 2015.

³ Greg Louganis, Olympian diver: http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multimedia/video/public-service-announcements/WCMS_323860/lang--en/index.htm and <http://www.ilo.org/aids/multimedia/voices/lang--en/index.htm>

LESSONS LEARNED

- A key factor to the success of the VCT@WORK Initiative was that it was implemented in workplaces which had a commitment to non-discrimination through workplace policies/programmes.
- As the initiative reached more men, it can be a good model to create demand for and enhance the uptake of HIV services among men, who until now are not adequately reached in the AIDS response.
- Peer educators at workplaces played an effective role in mobilizing workers, providing information and promoting VCT.
- A strong communication strategy contributed to the success of the initiative. The Getting to Zero at Work campaign provided a solid basis for the implementation of the VCT@WORK Initiative. Communicating ‘the benefits of testing’ helped convincing workers to take the HIV test. Similarly, involving celebrities living with HIV was also found to be very effective.
- Testing under the wellness helped to dilute the stigma around HIV testing. However, the experience showed it calls for much greater coordination effort with a number of service providers for different tests. People who volunteer to take other diagnostic services such as blood pressure or diabetes are a lot more than those who take the HIV test.
- Employers’ and workers’ organizations (trade unions) played an important role in mobilization of enterprises and workers respectively.
- Organization of CEO testing events proved to be very successful. It motivated workers to take the test and also dispelled their fears about facing discrimination or losing jobs in case they were found to be living with HIV.
- Linking the initiative with national AIDS programme and other national initiatives such as the President’s Comprehensive Response Plan in Nigeria; the National Testing Initiative in South Africa; and the migrant workers’ initiative in India helped.
- Public-private partnerships have a huge potential to upscale HIV testing for men and women workers, including workers in the supply chains of companies.
- It is important to track referrals from workplaces to testing centers and also from the testing centers to treatment for workers who are found positive. This calls for setting up partnerships with different partners, as well as an effective motoring system.
- It is important to work with national AIDS programme to ensure that the data related to testing for workers is captured well, analysed and used to take programmatic decisions.
- Migrant and informal economy workers can be best reached by taking the HIV information and testing services to where they are. It is difficult for them to travel to testing centres as it means substantial opportunity cost to them, including the loss of daily wage.

NEXT STEPS:

The new UNAIDS strategy proposes to fast track the AIDS response in the next five years (2016-2021) with a view to ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

The strategy lays down the target of 90-90-90 by 2020:

90% of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy, and 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have viral suppression.

Close to half of the people living with HIV still do not know their status.

Achieving the 90-90-90 targets is dependent upon scaling up HIV testing. The workplace offers not only a unique opportunity to expand HIV testing services, but also to successfully reach out to both men and key populations. Based on the success of the VCT@WORK Initiative, the ILO intends to fast track and upscale the Initiative.