

Ensuring sustainable psychosocial services and comprehensive HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and hepatitis C virus (HCV) care package to detainees in Ukrainian pre-trial detention centers

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Background

- Ukraine has the second-largest HIV epidemic in Eastern Europe.
- HIV prevalence in Ukrainian penal settings is 8.9%.
- Since 2017, the USAID/PATH Serving Life project has implemented a comprehensive HIV, TB, and HCV care package for people in penal settings across 12 regions in Ukraine.
- In 2021, Serving Life, together with the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine's Center of Health Care (MOJ/CHC), implemented the first pilot to provide sustainable psychosocial and HIV services to detainees in a pretrial detention center (SIZO) through the placement of a social worker.

Description

- Serving Life and a project-supported non-governmental organization, "Light of Hope," analyzed staffing regulatory documents of the health care unit at Poltava SIZO, developed a pilot protocol and job description, and hired and trained a social worker for HIV/TB/HCV prevention, HIV rapid testing, and treatment adherence in Poltava SIZO's health care unit.
- Serving Life financed the social worker position during the one-year pilot, and "Light of Hope" provided ongoing training, mentorship, and supervision.
- To support the sustainability of this position, the project concurrently advocated to the MOJ/CHC to integrate a full-time social worker position into the regular, government-funded staffing schedule at SIZOs.

Lessons

- The social worker provided counseling and motivational interview sessions to offer a variety of integrated services to detainees, ranging from HIV/TB/HCV prevention, HIV pre- and post-testing, antiretroviral treatment (ART) adherence and drug dependency (Figure 1). Daily provision of psychosocial services without stigma and discrimination to detainees by a trusted, trained social worker was key to the pilot's success.
- Index case testing (ICT) with index partners identified by detainees living with HIV (Figure 2) was a successful method of additional case finding. The provision of ICT services by a trusted and dedicated social worker was a key component for the high acceptability rate of ICT by detainees.
- As a result of the project's advocacy efforts, the MOJ/CHC granted approval for the Poltava SIZO to officially employ a social worker funded by the state. As of January 2022, the first social worker was officially included as part of the SIZO's health care unit staff.



Photo: Serhii Levchenko, social worker at Poltava SIZO (second person from right), is the first social worker in a Ukrainian penal setting officially hired and paid by the state budget. Photo/Tetiana Gaborets, PATH Ukraine



Photo: Courtyard of a Ukrainian SIZO. Photo/Vladyslav Sodel, USAID Photographer, Kyiv, Ukraine.



Photo: Ukrainian detainees supported by the USAID/PATH Serving Life project. Photo/Vladyslav Sodel, USAID Photographer, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Figure 1: Counseling and motivational interview sessions conducted by social worker for Poltava SIZO detainees, January – December 2021.

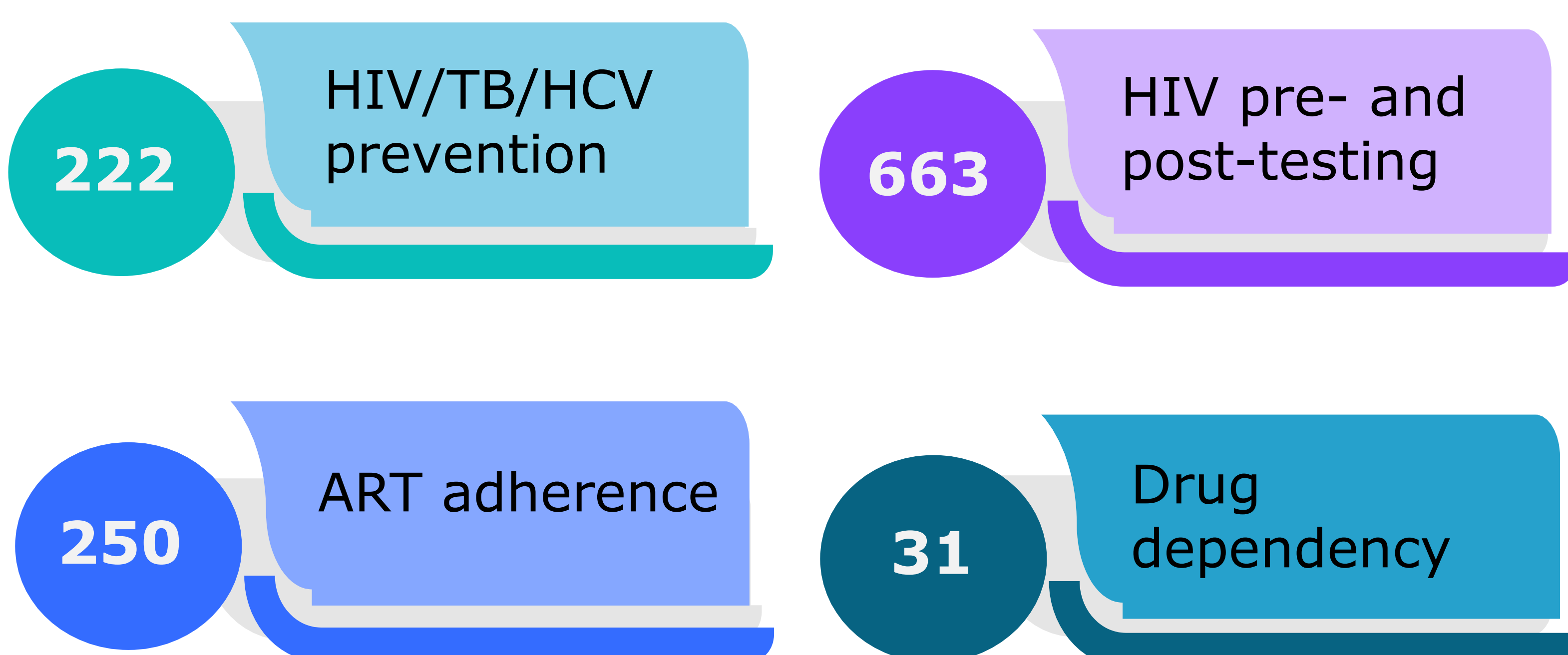
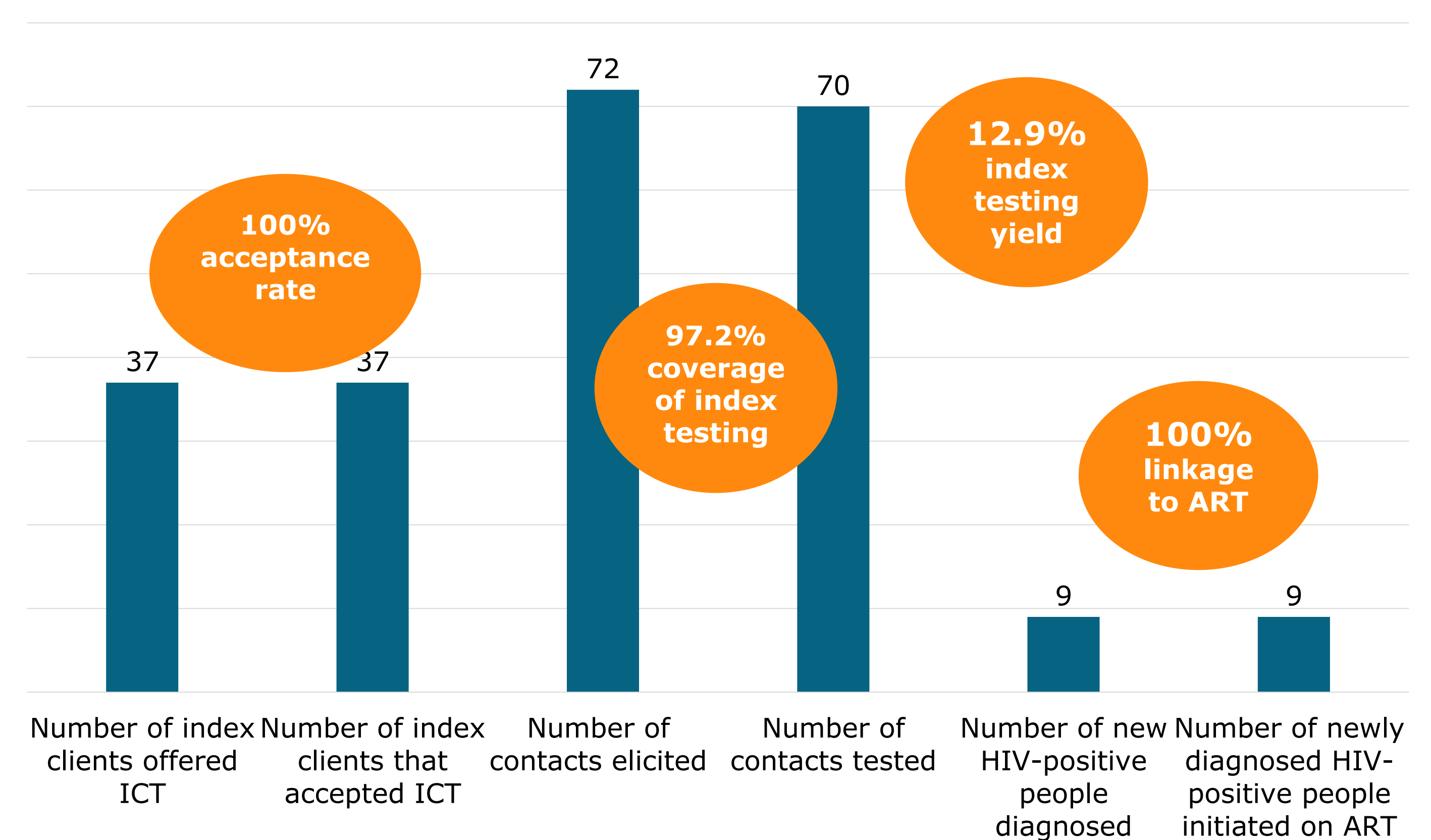


Figure 2: ICT cascade at Poltava SIZO, January – December 2021.



Conclusions

- The successful pilot at Poltava SIZO showed the value of counseling and motivational interviewing to provide comprehensive HIV/TB/HCV care in penal settings, and provided an opportunity to ensure sustainability of psychosocial services for detainees using state funds beyond the Serving Life project. The MOJ plans to expand this approach to all SIZOs in Ukraine in 2023.

Ensuring continuity of integrated HIV services during the war

When the Russian-Ukrainian war began on February 24, 2022, the social worker, Serhii Levchenko, left his post to join the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In his absence, the social worker from the partner NGO "Light of Hope" visits regularly to implement the package of services. The position is reserved for Serhii and he plans to return directly after the war.

