

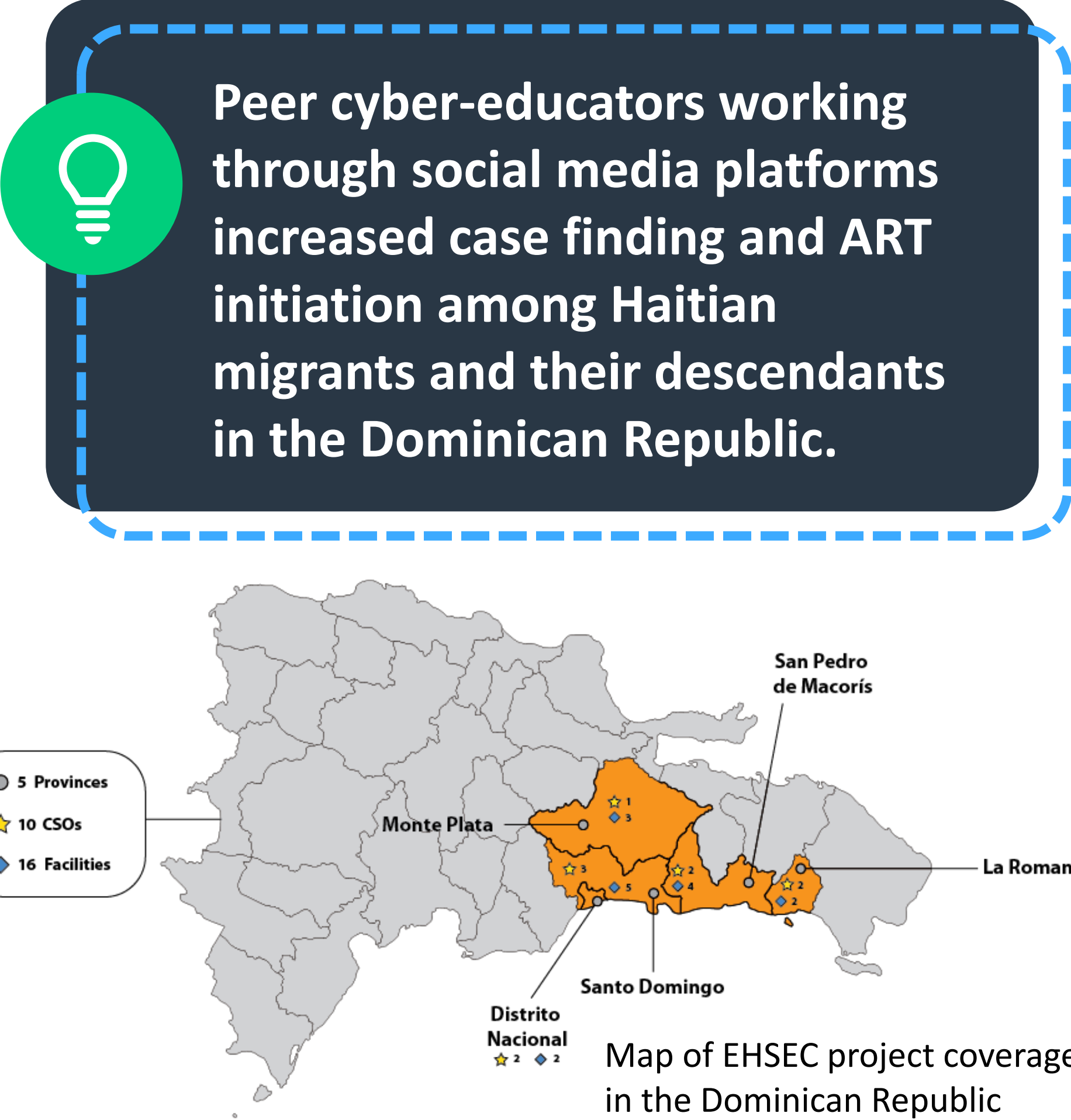
Use of social media platforms by peer cyber-educators strengthened case finding and antiretroviral therapy initiation among Haitian migrants and individuals of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic

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BACKGROUND

In the Dominican Republic, the HIV Services and System Strengthening (HS3) project (October 2019–September 2022) and the Enhanced HIV Services for Epidemic Control (EHSEC) project (October 2022–September 2027), funded by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), have offered HIV testing and treatment services to Haitian migrants and individuals of Haitian descent—a priority population (PP) in the country—through eight civil service organizations (CSOs) and 16 government and CSO-led health ART facilities in five provinces. Based on UNAIDS estimates, approximately 40% of these PP individuals living with HIV know their serological status, while only 27% are on treatment;¹ this is far from achievement of the UNAIDS 95-95-95 goals.



DESCRIPTION

From October 2019 through September 2021, HS3 identified 4,399 of the PP individuals living with HIV, with 5% case finding and 83% treatment initiation. Hence, HS3 consulted with members of the PP to design innovative strategies to increase case finding and treatment initiation. Social media was selected to strengthen PP engagement in HIV services, which resulted in training and engaging 13 peer cyber-educators (PCEs) to identify PP individuals through Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and dating applications. Beginning in October 2021, Creole- and Spanish-speaking PCEs identified PP individuals on social media through keywords related to the Haitian community. Once the connection was established, PCEs used specific messages to engage them in HIV services, virtually navigated PP individuals to HIV testing sites, and provided treatment initiation support after a counselor offered HIV rapid testing.

LESSONS LEARNED

We analyzed retrospective client records from October 2021 through September 2023 using routinely collected, aggregated program data for PP individuals ages 15 and older who received an HIV test and its result.

TABLE 1. HIV testing, case finding, and treatment initiation, by testing strategy (October 2021–September 2023)

Indicators	Testing Strategy		
	Social media strategy	Non-social-media strategy	Total
Tested	1,286	77,571	78,857
HIV positive	145	4,768	4,913
Initiated ART	144	4,586	4,730
Case-finding rate	11%	6%	6%
ART initiation rate	99%	96%	96%

Overall, the projects tested 78,857 PP individuals, with 6% case finding and 96% treatment initiation (Table 1). The non-social-media strategy reported 6% (4,768/77,571) case finding and 96% (4,586/4,768) treatment initiation, while the social media strategy reported 11% (145/1,286) case finding and 99% (144/145) treatment initiation.



HIV testing promotion on project Instagram page, SakPase



Toll-free HIV hotline and WhatsApp contact information

CONCLUSIONS/NEXT STEPS

The social media strategy reported higher case finding and treatment initiation compared to non-social-media testing strategies. Our analysis shows that the engagement of PP individuals through social media strategies is feasible and effective in closing the gap toward achievement of the UNAIDS 95-95-95 goals in the Dominican Republic.

REFERENCES:

- 1 United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Dominican Republic: HIV/AIDS epidemic control. Washington (DC): USAID; 2023. Available from: <https://www.usaid.gov/dominican-republic/fact-sheet/hiv-aids-epidemic-control>

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- 1 FHI 360, Dominican Republic
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