

UNAIDS PROGRAMME COORDINATING BOARD WORKING GROUP

First meeting of the PCB Working Group on the Thematic Segment of the 58th PCB meeting

Beyond 2025: Countering health inequities through sustaining the HIV response, human rights and harm reduction for people who use drugs

Meeting Summary

Date: 17 March 2026

Venue: Conference Room 6 And Teams

Agenda

- Welcome and introduction
- Presentation of the draft outline of the background note on “***Beyond 2025: Countering health inequities through sustaining the HIV response, human rights and harm reduction for people who use drugs***”
- Discussion on the draft outline of the background note
- Presentation of the pre-zero draft agenda
- Discussion on the pre-zero draft agenda
- Next steps

SUMMARY

1. Welcome and introduction

Morten Ussing, Director of Governance, UNAIDS Secretariat, welcomed participants to the first meeting of the PCB Working Group established to prepare the thematic segment of the 58th PCB meeting on “*Beyond 2025: Countering health inequities through sustaining the HIV response, human rights and harm reduction for people who use drugs.*”

He emphasized that the thematic segment is mandated through the PCB Modus Operandi and provides a full day for in-depth discussion, with no decisions taken on the day itself. Decisions are taken at the subsequent PCB meeting based on the summary report.

Mr Ussing recalled the process for selecting thematic segment topics. The PCB Bureau issues a call for themes after the June PCB each year, and proposals are reviewed based on broad relevance, responsiveness, focus and actionable scope. The present theme was proposed by the PCB NGO Delegation, widely supported by the Bureau, and postponed from June 2025 due to a PCB meeting agenda that could not accommodate it.

He noted the Working Group's role in shaping the focus of the background note, the annotated outline, the agenda and the selection of speakers. The Secretariat prepares the background note on behalf of the Executive Director, with Cosponsor support. He also expressed gratitude to UNODC as it serves as the technical co-lead for this thematic segment.

Two meetings of the Working Group are anticipated, with the second to review the full draft background note, near final agenda and speaker list. Written comments from Working Group members would be welcomed until **20 March 2026**.

2. Presentation of the draft annotated outline of the background note

Dasha Ocheret, Adviser on Community Led Responses, UNAIDS Secretariat, presented the draft annotated outline co-prepared with UNODC. She recalled that the last PCB thematic segment focused on harm reduction was held more than ten years ago (2014), and this background note aimed to capture progress, challenges and solutions since then.

The outline covered:

- An introduction summarizing epidemiological trends, the disproportionate HIV burden among people who inject drugs, and the 2030 targets relevant to this population.
- Inequalities preventing progress, presenting regional access data to harm reduction services and highlighting disparities affecting young people, women, LGBTI persons, sex workers, displaced populations and people in prisons.
- Structural and human rights-related barriers, including criminalization, stigma, discrimination, and gaps in domestic and international funding.
- Human rights and inequalities, including advances and setbacks in policy, decriminalization and non-custodial measures, stigma, violence, and specific focus on young people and women who use drugs.
- Harm reduction within broader contexts such as conflict, displacement and climate-related crises.
- Community leadership in advocacy, service delivery and sustainability.
- Sustainability, including domestic funding challenges, shrinking civic space, integration into national systems, community-led services and transition agendas.
- A final section on strategic directions and recommendations relating to strategic information, new technologies, preparedness, community leadership, human rights and sustainability.

3. Discussion on the annotated outline of the background note

Participants welcomed the outline and offered detailed reflections:

Member States

- Highlighted reintegration challenges following treatment and psychosocial support, urging attention to sustainable reintegration outcomes, integration into primary health care, and harm reduction in humanitarian settings.

NGO Delegation:

- Expressed that *chemsex* and MSM perspectives should be more prominently included, noting strong intersections between sexual practices, identity, drug use and HIV risks.
- Emphasized the diversity among people who use drugs, including noninjecting and sexually-associated use patterns, highlighted decriminalization as a core structural barrier and recommended treating it as crosscutting across the document.

Cosponsors

- Urged inclusion of the Middle East crisis, noting impacts on harm reduction programmes, displacement and UNAIDS' reduced presence in the region.
- Noted recent Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolutions on harm reduction beyond 2030 and urged greater focus on actionable solutions, sustainability and practical interventions for the next 5–10 years.

Ms Ocheret thanked participants for their comments and explained that chemsex would be reflected more prominently, noting that it will be specified in the introduction when discussing burden and inequalities, and also in the sustainability section, particularly where countries transition from global donor to domestic funding and what happens to chemsex--related harm reduction services, including any good practices or additional barriers.

She confirmed that decriminalization is already included as a structural barrier and that the paper will also address the space needed for community leadership on and civil society organizations to engage in legal reform, adding that it will be highlighted throughout the document rather than appearing in just one place.

Responding to comments on the Middle East crisis, she stressed that crisis, war and climate change create contexts in which the needs of key populations - particularly people who inject drugs - must be addressed more explicitly, and that these considerations may influence discussions on the agenda, panels and speakers. She emphasized that upcoming calls for case studies and best practices would welcome submissions from the Middle East region.

On data gaps, Ms Ocheret agreed that it is essential not only to summarize available data but also to highlight the lack of strategic information, noting that population size- estimates remain a major challenge for HIV response planning, and that this issue will be reflected in the introduction and integrated throughout the outline.

Addressing reintegration, she acknowledged the importance of capturing outcomes beyond HIV - such as reintegration into society after receiving harm reduction and psychosocial services - which positively influence the cost-effectiveness- of harm reduction and decriminalization approaches; she also underlined the need for inputs from people with lived experience and service providers, including in humanitarian settings, and affirmed that women who use drugs will be a highlighted focus in the paper.

In response to calls for more concrete solutions, Ms Ocheret agreed that the outline must present actionable examples that have proven effective in particular country or legal contexts and that can be adapted by others, noting that much of this would sit within the sustainability section but that solutions should also be woven into descriptions of challenges.

4. Presentation and discussion of the zero-draft agenda

Umunyana Rugege, Head of Human Rights at UNAIDS Secretariat, presented the pre-zero draft agenda structured around:

- **Opening dialogue: keynote addresses** by the UNAIDS Executive Director, a high-level country representative and a community/civil society representative, setting the strategic framing for the day.
- Session overview: presentation of key data and important elements contained in the thematic segment background note.
- **Three panels**, aligned with the background note:
 1. **Addressing inequalities that prevent progress**, with voices from women who use drugs, young people, people who use drugs in prison settings, and humanitarian contexts.
 2. **Protecting human rights through law and policy change**, including decriminalization, alternatives to punishment, country best practices, civic space and human rights advocacy.
 3. **Sustainability**, including funding gaps, domestic financing, bilateral arrangements, integration (including social contracting), and removing legal barriers to community-led harm reduction.

Exact timings of the thematic segment day would be defined at the second meeting of the PCB working group.

5. Discussion on the draft agenda

NGO Delegation

- Encouraged moving beyond community “silos” and instead structuring discussions around *contexts* (e.g., chemsex, refugee settings, nightlife, sex work economies), to reflect diverse social dynamics and intersectional harms.
- Cautioned against overmedicalization and limiting integration to primary health care models; harm reduction must remain rights-based and community-led.

Cosponsors

- Reiterated challenges of achieving solution-focused discussions amid funding cuts and economic strain, but supported exploring actionable integration models.

The Secretariat responded that the approach to developing the thematic segment is firmly grounded in intersectionality, noting that this lens guided all UNAIDS work by examining inequalities across different groups and settings.

Umunyana Rugege emphasized that the human rights approach remained central and flowed through all aspects of the background paper and agenda design. She stressed the importance of nuance when discussing integration, recalling earlier concerns that poorly designed integration could amplify inequalities, and highlighted the need to bring different perspectives into the conversation.

She underscored that while the panels must ensure representativity - including women who use drugs, young people, trans people, and people in humanitarian contexts - the discussions should avoid siloed approaches and instead reflect diverse, intersectional experiences. She also

noted the importance of ensuring that the thematic day supports meaningful decision points by identifying what advice Working Group members want countries to take forward after the segment.

Morten Ussing added that although the thematic day itself does not result in immediate decisions, the Working Group plays a central role in shaping the recommendations of the background note, which in turn strongly influences the decisions adopted by the PCB at the subsequent meeting. He explained that the PCB's decisions typically include commitments for Member States and responsibilities for the Joint Programme, and highlighted the unique role of the NGO Delegation as an integral contributor to shaping intergovernmental outcomes. Mr Ussing further noted the importance of receiving multiple speaker suggestions from different regions and constituencies to ensure gender and geographic balance, and emphasized the practical need to finalize the speaker list early due to the complexity of arranging travel under UNAIDS' new management system.

Together, the Secretariat affirmed the need for intersectionality, nuanced integration discussions, a grounding in human rights, and broad constituency representation throughout the thematic day's agenda and documentation.

6. Next Steps

Mr Ussing reminded members that written comments on both the annotated outline and draft agenda should be submitted by **COB 20 March 2026**.

A call for **country case studies and good practices** will be circulated to PCB members and missions; these would inform the background note and be compiled into a conference room paper with impact beyond the thematic segment.

Members were invited to propose **speakers** for the panels, keeping in mind gender, regional and constituency balance. The Secretariat aims to finalize the speaker list as early as possible due to travel preparations.

The second Working Group meeting will be convened once the near-final background note and agenda are ready for review.

Mr Ussing closed the meeting with thanks to all participants for their contributions.

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