

Joint Statement by UNAIDS

Priority theme: Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective (agenda item 3(a)(i))

Thank you, Mr Chairperson,

I deliver this statement on behalf of the Secretariat and co-sponsors of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)¹, to address the inter-linkages between the AIDS epidemic and gender equality, in the context of the priority theme of the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Mr Chairperson,

Despite significant progress, the AIDS epidemic continues to take a heavy toll on women and girls, including in humanitarian and fragile settings. Deeply rooted gender-based discrimination, violence and inequalities—compounded by deepening poverty among women and girls globally²—deny many women and adolescent girls economic justice and deprive them of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. They bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, including in the context of HIV, and are denied equal access to well remunerated and secure economic opportunities. The unequal distribution of paid, unpaid and underpaid work impacts on women's economic empowerment, agency, autonomy and choices and is an infringement of their rights.

These intersecting inequalities increase the risks of HIV, especially for adolescent girls and young women. Many women and girls living with, at risk of and affected by HIV experience sexual and gender-based violence, stigma, discrimination, as well as exclusion from opportunities in education and economic empowerment, including denial of land, property and inheritance rights and equal access to justice systems.

The data is sobering. In 2022³:

- 71% of new HIV infections among adolescents (aged 10–19 years) were among girls.
- Every week, 4000 adolescent girls and young women (aged 15–24 years) became infected with HIV worldwide. 3100 of these infections occurred in sub-Saharan Africa, also where 6 out of 7 new HIV infections in adolescents (aged 10–19 years) were among girls.
- Globally, for women in key populations, female sex workers are 30 times more likely to be infected with HIV compared to women in the general population, while transgender women are 14 times more likely, and women who inject drugs face a 40% higher risk of HIV infection compared to men who inject drugs.

In 2020, the average HIV prevalence among women in prison was 5.2% versus 2.9% among men⁴.

¹ The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) brings together the efforts of 11 United Nations Cosponsors—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and the UNAIDS Secretariat to help the world end AIDS as a public health threat.

² [Poverty deepens for women and girls, according to latest projections | UN Women Data Hub](#)

³ [Global HIV & AIDS statistics — Fact sheet](#) (UNAIDS, 2023) and [E/CN.6/2024/6](#)

⁴ Update on HIV in Prisons and Other Closed Settings (UNAIDS/PCB (49)/21.25.rev1, Geneva, 2021) https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/PCB49_HIV_Prisons_Closed_Settings_rev1_EN.pdf

Mr Chairperson,

For many women and girls, HIV is both a cause and an outcome of poverty. We must challenge and transform the systemic, intergenerational, social and economic injustice, and the denial of human rights of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The 2021 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and the Global AIDS Strategy for 2021–2026 provide a solid framework and targets to guide the efforts required to end inequalities and end AIDS. We call on Member States to urgently implement their commitments to end the social, economic, racial and gender inequalities, stigma, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence and human rights violations, and remove restrictive and discriminatory laws, policies and practices that continue to perpetuate HIV among women and girls in all their diversity, including in crisis-affected contexts.

We also call for the implementation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on Women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS⁵. Let me highlight three areas where HIV-related investments and financing for gender equality and women's empowerment are especially relevant to the Commission's priority theme and will advance progress across multiple SDGs:

- 1. Education** is a game-changing investment that protects adolescent girls and young women from HIV, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Keeping girls in secondary school reduces their HIV vulnerability by up to 50 per cent. The Education Plus initiative has been endorsed by the African Union and is now being led by 15 African countries⁶, with support from UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women. Education Plus advocates for universal access to free quality secondary education, violence-free school environments, comprehensive sexuality education, access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and effective school-to-work transitions for adolescent girls and young women.
- 2. Financing gender- and age-responsive social protection** is a powerful enabler of the AIDS response, by addressing the social and economic inequalities that fuel the epidemic, reducing the risk of HIV acquisition and enabling access to services. Women and girls living with, at risk of, and affected by HIV must be able to access social protection without stigma and discrimination.
- 3. Increased financing for feminist and girls' rights organizations, including those led by women and girls living with HIV** is critical. We call for the implementation of the Global AIDS Strategy, which requires greater support for women-led responses, including for advocacy and service delivery for HIV prevention, treatment and care.

Mr Chairperson,

In closing, we commend the continued leadership of SADC countries in sponsoring the CSW resolution on Women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS. We applaud their efforts this year—under the chairpersonship of Angola—and call on all Member States to extend their support to this important resolution and its implementation.

I thank you.

⁵ [E/CN.6/2024/6](#)

⁶ Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Eswatini, Gabon, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

