



Gender equality is needed to end AIDS

Gender inequality fuels the HIV epidemic

HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death worldwide for women aged 15-44 years¹. Gender inequality is a major contributor to the global HIV epidemic and the HIV response has become a painful testimony of gender inequality in practice. There is not a single country in the world that has achieved gender equality: equal rights and opportunities in all areas of life, as well as recognising varied gender-independent behaviours, goals, and needs equally. Consequently, women in all their diversity are disproportionately impacted by the HIV epidemic and their sexual and reproductive health and rights are violated.

Why women and adolescent girls are disproportionately affected

Gender norms limit women's decision-making authority and control over their bodies, therefore diminishing their capacity to protect their sexual health and limiting their access to services and treatment. The COVID-19 exacerbated economic and social hardship, which is also coupled with restricted travel and social isolation measures. This has increased exponentially gender-based violence at an alarming rate (UNAIDS 2020). Intimate partner violence increases HIV susceptibility, and (fear of) violence is related with lower rates of treatment access, treatment adherence, and viral suppression among women and girls. Additionally, HIV infection increases the likelihood of encountering gender-based violence.

Harmful gender standards affect everyone

While social norms change from location to location and across time, they exert a strong influence on us. Men and boys are incarcerated by masculinity norms. To avoid appearing weak, men may be unwilling to seek medical care, resulting in a delayed HIV diagnosis. Not adhering to the gender standards of society may result in stigma or even persecution. Sexual labour and homosexual sex are criminalized in a number of nations. This discrimination promotes violence-related HIV infections and restricts access to basic treatment and is thus a structural driver of the HIV epidemic among communities.

¹Women's Health | WHO | Regional Office for Africa



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Aidsfonds' work on achieving gender equality



Gender equality means equal rights and opportunities within all areas of life and valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender. Under the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, the world has committed to ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. Aidsfonds is committed to achieving gender equality in the world.

What we are doing

✓ Aidsfonds is advocating for accelerated access to **new HIV prevention tools** such as the Dapivirine vaginal ring. The Dapivirine ring is the first discreet, women-controlled, long acting HIV prevention product. Find out more about this through our [EmpowerRing: Prevention by Choice project](#)

✓ Scaling our work on **digital health** to reach millions of young women and girls with sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services. Our [Stepped Care projects](#) ensure that young women and youth have the right information and service in the desired place, at the desired time delivered by the desired digital solution or person to meet their specific needs.

✓ Aidsfonds is investing in advocacy to elicit **system change** and influence policies to improve gender equality. Our global advocacy team based in Washington, Brussels, Geneva and The Hague ensure that women stay central to the global agenda on HIV. We are also advocating to involve women, especially those living in sub-Saharan Africa, in **HIV cure studies**. Currently this field is still very dominated focusing on white men in Western Europe and Northern America.

✓ Through our [You\(th\) Care project](#) in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia, we will enable adolescents and youth aged 10-25 years, especially girls and other adolescents experiencing gender inequality, in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia to advocate for and practice self-care for their SRHR needs and to increase access to (digital) self-care services and commodities.

✓ Through our **key populations** projects including the [Love Alliance](#), where we advocate to end sexual, gender based violence, stigma and discrimination and promote access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and also through [Hands Off](#) where we seek to reduce violence against sex workers, we are reaching women in all their diversity.

✓ **Mothers and children** are supported through our [Kids to Care](#) programme which seeks to empower communities to find and support pregnant women and children living with HIV. We are working to ensure that all pregnant women living with HIV receive treatment and their children are born and remain HIV free.

Let's connect

Aidsfonds is part of Aidsfonds – Soa Aids Nederland, a non-governmental organisation based in the Netherlands that also works internationally. Aidsfonds, in our role as fundraiser & funder, advocate and expert, is interested to partner to accelerate progress towards gender equality of adolescent girls and young women in all their diversity, adolescents and young people living with HIV.

We would like to talk to anyone who shares our dream and wants to join an inspiring movement. Get in touch with us to discuss collaboration, strategic partnerships and innovative solutions to end AIDS by 2030. Please contact Lewis Smith, Partnerships Lead at Aidsfonds: lsmith@aidsfonds.nl



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