

World AIDS Day 2024: Communities and Civil Society in Asia-Pacific Call on leaders to 'Take the Rights Path'!

This World AIDS Day, Global Fund Advocates Network Asia-Pacific (GFAN AP), communities and civil society across Asia-Pacific call on leaders to **'take the rights path'** towards ending AIDS as an epidemic. The promotion and upholding of human rights is not only a necessary obligation by leaders and duty-bearers, it is also an essential approach for ending AIDS as an epidemic, for ensuring sustainable development, and for safeguarding human security. More now than ever, we must act to ensure everyone's rights are protected, to ensure everyone's health is also protected!

In 2023, AIDS-related illnesses resulted in the deaths of 630,000 people – or one person every minute¹. Over the same year, despite progress towards the 95-95-95 targets², the world recorded 1.3 million new HIV infections, bringing the total number of people living with HIV to 39.9 million. The Asia-Pacific is home to 60% of the world's population, some 4.3 billion people, with five of the ten most populous in this region – India, China, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and all face varying challenges in terms of their health and social insurance systems. In Asia-Pacific, where approximately 17% of all people living with HIV (PLHIV) are located, key and vulnerable populations experience higher-than-average health risks: only 67% of PLHIV are on life-saving antiretroviral therapy (ART), 10% below the global average of 77%; while AIDS-related deaths numbered 150,000 in 2023, representing a disproportionate 24% of the global total.

Across the world, key and vulnerable populations face criminalisation, stigma and discrimination based on their identities and behaviours. For example, 145 countries criminalise the use or possession of small amounts of drugs; 168 countries criminalise some aspect of sex work; 67 countries criminalise consensual same-sex intercourse; 20 countries criminalise transgender people; and 143 countries criminalise or otherwise prosecute HIV exposure, non-disclosure, or transmission. At the same time, the median prevalence of HIV is notably higher among certain marginalised groups as compared to the average – it is 7.7% higher among gay men and other men who have sex with men; 3% higher among sex workers; 5% higher among people who inject drugs; 9.2% higher among transgender people; and 1.3% higher among people in prisons.

"The relationship between human rights and health outcomes is clear and well-documented," said Harry Prabowo, Programme Manager at Asia-Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN+). "In contexts where communities experience frequent human rights violations such as persecution and discrimination due to SOGIESC³, HIV status, and other identities, people living with, affected by and/or vulnerable to HIV are prevented from accessing quality prevention, testing and treatment services, which is an impingement on their right to health. Therefore, HIV responses must seek to advance human rights and strengthen community systems, including community-led monitoring to be effective and sustainable in the long term, in line with the 10-10-10 targets⁴ and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and Universal Health Coverage by 2030."

In the wake of shrinking civic space, deteriorating civil liberties, and an erosion of human rights across the globe and in the region, we need stronger commitments from leaders and duty-bearers to strengthen community systems and let communities lead! Community-led and community-based organisations (CBOs), who work at the grassroots level with key and vulnerable populations, sit at the heart of community health interventions. Yet, CBOs are under-resourced and deprived of adequate representation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions and policies at national, regional, and global levels.

"Global and national figures fail to highlight the inequities in progress on community, rights and gender that affect and disproportionately impact key and vulnerable communities," stressed Sita Shahi, Regional Coordinator of the International Community of Women Living with HIV Asia-Pacific (ICWAP). "There needs to be a meaningful shift towards equitable sharing of power and inclusion of community perspectives and voices at all levels. We as communities have the right to self-determination and are entitled to an equal voice at the table with governments, donors, technical agencies, and other stakeholders in discussions on health interventions intended for communities, and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the same".

¹ [UNAIDS Fact Sheet 2024](#)

² The 95-95-95 targets call for 95% of people living with HIV to know their HIV status, 95% of people who know they are living with HIV to be receiving antiretroviral therapy, and 95% of people receiving antiretroviral therapy to have a suppressed viral load by 2025.

³ Sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics

⁴ The 10-10-10 targets for removing social and legal impediments towards an enabling environment limiting access or utilization of HIV services are: less than 10% of countries have punitive legal and policy environments that deny or limit access to services; less than 10% of people living with HIV and people from key populations experience stigma and discrimination; and less than 10% of women, girls, people living with HIV and people from key populations experience gender inequality and violence. ([UNAIDS, 2025 AIDS Targets](#))

'TAKE THE RIGHTS PATH' TO END HIV/AIDS!

Diminishing resources in recent years have significantly hindered our progress towards the targets. Funding availability for HIV dropped to US\$19.8 billion in 2023, a significant reduction of 5% from US\$20.8 billion the year before, and marked the lowest amount for HIV since 2011. Additionally, the amount of funding available falls far short of the US\$29.3 billion that is needed in 2025 to get back on track to end AIDS as a public health threat.

In addition, our operating environments have also grown more complex due to ongoing effects of climate change, conflict, political tensions, and attacks on human rights, gender equality and civil society. These colliding crises have far-reaching negative effects on communities living with, affected by and/or vulnerable to HIV, not only exacerbating the effects of HIV and AIDS, but also further depriving people of their livelihood rights, rights to safety, and other fundamental rights.

In face of these challenges, communities and civil society in Asia-Pacific call on country leaders, donors and duty-bearers to:

1. **Uphold and protect human rights for all, including key and vulnerable populations living with, affected by and/or vulnerable to HIV**, by removing laws that criminalise and impinge on the enjoyment of human rights and enacting anti-discrimination laws that uphold the rights of every person. Counter the stigmatization of HIV and advance gender equality through training and awareness-raising efforts for health care providers, policymakers, and the general public.
2. **Substantially increase the available resourcing for HIV interventions by supporting the upcoming Eighth Replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) in 2025.** The Global Fund provides 28% of all international financing for HIV programmes and has invested US\$26.6 billion in programmes to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS as of 2023 and has committed to integrating four key principles – participation, equity, accountability, and transparency – throughout the grant cycle and into the policy-making process. Since 2017, the Global Fund has also invested more than US\$200 through [Breaking Down Barriers](#) to support programmes to remove human rights and gender-related barriers to services in 24 countries.
3. **Increase the mobilisation of domestic resources for health in recipient countries**, to support the continuation of meaningful and sustainable health interventions in the long term. Invest domestic resources in cost-saving prevention programmes that could reduce future transmissions of HIV.
4. **Advocate for direct resourcing to communities and a power-shift to ensure communities have an equal say and meaningful engagement during discussions** with governments, donors, technical agencies, and other stakeholders about community health programming and policies that impact their rights. Provide communities with the resources and the power they need to take charge of their lives and health, and let communities lead on health interventions intended for communities.

#MoreNowThanEver, we must **'take the rights path'** together to end AIDS as an epidemic by 2030!

The [Global Fund Advocates Network Asia-Pacific \(GFAN AP\)](#) is an advocacy platform of HIV, Tuberculosis and malaria community and civil society organisations in the Asia-Pacific region that supports advocacy for a fully resourced Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund); increased and sustainable domestic resource mobilisation for health; and equitable, people-centred, human rights-based and gender transformative inclusion of HIV, Tuberculosis and malaria responses within Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

The [Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health \(APCOM\)](#) works to improve the health and rights of gay men, other men who have sex with men, and SOGIESC people across Asia and the Pacific.

The [Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS \(APN+\)](#) fosters partnership and collaboration to improve the quality of life for all people living with HIV in Asia and the Pacific through peer-led advocacy, leadership, network strengthening, and communication.

The [Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers \(APNSW\)](#) is a sex worker initiated and lead organisation representing sex worker organisations in Asia & the Pacific.

The [International Community of Women Living with HIV Asia Pacific \(ICWAP\)](#) is the regional network run by and for women living with HIV (WLHIV) in Asia and the Pacific.

The [Network of Asian People Who Use Drugs \(NAPUD\)](#) is a regional peer-based network that promotes the health and defends the human rights of people who use drugs (PUD) in Asia.

The [Asia Pacific Network of Young Key Populations \(Youth LEAD\)](#) works to empower adolescents ages 14-18 and young key populations ages 18-30 at the grassroots level from across the Asia-Pacific region.