

# Statement by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

## Priority theme: Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (agenda item 3(a))

Thank you, Chair,

The commitment to addressing HIV/AIDS among women and girls is an integral part of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It is complemented by and mutually reinforcing with the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, and the 2021 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

Since Beijing, significant strides have been made in reducing female poverty, closing the gender gap in education and implementing legal reforms to protect women's rights, as well as in reducing new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths overall and among women and girls globally.

However, stark gaps in women's equality persist compromising their health and well-being and continuing to fuel the HIV epidemic:

- Across 26 countries with available data, only 55% of women currently married or in a union make their own decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and their own health care.
- Gender-based violence continues unabated and more than 370 million girls and women alive today—or 1 in 8—experienced rape or sexual assault before the age of 18.

Discrimination, violence, gender stereotypes, negative social norms and HIV-related stigma increase the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV. 53% of all people living with HIV—that is more than 21 million people—are women and girls. Among adolescents globally 75 per cent of new HIV infections occur in girls. Every week, 4000 adolescent girls and young women become infected with HIV globally. 3100 of them are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Funding is vital to tackling these challenges. However, in the current HIV funding crisis, women and girls living with and affected by HIV are being acutely impacted. A recent report reflects that one in four women living with HIV have had to skip life-saving treatment due to financial barriers, and that there have already been closures of maternal health facilities. Fear and anxiety about pregnancy complications are common, particularly among women living with HIV who need specialized care. Over 60% of women-led HIV organizations have lost funding or been forced to suspend essential programmes, leaving entire communities without access to vital services.

There is an urgent need for sustained, flexible funding for women-led responses and a recommitment to protecting the rights, health, and well-being of all women and girls living with, at risk of or affected by HIV. Strengthening our work on human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is a promise of the Pact of the Future, one that we have collectively made, and must all ensure is delivered.

Placing gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls, and human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, at the centre of the HIV response is essential, now more than ever. With only five years left to achieve the sustainable development goals, including the commitment to ending AIDS as a public health threat, UNAIDS calls for an acceleration of political commitments to and investments in gender equality for all women and girls, including those living with, at risk of, and affected by HIV and the systematic inclusion of all women and girls in decision making in all spheres, in the HIV response and beyond.

Thank you.

