

World Aids Day: Call to action!

For the attention of the Governments of Europe and Central Asia;

Dear Decision-makers,

We, the young people, coming from the undersigned civil society organizations, are deeply concerned with the ongoing HIV pandemic and its repercussions on the lives of millions of people all over the world, and specifically in Europe and Central Asia.

Having noted the tremendous progress in the global HIV and AIDS response, we believe that the programs addressing HIV interventions and providing SRHR services should not only be designed based on the assumption that young people are the beneficiaries but also deserve to be part of the policy and programs formulation. We further recognize the actions taken by various governments and the UN, however, as long as young people do not become a critical part of the response, we cannot sustain any gains in the response.

We thus recall the Bali Youth Declaration 2012; the AIDS 2014 Youth Call to Action, the 2016 High Level Meeting Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS; and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the International AIDS Conference 2016, and would like to emphasise once more the importance of youth participation in decision making processes, especially in responding to the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Today we mark the 28th World AIDS Day! Since the beginning of the epidemic over **36 million people worldwide have died** due to AIDS related illnesses and currently over **35 million persons are living with HIV** claiming the lives of approximately 2 million persons every year, including 270,000 children.

Although HIV is preventable through effective public health measures, significant HIV transmission continues in Europe. At a global level, 41 % of new HIV infections are among young people. In 2015, almost 30 000 people were diagnosed in European Union and European Economic Area Member States; a rate of 6.3 cases in every 100 000 people. Alarmingly Eastern Europe and Central Asia saw a 57% increase in infections between 2010-2015, one of the most significant increases worldwide.

Stigma and discrimination are among the foremost barriers to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Many of the people most vulnerable to HIV face stigma, prejudice and discrimination in their daily life. This pushes them to the margins of society, where poverty and fear make accessing healthcare and HIV services difficult. Half of all new HIV infections worldwide are among people belonging to key affected populations, this includes but is not limited to, women, children and young people and adolescents.

No single institution or agency can overcome the HIV and AIDS epidemic on its own. All sectors and levels of the government must be mobilized and strong partnerships formed with people living with HIV and AIDS. In addition to this, the business sector, faith-based organizations, youth groups and other civil society organizations should also be included in these partnerships.

Youth should be the key to fight HIV and AIDS; Their active and meaningful participation in prevention and care efforts is crucial, and those who are especially vulnerable, including young key populations, must be included.

Prevention efforts targeted at those who are currently most affected should be supported by prevention work among young persons generally. The involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS is crucial in the response to the pandemic and their participation must be an integral part of planning and implementation of interventions.

Therefore, on the occasion of the World AIDS Day and considering the current SDG framework, we the young people call on you to:

1. Adopt adequate legislative frameworks to protect, empower and inform individuals afflicted by the HIV and AIDS pandemic that does not discriminate people affected by HIV and AIDS on the basis of race and color, as well as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and religion and beliefs.
2. To develop mechanisms and strategies to ensure targeted prevention measures for population groups at risk.
3. Align health and development efforts around country-led time-bound goals towards ending extreme poverty and HIV as set forth in the SDGs.
4. We urge governments to ensure free and universal access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education in both formal and non-formal settings for all young people, by also engaging and reaching the most vulnerable ones including young key populations.

Endorsed by: