

Intervention as delivered at the Beijing+25 UNECE Regional Review Meeting, Geneva.
Session: *Ending violence against women and girls: Lessons and solutions from the region*
29 October 2019, 15:00 – 18:00, Room XXII

Madame Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates and partners,

UNAIDS appreciates the opportunity to address the linkages between HIV and violence against women and girls.

As the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action approaches, there is urgent need for accelerated action, especially for the millions of women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, violence and exclusion.

Violence against women remains a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights. Combined with gender inequality, violence against women increases the HIV risk for women, hinders their access to HIV and other health services, and is associated with poor HIV treatment adherence and worsens health outcomes for women living with HIV.

A 2018 study by the Eurasian Women's Network¹ on AIDS showed that:

- Among HIV-positive women who have been abused, 71% of them reported psychological violence, 68% economic violence, and 52% physical violence; 32% of them associated it with HIV status and 10% experienced it constantly.
- Many of these women did not seek help because of fear of publicity, public condemnation and lack of belief that assistance will be provided.

Gender inequality and harmful gender norms perpetuate stigma and discrimination and impede the ability of women and girls to prevent HIV and mitigate its impact.

Beyond the health-care sector, HIV-related stigma and discrimination are found in every area of social life, from inside families and communities to educational and workplace settings, and within the justice system.

Considering all these barriers and constraints, what can we do to address the intersectionality and multiple forms of discrimination that impact so many women and girls?

1. A **rights-based, gender transformative and holistic approach** is needed to reach women and girls, including adolescents and young people. We must ensure their access to the **information and services** they need to protect themselves from HIV and to exercise their sexual and reproductive health rights. Substantial evidence indicates that **comprehensive sexuality education** plays a central role in the life of young people to prevent HIV, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies and gender-based violence.

¹ A study conducted among 464 women living with HIV in 12 countries from the EECA region: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova and Transnistria, Tajikistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Estonia.

- 2. We need to bolster implementation and funding of gender-responsive, multi-sectoral national action plans to address all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls.**

We need to pay particular attention to women and girls from stigmatized communities at high risk of both HIV and violence like sex workers, transgender women, women who use drugs and women in detention.

- 3. We need to enact and enforce comprehensive legislation and policies against all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls.**
- 4. We need to ensure that all victims/survivors of gender-based violence have access to timely, quality services to address the physical, mental and sexual and reproductive health consequences of violence against women, including risks of acquiring HIV.**