



Integrating HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights: Reaching and engaging young people most affected by HIV

The Link Up project is an ambitious three-year initiative for advancing the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of more than one million young people in five countries. Launched by a consortium of global partners in early 2013, it aims to do this by strengthening the integration of HIV and sexual and reproductive health programmes and service delivery. Link Up works with young people affected by HIV, particularly young men who have sex with men, sex workers, people who use drugs, transgender people and young women and men living with HIV. The project will amplify their voices through community mobilisation and advocacy in national and global forums, particularly those informing the post-2015 development framework.

What is integration and how does it benefit young people most affected by HIV?

Integrating HIV and SRHR services means providing components of sexual and reproductive health services in conjunction with HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services. For instance, it could involve offering sexually transmitted infection and HIV testing and treatment in family planning clinics. Integrating service delivery can significantly increase access to HIV and sexual and reproductive health services for young people living with HIV, as well as young sex workers, people who use drugs, men who have sex with men, and transgender people.

Comprehensive integration makes human rights an explicit part of service delivery, and helps protect young people from rights violations associated with misguided HIV and sexual and reproductive health interventions. It entails that services be provided in a supportive, non-judgmental manner, irrespective of the patient's age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, legal status, HIV status, lifestyle or livelihood. Emphasising human rights also means providing comprehensive information on sexual health and rights, and on reproductive health and rights. It involves offering young people the same services that are available to adults, and involves promoting fully informed decision-making as well as confidentiality and privacy. It also means providing an environment free of abuse, violence, coercion and discrimination.

How do national policies addressing integration take into account the needs of young people most affected by HIV?

Link Up country assessments in Bangladesh, Burundi, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Uganda indicate that integrating HIV and sexual and reproductive health is squarely on national health agendas. The assessments examined the extent to

Consortium partners

- ATHENA Network
- Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS
- International HIV/AIDS Alliance (lead agency)
- Marie Stopes International in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Uganda
- Population Council
- Stop AIDS NOW!
- HASAB (HIV/AIDS and STD Alliance) in Bangladesh
- Alliance Burundaise Contre le SIDA in Burundi
- Organisation for Support Services for AIDS (OSSA) in Ethiopia
- Alliance Myanmar
- Community Health Alliance Uganda

Other key collaborators include UNFPA, UNESCO and AIDS Fonds. Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the government of the Netherlands (BUZA)

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which national policies relating to integration acknowledge young people most affected by HIV in the five countries, with the following findings:

- National policies in all five countries call for integrating HIV and sexual and reproductive health services, and reaching out to young people. However, they pay little attention to the needs and rights of young people most affected by HIV.
- Young people most affected by HIV do not feel safe or comfortable accessing services. All five countries criminalise HIV transmission, drug use, same-sex relations and sex work, while the police regularly harass and arrest sex workers and gay and transgender people.
- Young people face multiple barriers to contributing to HIV and SRHR policy and programme development processes.
- Health system capacity is insufficient for integrated service delivery.
- Lack of data on young people most affected by HIV leaves decision-makers without an evidence base to guide the development of appropriate services.

Recommendations

For governments

- Strengthen health systems to ensure they can fully deliver integrated HIV and SRHR services.
- Enact laws that respect and protect sexual and reproductive rights and pledge to reform discriminatory or punitive laws that impede access to HIV and SRHR services, such as laws criminalising HIV transmission and exposure, same-sex practices, and sex work.

For ministries of health

- Develop policies recognising that sexual and reproductive rights are universal human rights and apply to young people most affected by HIV.
- Develop, fund and implement policies and accountability systems to promote full integration of HIV and SRHR.
- Develop, fund and implement policies, guidelines, protocols and accountability systems to ensure health providers uphold and promote the rights of voluntarism, self-determination, confidentiality and informed consent in relation to HIV testing and treatment; family planning and fertility decision-making; and antenatal, maternal and postnatal care.
- Collect data and support research that will promote a better understanding of the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people most affected by HIV.
- Engage young people most affected by HIV as both decision-makers and programme implementers. Build the capacity of health managers and providers, as well as that of young people most affected by HIV, to promote equal access to integrated services.

For donors

- Mandate that funded countries deliver on HIV and SRHR integration policies and interventions, including those for young people most affected by HIV, and provide resources to build their capacity to do so.
- Support interventions that strengthen young people's capacity to participate in health policy and programme development, and to challenge underlying structural barriers to HIV and SRHR services, such as gender inequality, and discriminatory and punitive laws. Especially seek the involvement of young people living with HIV, young people who engage in sex work, young people who use drugs, young transgender people, and young men who have sex with men.

For global policymakers

- Ensure the post-2015 development agenda carries forward the recommendations of the ICPD High-Level Task Force and includes targets aimed at eliminating AIDS-related deaths and significantly reducing new HIV infections.

For civil society groups

- Ensure that civil society-driven advocacy targets policy and programme development processes relating to HIV, SRHR and integration at national as well as at global levels.
- Build the capacity of and participation and leadership space for young people most affected by HIV to advocate as equal partners for full integration of HIV and SRHR.
- Advocate for the collection of nationally representative age-disaggregated data on young people most affected by HIV.