

Breaking Down Barriers: A Global Fund initiative to advance the right to health

Why human rights solutions are central to achieving health for all

We cannot end HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria without addressing the underlying causes keeping those most vulnerable away from health services – human rights-related barriers such as disease-related stigma, entrenched gender inequalities, and harsh laws and policies that criminalize and discriminate against key and vulnerable populations. Humanitarian emergencies, including pandemics and conflicts, continue to emerge, compounding existing challenges. Example of human rights barriers, include:

- Overly broad criminalization of HIV may discourage individuals from seeking testing or treatment.
- Individuals with HIV, TB, or malaria forced to flee their homes due to conflicts may face barriers to accessing health services.
- The criminalization of drug use and incarceration can impede people who use drugs from obtaining health services.
- Fear of stigma and discrimination, and IDs that do not have the correct gender marker discourage transgender people from seeking health services.
- Stigma towards sex work impedes access to health and social protection, as we saw during COVID-19.
- Stigma and societal norms related to masculinity can create obstacles for men and boys in accessing healthcare, including TB services.

- Women and girls who require male family member permission to leave the house and lack independent income for transportation face challenges in accessing health services.
- Gender-based violence as well as violence associated with sexual orientation and gender identity interfere with the ability of women and girls in all their diversity to negotiate safe sex and protect themselves from HIV.

If we prioritize dismantling the barriers, advancing human rights and gender equality, and addressing the inequities that leave people behind, the vision of healthy lives for all can become a reality.

How is the Global Fund addressing human rights-related barriers

The Global Fund plays a crucial role in supporting evidence-informed solutions and addressing rights-related barriers to health. The Breaking Down Barriers initiative furthers that mission by investing in a groundbreaking effort to confront obstacles posed by laws, policies, and practices limiting people's access to health services. Now supporting 24 countries¹ through matching funds, the initiative provides the financial incentive for additional investments needed to develop and implement country-owned strategic plans. This is coupled with technical support for comprehensive programs addressing injustices that threaten progress against HIV, TB, and malaria.

This translates to putting knowledge and the skills to understand and secure health-related human rights services in the hands of people affected by HIV, TB and malaria. Additionally, it enables health care providers, police, prison officials, judges and parliamentarians to provide supportive and effective services to those who are most vulnerable to HIV, TB and malaria.

Results: Investing in human rights is a smart investment

The Breaking Down Barriers initiative is an unprecedented investment in health-related human rights – Global Fund investments in programs to reduce human rights-related barriers have increased more than 10-fold in countries supported by Breaking Down

¹ Since 2017, the Global Fund's Breaking Down Barriers initiative has provided support to 20 countries – Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Nepal, the Philippines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda and Ukraine. As of 2023, the Global Fund expanded this initiative to four more countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Thailand.

Barriers; from 10.6 million in the 2014-2016 allocation period to 130 million in the 2020-22 allocation period.

The evidence from Breaking Down Barriers assessments is well documented and clear – dedicated funding for programs and interventions to remove rights-related barriers is effective. Progress in removing human rights-related barriers has been observed in all countries supported by Breaking Down Barriers. Some tangible results include:

- In 16 of the 20 countries, over 20% progress in scale and coverage of programs was achieved from the baseline assessments.
- For HIV programs, the fastest progress since the baseline assessment was in human rights literacy and access to justice. All other program areas also showed an increase in scale or coverage, including programs to reduce stigma and discrimination, which continue to have the largest coverage.
- In Ukraine, despite the extremely difficult circumstances associated with the full-scale invasion, human rights programs continued to be implemented, with adaptations to meet the most urgent needs of clients. These programs helped ensure that significant numbers of clients were able to continue receiving lifesaving health care services.
- In Cote d'Ivoire, Benin and Senegal, the “Look In, Look Out” (LILO) training program indicated that the program led to concrete changes in behaviors and acceptance of people living with HIV and key populations.
- In Philippines, the expansion and strengthening of paralegal services resulted in the communities being able to obtain legal assistance for health-related rights violations. For instance, community members were able to work with paralegals to address cases of provision of stigmatizing health care, and to improve the environment to encourage people living with HIV to better know and claim their rights.
- In Uganda, Breaking Down Barriers supported coordinated rapid response to risks posed by the Anti Homosexuality Act 2023, which included capacity of community-led organizations, programs such as community-led monitoring, rapid responses and legal services, and mechanisms such as the Equity Committee.

The initiative has demonstrated that investing in human rights is value for money, by creating enabling environments for resilient and sustainable systems for health and delivering improved outcomes, including in countries navigating the most difficult contexts, such as pushback against human rights or war.

Human rights investments contribute to resilient communities and structures that can better navigate challenges as they emerge, contributing to the realization of the highest attainable standard of health for all.

Learn more at www.theglobalfund.org/en/human-rights/breaking-down-barriers/