

# 2026 UN High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS

## Positions of German Civil Society: Key Arguments and Demands

### Executive Summary

The 2026 United Nations High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS (UNHLM) is taking place in an increasingly tense geopolitical environment. [The negotiations on the modalities resolution have already demonstrated that key](#) achievements of the global HIV response can no longer be taken for granted. The 2026 UNHLM is therefore not only a global health conference, but also an important indicator for the future of human rights-based and evidence-informed global health policy.

#### a) Defending the explicit recognition of key populations and human rights-based language

During the negotiations on the modalities resolution, Russia proposed that key populations in the context of the HIV epidemic should no longer be explicitly referenced. Thirty-three states supported this proposal, while another twenty-nine abstained.<sup>1</sup> However, the explicit recognition of key populations remains essential for targeted prevention, access to care, and political accountability. The political declaration of the UNHLM must therefore safeguard existing human rights standards and maintain explicit reference to disproportionately affected groups. Any rollback on community engagement, participation, anti-discrimination, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) would weaken the foundation of evidence-based HIV policy.

#### b) Safeguarding the participation of civil society and communities

Another amendment proposed by Russia aimed to further restrict the participation of civil society in the UNHLM. Twenty-eight states supported this proposal, while thirty-two abstained.<sup>2</sup> This outcome highlights the growing pressure on civic space within multilateral processes. Yet the global HIV response has been successful precisely because communities and people living with HIV have played a central role in prevention, service delivery, monitoring, and political advocacy from the outset. Credible and effective HIV policy therefore continues to depend on the active participation of communities and civil society organizations. Transparent and inclusive participation processes are essential in this regard.

#### c) The political significance of the vote on the modalities resolution

Following the votes on the Russian amendments, member states voted on the modalities resolution itself: 136 states voted in favor, 11 abstained, while, unsurprisingly, Russia, Belarus, and North Korea voted against the resolution. It is notable that several states which had previously supported the Russian amendments also abstained during the final vote. This illustrates the growing tensions within multilateral global health processes, and the increasing difficulty of safeguarding established human rights standards internationally. This makes early diplomatic coordination and strategic alliances by the German government with like-minded states, including partners from the Global South, all the more important.

<sup>1</sup> [The following states abstained:](#) Angola, Bangladesh, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, Indonesia, Laos, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, and Uganda.

<sup>2</sup> [11 states abstained from the vote on the resolution:](#) Algeria, Burundi, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the United States, and Iran. Of the eleven states that abstained during the final vote on the modalities resolution, ten had previously supported the Russian amendment calling for key populations not to be explicitly recognized. The only exception was the United States.

# The 2026 UNHLM as a Test Case for Human Rights-Based HIV Policy

## Background

- The 2026 UNHLM is taking place in an increasingly tense geopolitical environment:
  - growing pressure on multilateral processes,
  - increasing polarization within the United Nations along political fault lines,
  - attacks on human rights, gender-responsive policies, and established language regarding gender, SRHR, the recognition of key populations, etc.,
  - restrictions on and shrinking space for civil society participation.
- The negotiations on the modalities resolution have already demonstrated that key achievements of the global HIV response can no longer be taken for granted. Disputes over civil society participation in the UNHLM<sup>3</sup>, the recognition of key populations<sup>4</sup>, the SDGs, and gender- and human rights-related language illustrate increasing political polarization. <https://www.aids-kampagne.de/aktuelles/2026-04-27-modalitaetenresolution-un-hlm-hiv-2026>
- In addition to Russia, Belarus, and North Korea voting against the modalities resolution, eleven states abstained from the vote.<sup>5</sup>
- The UNHLM therefore goes far beyond a technical debate on health policy. It is a central political arena for negotiating:
  - human rights,
  - social participation,
  - the recognition or denial of realities,
  - evidence-based policymaking,
  - and the future of multilateral cooperation.

## Demands

- Germany should send a clear signal against the increasing politicisation of the UNHLM and firmly advocate for a human rights-based, evidence-informed, and multilateral HIV policy.
- The outcomes of the UNHLM must not result in regression regarding human rights-based language, participation, and evidence-based HIV policy.
- The political declaration must strengthen existing human rights commitments and must not relativise or weaken the progress already achieved.
- It must be made clear that a human rights-based approach, including the recognition and participation of key populations, is also technically and scientifically necessary. The rejection of this evidence-based understanding is rooted in hostility towards minorities.

## Strategic Alliances and Multilateral Responsibility

### Background

The current negotiations clearly demonstrate that central elements of the global HIV response, including references to human rights and political commitments (SDGs), the

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<sup>3</sup> **The Russian proposal to regulate the participation of civil society in the UNHLM:** 28 countries supported Russia's proposal; 32 countries abstained; and 77 countries voted against Russia's proposed amendments.

<sup>4</sup> **The Russian proposal not to explicitly recognize key populations was supported by 33 countries ("in favor"):** Algeria, Bahrain, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Eritrea, The Gambia, Guinea, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. **The following 29 states abstained:** Angola, Bangladesh, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Türkiye, and Uganda.

<sup>5</sup> **Voting behaviour on the modalities resolution:** 136 countries voted in favour of the resolution; 3 countries voted against the resolution: Russia, Belarus and North Korea; and 11 countries abstained from the vote: Algeria, Burundi, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the United States and Iran. Of the eleven states that abstained during the final vote on the modalities resolution, ten had previously supported the Russian amendment not to explicitly reference key populations ("In Favour"). The only exception was the United States. The overlaps were: Algeria, Burundi, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Iran.

participation of communities, and the explicit recognition of key populations, are increasingly politically contested. Against this backdrop, a purely national positioning by Germany is insufficient. **What will be decisive is the early establishment of strategic alliances with like-minded member states in order to build sufficient political leverage in the negotiations.** From our perspective, close cooperation with selected (progressive) African states and other partner countries from the Global South is particularly important. Many of the central debates surrounding HIV, access to healthcare, the role and contribution of community systems, and sustainable financing directly affect countries in Africa.

### **Demands**

- Germany should strengthen existing partnerships and actively build diplomatic alliances, particularly with African states, in order to:
  - defend and strengthen evidence- and human rights-based as well as multilateral approaches,
  - prevent the dilution of human rights-based language and the avoidance of references to international commitments (particularly the SDGs),
  - preserve progressive positions within the political declaration,
  - and safeguard the participation of communities and civil society.
- A partnership-based and dialogue-oriented approach is necessary — one that reflects existing power asymmetries and takes seriously the perspectives of particularly affected countries.
- Community and civil society perspectives should be more strongly integrated into diplomatic coordination processes, as they are essential for effective responses.

## **Defending Human Rights, Communities, and Participation**

### **Background**

- The global HIV response has been successful because it has been driven significantly by people living with HIV, the communities and key populations they represent, and civil society movements.
- People living with HIV and members of particularly vulnerable key populations have created important structures. They carry out essential and central work in identifying and addressing gaps, prevention, care, monitoring, data collection, political representation, and reaching marginalized groups.
- Especially in contexts where state systems exclude, discriminate against, and criminalize people, community structures often remain the most important interface for healthcare access for particularly vulnerable groups in the spirit of universal access.
- Germany should continue to clearly advocate for the preservation of existing human rights-based language.
- Considering the widely observed destruction of scientific knowledge and evidence, the political declaration must remain evidence based.
- Particularly vulnerable groups and their needs must continue to be explicitly recognized.
- Human rights, decriminalization, and protection against discrimination must remain central components of the declaration.
- It is important to highlight positively that Germany has established an official delegation including civil society participation. This sends an important signal for an inclusive and participatory approach. Germany represents this model, which has also achieved major successes domestically.

### **Demands**

- Germany should continue to clearly advocate for maintaining existing human rights-based language.
- The political declaration must remain evidence-based and continue to explicitly recognize particularly affected groups. Human rights, decriminalization, and protection against discrimination must remain central components of the declaration.

- Germany should actively continue and strengthen the participatory approach pursued so far. This includes transparent consultations with communities and CSOs before and during the UNHLM, as well as regular exchange between the German government and civil society throughout the negotiations in New York.

## **Protecting UNAIDS and Strengthening Multilateral HIV Policy**

### **Background**

- The current debates surrounding the future of UNAIDS are taking place during a period of profound uncertainty in multilateral global health governance. Within the framework of the UN80 process and ongoing reform discussions, increasing questions are being raised as to whether certain functions of UNAIDS could potentially be assumed by other actors.
- It must be clearly stated that UNAIDS fulfils essential political, coordinating, and normative functions regarding the formulation of scientifically validated standards and the identification of best-practice examples, functions that currently cannot be fully replaced by any other institution. Particularly noteworthy is UNAIDS' unique role within the UN system regarding the participation of communities and civil society. No other UN organization has a comparably institutionalized participation of communities within its governance structures.
- The participation of people living with HIV and civil society actors is an integral component of UNAIDS structures and a key reason for the political legitimacy and human rights-based orientation of the global HIV response.
- UNAIDS' anchoring within the ECOSOC and UN system provides political legitimacy and normative influence that go far beyond the role of a financing mechanism. This is particularly relevant for defending human rights-based approaches, ensuring the visibility of key populations, safeguarding community-based perspectives, and ensuring political accountability in the field of HIV.
- Particularly critical would be the loss of independent community-led monitoring structures and detailed epidemiological data on global HIV developments, which are currently ensured by UNAIDS. These data are central to the development of targeted HIV programs, including those implemented by institutions such as the Global Fund. Without these data, we would know very little about current developments in the global HIV epidemic.
- At the same time, concerns are growing that reform and austerity processes could lead to increased political influence over data systems and participation structures. In the future, this could result in data on the existence of certain groups and their needs no longer being collected.
- The fact that some countries (e.g. Brazil, the Philippines, Chad, and South Africa) are increasingly contributing financially to UNAIDS country offices, or are considering doing so, demonstrates the importance of UNAIDS' work at both country and regional levels.
- Through the work of UNAIDS country offices, interfaces have been created that enabled different actors to identify and address deficiencies, representing significant added value, value that could not have been achieved without the structures provided through the United Nations system.

### **Demands**

- Germany should advocate for the preservation of disaggregated and independent HIV data collection, for community-led monitoring structures, and for strong participation of people living with HIV and the community structures they have created within multilateral global health policy.
- The role of UNAIDS as the central multilateral and human rights-based institution of global HIV governance should be actively defended.

## Timelines, Reform Processes, and Political Responsibility

### Background

- The political declaration of the UNHLM remains a central instrument for global advocacy and accountability. Regressions regarding language, agreed targets, or participation would have direct consequences for financing, programs, the continued control and containment of the HIV epidemic, and the enforcement of the human right to health.
- At the same time, UNAIDS is undergoing a comprehensive transformation and reform process, the outcome of which remains uncertain at this stage.
- Of particular importance is a clear and reliable timeline, both for the UNHLM and for the adoption of the new Global AIDS Strategy 2026–2031 and the decisions concerning the future of UNAIDS proposed through the UN80 reform process.
- It is especially important that the final UNAIDS transformation plan is not pre-empted. The relevant processes are still ongoing and are intended to be concluded through an orderly and inclusive procedure involving various stakeholders.
- Decisions regarding UNAIDS and applicable timelines are made by the countries represented on the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) during the meetings convened for this purpose by the Board.
- An interim report by the PCB Working Group is expected to be discussed in June, before a final transformation plan is debated by the PCB in October and subsequently submitted to ECOSOC for decision in November.

### Demands

- Germany should advocate for a transparent, coherent, inclusive, and orderly process. The decisions of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board concerning reform processes proposed under UN80 must be respected.
- Contradictions arising from the different processes with regard to timelines and decision-making should be resolved.
- Decisions must be carefully considered and require time. The achievements of the global HIV response, to which UNAIDS has made a substantial contribution, must not be undermined under the argument of “time pressure.” Germany must advocate that any transformation of UNAIDS can only take place once there is clarity about how the individual components of its work will be continued.
- Decisions regarding UNAIDS and timelines are to be made by the countries represented on the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board.
- Ongoing reform and transformation debates must not weaken or delay the political momentum of the UNHLM or the adoption of the Global AIDS Strategy.
- Germany should advocate for negotiations on the new Global AIDS Strategy and the reform processes to take place with broad participation of member states, communities, and civil society.

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