



22nd International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA)

Key Populations at ICASA 2023

03- 09 December 2023 Harare • Zimbabwe

AIDS IS NOT OVER: Address inequalities, accelerate inclusion and innovation

Background

The 22nd edition of the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) will be held in Harare, Zimbabwe from **4th to 9th December 2023** under the theme **“AIDS IS NOT OVER: Address inequalities, accelerate inclusion and innovation”**. The theme of the conference engages the whole continent and all stakeholders in efforts to accelerate progress towards the UNAIDS fast track 95- 95- 95 targets towards epidemic control and an end to AIDS as a public threat.

The Global HIV/ AIDS community and in particular communities of key and vulnerable populations are concerned with the dire state of the epidemic amongst key populations, characterized by escalating rates of new HIV infections and persistent human rights barriers and inequalities. Pervasive experiences of criminalization, violence, stigma and discrimination preclude sex workers, gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men, trans and gender diverse persons, people who use and inject drugs, prisoners and the youth from accessing life-saving HIV prevention, care and treatment services. Structural barriers to access to HIV services disproportionately plague key populations and perpetuate vulnerabilities that sustain the spread of HIV.

The theme of the 22nd ICASA 2023, AIDS IS NOT OVER: Address inequalities, accelerate inclusion and innovation is a call to action against complacency, it calls for efforts to galvanize actions to bolster inclusion and innovation. Moreover, the theme makes emphases of the stark realities of the poor progress in the promotion, protection and fulfillment of human rights for communities at an elevated risk of and those living with HIV. Communities of key populations and their leadership will seek to engage with the Ministry of Health and Child Care, National AIDS Council leadership and key stakeholders in the 22nd ICASA host country, Zimbabwe from the **18th to 22nd September 2023** as part of due diligence and preparedness efforts to ensure that the 22nd ICASA delivers an equity driven, inclusive, safe and non-punitive environment for key populations from the world-over to meaningfully contribute to deliberations and actions towards achieving an AIDS free generation.

Communities of key populations and their allies will utilize the conference platform to engage governments, funding agents, technical partners and other stakeholders in the HIV response to renew and affirm global commitments to ensuring universal access to health care, including ensuring that NO-ONE is left behind in the HIV response. We seek to engage various stakeholders in Zimbabwe and globally to ensure the conference is primed to deliver a safe, secure and seamless learning and sharing experience, drawing best practices for implementation at scale and equally spotlighting the world’s attention towards practices that reverse the gains of the global HIV response and threaten the vision of achieving an AIDS-free Africa.



THE OBJECTIVES OF THE 22nd ICASA 2023 are:

1. Mainstream respect for equity, inclusion and diversity in the control and mitigation of the impact of diseases.
2. Sustain and increase domestic financing and community response.
3. Respond to HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, Monkey-pox, Ebola and any other emerging diseases.
4. Mitigate the impact of hepatitis, tuberculosis and malaria through health systems strengthening.
5. Generate and provide evidence-based data for policy formulation



The Africa Key Populations Experts Group (AKPEG), African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) the African Network of People Using Drugs (AfricanPUD) and African Queer Youth Initiative (AQYI) Advocates for Prevention of HIV and AIDS in Africa (APHA), Global Black Gay Men Connect (GBGMC) and other networks of key populations (KP) will host a series of meetings, workshops and networking events in the course of the 22nd ICASA, including a one day KP Pre-Conference, KP networking zones and networking events.



The networks will utilize the conferencing opportunity to bolster advocacy for renewed impetus to remove structural barriers, particularly criminalization, stigma and discrimination that impede access to life saving KP focused HIV/SRHR interventions including prevention and treatment of HIV, TB, STI and other comorbid conditions. The ICASA conference is a platform for exchange and learning among KP led community-based organizations, human rights and HIV service organizations, and other agencies working with and for KPs. In addition to bringing about visibility and addressing human rights violations based on KP status and SOGIESC the networks will advocate for increased resources, community leadership and strengthening of community structures and capacity to address inequalities that negatively affect health outcomes of KPs.

Rationale

The AIDS response in Africa has come a long way, with remarkable progress towards the UNAIDS 95-95-95 fast track targets. The 2023 UNAIDS Global AIDS Update- The Path that End AIDS notes that 29.8 million of the 39 million [33.1 million-45.7 million] people living with HIV globally are receiving life-saving treatment. An additional 1.6 million people received HIV treatment in each of 2020, 2021 and 2022. Overall, numbers of AIDS-related deaths have been reduced by 69% since the peak in 2004. Botswana, Eswatini, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe, all in sub-Saharan Africa, have already achieved the 95-95-95 targets, and at least 16 other countries (eight in sub-Saharan Africa) are close to doing so¹.



Progress towards reaching epidemic control among Key populations (KPs) including Men who Have Sex with Men (MSM), Sex Workers (SW), Transgender Persons (T), People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) has been inadequate. HIV prevalence and rates of new HIV infections is significantly higher among key populations compared to the general population due to inequalities in access to HIV prevention, care and treatment. National Key Population programs in Africa, where they exist, are plagued with inadequate coverage and scale to achieve and sustain public health impact, inadequate differentiation of interventions to respond to heterogeneous KP needs, inadequate KP focused HIV/SRHR service packages for diverse KP communities and pervasive experiences of inequalities driven by criminalization, stigma and discrimination.

It is against this background that the African KP networks will convene stakeholders to strategize towards making an end to AIDS among key populations a reality.

¹ The path that ends AIDS: UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2023. Geneva: Joint United Nations



Key Populations @ ICASA 2023



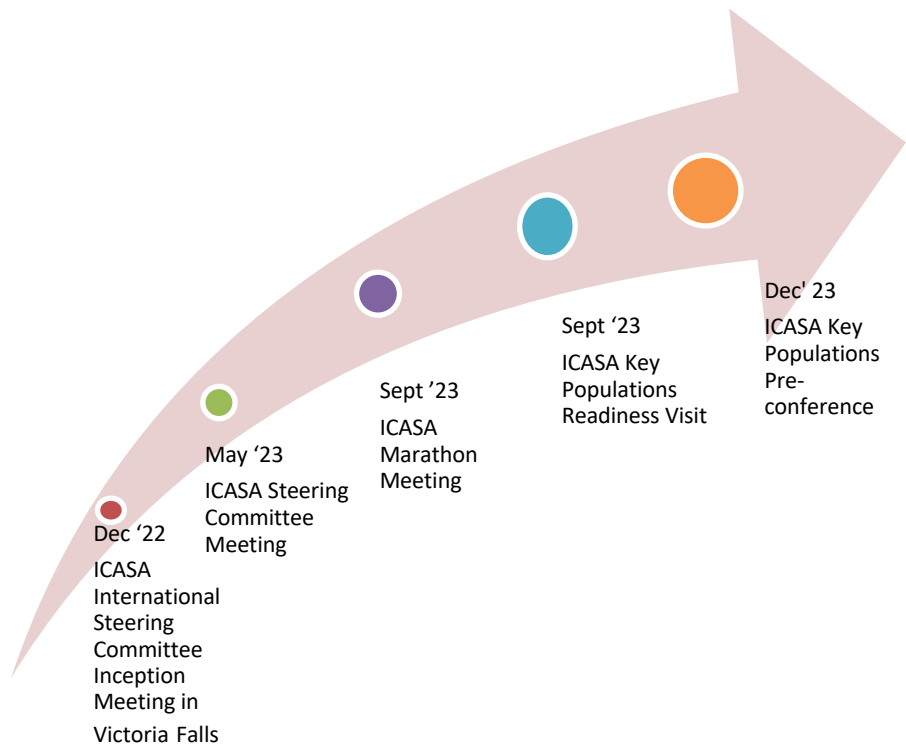
Objectives

Networks of African Key Populations including the African Sex Workers Alliance, Gender Dynamix, Global Black Gay Men's Coalition and others have since 2011 participated in the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) and have successfully hosted several engagements including the Key Populations Pre-Conference, leading in abstract and non-abstract driven presentations and workshops, KP focused Health Symposia and networking zones amongst others.

At this 22nd edition of ICASA in Zimbabwe, the consortia of Key Populations in Africa will bring together more than 150 human rights defenders, HIV/AIDS activists, health experts and officials, religious and political leaders, partner organizations and funders for various ICASA related conferencing engagements. The majority of participants will be drawn from the continent with a balanced representation of anglophone, francophone and lusophone countries to ensure a continent-wide representation.

The consortia of Key Populations in Africa will collaborate, organize and coordinate ICASA related pre-conference engagements with and for Key Populations in Africa under the theme **'AIDS IS NOT OVER: Address inequalities, accelerate inclusion and innovation.'**

Our overall objectives at the 22nd ICASA is to bring visibility to and advocate for the removal of health inequalities that affect positive health outcomes for key populations in their diversity. The pre-conference will center human rights for key populations as a priority in the efforts to end AIDS as a public health threat in Africa so that each country is **"On the path that end AIDS"**. Further KP networks and their allies will call to action states to be increasingly accountability to commitments to Universal Health Care, leaving no one behind and moving from rhetoric to action.



Activities

African Key Populations and their affiliates will host a number of events at the 22nd ICASA 2023 as highlighted in the road map below:

● 1. Key Populations Preparedness Visit to Zimbabwe 14 September – 18 September 2023



The African Key Populations Regional Networks Steering Committee for ICASA will conduct a Preparedness Scoping Visiting Zimbabwe from the 14th -18th September 2023. The purpose of the visit is a routine pre-ICASA due diligence exercise to engage the host country government and other key stakeholders charged with the hosting function to ensure that ALL delegates including delegates of Key Populations attending the 22nd ICASA conference are treated with respect, dignity and accommodated for their diverse needs. Communities of key populations including sex workers, gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men, trans and gender diverse persons and people who use drugs are criminalized in most parts of Africa including in Zimbabwe. It is prudent that as diverse communities travel for the conference, necessary safeguards are employed to ensure delegates do not contend with arbitrary arrests, detention and ill-treatment during the conference. The scoping visit aims to build impetus for the protection, safety, and security of marginalized communities and to ensure their meaningful and unfettered participation at the conference.

The delegation of the Steering Committee of KP Regional Networks will also be joined by representatives of the ICASA, and KP representatives from host country secretariat in this scoping visit. The scoping visit will be conducted in the city of Harare.

● 2. The KP Pre-conference: **Human Rights, Criminalization, Decriminalization: The Case for Africa** 3rd December 2023

The Africa Key Populations Experts Group (AKPEG), African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) the African Network of People Using Drugs (AfricanPUD) and African Queer Youth Initiative (AQYI) Advocates for Prevention of HIV and AIDS in Africa (APHA), Global Black Gay Men Connect (GBGMC) and other networks of key populations (KP) will host a one-day Pre-Conference prior to ICASA 2023. The KP pre-conference will be a safe platform to deliberate on the state of the HIV epidemic among Key Populations and to determine the stumbling blocks for progress on the path that ends AIDS for Key Populations. More specifically the KP- Preconference will pursue the following objectives:

- Reflect on progress in the HIV response among Key Populations in Africa
- Showcase best practice interventions in the provision of KP-focused HIV prevention, care, and treatment services from KP- led community-based organizations.
- Determine barriers to access to HIV prevention, treatment, and care services for KPs in Africa.
- Develop pathways to accelerating progress towards ending AIDs as a public health threat for Key Populations in Africa.
- Galvanize momentum for collaboration and partnerships in providing hassle-free, friendly and affirming HIV/SRHR services for key populations.

The KP Pre-conference will be a one-day event that will provide a space to:

- Address emerging and cross-cutting issues that affect all KP groups with a special focus on spotlighting health equity gaps in access to HIV prevention, treatment and care including the resurgence of archaic draconian laws and anti-gender movements against key populations and LGBTQ+ persons.
- Reflect on the impact of criminalization of key populations on access to HIV prevention, treatment and care services, KP community ownership of country programs, political will and domestic investments to the HIV response among key populations.
- The conference will further explore the acceptability and feasibility of adaptation of new HIV prevention and treatment guidelines, innovations and technologies for key populations including HIV self-testing, expanding choices of PrEP modalities such as daily, event-driven and long-acting PrEP, and investing in “flipping the script” on the narrative of HIV positive living with HIV to make new emphasis on the Undetectable=Untransmittable messages, disseminating the World Health Organization Recommendations that HIV positive persons with undetectable viral load have ZERO risk of transmitting HIV to their sexual partners if they continue to take their medicines correctly and sustain viral suppression.
- The conference will also re-invigorate appetite to strengthen KP network leadership in the last mile towards epidemic control to bolster community voices to influence the communities of practices and provide technical and thought leadership as global priorities align to focus on removing inequalities that affect positive health outcomes for key populations with governments and with major funding and technical partners of the HIV response, such as the Global Fund, PEPFAR, UNAIDS and WHO.
- Breakout sessions will be used for deeper dives in exploring the KP constituency-focused challenges and mitigation strategies for gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers in their diversity, trans and gender-diverse persons and people who use and inject drugs and communities vulnerable to HIV including escalating rates of new HIV infections, Sexually transmitted infections, Tuberculosis, mental health, gender-affirming care, and harm reduction intervention for people who use and inject drugs including implementing of needle and syringe programs, opioid substitution therapy.



It is envisioned that **100** participants will attend the KP Pre-Conference.

The participants will include KP representatives, including young KPs, health and human rights advocates, service providers, researchers, policymakers, donors, and individuals and entities working to address the needs of KPs in Africa and globally. Preferences will be given to participants from the African region.

● 3. The Key Populations (KPs) Networking Cocktail Event

6 December 2023

The KP Networking Cocktail Event will be hosted by GALZ, an association of LGBTQ persons in Zimbabwe. The networking event will facilitate exchange and networking events between KP communities in Zimbabwe to their counterparts from the breadth of the continent. The networking event will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences as well as “local intelligence” to navigate an otherwise restrictive legal and policy environment among peers and strengthen partnerships for south-to-south collaboration.

● 4. KP Networking Zone

5-8 December 2023

The KP networks will establish and manage KP networking zones at the community village. The networking zone will provide a public space in which KP communities, their affiliates, men who have sex with men (MSM) & Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people, people who use and inject drugs and sex workers will participate in activities that highlight KP focused HIV, Sexual Reproductive and Health Rights in Africa. The goal is to provide visibility and a platform for African KP members and affiliates to showcase their work, and share knowledge and experiences.

Sponsorship Opportunities

Conference scholarships for KP constituents have often been modest from past conferences, therefore the KP networks would like to urge partners in the HIV response to support the participation of KPs to ICASA 2023. Opportunities for partners to sponsor KP-focused ICASA 2023 activities include options to fully sponsor an event or contribute to the cost of hosting an event.

The Regional KP networks provide a platform for our partners to co-brand the KP pre-conference event, the networking zone and the networking cocktail to demonstrate the solidarity and visibility of our partnerships. The networks will produce a variety of promotional materials branded with advocacy messages for the conference including conference bags, T-shirts, condoms, posters and stickers.

