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## Contribute to a UN that Cares

COMMIT TO  
A FAIR, EQUITABLE  
AND RESPECTFUL  
WORKPLACE





#### **WE KNOW THAT:**

- people living with HIV deserve to be treated with respect and dignity
- the UN system prohibits discrimination against personnel living with HIV
- each of us has a role to play in ensuring that the UN workplace is fair, equitable and respectful.

## I know that the response to AIDS plays a role in the official work of the UN system, but what does the workplace have to do with it?



The AIDS epidemic is so vast and complex that an effective response requires the participation of everyone. HIV is all around us, and neither governments nor health systems alone can address it. All of us—in workplaces, community organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and the full range of civil society—need to join together to promote an effective and humane response.

More than 90% of people living with HIV are adults of working age. As a result, the workplace is inevitably affected by the epidemic. Absences, illnesses and death due to HIV-related illnesses have profound implications for staff, their families and the UN. The workplace is an ideal setting for prevention, care and treatment, as well as for efforts to combat HIV-related stigma and discrimination. It is estimated that 1.4% of the UN workforce worldwide (approximately 1400 staff members) may be living with HIV.

A survey of UN employees in 2002 regarding their attitudes about HIV revealed some interesting findings. Of those who responded to the survey:

- 12% said they were afraid that they might be HIV-positive but did not want to know their HIV status
- 41% of respondents did not know their HIV status because they feared that seeking information would lead to negative judgements
- 32% said they feared that the UN would not keep their HIV test results confidential
- ninety-six employees (2%) of those responding said they were living with HIV but were afraid to reveal their status at work.

Despite these signs of the stigma associated with HIV, a resounding 95% of UN employees support the UN policy that people living with HIV should continue to work in the UN. A mid-term evaluation report of the UN Learning Strategy on HIV/AIDS indicates slow but steady progress regarding employee attitudes and learning about HIV. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents stated that providing opportunities to all UN employees to learn more about HIV was “very important.” In high-prevalence countries, more than 50% of staff knew their HIV status. Slightly more

than half, 54%, of respondents, stated that a UN colleague's work arrangements or contractual status would not be negatively affected if he or she were known to be living with HIV. Respondents were generally likely to believe that most colleagues would be supportive if a UN colleague decided to disclose his/her HIV-positive status to those at work. Over 75% of the respondents to the Facilitators' survey felt that the Learning Strategy had helped to reduce workplace stigma and discrimination related to HIV.

Although progress has been made, perception of stigma remains. There is a way to help to dissipate some of the fears about HIV, which is for all of us to talk openly about it—in learning sessions and privately with our colleagues. By talking about HIV, we can help make it less frightening. And when the infection is less frightening, those of us who are living with HIV will feel free to be more open about the issue.

UN system personnel come from all over the world. In a workplace environment as diverse as ours, we will inevitably encounter beliefs or behaviours with which we do not always agree. It is important that we accept, and try to learn from, our fellow UN personnel who have different personal and cultural backgrounds. By doing so, we will be better prepared to collectively carry out the important work of the UN system.

## UN Cares

Since 1991, the UN has had a system-wide HIV workplace policy. The policy states that all staff and their dependents have access to prevention education, voluntary counselling and testing services, health insurance covering HIV-related expenses, and a workplace free of stigma and discrimination. Since the policy was enacted, some agencies have implemented workplace programmes. The UN Learning Strategy on HIV/AIDS has provided a structured programme of HIV education across the system. To eliminate any duplication in efforts and in order to be more cost efficient and effective, agency-specific programmes merged into one UN Cares harmonized work programme. UN Cares unifies HIV workplace programmes across the UN system, while “Delivering as One” a comprehensive range of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services to all UN personnel and their families. The UN Cares Services Directory on HIV provides online resources, while a Global Coordinator in

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Talking about HIV can help make it less frightening, so that those of us who are living with HIV will feel free to be more open about the issue.

## The Secretary-General has made UN Cares a priority

...stating his determination “to make the UN a model of how the workplace should respond to HIV.” Success will depend on the leadership and action of all UN organizations and personnel.

“ In every country the UN system community has the potential, as individuals, families, leaders in our communities to be a powerful reinforcing force to the work we are mandated to do for society. In fact we have a special obligation to ‘practise what we preach.’... UN Cares... represents an important and even pioneering step emblematic of the type of initiative that helps propel our UN Reform process.”

– HENRY JACKELEN,  
UN Resident Coordinator, Paraguay

New York and five regional coordinators worldwide provide technical assistance to country offices and individuals, as needed.

UN Cares is designed to lessen the impact of HIV in the workplace by supporting “universal access” to a comprehensive range of benefits, including prevention, treatment, care and support, for all UN personnel and their families.

The core of UN Cares is the *UN Cares 10 Minimum Standards* (see Annex 1), which include voluntary counselling and testing, access to male and female condoms, and emergency prevention measures (post-exposure prophylaxis starter kits) in case of accidental exposure, among others. The *Minimum Standards* also support increased measures to tackle head-on the stigma and discrimination that are associated with HIV. In that spirit, UN Plus, the UN System HIV-Positive Staff Group, plays a supportive role for people living with HIV.

UN Cares, the UN Learning Strategy on HIV/AIDS, and UN Plus are three complementary initiatives. UN Plus will continue to serve as the advocacy and support network for UN system personnel living with HIV. The Learning Strategy will continue to build staff knowledge on HIV, both in the context of the UN system workplace as well as in our work to support national responses to the epidemic. UN Cares provides the system-wide implementation framework and overall coordination to deliver “universal access” to essential information and services to all UN personnel and their families.

## UN Cares Services Directory on HIV

The UN Cares Services Directory on HIV is the online resource providing country-specific information on:

- HIV counselling and testing facilities
- support groups for people living with and affected by HIV
- UN and other medical and treatment centres
- availability of antiretroviral medicines
- HIV organizations and web sites

- UN contact for, and location of, post-exposure prophylaxis starter kits in case of accidental exposure to HIV
- country-level contact persons for UN Cares
- opportunistic diseases and malignancies
- access to male and female condoms at your duty station.

It's easy to access the Services Directory on HIV:

- visit [www.uncares.org](http://www.uncares.org)
- click “UN Cares Services Directory on HIV”
- log in by selecting your agency from the drop-down menu and entering your password (the password is your continent in lower case). Click “Login”
- select the country you want to query from the drop-down menu above the banner
- access the information you need from the general or technical directory.

To protect the contact information of the persons listed in it, use of the Services Directory on HIV is restricted to UN personnel and their families. For more information on the UN Cares Services Directory on HIV, contact [servicesdirectory@uncares.org](mailto:servicesdirectory@uncares.org). For general information about UN Cares, contact [info@uncares.org](mailto:info@uncares.org).

### What is the UN system doing to promote a fair, equitable and respectful workplace?

First and foremost, the UN system has adopted a comprehensive workplace policy that expressly prohibits discrimination against personnel living with HIV. The UN system mandates that workplaces provide personnel with learning sessions on HIV and ensure that staff members have access to counselling and testing. This booklet is meant, in part, to underscore the UN system's commitment to fair, equitable and respectful treatment of all personnel, regardless of their HIV status.



Your password for  
the Services Directory on HIV  
is your continent in lower case:

- africa
- asia
- central america
- eurasia
- europa
- north america
- south america



## What are considered stigma and discrimination in the workplace?

Stigma is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person. It is a form of prejudice that discredits or rejects an individual or group because they are seen, or perceived, to be different. When people act out their prejudice, stigma turns into discrimination. HIV discrimination is the unfair and unjust treatment of an individual based on his or her real or perceived HIV status or other characteristics. Stigmatizing people and discriminating against them breach their fundamental human rights.

## Examples of discrimination in the workplace and how it affects us all

Read each of the following examples of discrimination and consider the impact that HIV is having in the workplace. What is the impact on the person living with HIV? What is the impact on that person's colleagues?

- Manuel is a person living with HIV who was hired to address UN Cares issues. While most colleagues have no problems working with him, the staff members who handle his reimbursements only speak to him through a glass window and use gloves when handling his requests.
- Yuan is also living with HIV, and addresses UN Cares issues. She has made great strides in instituting HIV programmes organization-wide, and her colleagues hold her accomplishments in high regard. However, her colleague sitting at the next desk disinfects their shared office equipment every morning.
- Christophe is a programme officer living with HIV. His contract has recently been renewed. Although he is in great health, a colleague complains to HR that since Christophe is “likely to die soon anyway”, he is not worth the resources. The same colleague has been advocating for Christophe's removal among other colleagues.

Each of these examples shows a lack of knowledge about HIV, how it can—and cannot—be transmitted, and of the fact that people living with HIV can lead healthy lives. The people being discriminated against are likely to feel depressed, angry, scared, undermined in their work, and have

decreased self-esteem and lowered morale, among other things. As a result, their relationships with their co-workers may be strained.

Other staff members cannot fail to notice how these individuals are being treated. These actions send a clear message to others that it is not acceptable to disclose their own HIV status, or even their concerns about HIV, in such an office environment. As a result, staff members may be hesitant to speak openly about HIV and to access HIV-related services.

The UN Cares efforts are being undermined by the stigmatizing actions of these co-workers. HIV-related stigma and discrimination impede prevention and care efforts. This can mean that people will not receive the information and services they need to protect and care for themselves—including getting essential and possibly life-saving treatment.

### Creating a supportive workplace environment

David is a staff member who decides to reveal his HIV-positive status to his supervisor and colleagues. Consider the following reactions of his colleagues:

- Petra, David's supervisor, listens quietly yet angrily. She knows that David has had several girlfriends in addition to his wife, and judges him silently for ruining his wife's life. Petra tells David that he should probably not tell anyone else in the office that he is living with HIV, as they will treat him differently. Petra also expresses that she fears his HIV-positive status will affect his performance.
- Arturo, David's colleague, listens sympathetically. David has been missing a great deal of work due to recent illness and tells Arturo that he is afraid to submit his claims for health benefits because he fears that other staff will find out that he is HIV-positive. Arturo assures David that the UN system does not discriminate due to HIV status, and that numerous policies and programmes exist to protect him, his confidentiality, and his job status. He encourages David to utilize all of the health benefits available to him through the UN system. Arturo tells David that he can find out details about the UN policy and programme at [www.uncares.org](http://www.uncares.org) and about insurance by speaking to a human resources officer or to his insurance company directly.

Stigmatizing people and discriminating against them breach their fundamental human rights.



It is important that we accept, and try to learn from, our fellow UN personnel who have different personal and cultural backgrounds.





“ I have discovered that all sorts of discrimination happens, everywhere and all the time, even within the United Nations, and this is why I think that UN Plus is an extremely valuable group that can really make a difference for its members, and hopefully also for others.”

- YANN SIEGENTHALER,  
co-founder of the vision of UN Plus

Arturo offers David support and assistance, referrals and resources and assures him that he can work in a fair environment and have access to the services he will need to maintain his health. Petra, however, offers David no feeling of support and judges him. David may continue to fear submitting his health claims because Petra said that if others in the office find out his HIV status they would treat him differently. This could also lead to David seeking services outside the UN system and trying to handle the costs himself.

As a supervisor or manager, if one of your staff members comes to you and reveals their HIV-positive status, you should offer reasonable accommodations at work, along with support and confidentiality. If one of your colleagues reveals their HIV-positive status to you, how could you offer support?

### **If I experience discrimination in the workplace, what should I do?**

Whether you experience discrimination due to your HIV status or something else, you should use the same means of recourse as you would for any other type of harassment or abuse of authority.

First, prepare yourself. Document what is happening in writing and try to put what you are experiencing into words. Second, seek solutions. Try to solve the situation and/or speak about it directly with the employee or manager who is discriminating against you. Third, seek help. If the situation does not change, look for a mediator (this can be an ombudsperson, a supervisor, or a colleague in human resources or another department). If the mediation fails, obtain the necessary and specific information for your organization on how to initiate a formal grievance procedure. You may obtain this from your human resources person, the staff association, or the office of the ombudsperson.

### **What is homophobia and how does it contribute to HIV-related stigma and discrimination?**

Homophobia is the term used to describe a fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexual people, who are often known as lesbians and gay men. In a number of countries, other terms are used, since not all people who have same-sex relationships self-identify as gay or lesbian. Many international organizations use the abbreviations MSM—men who have sex with men—or WSW—women who have sex with women.

Widespread homophobia is posing a critical challenge to the AIDS response in many countries around the world. In 2006 no fewer than 80 Member States of the United Nations criminalized consensual same-sex acts between adults, thus institutionally promoting a culture of hatred. Among these, seven had legal provisions with the death penalty as punishment. Where homosexual acts are illegal the law instigates widespread fear and shame, often forcing people to hide their sexuality, making them live in heterosexual partnerships and, especially in the case of men who fear prosecution, leading to their having unsafe sex in secret. Where people cannot live openly and disclose their sexuality, the risk of HIV infection may be greatly enhanced, as individuals are too afraid to access HIV prevention services for fear of the negative consequences that might result. Therefore, the decriminalization of same-sex relationships and the eradication of violence against sexual minorities have been underlined as fundamental steps that need to be taken for progress to be made within the AIDS response.

In addition, HIV is frequently misused as a pretext to discriminate against men who have sex with men, even though globally the main means of HIV infection is via unprotected heterosexual intercourse.

### **What can we, as personnel of the UN system, do to eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination in the workplace?**

Stigma and discrimination threaten all of us. All UN system personnel, particularly managers, have a responsibility to stamp out stigma and discrimination. As outlined in Minimum Standard number 10, managerial commitment is imperative for the successful implementation of UN Cares. Not sure what you can do as a manager? Or as an employee? Make it a priority to focus on eliminating stigma and discrimination by doing three (or more) of the following:

- Attend an HIV learning session and suggest that colleagues do the same.
- Display your certificate of attendance at an HIV learning session in your workspace.
- Review the UN preferred terminology for HIV to make sure that you are not inadvertently contributing to stigma through your choice of words.
- Discuss HIV openly with as many people as possible.



“ I’ve noticed that, if I am in hospital or go to the dentist or anything, being HIV-positive, I am always, always the last in surgery... That’s one thing with this virus that’s really affected me, that [I’m] always last for all [my] appointments, being treated differently in the hospital... It feels like you have to educate them, rather than them being there to look after you.”



### If you are a supervisor...

you should complete the supervisor's module in the e-course *Building our Professional Capacity to Address HIV*. You can get a CD-ROM copy of this e-course from your local UN Cares/Learning Facilitators. It is also available online at [www.unaids.org/ecourse](http://www.unaids.org/ecourse). A module for those working on human resource issues is available on the same CD-ROM and web site.

- Wear a red ribbon or a UN Cares or UN Plus pin.
- Display a red ribbon by your desk.
- Participate in events in response to AIDS.
- Go to an awareness event or make a contribution on World AIDS Day on 1 December.
- Volunteer at a local AIDS service organization.
- Keep informed about HIV and inform your friends and loved ones.

### What impact does stigma and discrimination have on the spread of HIV?

Stigma and discrimination may mean that people who are HIV-positive decide not to access care, treatment or counselling services, or other entitlements, for fear of being ostracized. Stigma and discrimination may also increase physical, psychological and social stress and may sometimes cause depression.

For people who are HIV-negative, stigma and discrimination can affect their ability to protect themselves and their families from HIV transmission by discouraging them from seeking information, prevention services, or HIV testing. The stigma of HIV is especially strong for members of particular groups such as men who have sex with men, sex workers, and people who use drugs.

Of particular importance to the UN system, HIV-related stigma and discrimination violate fundamental human rights, such as the right to be free from discrimination, the right to privacy, the right to health, and the right to information and education. In short, all of us who are employed by the UN system have a stake in combating the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV—just as we all have a stake in fighting for other human rights.

If you hear a colleague make discriminatory statements or derogatory comments about someone thought to be living with HIV, intervene and explain why these comments are not acceptable. Some of us may not be aware that we are using stigmatizing language or that we are inadvertently contributing to stigma and discrimination. All staff members should avoid discriminatory language in their day-to-day lives, e.g. we should all avoid using the terms 'victim' or 'sufferer' to describe someone living with HIV. Make an effort to use and encourage suitable and accurate language and terminology—what you say and how you speak is critical to modelling appropriate behaviour in your community. Avoid negative terms. Instead of saying, for example, that someone is "an AIDS victim", say instead that he or

she is “living with HIV”. Make sure that your knowledge of HIV is based on facts rather than rumours. Be open to discussing HIV with your colleagues and be prepared to listen to the concerns of others. Do not be afraid to ask questions.

Make use of the structures already in place to help protect our rights and well-being at work. These include staff associations or unions, as well as health and safety committees or officers. Such bodies can provide leadership and set a positive example, in addition to working with management to ensure that all measures are in place to promote understanding, respect, and non-discrimination.

Despite an underlying assumption that we, in the UN system, are respectful of all people, we all function within certain parameters to define our worlds and our boundaries. It is critical that we consider how we perceive people living with HIV and make sure that we do not act in a way that strengthens stigma or discrimination. This becomes even more important when we live with HIV ourselves, as self-devaluation is very harmful for an individual’s well-being.

Here are a few questions for personal reflection:

- “How would I feel if my best friend were to disclose that he or she had HIV?”
- “How would I feel if I fell in love with a person who was living with HIV—would I still pursue the relationship?”
- “How would I feel if someone in my family, perhaps my own child, became involved with someone living with HIV—would I be supportive of his or her relationship?”

Regardless of HIV status, we as people all have the same needs and the same rights to love and relationships.

Each of us  
has an important role  
to play in eliminating HIV-related  
stigma and discrimination  
from the UN system workplace.



Regardless of HIV status,  
we as people all have the same needs  
and the same rights  
to love and relationships.



“ They should continue this [UN Cares] programme, because as they enlighten us, we enlighten the societies around us.”

– SUSAN KIMWELE,  
Staff Member, United Nations  
Office at Nairobi

### Working in a world with HIV

*What contributes to HIV-related stigma and discrimination in your country?  
Do these factors spill over into the UN workplace?*

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*What are some things you can do to prevent HIV-related stigma and discrimination in your workplace?*

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*Who is running the UN Cares programme at your duty station?  
How can you contribute to its success?*

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*What is being done at your duty station to ensure supervisors and human resource personnel complete the e-course Building our Professional Capacity to Address HIV?*

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*Where can you turn to for further advice and assistance about the UN system's policies, programmes and entitlements relating to HIV, both locally and outside your duty station?*

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