

Funding what's possible

Advancing Human Rights of Inadequately Served Populations

Advancing human rights is at the core of RCF's mission

In 2012, when regional and global HIV civil society and community-led networks and donors established the Robert Carr Fund, they knew that protecting human rights was fundamental to their joint mission – improving the lives of the people most affected by HIV. Defending and promoting human rights is central to everything that RCF does. It also requires a lasting commitment and long-term investment. That is why RCF places so much importance on long-term core support and continuity in funding.

Many people affected by HIV also experience systematic human rights violations and barriers to information and services. These include people living with HIV; gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men; people who use drugs; people in prisons or other closed settings; sex workers and transgender people. Depending on the dynamic of the HIV epidemic, they may also include women and girls, young people, migrants, and people living in rural areas.

We call these groups “inadequately served populations” (ISPs). To improve their health, social inclusion, and wellbeing, RCF pools funding from donors¹ and invests it in global and regional civil society and community led networks that specialize in meeting the needs of ISPs.

¹ Currently, contributors to the RCF pooled funding mechanism include the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (formerly DFID), the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

As people with direct experience of key HIV-related needs and barriers to health services, ISPs are central to efforts to improve human rights environments, access to HIV services, and the effectiveness of national and international funding for health and human rights.

RCF supports civil society networks to strengthen their influence by building coalitions, mobilizing communities, and engaging with decision-makers. In 2019, RCF grantees included 68 individual networks that together spent over \$1.5 million to advocate for better laws and policies that protect ISPs from discrimination, reduce criminalization, affirm gender equality, and ensure everyone can access health services they need. Their work reinforces investments by the Global Fund and by other funders in effective HIV programs and in efforts advancing gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, and rights of key populations, including people living with HIV.

Advancing Sustainable Development Goals and the Global AIDS Strategy

Human rights are central to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for good reason: people's well-being cannot be improved without improving human rights. This is especially true for ISPs, who experience discrimination and human rights violations because of their health or migration status, history of incarceration, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, or because they use drugs or make a living as sex workers.

ISPs need to be able to “build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” – in the words of SDG16 – in order to make progress towards the other SDGs that affect them most. RCF's work intersects with the SDGs in many other ways:

HOW THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INTERSECT WITH ISPS' NEEDS

SDG 3	Good Health and Wellbeing Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages — including by ending both the AIDS and tuberculosis epidemics by 2030, combatting hepatitis and other communicable diseases, and achieving universal health coverage.
SDG 5	Gender Equality Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls — including full access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
SDG 10	Reduced Inequalities Reduce inequality within and among countries — including the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices.
SDG 16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels — including the reduction of violence and corruption, and promotion of inclusive, participatory decision-making with the explicit inclusion of affected communities.
SDG 17	Partnerships for the Goals Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development — including domestic resource mobilization and cross-sectoral partnership.

Human rights abuses remain a grave concern for effective HIV prevention, as data from RCF's grantees shows. In 2019, 74% of RCF-funded networks reported on harmful policies that fueled stigma, discrimination, criminalization and/or violence against the ISPs they represent. For instance, RCF grantees documented violence against LGBTQI communities in Ukraine, Cuba, and other places, and expressed concern about Uganda's renewed efforts to impose the death penalty for same-sex behaviors and/or identity and Nigeria's trial of 47 men under its anti-gay laws.

The [Global AIDS Strategy 2021–2026](#), developed by UNAIDS, recognizes that stigma, discrimination and human rights violations both reflect and drive the inequalities undermining HIV responses. The strategy calls for action to tackle the social and structural factors that keep people most at risk from accessing services. The Global AIDS Strategy also recognizes the central role of communities in leading the way in getting the HIV response on track. RCF support for civil society and community-led networks directly supports this goal.

COVID-19 and human rights of inadequately served populations

RCF grantees have been active on many fronts during the COVID-19 pandemic, representing the interests of ISPs. They have mobilized to protect the health of prisoners ([European Prison Litigation Network](#)) and to advocate against criminalization of COVID-19 ([HIV Justice Network](#)). During the COVID-19 crisis, community-led networks ran hotlines and have been sources of vital support, advice and information tailored to the ISP needs ([Youth RISE](#)) and guardians of human rights ([International Drug Policy Consortium](#)). RCF-funded networks have defended communities and acted as determined advocates for inclusive, rights-oriented policies ([International Network of People Who Use Drugs](#)). They have worked to ensure inadequately served populations are not left behind by state and market response failures ([Global Network of Sex Work Projects](#)) and sustained mobilization, creativity, and innovation ([International Treatment Preparedness Coalition](#)).

Keeping track: RCF grantees making a difference for human rights

RCF's rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework enables it to collect detailed grantee data and measure the results of its investments in a transparent, consistent, and systematic way. The Fund tracks the extent to which grantees have strengthened civil society networks, increased advocacy capacity, promoted human rights, increased access to services, and improved financial accountability.

Achieving change for human rights requires time and multiple strategies. This is why RCF provides long-term support to its grantees and prioritizes flexible core funding. RCF-funded networks often pursue a range of approaches which frequently build on each other, from generating evidence and mapping strategies to developing and launching advocacy campaigns; engaging formally with decision-making bodies and processes; and improving laws, policies, service access or quality, and availability of funding.

Human rights policies

In 2019, 50 RCF-funded networks contributed to improving human rights policies and ensuring that good laws are enforced and harmful laws are amended, from repealing or preventing HIV criminalization laws to strengthening gender identity laws to protect transgender people.

Many RCF grantees prioritize collecting credible evidence through community-led monitoring to support their advocacy for change. For example, the [ATHENA network](#) documented human rights violations against girls and young women in Africa, while the [Consortium of Networks of People Who Use Drugs](#) conducted a multi-country survey of representation of people who use drugs in Global Fund Country Coordination Mechanisms.

Networks use this evidence to advocate for policy change by using UN or parliamentary processes or through strategic litigation. By the end of the first year of the 2019–2021 RCF funding cycle, grantees' efforts had already contributed to concrete policy or legal change related to human rights. For instance, Zimbabwe moved closer to repealing HIV criminalization laws ([ARASA/HIV Justice Global Consortium](#)), while women of childbearing age have gained access to dolutegravir in Uganda ([ICW East Africa/ICW Consortium](#)) and in several countries in Eurasia, women living with HIV were granted access to assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization ([EWNA/Eurasia Regional Consortium](#)).

Better policies do not automatically translate into better practices and civil society and community networks play a role in monitoring the enforcement of protective laws and improved practices. Networks across Africa have recently reported fewer arrests and less harassment of people who use drugs and of men who have sex with men ([Consortium of Networks of People Who Use Drugs](#) and [SHAG Consortium](#)).

For further information on the networks' results, please consult the [RCF Annual Report 2019](#). The RCF Annual Report 2020 will be available on [RCF website](#) in September 2021.

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