

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

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Breaking Down Barriers?

The Global Fund's Breaking Down Barriers (BDB) initiative is a groundbreaking effort to confront human rights-related barriers to HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria services, posed by laws, policies and practices. The initiative provides catalytic matching funds to amplify Global Fund investments, and technical support to drive the development and implementation of country-owned national plans and comprehensive programs to address the injustices that continue to threaten progress against HIV, TB and malaria.

Why is breaking down barriers to health services important?

We cannot end HIV, TB and malaria without addressing the underlying root causes of human rights related barriers. Too often, the people most vulnerable to HIV, TB and malaria are the same people who don't have access to health care due to disease-related

stigma, deep rooted gender inequalities and harsh laws and policies that criminalize and discriminate against key and vulnerable populations.

If we prioritize dismantling these barriers to health services and addressing the inequities that leave people behind, we are creating enabling environments for resilient and sustainable systems for health and delivering improved health outcomes. This is even more critical in today's global climate, as countries are navigating the most difficult contexts, such as pushback against human rights, conflicts and pandemics.

What are your areas of human rights investment?

There are different human rights program areas specific to the responses of each of the three diseases – HIV, TB or malaria. These include programs aimed at nondiscriminatory and people-centered health care and law enforcement practices and eliminating stigma and discrimination, as well as programs aimed at mobilizing communities, enhanced legal literacy and access to justice.

For more detailed information on investments by disease area, please refer to the individual technical briefs below:

- Removing human rights barriers to [HIV Services](#)
- Removing human rights barriers to [TB Services](#)
- Equity, Human Rights, Gender Equality and [Malaria](#)

What countries do you work in?

We currently work in 24 countries: Bangladesh, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Nigeria, Mozambique, Philippines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda and Ukraine. Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Thailand have joined the Breaking Down Barriers initiative starting with the funding cycle 2023-2025

How do you measure results and impact?

Since the Breaking Down Barriers work began in 2017, it has relied on [baseline, mid-term and progress assessments](#) to monitor and evaluate the outcomes and impact of programs to remove rights-related barriers to services. Information from these assessments have been used to calculate progress under Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Beginning in 2024, all countries that are part of Breaking Down Barriers conduct yearly self-assessments of progress to scale up each program area. This information will be regularly analyzed, along with complementary insights, to report against the new KPI E1, described in detail within the [2023-2028 KPI Framework](#). For more detailed information on KPIs, please refer to the Global Fund's Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation [page here](#).

What have the results been?

Global Fund investments in programs to reduce human rights-related barriers have increased more than 10-fold in countries supported by Breaking Down Barriers; from 10.6 million in the 2014-2016 allocation period to 135 million in the 2020-22 allocation period.

The evidence from Breaking Down Barriers assessments is well documented. Specific results include:

16 of the 20 countries, over 20% progress in scale was achieved from the baseline assessments. Overall, the average score across BDB countries had increased by 76% for HIV and 256% for TB since baseline.

The 20 original Breaking Down Barriers countries have developed country-owned plans to reduce human rights-related barriers or integrated such plans into AIDS, TB and malaria National Strategic Plans.

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 behaviours and acceptance of people living with HIV and key populations.

In the 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 a coordinated rapid response to risks posed by the Anti Homosexuality Act 2023, which included strengthening capacity of community-led organizations, programs such as community-led monitoring, rapid responses and legal services, and mechanisms such as the Equity Committee.

How does Breaking Down Barriers align with the broader scope of Global Fund's work, particularly in areas like gender and community engagement?

Advancing human rights, health equity and gender equality, and maximizing community engagement are at the heart of effort to end AIDS, TB and malaria, and each play critical roles in achieving health for all. Non-discrimination, gender equality, and meaningful participation and engagement of affected communities are human rights principles that contribute to effectiveness of the Global Fund investments.

For example, gender-diverse individuals grapple with heightened levels of gender-based violence, stigma, and discrimination limiting their ability to access or utilize health services. Similarly, societal expectations around masculinity pose barriers for men and boys seeking healthcare. The communities who experience such barriers within society and healthcare settings are represented in the Global Fund's decision-making mechanisms for addressing these complex issues.

Specifically, we have community representatives in our governance structures, and invest in a significant body of community-led monitoring of human rights violations, community-led research and advocacy to identify and address barriers. This embedded approach ensures that the people most impacted by human rights and gender-related barriers can directly advocate and contribute to building resilient, accessible, acceptable, and sustainable systems for health.

For more information visit: <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/gender-equality/>

Aside from the Breaking Down Barriers work, what is the Global Fund's role in advancing human rights?

Human rights are core to the [Global Fund vision](#) to defeat HIV, TB and malaria and ensure a healthier, safer, more equitable future for all. We invest in programs to reduce human rights and gender-related barriers to health services across the Global Fund portfolio. Bringing this human-rights-based vision to life has led to saving 59 million lives and reduced the combined death rate from TB, HIV and malaria by more than half in the countries where we invest.

As an example, Global Fund grant agreements include five [minimum human rights standards](#) that every recipient must agree to in order to receive funding. These standards are also part of the [code of conduct](#) for all recipients of Global Fund resources. Moreover, the Global Fund integrates human rights principles firmly in the way we work by integrating four key human rights principles – participation, equity, accountability, and transparency – throughout the grant cycle and into the policy-making process.

The Global Fund guidance provided during the applicant and implementation process is anchored on these principles.

What is Global Fund doing in countries where there is no specific Breaking Down Barriers investment?

The Global Fund supports programs to remove rights-related barriers to services for all countries, not only those that are part of Breaking Down Barriers and tracks human rights investment levels across its HIV and TB portfolio as a complementary insight to our strategic performance reporting. Beginning with the country dialogue process, the Global Fund works with countries to ensure that community voices and key populations are meaningfully engaged to provide input to the programs needed to address the three diseases, including addressing stigma and discrimination, supporting civil society advocacy, improving legal literacy, and increasing access to justice.

Additionally, all country applicants are encouraged to prioritize the following human rights program essentials in their funding requests:

- HIV programs for key and vulnerable populations integrate interventions to reduce human rights- and gender-related barriers.
- Stigma and discrimination reduction activities for people living with HIV and key populations are undertaken in health care and other settings.

- Legal literacy and access to justice activities are accessible to people living with HIV and key populations.
- Support is provided to efforts, including community-led efforts, to analyze and reform criminal and other harmful laws, policies and practices that hinder effective HIV responses.
- TB programming should be human rights-based, gender-responsive and gender-transformative; informed by and respond to analysis of inequities; include stigma and discrimination reduction activities for people with TB and TB-affected populations; include legal literacy and access to justice activities; and include support for community mobilization and advocacy and community-led monitoring for social accountability.
- For malaria, applicants should ensure that sub-nationally tailored planning considers factors beyond malaria epidemiology such as equity-, human rights-, and gender-related barriers, and the important sociocultural, economic and political factors influencing individual and population-level risk, as well as access and engagement with health services.

Human rights and gender equality risk is assessed – and, where needed, mitigation actions are deployed in all Global Fund high impact and core portfolios.

What is the role of the Global Fund partnership in removing human rights barriers?

Ultimately, the work comes down to countries: Governments, communities and civil society to make political, policy, and financing choices that are required to end these epidemics, and technical partners to support their realization. Such choices include but are not limited to:

- Develop and implement national plans and comprehensive programs.
- Lead advocacy efforts to raise awareness about critical issues in a country context.
- Engage with communities to understand specific needs and challenges related to human rights and gender.
- Drive community-centered approaches to ensure that interventions are contextually relevant and responsive to the diverse needs of affected populations.
- Assess the impact of interventions, tracking progress towards goals, and making data-informed adjustments to optimize the effectiveness of the programs.

In Breaking Down Barriers countries, catalytic matching funds, evidence and technical assistance have demonstrated their critical role in advancing comprehensive programs to address human rights barriers, based on country-owned plans, and in amplifying leadership and voice of communities.

Given the current global erosion of human rights and gender equality, it is more important than ever for the Global Fund partnership as a whole to invest and expand programs to remove barriers and in enhanced safety and security as part of all programming, as well as leverage its collective diplomatic voice to advance gender equality, human rights, and equity and challenge laws, policies and practices that limit impact on HIV, TB and malaria.