

VIRTUAL HUB REPORT: AIDS 2024

Insights and Highlights from the AIDS 2024 Virtual Hubs



During the 25th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2024), Y+ Global coordinated **12 Virtual Hubs across Africa, Latin America, and Asia**, enabling young people living with and affected by HIV to engage with the conference from their communities. These hubs created inclusive spaces for learning, reflection, and youth-led dialogue around global HIV issues and solutions.

The International AIDS Society (IAS) generously granted support for virtual hubs in Colombia, Honduras, Lao PDR, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. Each hub was led by a local youth network or community-

based organisation and adapted to local languages, contexts, and advocacy priorities.

The **hubs supported more than 200 young people in participating in this year's conference**, creating a dynamic and supportive space for engagement despite challenges such as time zones, language barriers, and internet connectivity. For many participants, this was their first opportunity to connect directly with a global health conference, and their reflections showed how important it is to create youth-friendly entry points into high-level spaces.

LATIN AMERICA & ASIA: PRIORITISING VISIBILITY AND REPRESENTATION

In Latin America and Asia, the hubs focused on amplifying youth voices, particularly from underrepresented regions in global HIV dialogues. These hubs prioritised connection, political advocacy, rights-based approaches, and peer learning.

In Colombia, **Más Que Tres Letras** hosted the hub, engaging 45 young people over several days. Despite time zone differences and the need for translation, participants created a vibrant space to discuss mental health, community building, and the often invisible reality of ageing with HIV. Their reflections emphasised the importance of intergenerational dialogue and emotional well-being.



[Photos taken from the hub organised in Mexico by J+MEX, Jóvenes Positivos MX and Yaaj México]

In Mexico, the **Mexican Network of Positive Youth and Adolescents (J+MEX)** mobilised 13 young leaders from across the country to join the hub. Partnering with Jóvenes Positivos MX and Yaaj México, the group joined **sessions** on sexual and reproductive rights, political participation, and health systems, advocating for youth-friendly, rights-based services. J+MEX also contributed to regional and global consultations, showcasing how youth networks can shape HIV responses at all levels. Some young advocates shared

TikTok videos and Instagram reels, capturing their experiences. **Link 1. Link 2. Link 3.**

In Honduras, the **Foro Nacional de VIH/SIDA** brought together a cohort of youth who participated in advocacy-focused sessions. The hub highlighted the country's context of stigma, limited access to quality healthcare, and lack of youth representation in policy spaces. Participants shared lived experiences and strengthened their advocacy skills for future national dialogues.



[Photos taken from the hub organised in Honduras by Foro Nacional de VIH/SIDA]

In Lao PDR, the **Community Health Inclusion Association (CHIAs)** hosted a hub attended by 20 participants, primarily young people from key populations. Sessions focused on HIV prevention strategies, community-led responses, and youth mental health. The

hub used innovative tools like real-time translation apps and designated note-takers to ensure everyone could follow the sessions. Their call for legal reform, youth leadership, and inclusive health access was a strong reminder of the structural barriers youth face in Asia.

AFRICA: STRENGTHENING PEER-LED ADVOCACY AND LEARNING

The hubs in Africa emphasised peer learning, safe spaces, and strengthening community-led responses. Participants gathered to discuss key issues affecting youth living with HIV in their regions and reflect on shared challenges and opportunities.

In Kenya, the **Ambassador for Youth and Adolescent Reproductive Health Programme (AYARHEP)** hosted the hub, engaging in strategic dialogue about adolescent-friendly services, inclusion in policy spaces, and methods to dismantle HIV-related myths. Participants highlighted the lack of youth involvement in national HIV programmes and expressed an interest in establishing youth-led accountability mechanisms.

In Malawi, the **National Association for Young People Living with HIV (Y+ Malawi)** focused on linking local action to global processes. Youth participants engaged in sessions on financing, community engagement, and differentiated service delivery, generating feedback to contribute to national HIV strategy dialogues.

In South Africa, the **Sisonke National Movement for Sex Workers** supported the virtual hubs. Young participants explored gender-based violence, U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable), and intersectionality. Facilitated by youth-led networks, the space fostered vulnerable yet powerful conversations

around mental health, visibility, and stigma.

In Tanzania, the **Children's Dignity Forum and the Network of Young People Living with HIV and AIDS in Tanzania (NYP+)** created a collaborative and reflective space for young people living with HIV to connect around self-care, treatment adherence, and storytelling as advocacy. Young leaders emphasised the need for investment in mentorship and psychosocial support.

In Zambia, **Copper Rose Zambia** emphasised peer support, navigating disclosure, and accessing youth-centred health services. Participants shared creative approaches for educating peers and confronting stigma in schools and communities.



[Photos taken from the hub organised in Zambia, by Copper Rose Zambia]

SHARED LEARNINGS AND VIRTUAL HUB REFLECTIONS

Across all hubs, participants expressed deep appreciation for the opportunity to engage with the AIDS 2024 conference in a youth-friendly and contextualised way. While some sessions were highly technical, youth organisers found creative ways to make the content accessible through real-time translations, simplified summaries, and post-session debriefs.

A common recommendation was that a clinical expert or health professional join hubs during more scientific sessions to help translate complex medical

language into youth-friendly language. There was also a shared desire for more multilingual support and better digital access, especially in rural or low-resource areas.

Participants in Latin America emphasised their region's underrepresentation at the global level and called for stronger efforts to include Spanish-speaking youth in future conference planning. Meanwhile, hubs in Africa and Asia called for increased support for youth networks, decriminalisation of key populations, and safe platforms to tell their stories and shape policies.

Importantly, all participants valued the sense of connection and community created during the virtual hubs. Several hubs discussed launching follow-up spaces, such as online forums, regular meetups, and blogs, to keep the momentum alive and foster cross-country youth alliances.



[Photos taken from the hub organised in Lao PDR, by the Community Health Inclusion Association (CHIAs)]

WHY VIRTUAL HUBS MATTER FOR OUR WORK?

The AIDS 2024 Virtual Hubs were not only a window into a major global conference but a proof of concept for youth-led, community-centred engagement. These hubs allowed young people, many of whom had never been in international advocacy spaces, to engage with global dialogue on their own terms.

Furthermore, virtual hubs significantly reduce the costs associated with attending international conferences, such as travel and accommodation, thus enabling broader participation. By lowering these financial barriers, virtual hubs allow for the greater engagement of young people, particularly those from under-resourced areas, who might otherwise be excluded. This increased accessibility fosters a more diverse and representative dialogue.

This approach reflects our broader commitment to equity, participation, and youth leadership in all aspects of the HIV response. Creating access to information, networks, and decision-making spaces—whether virtual or in-person is essential for building sustainable, inclusive, and impactful responses to the HIV epidemic.

These hubs are also a call to action: global health events must be accessible, multilingual, and co-created with youth, especially those from the Global South. Only then can we achieve meaningful participation and systemic change.



[Thank you, posters taken by the Mexican Network of Positive Youth and Adolescents (J+MEX)]

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite efforts to engage young people meaningfully in the conference, all the hubs encountered challenges related to language accessibility, underscoring the necessity for improved translation services, including live captions and AI-based translations, to encourage more inclusive participation. Time zone differences also created difficulties, particularly in Colombia, where participants were limited in the number of sessions they could attend each day; future events should consider staggered session times to better accommodate global attendees. Technical issues, especially those concerning internet connectivity, were noted, suggesting that enhanced technical support and pre-event orientations could

help mitigate these challenges going forward. Additionally, participants expressed a strong interest in increased opportunities to connect with other virtual hubs worldwide, advocating for the establishment of a global community to enhance the events' impact.

Overall, the AIDS 2024 Virtual Hubs played a crucial role in empowering youth, fostering community, and supporting more inclusive global discussions on youth-led responses to HIV. The reflections and recommendations from these hubs provide valuable insights for improving future virtual events and ensuring comprehensive representation.