



# *COALITION* **PLUS**

## **Gender Policy Coalition PLUS**

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## Preamble

As a network in the fight against AIDS and hepatitis, Coalition PLUS is firmly committed to the rights and health of key populations vulnerable to these epidemics. Aligned with international guidelines aimed at reducing gender inequalities in the HIV response,<sup>1</sup> and with Sustainable Development Goal 5 which aims to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, Coalition PLUS recognizes the need to implement a Gender Institutional Policy.

### What is the Coalition PLUS Gender Institutional Policy?

The Coalition PLUS Gender Institutional Policy sets out our principles, our position and our commitments on the incorporation of gender issues, as well as our implementation mechanisms at organizational and operational level. It represents an essential framework for our collective action and will be gradually implemented by adapting the mechanisms to institutional, national and regional contexts.

### Our vision of gender

Recognizing and respecting the diversity of needs and contexts within the network, our vision of gender is to create an environment where gender equality is actively promoted, and where gender-based discrimination is systematically stamped out so as to guarantee equal access to health and rights for all.

### A shared commitment

The member associations of Coalition PLUS share common values and are committed to working to achieve the Union’s social purpose. Community participation is central to our governance. Within this framework, each member remains legally and financially independent, complying with the regulations in force in their country and with health, social, economic and cultural specificities. The member associations’ membership of Coalition PLUS is subject to their sovereignty and compliance with 10 membership criteria, including the adoption of this gender policy.

### Who is this document intended for?

This document is intended for our Union<sup>2</sup> as a whole, as well as the communities involved in our actions. In the interests of transparency and openness, it is also made available to our institutional partners. Lastly, this policy could inspire other initiatives to promote an inclusive and intersectional approach in our fight against HIV by addressing other forms of discrimination such as racism and xenophobia.

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<sup>1</sup> "Confronting Inequalities: Lessons for Pandemic Responses from 40 Years of AIDS" (2021); Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Ending Inequalities and Getting on Track to End AIDS by 2030 (2021).

<sup>2</sup> encompassing the Secretariat, and the member and partner associations of the Coalition PLUS geographic, linguistic and thematic networks



## History and Method

For a number of years now, Coalition PLUS has gradually incorporated gender issues within its network. In 2021, priority was given to questions of sexist and sexual violence, resulting in the establishment of a Case Management Procedure and the creation of a Counseling and Support Unit. All employees attended awareness-raising sessions, which are now available to all of the member's network as e-learning modules. In February 2023, the Coalition PLUS Executive Board confirmed its determination to see the network adopt a Gender Institutional Policy, mandating the creation of a Working Group (Gender WG).

The Gender WG, composed of administrators and employees, evaluated the needs to develop a consistent gender policy for the network. The process of reflection and the preparation of the document followed a participatory methodology involving the members of the Gender WG at all stages, who met on several occasions and contributed their revisions and comments.

The Gender Institutional Policy was adopted by the Executive Board in July 2024. An employee dedicated to the operational coordination facilitates its application, overseeing the dissemination and assimilation of the gender policy throughout the network, as well as the definition and implementation of a cross-cutting action plan. Regular monitoring will be introduced to assess the efficiency of the measures and adjust the approach on the basis of feedback.

## Key concepts

This section presents the basic definitions we adhere to in order to promote a thorough understanding of gender-related issues and consistent application within our commitments to diversity and gender equality.

### Words connected with diversity based on gender and sexual orientation\*

**Gender** refers to cultural norms, social expectations, roles, behaviors and identities associated with being male, female or any other position on a continuum between these two extremes, in a given society.<sup>3</sup> It is an identity that is constructed and can change over time, varying significantly between and within cultures,<sup>4</sup> and which goes beyond the **sex assigned at birth**, which is based solely on biological differences. Gender, in interaction with other socially and culturally constructed categories (class, race, age, etc.), is a major social determinant of health inequalities. Gender plays a crucial role in the fight against AIDS, not only in health profiles due to biological differences, but especially in access to information, prevention and health services due to gender norms, thereby exacerbating the vulnerability of certain populations in the face of this virus.

**Gender identity** is the gender a person identifies as, irrespective of their sex assigned at birth. It is a deeply felt internal and individual feeling, including the personal sense of the body. This identity is independent of sexual or romantic orientation. A **cisgender** person identifies as their sex assigned at birth, while a **transgender** person has a gender identity that does not correspond to their sex assigned at birth.<sup>5</sup>

Each person can determine their identity (self-identification) and chose a transition path, where appropriate.<sup>6</sup> There are multiple trans paths that may involve a social, medical or legal transition, or a combination of the three. It is a personal process that varies from one person to another.

**Gender binary** is a classification of gender identity into two sexes (male, female) with associated 'male/female' stereotypes. This model is based on characteristics perceived as linked to genital organs, even though many cultures are constructed outside of this binary framework.<sup>7</sup> **Non-binary** refers to gender identities that do not correspond to a strict male/female dichotomy, encompassing all other possibilities.<sup>8</sup>

**Sexual orientation** refers to sexual attraction to men, women or non-binary persons. This continuum includes **heterosexuality**, **homosexuality**, **bisexuality**, **pansexuality**, and **asexuality**, reflecting the diversity of human emotional and sexual orientations.

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*.

<sup>4</sup> Gender-transformative HIV programming: Identifying and meeting the needs of women and girls in all their diversity - International HIV/AIDS Alliance 2018

<sup>5</sup> <https://questionsexualite.fr/connaître-son-corps-et-sa-sexualité/la-diversité-de-gendre/qu-est-ce-que-la-transidentité>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2019/unaids-gender-assessment-tool>

<sup>7</sup> Une histoire de genres, Guide pour comprendre et défendre les transidentités, Lexie – Marabout 2021

<sup>8</sup> Une histoire de genres, Guide pour comprendre et défendre les transidentités, Lexie – Marabout 2021

*\*The notions of diversity based on gender and sexual orientation cover a broad spectrum of social and personal concepts. This list is not exhaustive and summarizes the key concepts for our gender policy.*

## Construction of gender-based inequalities

**Gender stereotypes** are generalized views or preconceptions about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men. Whether overtly hostile (such as “women are irrational”) or seemingly benign (“women are nurturing”), harmful stereotypes perpetuate inequalities and are a contributing factor in violations of a vast array of rights such as the right to health, education, work, freedom of expression, political participation, and freedom from gender-based violence.<sup>9</sup> For example, women may overlook their own health needs because of the stereotype that they should prioritize family care, while men may be discouraged from seeking medical help because of the stereotype surrounding masculine strength and independence.

**Gender-based stigmatization** refers to the way in which a person is identified, labeled and devalued based on their conformity or non-conformity with socially prescribed gender norms.<sup>10</sup>

**Gender-based discrimination** refers to behaviors that deny individuals the equal treatment they seek or have the right to, based on their sex, gender identity or sexual orientation.<sup>11</sup> This includes actions or practices that deprive people of rights, opportunities or equal treatment based on preconceived social or cultural norms associated with male or female roles. For example, refusing to provide medical care to a person based on bias connected with gender or sexual orientation is a form of gender-based discrimination.

**Gender-based violence (GBV)** encompasses all forms of violence targeting a person based on their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or gender stereotypes. GBV disproportionately affects women.<sup>12</sup> It includes physical, sexual and psychological violence, and other forms of ill-treatment such as economic constraint or deprivation of liberty. **Microaggressions** are often subtle, short and regular acts that convey hostile, contemptuous or degrading messages directed at individuals based on their social identity (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). They can take the form of microassaults (direct attacks), microinsults (comments or behavior that convey disrespect) and microinvalidations (dismissing or invalidating people’s experiences). Often going unnoticed, these acts perpetuate stereotypes and have cumulative harmful effects on the mental health and well-being of the targeted persons.<sup>13</sup> **Sexist violence** refers specifically to acts, attitudes, comments or practices that discriminate, demean, or reinforce gender stereotypes. **Sexual violence** is any sexual contact committed with violence, coercion, threat or surprise<sup>14</sup> forcing a person to undergo any conduct, comment, gesture, or contact of a sexual nature without consent, in the public or private space, including within conjugal, amicable or family relationships. Since 2021, Coalition PLUS has put in place a Case Management Procedure for cases of sexist and sexual violence.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/gender-stereotyping>

<sup>10</sup> Comprendre la stigmatisation fondée sur le genre lors de la transition vers l’âge adulte Quintessence, Réseau Qualaxia 2021

<sup>11</sup> Genre & VIH/sida : boîte à outils Plateforme ELSA, 2022 édition

<sup>12</sup> Gender-transformative HIV programming: Identifying and meeting the needs of women and girls in all their diversity - International HIV/AIDS Alliance 2018

<sup>13</sup> “Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice”, *The American Psychologist*, vol. 62, no 4, 2007, p. 271–86 (PMID 17516773, DOI 10.1037/0003-066x.62.4.271)

<sup>14</sup> Onu Femmes <https://www.onufemmes.fr/violences-sexuelles>

<sup>15</sup> Whistleblowing procedure for SSV - Coalition PLUS

## Gender approach: what is it?

**The gender approach** is a methodology designed to integrate the concerns and experiences of women and of all sexual and gender identities – including those of men – in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of an organization’s actions, programs and policies. The methodology aims to deconstruct gender stereotypes, promote gender equality and create environments where all sexual and gender identities are equally respected and valued. The inclusion of a gender approach is a long-term strategy that can have different levels of complexity (gender-negative, gender-blind, gender targeted, gender-responsive or gender-transformative approach).<sup>16</sup> The institutionalization of the gender approach refers to the systematic integration of the gender dimension into all programs and procedures as well as into the internal structure of an organization.<sup>17</sup>

**Intersectionality** is a sociological concept and an analytical tool that examines the way in which the multiple identities and social categories (gender, class, race, sexual orientation, immigrant status, disability, etc.) interact, interrelate and are mutually reinforced, creating unique and complex experiences<sup>18</sup> and impacting access to rights, opportunities and services. **An intersectional approach** consists of considering gender as a determinant that interacts with other parameters, producing multiple and distinct experiences among people living with – or vulnerable to – HIV in different contexts. These experiences shape their social identities, their vulnerabilities, their access to services, their well-being and the levels of stigmatization and discrimination towards them.

**Gender equality** is the principle according to which all individuals should be treated equally, with the same dignity and the same rights, without any limitations set by their sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender stereotypes. It is an overarching principle integral to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>19</sup> and the UNAIDS Strategy 2016–2021 to end AIDS.<sup>20</sup> **Gender equity** refers to the impartial treatment of all individuals, according to their respective needs. This treatment may vary while still guaranteeing equivalent rights, advantages, obligations and opportunities. Gender equity is the means by which gender equality is materialized.<sup>21</sup> **Parity** is an instrument at the service of equality, which consists in ensuring that each gender is represented equally in institutions, thus guaranteeing the access of women and men to the same opportunities, rights, opportunities to choose, material conditions while respecting their specificities.<sup>22</sup> **Inclusivity** refers to a group, environment or system adapted to ensure equal treatment based on the needs and abilities of everyone, without distinction. This involves access to the same advantages and opportunities for all.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2019/unaids-gender-assessment-tool>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/dz/UNDP-DZ-Guide\\_genre.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/dz/UNDP-DZ-Guide_genre.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Crenshaw K., “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6 (Jul., 1991), pp. 1241-1299.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2019/unaids-gender-assessment-tool>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/global-AIDS-strategy-2021-2026-summary\\_en.pdf](https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/global-AIDS-strategy-2021-2026-summary_en.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> *Genre & VIH/sida : boîte à outils* Plateforme ELSA, 2022 edition

<sup>22</sup> Definition - Parity and equality between women and men | Insee.

<sup>23</sup> <https://vitrinelinguistique.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/fiche-gdt/fiche/26561001/inclusivite>

## Our principles

The fight against HIV remains the common goal within Coalition PLUS, guiding our collective action in favor of the health and rights of vulnerable populations affected by this epidemic. The need to take a gender approach to this fight has emerged as a component of this. Incorporating gender into our mission to combat AIDS and hepatitis will follow the above-mentioned principles, in accordance with our values and purpose.

**Community-based approach:** the participation and positioning of the community within action reinforces the empowerment of the people concerned for greater social justice and the transformation of social determinants.<sup>24</sup> The fundamental principle of **“Nothing about us without us!”** that has guided our member organizations these past decades remains a central pillar of the political stance and operation of Coalition PLUS at all levels. This also applies to our gender policy, which must ensure the participation of all the actors concerned in its definition, its assimilation and its implementation. The communities, particularly women and sexual and gender minorities, must be integrally involved in the deliberation, construction and implementation of the programs that develop, evolve or emerge within the framework of this gender policy.

**Defense of human rights:** the integration of a gender approach in our actions forms part of the struggle to uphold the human rights of the populations most exposed and vulnerable to HIV and hepatitis, including women and LGBTI people. This approach also includes the defense of their sexual and reproductive rights and their access to care. **The promotion of gender equality is therefore intrinsically linked to the defense of human rights.** Within the framework of our human rights approach, we apply a zero-tolerance policy to moral and sexual harassment and sexual violence, as well as to inaction in the face of such conduct. We recognize the importance of creating a safe environment where victims and witnesses can express themselves as part of a process of self-learning and individual and collective responsibility. Within our internal operation, this takes the form of prevention and action against sexist and sexual violence (SSV) in accordance with our *Case Management Procedure for SSV*. In our actions, this hinges on the reporting of SSV and the demand for appropriate responses to these violations of human rights.

**Social change:** our gender approach furthers and reinforces our goal of social change. Community-based organizations are not only healthcare providers, they are also agents of social change, with the aim of transforming society and the environment to ensure better access to health and to rights for people affected by and living with HIV and key populations within the epidemic. It is within this framework that our gender approach also seeks to create a **fairer and more inclusive society**, actively promoting gender equality, combating gender-based discrimination and guaranteeing equal access to health and rights for everyone.

**Cross-cutting:** gender issues run throughout all of the Union’s programs, projects and policies, and are a collective responsibility that concerns all actors at all levels (Secretariat, members, network).

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<sup>24</sup> *A New Social Reformer. The Patient [Paper]*. D. Defert. (1989). 5<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference. Montreal, Canada.



**Networking:** promoting the gender approach within our network relies on the **sharing of experiences and skills**. The Coalition PLUS geographic, linguistic and thematic networks provide forums for these exchanges, thus fostering **mutual learning** and the development of innovative solutions to strengthen our action in favor of gender equality.

**Recognition of diversity:** this principle encompasses two key dimensions. Firstly, the recognition and **respect for the diversity of the contexts, cultures and priorities** of each member structure of Coalition PLUS, with the possibility of implementation tailored to each institutional reality. Secondly, the **recognition of the diversity of the needs and realities** of populations in a context of inequality, where gender interacts, among others, with social class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and immigrant status, creating diverse needs and experiences.

**Fight against gender inequalities in health:** this involves **taking into account gender inequalities that may impact access to prevention and healthcare**, especially sexual and reproductive health, as well as developing programs, services and actions that do not fuel these inequalities and which, on the contrary, challenge them and help eradicate them.



## Our commitments

These commitments constitute the scope of action within which Coalition PLUS has resolved to take action on gender issues. Two levels can be identified: organizational and operational. They are gradually adapted to the existing base, in line with each national context. Through these commitments, we are initially seeking to be **gender responsive** within the Gender Results Effectiveness Framework (GRES)<sup>25</sup>: **recognizing and highlighting gender differences, issues and inequalities and incorporating them into our strategies and actions**. These commitments will be periodically reviewed and updated.

### Organizational commitments

Internally, involving the Secretariat and the members, our commitments call for an **organizational transformation**. The diversity of our contexts and countries of operation requires a strong political will to push forward the gender approach. Within our organizations, we undertake to:

1. **Prevent, respond to and combat gender-based violence (violence against women, homophobic and transphobic violence, sexual & moral harassment, domestic violence)**, through, for example, the Counseling and Support Unit for victims of SSV, the application of the Case Management Procedure for SSV, and access to counseling for employees.
2. **Promote a shared, gender-responsive organizational framework among all of the actors in the Coalition PLUS network (Secretariat, members, network)**. This includes, for example, the hosting of awareness-raising workshops on gender issues, topical training session, inclusive internal and external communication promoting messages in favor of gender equality, a political line on international days through the visibilization of gender issues, and the establishment of a gender policy within each member structure.
3. **Implement a wage policy promoting gender inclusion and equality including equal pay, inclusion in recruitment and work-life balance**. This is possible through wage transparency initiatives, monitoring of employability indicators, creation of a work-life quality charter, and a policy on the right to disconnect.

### Operational commitments

On an operational level, in all our programs and actions, we undertake to:

4. **Promote and build awareness of the gender approach across the board to ensure its systematic integration in the development of Coalition PLUS projects, programs and strategic documents**. This includes, for example, the dissemination of minimum gender standards which must be incorporated into projects, provision of tools for the planning and monitoring of the gender approach in projects, consolidation of strategic partnerships, and the creation of cross-sector posts in relation to gender.
5. **Integrate a gender approach to access to health in projects, services and actions targeting the beneficiaries and users of structures**. This involves, for example, analyzing gender

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<sup>25</sup> [https://erc.undp.org/pdf/GRES\\_French.pdf](https://erc.undp.org/pdf/GRES_French.pdf); [https://erc.undp.org/pdf/GRES\\_English.pdf](https://erc.undp.org/pdf/GRES_English.pdf)



inequalities within key populations which impact their sexual health and their access to prevention and care; adapting projects, services and actions to respond to and reduce these inequalities in access to services without discrimination; consideration of health profiles and differentiated specific needs based on gender.

## Implementation

The gradual roll out of the gender policy within the Coalition PLUS network will consist of the following stages:

- 1. Dissemination and assimilation of the gender policy:** the initial stage consists of disseminating the policy and encouraging its uptake by all of the actors in the Coalition PLUS network. This also includes encouraging members to create and review their own gender policy in line with this policy.
- 2. Inventory and self-assessment:** the Secretariat will coordinate an inventory of actions, procedures and projects already in place within the networks concerned by the integration of the gender approach. Each structure will also carry out a self-assessment to examine the internal and external context surrounding the commitments contained in this policy, and to identify their priority needs.
- 3. Development of an action plan for cross-cutting activities:** an *Action Plan* will be set out to move forward the implementation of this policy, initially at the level of the different branches of the Secretariat, programs and multi-country projects. This action plan defines the scope and procedures for adaptation of the gender policy within each department, the steps to follow, the timeline, the division of roles and responsibilities, and its implementation schedule.
- 4. Identification of the implementation mechanisms at national/regional level:** the Secretariat will facilitate the adaptation of the principles set out in the policy and the definition of relevant procedures based on the national or regional context. The aim is to identify adjustable and adaptable implementation mechanisms, potentially on a network-by-network basis or according to other relevant criteria.
- 5. Adaptation and implementation of the gender policy at each network/member level:** each member association and each network will define the most appropriate mechanisms aligned with their operational reality and their social, economic and political context. Once these mechanisms have been defined, each association will be responsible for putting them in place within their scope of action and with the possible support of the Secretariat.
- 6. Monitoring:** lastly, regular monitoring will be put in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures implemented and to adjust our approach in light of feedback and changing needs. A self-assessment tool will also be designed to enable each organization to assess the current situation, the challenges and the progress in the integration of the gender policy (*see Evaluation and monitoring section*).

## Evaluation and monitoring

The implementation of the gender policy requires regular evaluation to measure the efforts made towards the shared goal. The evaluation and monitoring procedures encompass three approaches:

- **At the level of the Secretariat, a cross-cutting action plan jointly developed with indicators** to evaluate the progress of the implementation within each branch and within the cross-cutting projects and programs.
- **Each member and each network defines two or three targets annually** that meet the commitments set out in this policy, based on their priority needs. These targets go hand in hand with tailored implementation mechanisms and monitoring indicators to measure the level of achievement (target reached, not reached, partially reached).
- **An annual report** on the progress of the implementation of the policy within the network drawn up based on the feedback from the members and consolidated by the Secretariat and the Gender WG. This report is presented every year to the **Executive Board as part of a progress meeting**, providing an opportunity for discussion on (i) the advancement of the members in its implementation, (ii) the obstacles encountered, and (iii) any necessary adaptations.

This evaluation provides a means to quantify efforts and progress in the application of the Gender Policy. **This policy is considered progressive** so as to allow for adaptation to constantly changing needs. This approach makes it possible to integrate new knowledge, adjust strategies to feedback and guarantee that the policy remains aligned with best practices and changing realities.