

Action for Universal Access 2010: Myths

Realities



HIV-related Travel Restrictions

Issue Statement

HIV-related travel restrictions are ineffective, discriminatory and inconsistent with the 2001 and 2006 declarations on HIV and AIDS, which commit member states, "to intensify efforts...to eliminate all forms of discrimination against people living with HIV."

Key Messages

- Seventy-four countries around the world still restrict the entry or immigration (e.g. for business, personal visits, tourism, labour migration, employment, study, asylum or refugee resettlement) of people living with HIV, in misguided and discriminatory efforts to "protect public health," despite the lack of evidence that such restrictions have any impact on HIV transmission rates.
- HIV-related travel restrictions prevent people living with HIV from visiting relatives or friends, vacationing, conducting business or studying abroad, attending conferences, migrating for work, applying for or receiving asylum, reuniting with family members, and contributing economically to the destination country.
- Thirteen countries ban people living with HIV people from entering for any reason or for any length of time, including the United States, the host country to the United Nations General Assembly headquarters.
- These restrictions have not been removed despite a World Health Organisation (WHO) convened expert consultation in 1988, which concluded that "no screening programme of international travelers can prevent the introduction and spread of HIV infection" and that such screening "would be ineffective, impractical and wasteful." The same year, the World Health Assembly urged member states to "avoid discriminatory action against and stigmatization of [PLHIV] in the provision of services, employment and travel."
- There is no need to have **any** HIV-specific immigration regulation or restriction. HIV should be treated the same as any other chronic condition with similar modes of transmission.

Background: Myths vs. Realities – The Road to Universal Access

The **myth** is that HIV-related travel restrictions only apply to people living with HIV wishing to attend conferences in certain countries, like the United States. In reality, HIV-travel restrictions seem to have the greatest impact on migrants and others seeking to move for work or study.

- Many poor people in developing countries want to migrate to more developed countries for work and to secure a better life. Many sell their assets or go into debt to be able to afford such a move, and are then required to take an HIV test, often without their knowledge or proper counseling. If they test HIV-positive, they are often informed without confidentiality being maintained. They face the prospect of losing everything, including the possibility of working in their home country, due to HIV-related discrimination.
- Many migrants go to destination countries HIV-negative and are infected with HIV there, often because they have no access to HIV-prevention information and commodities/services and/or are subject to sexual violence. In some countries testing HIV-positive can result in summary deportation.

