

### Sad, Sobering Statistics

- 2.4 million youth between 15 and 24 were infected in 2001, accounting for almost half of all new infections for that year.
- Youth aged 15 to 24 are the fastest-growing population of newly infected persons living with HIV/AIDS, with one youth infected every 15 seconds.
- 60% of all new HIV/AIDS infections are among 15 to 24 year olds.

Refugee youth – already rendered vulnerable by the trauma of conflict and displacement – have not been spared the frightening scourge of AIDS. One of the most visible and tragic outcomes of HIV/AIDS is the growth in number of orphans. Recent estimates show that there are more than 18 million children below the age of 15 who have lost one or both parents to AIDS in the sub-Saharan region.

More and more HIV/AIDS affected children and adolescents will be encountered in refugee operations. In Africa, a large number of adolescents are already living with HIV. In some parts of Africa, up to 60% of secondary school girls aged 15-19 are presently infected with HIV.

For over ten years, UNHCR has been involved in producing guidelines for field activities and materials to encourage prevention and help, both in the camps and during emergency situations. The guidelines are based on four principles: promoting prevention, ensuring a safe blood supply, controlling sexually transmitted infections, and providing basic information on HIV/AIDS. Access to voluntary counselling and testing services as well as home-based and community care of people living with AIDS are also promoted.

### Window of Hope

Although the HIV/AIDS epidemic has reached staggering proportions, it must be remembered that **most children and young people are HIV free!** The lowest HIV prevalence is found in children and teenagers between the ages of 5 and 14. This age group is referred to as **“the window of hope”**. These children and youth need to be equipped with the necessary information and means to avoid getting infected with the HIV virus. For them, there is a future of hope.

**“It’s important to tell people about AIDS, ‘cause... this thing is reality! It’s happening all around the world and many people are not aware of this thing. It’s killing people!”**

**“I will never get sick of hearing about it (AIDS) because the more you hear about it, the better you know about it and the better you can avoid it”.**

Quotations from refugee youth after seeing the UNHCR-supported South African refugee theatre project “You’re not alone”, that was performed in 50 refugee hosting schools in Gauteng Province in August 2000. The project is documented on video and is available from UNHCR Headquarters or UNHCR BO Pretoria.

UNHCR has sponsored various HIV/AIDS education programmes targeting refugee youth, with the **dual objectives to prevent the further spread of HIV, and to fight stigma and discrimination while creating an environment of caring and empathy towards those who are already ill or infected.**

In South Africa, an educational theatre production about AIDS was performed in 50 refugee schools. In western Tanzania, more than 50,000 primary students and 4,000 high school students have been educated on HIV/AIDS in refugee camps through lectures, poems and cultural group performances. Hundreds of educators and health care staff have been trained in Namibia, Botswana, Eritrea, Yemen, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and other countries. **Schoolbooks have been distributed and radio broadcasts used in many countries as potent tools to promote responsible sexual behaviour and destroy some myths about the disease. Refugee committees and youth centres have been created in numerous countries, most particularly in Africa.**

**Programmes which work have the following characteristics:**

1. They are developed through consultation and consensus with the local community
2. They use participatory learning methods (e.g. games, role plays, small group discussions, songs, dance, puppetry,...) that allow children and youth to contribute actively with their own experiences and creativity
3. They use culturally sensitive and accessible educational material (in terms of vocabulary, length and illustrations)
4. They are designed and implemented by the youth for the youth, in which adults have only a facilitating role
5. They not only transfer information, but also develop skills that help youths to make informed decisions about their relationships and their sexual behaviour