

Strengthening Girls' Rights!

Reproductive Health and HIV Prevention for Young Women and Girls in Zambia (SGR-II)

The Challenge

In Zambia, youth aged 15 to 24 make up 20% of the population but account for 40% of all new HIV infections annually. Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable, representing 7 out of 10 new infections in this age group. Early pregnancies is a significant challenge: According to the 2024 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, nearly 1 in 3 girls (27.6%) had been pregnant or had had a live birth by the age of 18. Early marriages have barely declined over the years.

Despite the existence of the Anti-Gender Based Violence Act, violence against girls and women remains pervasive, deeply rooted in overall gender inequality, and highly tolerated. 47% of ever-married women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence at the hands of their partner. The 2023 police report on GBV statistics shows a 28% increase in reported cases of gender-based violence compared to 2022.

The "triple threat" of HIV, early pregnancies, and gender-based violence (GBV) not only negatively affects the health and lives of young women and girls but also has an impact on Zambia's economy. A study found that the high rates of early pregnancies, HIV and gender-based violence lead to a loss of approximately 14% of the gross domestic product in Zambia.

Project name	Strengthening Girls' Rights! Reproductive Health and HIV Prevention for Young Women and Girls in Zambia (SGR-II)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Lusaka Province, Luapula Province, Southern Province, Eastern Province
Lead executing agency	National HIV/AIDS/STI/TB Council (NAC)
Duration	09/2023 – 08/2026
Budget	5,000,000 €

Our Approach

The project supports the Zambian government in its fight against HIV, early pregnancies and GBV. It supports for example local HIV and AIDS Coordination Advisors within local administrations in order to implement awareness measures more effectively – such as the Join-In Circuit on AIDS, Love and Sexuality. It gets young people involved in developing youth-friendly, gender-responsive services and improves sexuality education in schools. Through intergenerational dialogue with young people and religious and traditional actors, the project improves social framework conditions for young people to access health services.



Left: Parents participating in the body language station during the J-IC with parents

Right: Girls in a health facility who were supported in income generation activities.



Left: A young person at a joint religious and traditional leaders' roundtable highlights the challenges differently abled youth face in accessing health services.

Right: Young people participating in a scorecard process at a health facility

Achievements so far

Strengthened competences

- The Join-In Circuit on AIDS, Love and Sexuality (J-IC) has been anchored into partner institutions. The University of Zambia, and two nursing and midwifery colleges have integrated the J-IC into their curricula.
- Over 457 professionals and youth have been trained as J-IC trainers, and the J-IC has been introduced in more than 20 districts across Zambia.
- Over 56,000 people were reached directly by the J-IC between 2022 and 2024, including young people with disabilities, parents, religious and traditional actors and other community leaders.
- More than 120 District and Provincial AIDS Coordination Advisors have improved knowledge and skills for mainstreaming HIV, gender and human rights.

Improved access to health services

- Nearly 300 health facility staff in 3 provinces were trained on youth-friendly, gender-sensitive counseling.
- Young people in the catchment areas of the health facilities are more satisfied with the counseling services they receive.

Improved social framework conditions

- Actors from the social environment of young people, amongst them religious and traditional leaders, have been sensitized on topics around SRHR, gender and HIV prevention.

- 31 dialog formats to strengthen youth-friendly services reached 353 decision-makers and opinion leaders, including 146 religious and traditional actors.

New areas of work

The work on strengthening competences, improving access to health services and improving social framework conditions continues. In addition, from 2025 we have started to work in schools to improve young people's access to health services even further.

We are aiming to:

- Train over 1500 teachers in the delivery of age-appropriate sexuality education on the basis of the *Zambian Life Skills and Health Education Curriculum*.
- Establish school clubs on health education in 60 schools to help girls and boys make informed decisions.
- Engage parents, communities and opinion leaders to foster a positive and supportive community environment for young people.
- Strengthen collaboration between schools and health facilities to facilitate access to services.

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