

2023

Snapshot on HIV and AIDS

WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

unicef 
for every child

Contents

1. The overall situation
2. Vertical transmission
3. Treatment gap
4. Impact on adolescent girls

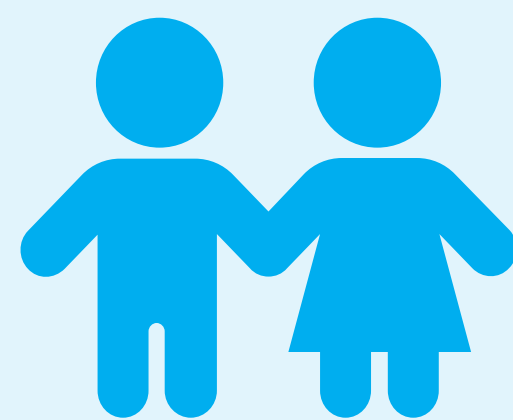
1. The overall situation



In West and Central Africa

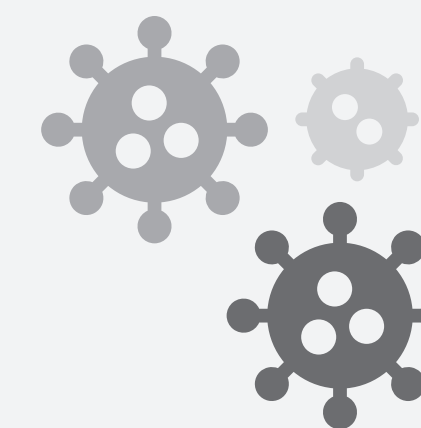
26%

of children living with HIV reside
in Western and Central Africa



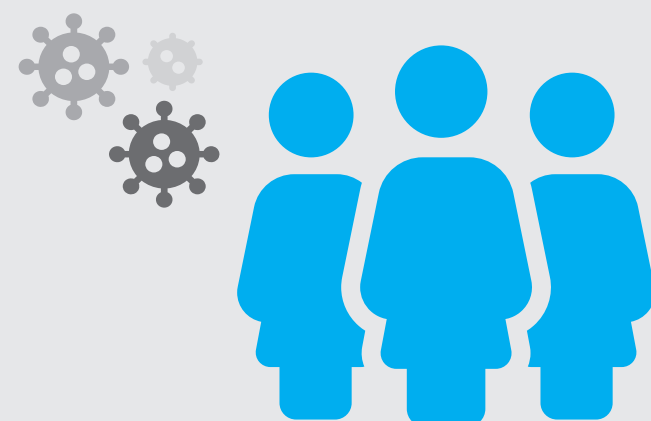
4 in every 10

new infections were
in children and adolescents



308

adolescents acquired HIV
every week in 2022



9 in 10

new infections among
adolescents were girls in 2022



Persistent gaps that need focused attention

20%

of pregnant women living with HIV are in West and Central Africa



48%

of pregnant women living with HIV are not on treatment



400 000

children are living with HIV and only 37% are receiving life-saving treatment



Source: UNAIDS 2023 estimates.

The overall situation for children, adolescents, and pregnant women in West and Central Africa

There has been steady but slow progress in protecting children and adolescents against HIV in West and Central Africa

A major AIDS epidemic is still underway in western and central Africa. Over one quarter (26%) of all children living with HIV globally are in this region, and 4 in every 10 (38%) new infections in children occur there.

There have been important gains in the past decade. Coverage of treatment programmes has grown impressively since 2010, including among pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV, and tens of thousands of lives have been saved. About 50 000 children acquired HIV in 2022, 41% fewer than in 2010, while some 16 000 adolescents acquired HIV, this is 49% fewer than 12 years earlier.

But there are persistent gaps that need focused action. Programmes to prevent vertical transmission of HIV are missing far too many women who have HIV. The region is home to about 20% of pregnant women living with HIV globally, but it accounts for 48% of those who are not on HIV treatment.

Prevention programmes are also failing to protect many thousands of adolescents against HIV, especially adolescent girls. Of the estimated 16 000 adolescents who acquired HIV in 2022, nearly 90% were girls.

Among children living with HIV, treatment coverage has increased more than fivefold since 2010, but the programmes still struggle to reach the estimated 400 000 children who are living with HIV. Over one third (37%) of children with HIV were receiving life-saving antiretroviral therapy in 2022.

As a result, an outsized share of AIDS-related deaths in western and central Africa are among children: they comprised about 8% of people living with HIV in 2022 but accounted for 28% of AIDS-related deaths.



Vertical Transmission of HIV

Modest success in preventing HIV in children

HIV programmes have averted about 440 000 HIV infections in children since 2010, but there are still major gaps in the region's efforts to eliminate vertical transmission of HIV. The number of annual new HIV infections in children has been declining at a modest rate, from 85 000 in 2010 to about 50 000 in 2022, and that number has changed little over the past eight years.

Most of the new HIV infections in children in the region are due to the failure to provide ART to their mothers during the pregnancy and breastfeeding periods. Over half (52%) of pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV were receiving antiretroviral therapy.

1 Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, and Sao Tome and Principe

2 Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

3 Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal and Togo.

4 Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Niger.

5 Benin, Cabo Verde, Liberia and Mauritania.

Coverage of ART programmes among pregnant women is also very uneven: it exceeded 80% in eight countries,¹ but was under 50% in seven other countries, some of them with large HIV epidemics.² HIV testing among pregnant women is even more uneven: coverage was over 80% in nine countries,³ but under 50 per cent in five countries⁴ and under 5 per cent in another four countries.⁵

As a result, the region's rate of vertical HIV transmission is 21%. A drastic scale-up of HIV treatment coverage for pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV is needed in western and central Africa.



There are big treatment gaps for children and adolescents

While access to treatment for adults living with HIV in western and central Africa has expanded impressively, access for children and adolescents lags behind. Paediatric HIV treatment is faring especially poorly.

Barely 1 in 4 (23%) HIV-exposed children were tested within the first two months of life in 2022.

Although the paediatric treatment programmes in the region are underperforming, about half as many children died of AIDS-related causes in 2022 compared with 2010: 34 000 versus 67 000. Together, the moderate decrease in the number of children acquiring HIV infection and the limited roll-out of paediatric treatment have averted an estimated 250 000 AIDS-related deaths in children aged 0-4 years between 2010 and 2022. Once the programmes do better at diagnosing and treating children who are living with HIV, the lives of many thousands more children lives will be saved.

Testing and treatment programmes are doing better at reaching adolescents: a little over two thirds (69%) of the 300 000 adolescents (10–19 years) living with HIV in 2022 were receiving antiretroviral therapy. This has reduced the annual number of AIDS-related deaths in adolescents by almost 40% since 2010.

The epidemic still claimed the lives of about 8 400 adolescents in 2022, half of them girls. Adolescent girls encounter face many obstacles when trying to access HIV and related health services, including stigma and discrimination, and parental consent laws. Their treatment outcomes also tend to be poorer compared with older women.

The coverage of both child and adolescent testing and treatment programmes has to expand, alongside the introduction of tailored service packages that respond to their varied needs.



Adolescent girls remain at risk

New HIV infections in adolescents have decreased, but not nearly quickly enough to meet the global targets. The annual number of new HIV infections among adolescents has decreased by about 49% since 2010, a far short of the 90% target set for 2025.

The gender disparities are striking. The vast majority of the 16 000 adolescents who acquired HIV in 2022 were girls: they accounted for almost 9 in 10 new HIV infections among adolescents.

Coverage of HIV prevention programmes has improved, but not enough is being done to protect adolescent girls against the socioeconomic and cultural factors that put them at risk. In addition, basic HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health services are often inaccessible or inappropriate for adolescent girls. There is an urgent need for multisectoral programmes that draw together interventions in the health, education and social security sectors.



2.

Vertical transmission

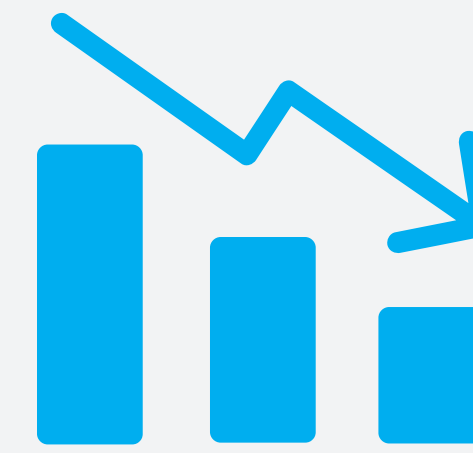


Programmes to prevent vertical transmission of HIV have saved lives

400 000

HIV infections

in children have been averted since 2010



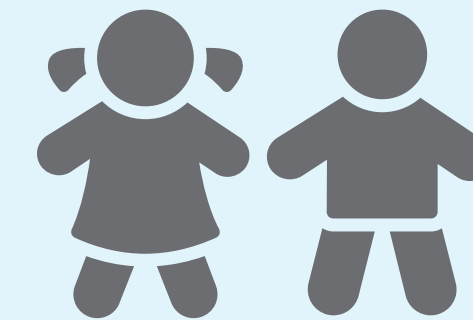
Number of annual new HIV infections have declined

2010

2022

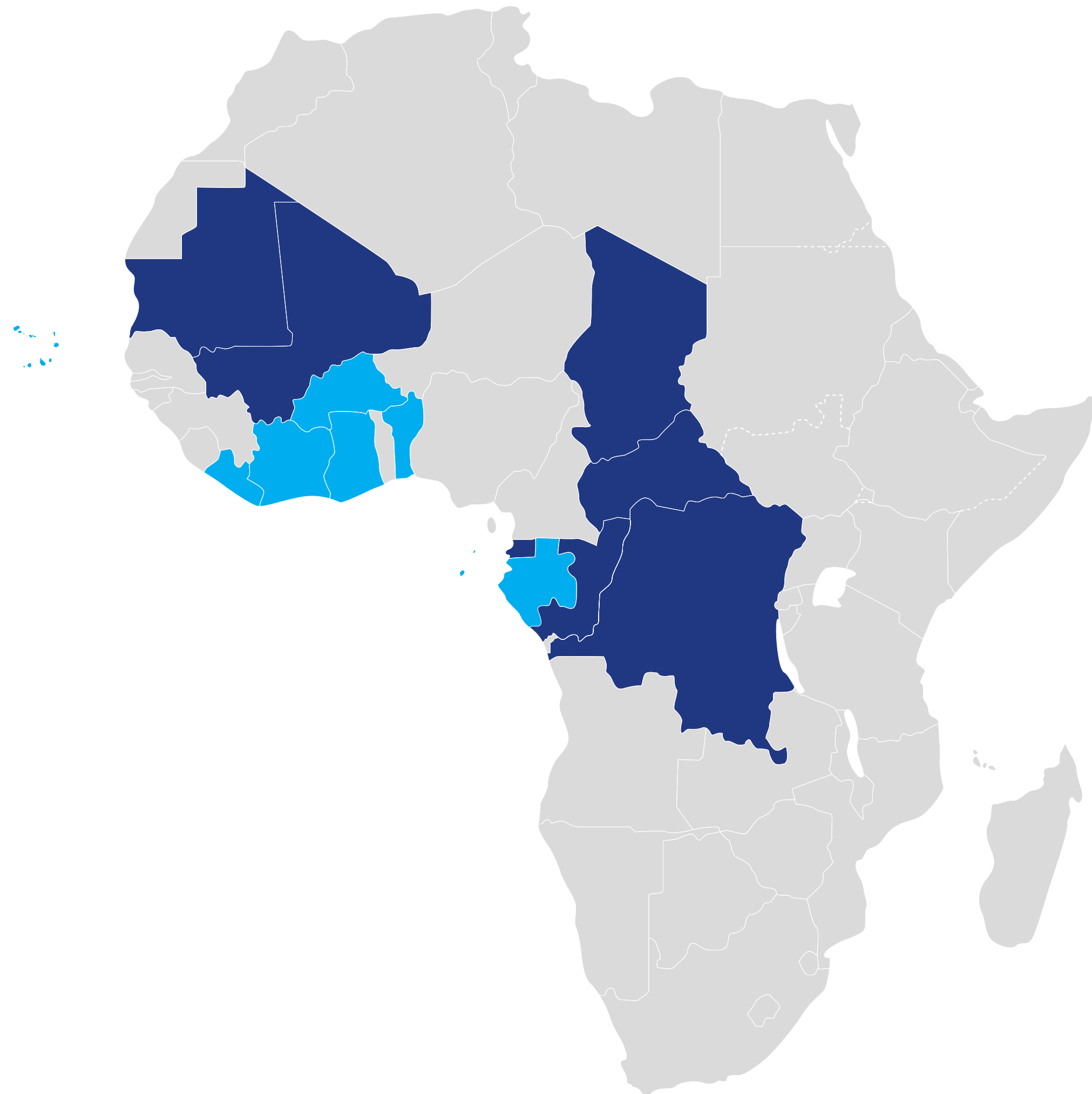
85 000

50 000



Source: UNAIDS 2023 estimates.

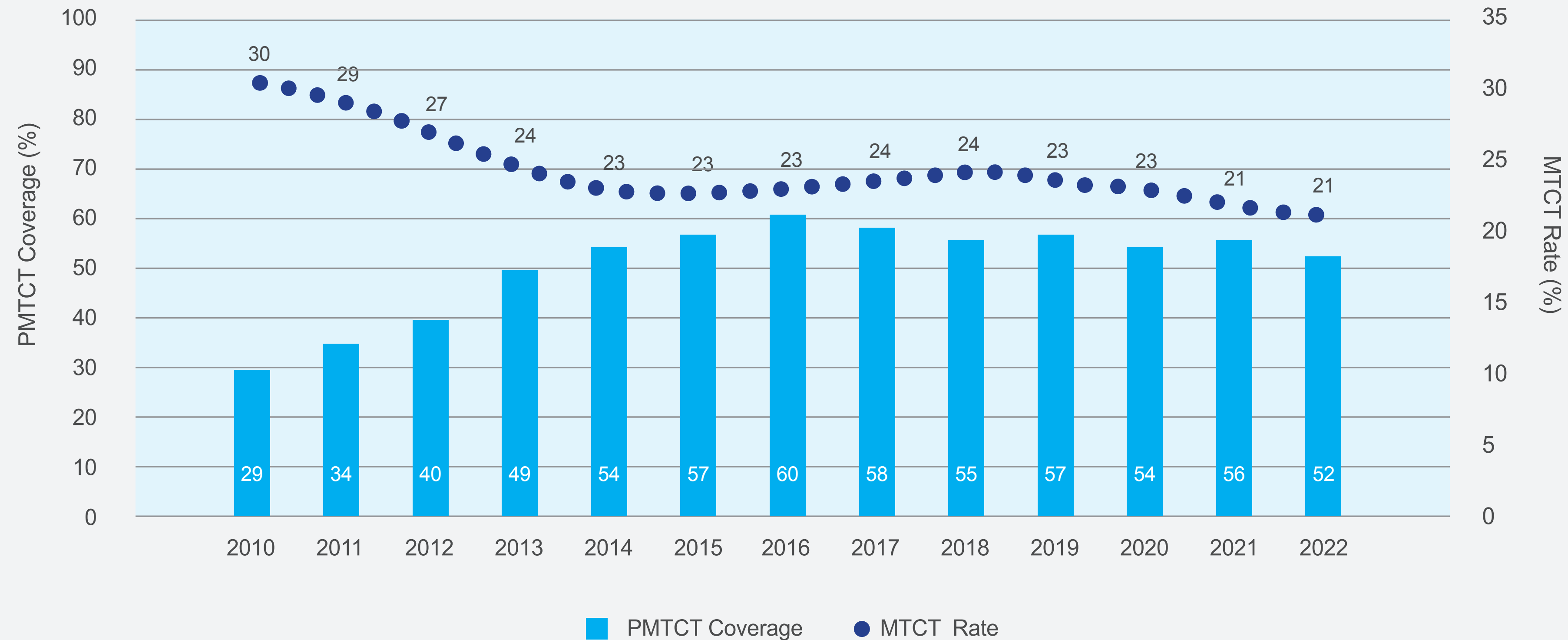
Only 52% of pregnant women and breastfeeding women living with HIV are on ART and coverage of programmes is uneven



■ **Countries exceeding 80% coverage:**
Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, and Sao Tome and Principe

■ **Countries below 50% coverage:**
Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

As PMTCT coverage is low (about 50%) about 1 in 5 HIV-exposed infants acquired HIV in 2022



Source: UNAIDS 2023 estimates.

3.

Treatment gap

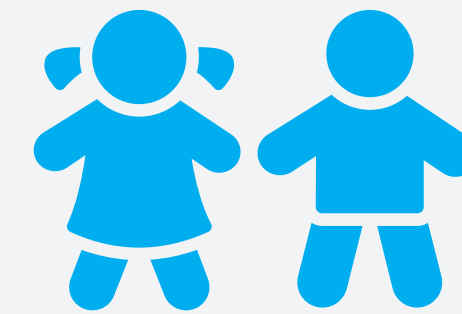


AIDS-related deaths have been averted, but children and adolescents lag behind

250 000

AIDS-related deaths

in children 0–4 years averted between 2010 and 2022

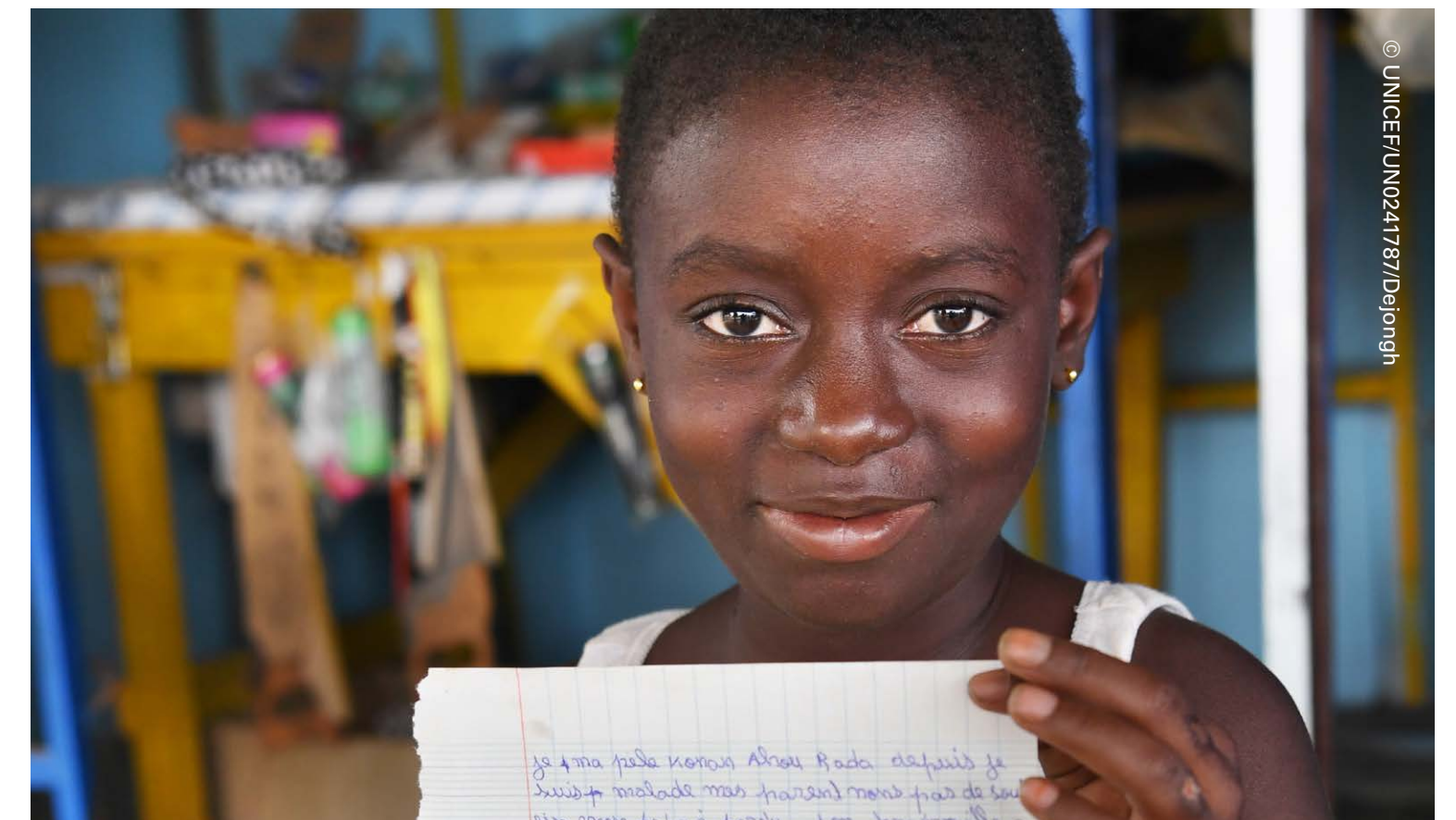
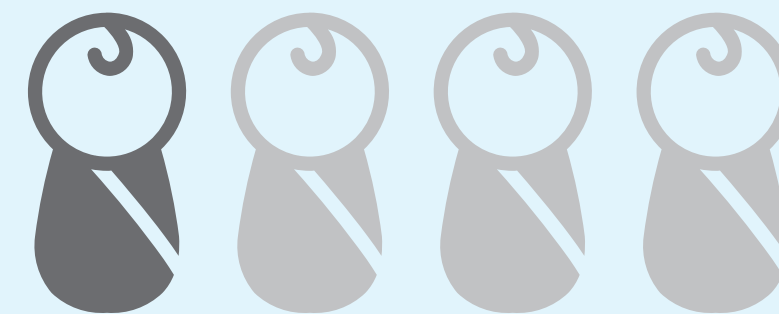


© UNICEF/UN0277694/DeJongh

1 in 4

HIV-exposed children

were tested in first two months of life in 2022



© UNICEF/UN0241787/DeJongh

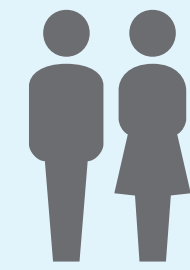
Source: UNAIDS 2023 estimates.

In West and Central Africa, children comprised about 8% of people living with HIV in 2022 but accounted for 28% of AIDS-related deaths.

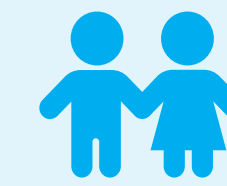


Access to treatment has expanded for adults, but children and adolescents lag behind

In 2022, in WCA region

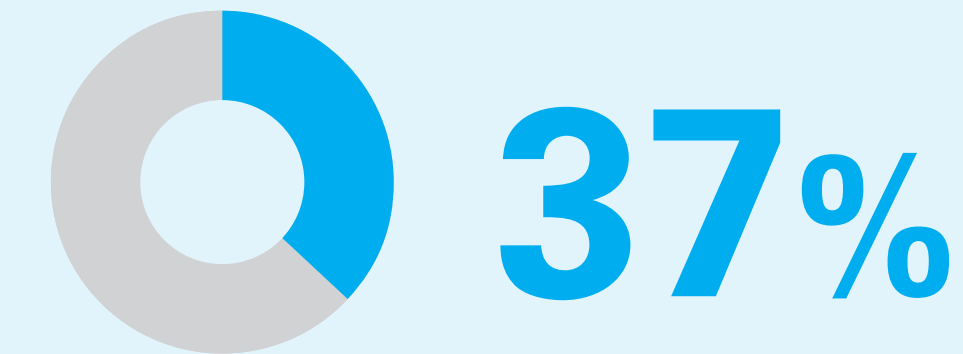
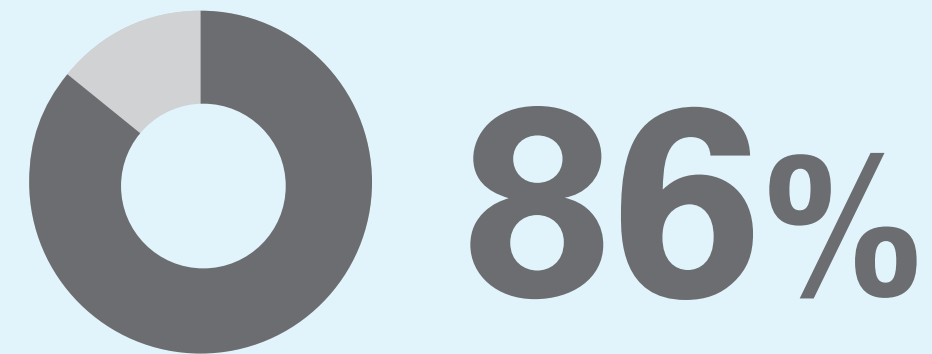


ADULTS (15+ years)
living with HIV

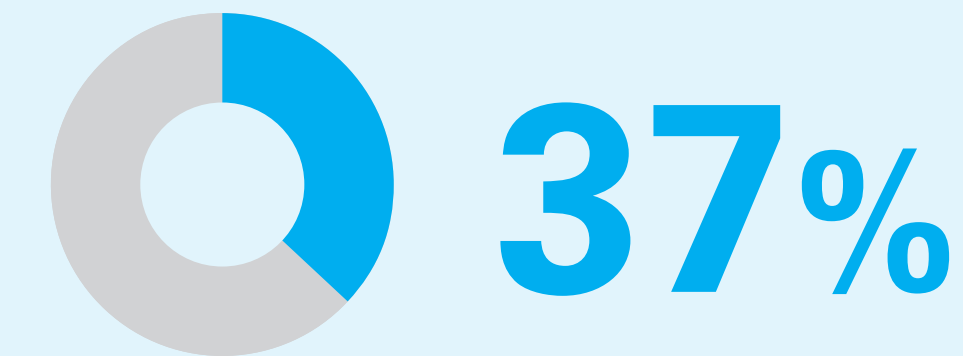
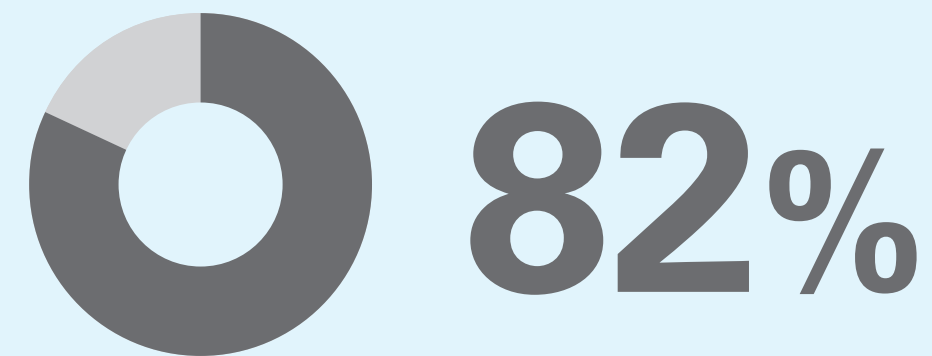


CHILDREN (0-14 years)
living with HIV

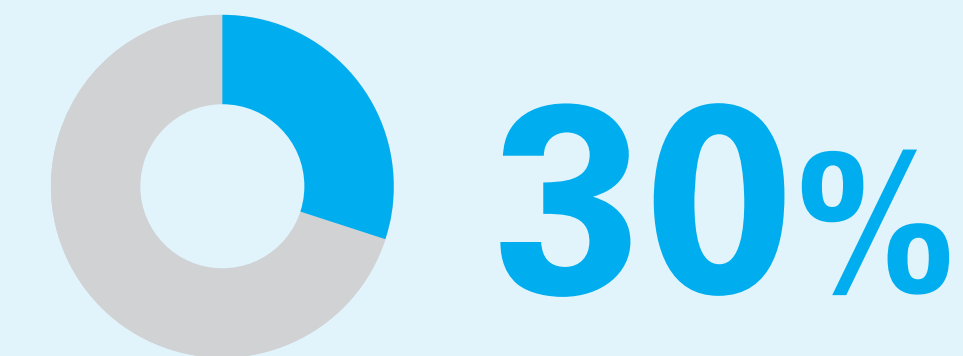
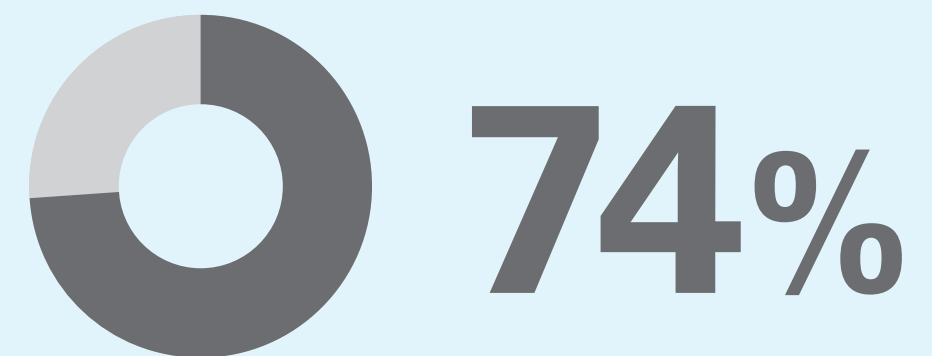
Know their status



Received ART



Were virally suppressed



Source: UNAIDS 2023 estimates.

4.

**Impact on
adolescent girls**



New infections in adolescents have decreased but not quickly enough

49% decrease

in the annual number of new HIV infections among adolescents since 2010 (short of the 90% target set for 2025)



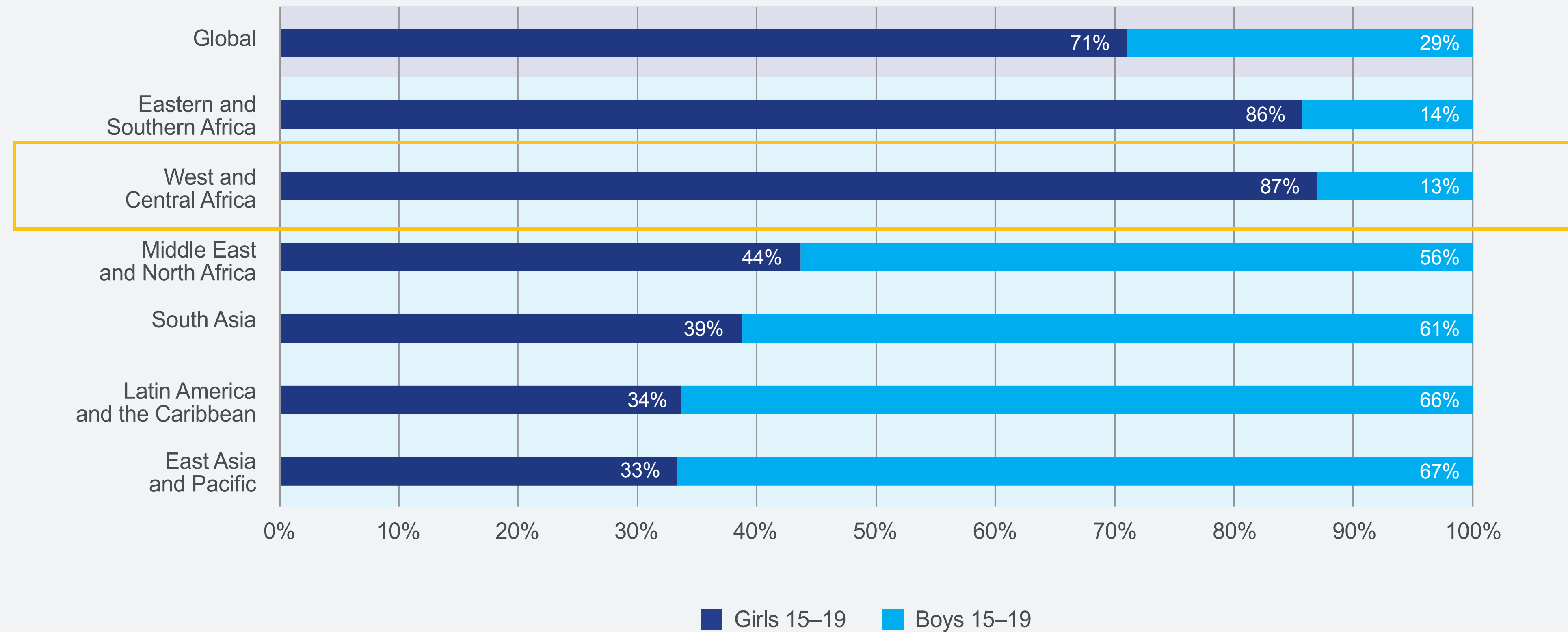
9 in 10 new HIV infections

among adolescents are among girls



Source: UNAIDS 2023 estimates.

Adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by HIV



Source: UNAIDS 2023 estimates.

Key Facts, Children, Adolescents and AIDS in West and Central Africa in 2022

Epidemiology	Estimate
Number of children and adolescents living with HIV (0-19 years)	570 000
Number of new HIV infections, children and adolescents (0-19 years)	66 000
HIV incidence per 1,000 population, adolescents (15-19 years)	0.24
Number of AIDS-related deaths, children and adolescents (0-19 years)	38 000
Number of pregnant women living with HIV	240 000
Mother-to-child transmission rate of HIV, final	21%
HIV response	Estimate
PMTCT coverage (%)	52%
Early infant diagnosis (%)	23%
ART coverage, children (0-14 years) (%)	37%

Source: Global AIDS Monitoring 2023 and UNAIDS 2023 estimates

For Every Child and Adolescent, End AIDS

For more information, contact:

Ms. Ulrike Gilbert
Regional Health and HIV Advisor
United Nations Children's Fund West and Central Africa Regional Office
ugilbert@unicef.org

unicef 

for every child