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Language guide for covering HIV and migration

Choosing your words

Language that we use has a real effect on how we see people who are living with and/or affected by HIV, and may influence how people living with HIV see themselves.

Know what you are talking about, be accurate, be sensitive, and say exactly what you mean. Below is a list of some accurate terms to use when reporting on HIV (more complete lists can be found in the references listed at the end).

- **HIV [Human Immunodeficiency Virus]** – a virus that attacks the body's immune system, making the body unable to fight infection
- **AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]** – occurs when an individual's immune system is weakened by HIV to the point where they develop any number of infections.
- **Asylum seeker** – Anyone who has applied for asylum against persecution outside their country of origin under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, and is waiting for a decision.
- **Migrant –** A migrant is someone who moves from one place or country to another by choice, instinct or plan.
- **Refugee –** Anyone who has been granted asylum under the UN Convention, to which the UK is a signatory, along with 144 other countries.

AVOID	USE	WHY
AIDS carrier Carrying AIDS (or HIV)	**Person living with HIV** **HIV positive person**	People 'have' HIV and/or AIDS, they do not 'carry' it.
AIDS sufferer AIDS victim AIDS positive AIDS 'timebomb'	**Person living with HIV** **HIV positive person**	Being HIV positive does not necessarily mean you are suffering or ill all the time. Most people living with HIV and/or AIDS continue to work and live a normal life for many years after diagnosis.
AIDS test	**HIV test**	The most commonly used test detects HIV antibodies. There cannot be a test for AIDS, since AIDS refers to a number of different infections.
AIDS virus	**HIV** [referring to virus] **AIDS** [referring to a number of infections]	HIV and AIDS are distinct so be accurate about what you mean.
A person is HIV	**Person living with HIV** **HIV positive person**	A person is not defined by their HIV status. They are a person first and foremost; and may also be living with HIV.

Bogus asylum seeker	**Asylum seeker**	Using the term 'bogus' pre-judges the outcome of an asylum application.
Catching HIV (or AIDS)	**Contracting HIV**	It is not possible to catch HIV because there are distinct ways in which you can become infected with HIV.
Full blown AIDS	**AIDS**	When you understand the distinction between 'HIV' and 'AIDS', there is no need to use the term 'full blown AIDS'. It only serves to dramatise the issue.
HIV/Aids Hiv/Aids HIV/AIDS	**HIV** **HIV and AIDS**	A slash means either or, whereas HIV and AIDS are not the same thing.
Illegal asylum seeker	**Asylum seeker**	Everyone has a legal right under international law to request asylum.
Innocent victim	**Person living with HIV** **HIV positive person**	The word 'innocent' or 'victim' suggest that there is a moral judgement associated with living with HIV and/or AIDS. HIV is a virus that can be contracted by anyone.
Intentionally / deliberately/ knowingly infecting (when applied to a legal charge)	**Recklessly transmitting**	It is often difficult to know if someone transmitted HIV intentionally or not. Reckless transmission is the legal term used in the UK.
Plague	**Epidemic** (in a given area or among a specific group; can be low, concentrated or generalised) **Pandemic** (worldwide)	Plague has historical significance and overly dramatises the issue. Where appropriate, use the specific prevalence figures to be clear what you mean.
Risk group	**Vulnerable group**	Groups can be more vulnerable to HIV because of contextual factors such as poverty, marginalisation and stigma. 'Risk' refers only to the exposure to infection and does not include wider social, economic and cultural factors contributing to vulnerability.
Safe sex	**Safer sex**	Sex is a very human activity and is never completely safe; however sex can be made safer for example by always using a condom.

References:
- Kaiser Family Foundation (June 2007). Reporting Manual on HIV/AIDS
- MediaWise (The PressWise Trust). Reporting refugee and asylum issues: guidance by and for journalists
- National AIDS Trust & National Union of Journalists (April 2007). Guidelines for reporting HIV
- VSO, vision document, Power of the Word – Language of HIV & AIDS

This language guide for covering HIV and migration forms part of a package of tools for journalists and HIV advocates compiled by the African HIV Policy Network, Panos London and Thomson Foundation. For more information visit www.nahip.org.uk

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