

ADDRESSING HIV-RELATED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN ELIMINATING DISCRIMINATORY POLICIES

Edwin J Bernard, Sylvie Beaumont, Elliot Hatt, Sofía Vázquez & Brent Allan
HIV Justice Network / Positive Destinations

IAS 2025, the 13th IAS Conference on HIV Science, Kigali, EP0623

Background

HIV-related travel restrictions covering entry, stay, and residence continue to violate the rights and mobility of people living with HIV worldwide. These restrictions, rooted in stigma and outdated public health thinking, obstruct access to healthcare, employment, education, and family unity. Migrants, including workers, students, and women, are especially impacted. Ending such discriminatory policies is critical for health equity and human rights.

Methods

Between June to December 2024, data were collected for **Positive Destinations**, the new platform hosting the Global Database on HIV-Specific Travel and Residence Restrictions (formerly hivtravel.org). Sources included official government documents, international bodies, civil society organisations, news reports, and user feedback.

Each country's policy was categorised as:

- **NONE:** No HIV-specific restrictions
- **PARTIAL:** Includes testing requirements for visas, limited healthcare access, or employment exclusions
- **SEVERE:** Includes entry bans, deportation, or denial of residence

Results

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

As of January 2025, 83 countries have no HIV-related travel restrictions, and 68 countries have unclear or insufficient information available. However, 50 countries continue to enforce either partial or severe restrictions.

SEVERE RESTRICTIONS (17 countries)

Countries such as **Bhutan, Brunei, Egypt, Iran, Kuwait, Malaysia, Russia**, and the **United Arab Emirates** maintain harsh restrictions. These include entry bans, compulsory testing, and deportation based on HIV status. Affected individuals are often migrant workers or students who may not be informed of these policies until after testing or disclosure. These policies often result in loss of employment, separation from families, or forced return to countries where healthcare may be unavailable or unsafe.

PARTIAL RESTRICTIONS (33 countries)

Countries such as **Australia, Canada, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia**, and **Singapore** impose partial restrictions. These may include mandatory HIV tests for visa applicants, discretionary residence decisions based on perceived health costs, or policies that disadvantage people with HIV without explicitly banning entry.

**POSITIVE
DESTINATIONS**

**INFORMATION AND ADVOCACY ON
TRAVELLING AND RELOCATING WITH HIV**

www.positivedestinations.info

DEPORTATION AND RESTRICTIVE IMMIGRATION PRACTICES

In 2024 alone, several countries deported non-citizens based solely on their HIV-positive status:

- **Kuwait** deported more than 100 people.
- **Russia's Dagestan region** deported nine people.
- **Libya** deported two people.

These actions have been mirrored by policy debates in high-income countries. **Sweden** has come under scrutiny for deporting LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, some living with HIV. In **France**, reforms are being considered that may reduce medical assistance for immigrants with HIV.

BARRIERS TO HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Across all regions, 2024 news reports highlight that migrants living with HIV face significant structural and social barriers to accessing care:

In **Canada**, migrants face healthcare gaps despite a public commitment to universal access.

In **India**, informal migrant workers face major hurdles in accessing HIV services and social protection.

In **Peru**, Venezuelan migrants face steep challenges accessing HIV treatment.

In **Poland**, Ukrainian refugees encounter HIV stigma and treatment gaps.

In **Spain**, LGBT migrants experience discrimination and bureaucratic delays when seeking HIV care and residence rights.

LEGAL ACTION AND POLICY REFORM

In **Canada**, a legal challenge led by the HIV Legal Network and a migrant supported by Battista Migration Law Group is contesting the "excessive demand" rule under Section 38(1)(c) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. The case argues the rule is discriminatory and inconsistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as it disproportionately denies work permits to PLHIV.

Australia raised its health cost threshold from A\$51,000 to A\$86,000 in 2024, improving access to temporary visas. However, people with HIV still face obstacles to permanent residency, as highlighted by a recent case where an Italian teacher was denied a visa solely due to his HIV status.

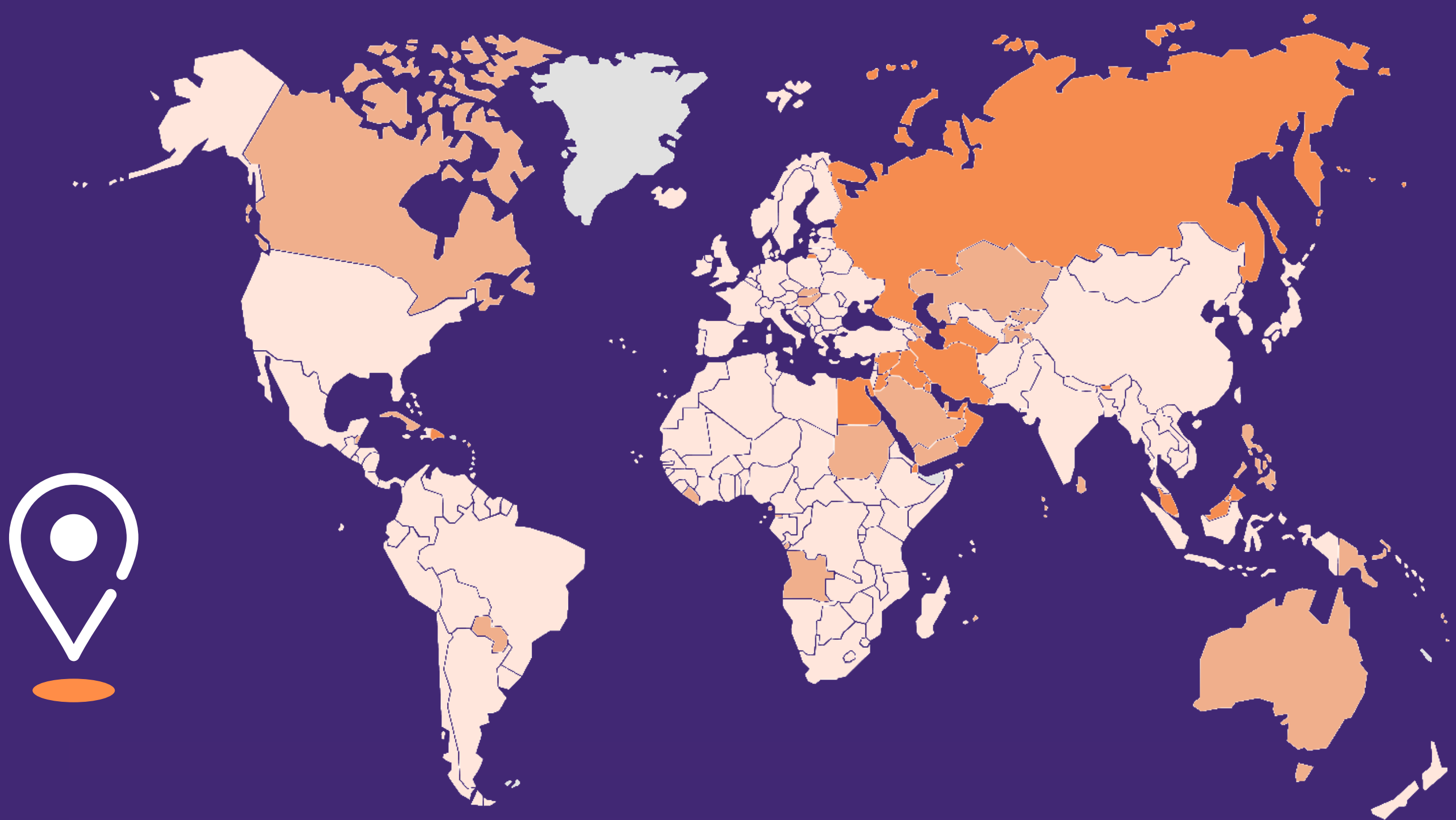
CRIMINALISATION AND DISCRIMINATION

Migration laws often intersect with HIV criminalisation, compounding harm.

Uzbekistan – which has one of the highest rates of HIV criminalisation in the world alongside Russia – recently imposed mandatory HIV testing for non-citizens as well as returning labour migrants from Russia, underlining the importance of repealing both countries' HIV criminalisation laws.

Tragic instances of discrimination include the case of a Syrian trans woman whose HIV status was shared, reportedly leading to deportation from **Turkey** and her subsequent death at the hands of the Free Syrian Army in collaboration with her family.

In the **U.S.**, immigration detention centres have been reported to subject LGBTQ+ and HIV-positive asylum seekers to mistreatment and medical neglect, despite international protection obligations.



Conclusions

HIV-related travel restrictions are rooted in outdated public health models and discriminatory ideologies. They violate international human rights norms and continue to marginalise the most vulnerable.

Advocacy efforts must focus on:

- Promoting **evidence-based policy reform**
- Advancing **legal and human rights literacy**
- Supporting **civil society capacity-building**
- Enhancing **international accountability mechanisms**

Eliminating these restrictions is essential to achieving universal health coverage, reducing HIV-related stigma, and ensuring freedom of movement and dignity for people living with HIV worldwide.

