

PRESS RELEASE

Launch of the ‘Vienna Express 2010: Towards Universal Access’ Month-long campaign to put HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia on the political agenda in the run-up to AIDS2010 in Vienna

Friday 18th June, 2010

On June 20, *AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW¹)* will launch **The Vienna Express 2010: Towards Universal Access**, which will travel the Eastern and Western routes to Vienna in the run-up to the AIDS2010 Conference on July 18. From **June 20 to July 21**, the campaign will connect a wide variety of community-level and national events – roundtables, public concerts, press conferences, street campaigns and visits to best-practice HIV projects – across 14 countries². These events have a common ambition: to turn the attention of the world’s media, political leadership and public to the HIV epidemic in its region of operations, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA). The EECA region, which has faced such unprecedented social and economic upheavals over the past decades, is now struggling to contend with **the fastest growing HIV epidemic in the world**.

Our Message to Vienna

The biggest drivers of the region’s epidemic are injecting drug use and unprotected sex. Altogether, an estimated 1.5 million people live with HIV in the region, and a disproportionate number of them are young people. Despite this growing humanitarian crisis, calls to strengthen the region’s response and to invest in helping vulnerable people are being met with **inertia and indifference at the political level**.

The region as a whole has a poor record on the goal of universal access to prevention, treatment, support and care and in the past year there have been dramatic cuts to funding for services aimed at key populations among whom the epidemic is most concentrated (sex workers, injecting drug users, prisoners and street children). Meanwhile, in the context of the world economic crises major international donors are quietly withdrawing or cutting their funding for the region’s HIV response.

By organising the Vienna Express in the run-up to AIDS2010, *AFEW* aims to increase the pressure on governments and international donors at a **critical moment in the international dialogue on HIV/AIDS**. The campaign will be covered by an online blog at www.viennaexpress.org, where key personalities from the campaign will share their thoughts about how issues such as injecting drug use, sex work, HIV/AIDS prevention and education are being tackled in their local communities. At the same time, participants at the event will be invited to send their ‘wish leaves’ – their messages, wishes and demands – to the Vienna conference, where they will be displayed on the **East-West Wish Tree** at the opening ceremony.

Partners

Financial support for the campaign has been provided by HIVOS, Open Society Institute (OSI), GTZ, UNAIDS, UNODC, and the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Health in the Netherlands.

Contacts

Ilona van de Braak, Director of Communications *AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW)*
ilona_van_de_braak@afew.org; +31 (0) 20 638 1718

¹ See the next page for more information about us.

² Austria, Belgium, Georgia, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, the Netherlands, Russia, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

About AFEW

AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW) is a Dutch, humanitarian, non-governmental public health organisation working to alleviate the burden of the HIV epidemic in Eastern Europe and Central Asia through innovative, evidence-based programmes and international exchanges. Together with and for people living with HIV and affected communities, as well as non-governmental and governmental partners, *AFEW* carries out projects for key populations, builds accessible models of effective treatment, care and support and conducts advocacy on the most pressing issues.

Since its foundation in 2001, *AFEW* has played a pivotal role in many important landmarks in the region's HIV response. Bringing new methods and approaches to the region, *AFEW* reaches the people at the centre of the epidemic – injecting drug users, sex workers, prison inmates, street children and at-risk youth. It was among the first non-governmental organisations to work in the Russian prison system, and it has since launched HIV prevention, care and support programmes in the prison systems of a further seven countries of the region. For a full breakdown of our activities, please go to www.afew.org