



## Women's Networking Zone 2010 Evaluation Report



**Women and Young Women to Vienna and Beyond!**

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September 2010**



## Acknowledgements

The Women's Networking Zone 2010 was convened by a four-person **Coordinating Team** led by Tyler Crone of ATHENA Network and Alice Welbourn of the Salamander Trust, with Amandine Bollinger of Salamander Trust and Luisa Orza (Salamander Trust Associate). The Coordinating Team was guided by a **Steering Committee** made up of: Wiltrut Stefanek (PULSHIV, Austria), Sabine Lex (AIDS Hilfe, Austria), Harriet Langanke (Gemeinnützige Stiftung Sexualität und Gesundheit (GS-SG), Germany), Andrea von Lieven (IAVI, Germany, and Founder member of WECARE+), Wezi Thamm (Founder member of WECARE+)

WNZ2010 was organized and brought about by the tireless efforts of an extensive and committed partnership made up of: Aids Hilfe Wien, Austria; AIDS Legal Network, South Africa; All Around Women Special, Section of the German AIDS Society, Germany; ATHENA Network; Balance Promocion para el Desarrollo y Juventud, Mexico; Blueprint Coalition on Women, Girls, and HIV, Canada; European AIDS Treatment Group; Global Coalition on Women and AIDS; GSSG, Germany; IAVI; International AIDS Women's Caucus; International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (ICW) Global; Netzwerk Frauen und Aids, Germany; PULSHIV, Austria; Salamander Trust, UK; Sophia Forum, UK; SOPHIE; STOP AIDS NOW!; UNDP; UNIFEM; Voices of Positive Women, Canada; WECARE+ (Women in Europe and Central Asia Region Plus); Women ARISE; Women of Color United, United States; World AIDS Campaign; World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS); World Pulse; and, World YWCA.

Many thanks to all those who supported our planning, preparations and delivery for the WNZ2010 through translation and media support before and during the Conference week, and as volunteers and hosts setting up, running and dismantling the Zone. **We are especially grateful to our extraordinary donors: Abbott, European Commission, Ford Foundation, Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, International AIDS Society, IPPF, Stop AIDS Now!, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Development Program and Women for Positive Action.**



### WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DONORS:



The Women's Networking Zone is coordinated by the ATHENA Network. Celebrating 10 years of parallel women's lives. WNZ2010 is convened by Aids Hilfe Wien, the ATHENA Network, GSSG, PULSHIV, Salamander Trust, and WECARE+. For further details see [www.aidsinfo.org/aetd](http://www.aidsinfo.org/aetd) and [www.womenetwork.org](http://www.womenetwork.org). The Young Women's Networking Zone is convened by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) [www.wagggs.org](http://www.wagggs.org).



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## 1. Introduction

The Women's Networking Zone (WNZ) is a dedicated area within the Global Village of the International AIDS Conference (IAC) to share issues and experiences that affect women in relation to HIV. Since the XIII IAC in Durban, 2000, there have been parallel fora with a Community focus at each International AIDS Conference. The ATHENA Network has led parallel women's organising since that time, and from the XVI IAC at Toronto, 2006, has convened the Women's Networking Zone (WNZ), at each successive Conference. This year marks 10 years of women's parallel organising at International AIDS Conferences, and the WNZ2010 was coordinated jointly with the Salamander Trust.

The WNZ has always sought to include a diversity-rich agenda, to promote the leadership of women living with HIV and to facilitate cross-regional, cross-generational and cross-sectoral dialogue between women working at grassroots level to those working at national or international policy-making levels. This year, the WNZ placed a particular emphasis on the meaningful participation and leadership of young women, especially young women living with HIV, by partnering with the Young Women's Networking Zone coordinated by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) to create a single integrated Zone.<sup>1</sup> A further partnership with World Pulse Media (for the second successive WNZ running) enhanced our global networking potential. Our slogan for AIDS2010:

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS HERE, RIGHT NOW!**

## 2. Aims and Objectives for WNZ 2010

The monitoring and evaluation of the Women's Networking Zone (WNZ) 2010 was guided by a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Working Group, and based on a set of overlapping and mutually reinforcing objectives and desired outcomes of the WNZ2010, summarised as follows:

The Women's Networking Zone at Vienna, AIDS2010, presented as an opportunity to mobilize women and young women for innovative community building and advocacy to:

- 2.1 Advance an inclusive, diversity-rich, engendered, human rights and women's rights response to HIV and AIDS
- 2.2 Highlight emerging women's and young women's issues and our successful responses to them
- 2.3 Ensure women's active, meaningful participation, especially of positive women, young women, and women across Europe and Central Asia in the Conference
- 2.4 Link positive, negative and untested women
- 2.5 Hold European bilateral donors accountable, both for women's rights and HIV funding domestically and globally

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<sup>1</sup> As a result of the joining of three individual networking zone entities under the banner of the WNZ by the Global Village coordinators, and in response to pressure from WNZ Coordinator Tyler Crone, the WNZ was granted a space of 82 square meters, rather than the standard networking zone size of 60 square meters. In late June another networking zone host cancelled, and their space (60 square meters) was offered to the WNZ making the Zone one of the largest in the Global Village at 142 square meters.



Specifically, some of the anticipated and desired achievements include:

- 2.6 Launch a strong network for women's rights and HIV across Europe and Central Asia
- 2.7 Raise capacity and develop awareness around issues facing women regionally, especially around injection drug use and migration
- 2.8 Raise capacity and awareness around issues facing women globally, especially around Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and criminalization
- 2.9 Challenge, catalyze and transform our global response to gender equality, women, girls and HIV

#### WNZ principles and process

The WNZ aims to be an inviting and inclusive forum for bringing together, local, regional, and global perspectives, as well as for bridging the gender, human rights, HIV, and sexual and reproductive health and rights communities. To these ends, and to meet the aims and objectives described above, the WNZ adopts a broadly participatory and consultative process embracing a comprehensive framework of principles, including:

- ✓ Consult globally and regionally
- ✓ Open call for peer reviewed proposals
- ✓ Develop a geographically and socially diverse programme
- ✓ Present creative and interactive sessions, including debates, panels, workshops, performances
- ✓ Focus on challenges and best practices in successful responses to HIV regarding women
- ✓ Identify emerging issues
- ✓ Promote information, debate and exchange of experiences, skills and knowledge amongst various stakeholders on priority gender-based and rights-based issues
- ✓ Link with other Networking Zones on overlapping issues

To read more about how these principles have been implemented during the preparations for the WNZ at Vienna 2010, see the [WNZ 2010 Monitoring Report](#)

The purposes of our monitoring and evaluation efforts were identified by the M&E Working Group as a combination of learning, accountability and advocacy:

- Institutional learning (for replication, efficiency and improvement in future WNZ events)
- Transparency and accountability to stakeholders (the WNZ partnership; contributors to the WNZ especially positive women, young women and women from Europe and Central Asia; visitors to the WNZ; members of the newly-formed "Women in Europe and Central Asia Regions Positive Network" (WECARe+); donors / supporters; Global Village organizers)
- Advocacy (around the intersections between HIV and Women's Rights, participation, and the on-going need for spaces in which those intersections can be safely contested, debated and elaborated)
- Understanding the impacts and the potential of the WNZ at individual, organizational, and international levels (of networking)

To these ends, the relevant questions to be asked of WNZ presenters, visitors and organisers were identified as:

- Have women enjoyed their experience?
  - Striking thing about taking part in the zone?



- What they liked best/least?
- What they learnt?
- Have they networked?
- Have the 9 objectives and outcomes of the Zone been achieved?
- Our level of inclusion and participation?
- Did we promote HIV-positive women's leadership?

The four resulting outputs from the Monitoring and Evaluation of WNZ2010 combined provide a comprehensive and detailed account of the process, outcomes and philosophy of the WNZ2010. These are:

- [WNZ2010 Executive Summary](#) report – an overview of the main outputs and achievements
- [WNZ2010 Monitoring Report](#) – a detailed archive and manual for accountability, institutional learning and replication
- WNZ Evaluation Report – (this report) - a detailed analysis of our objectives and outcomes based on participant feedback
- [Advocacy article](#) 'Why Women Organise Women's Organising' published in South Africa journal *AIDS Legal Quarterly*, Autumn 2010 issue incorporating *Mujeres Adelante* to review AIDS2010.

### 3. Summary of Monitoring Tools and Processes

Timelines, meeting minutes and budgets constituted the main monitoring tools during the development phase of the WNZ, and the entire process has been closely documented for accountability and transparency purposes, and to create both an archive of this experience and a comprehensive manual that could be used by others preparing for future WNZ events. During the week of the conference, documentation of the WNZ activities was carried out through photographic records; daily blogs for the on-line [openDemocracy](#) news and current affairs journal based on WNZ activities; production of daily editions of [Mujeres Adelante](#) (produced by ATHENA and AIDS Legal Network); summarising of sessions; and, the use of "Facebook" and personal blog pages (<http://ancablogging.wordpress.com>). The [programme](#) itself constituted a principle monitoring tool for assessing how well young women, women living with HIV, women from Europe and Central Asia, and themes identified through the consultative process leading up to the WNZ2010 were represented. It also enabled us to see at a glance whether there was a balance of regional representation and thematic areas, and a diversity of session type that would create a rich and diverse program conducive to achieving the objectives outlined above. A final post-conference stage in our monitoring activities was to request and collect as many session notes, presentations, or background papers as possible and upload them onto a [resources page](#) dedicated to the Vienna 2010 Conference on the [Women in Europe](#) website as a lasting resource and potential building block for both women who took part in the conference and many who were unable to, and to promote accountability, learning, institutional memory and replication.

The [WNZ2010 Monitoring Report](#) is now [available](#) online.



## 4. Evaluation of WNZ2010

### 4.1 Data Collection Tools and Methods

Three evaluation tools were developed for the WNZ2010: two short-answer feedback forms, one for visitors and one for presenters, with a focus on the immediate experience of visiting / presenting in the Zone. A longer feedback form was developed for in-depth written and verbal feedback via recorded interviews, which allowed for questions to be elaborated around more political and philosophical aspects of the WNZ, such as the perceived need for a women's networking zone space, emerging or current issues that this sort of space should be able to address, the value of the meaningful participation of women living with HIV (MIWA), and the kind of learning that the WNZ2010 had engendered. This would be used to inform both our own learning and current and on-going advocacy around women's rights issues, MIWA and promotion of the WNZ. We also kept a Guest Book for visitors to sign and leave comments.<sup>2</sup>

The M&E working group also proposed collecting sound-bites from random conference delegates in and around both the Global Village and the main conference area to ascertain the level of general awareness and perceptions (if any) of the WNZ from outside the WNZ space. Unfortunately we were unable to do this due to lack of human resources within the WNZ. For this reason, all the collected data come from people (primarily women) in some way involved in the WNZ – either as organisers, volunteers, affiliated organisations, session/activity presenters, or visitors. We recognise the subjectivity of the data, and that in this respect the collected data are positively biased in favour of the WNZ.

### 4.2 Short-answer visitor feedback form

The purpose of this form was to get a sense of who was using the Zone; whether we were attracting the stalwart supporters, or whether the Zone was attracting new people; how people were hearing about the Zone and with what expectations they were coming to the Zone; whether these were being met or exceeded; a sense of the experience of visiting the Zone, overall impressions and suggestions for improvement.

The visitor feedback form was filled out and returned by 45 participants. Of these, approximately half were first-time visitors to the WNZ and half were returning, having attended the WNZ either at previous conferences, or earlier in the Vienna conference week. The short answer visitor forms revealed huge diversity in terms of nationality and age; among the 45 responses, 29 different nationalities were recorded, with an age range from 22 to 75, of whom approximately one fifth were under the age of 30; three fifths within the age range 31 to 50, and a fifth over 50. [However, it should be noted that the Young Women's Networking Zone participants were probably under-represented in this survey, and these participants would have been almost exclusively under 30.] The forms also revealed considerable diversity in the 'type' of visitor, with most identifying as (one or more of) NGO workers, community activists and researchers. Five respondents identified themselves as women living with HIV.

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<sup>2</sup> Monitoring and evaluation tools and Guest Book comments are included as annexes 39 – 43 of the [WNZ2010 Monitoring Report](#).





Reasons for visiting the WNZ included:

- interest in a specific session topic; (*'To get info on M[ale] C[ircumcision] in the context of women's rights'*)
- general interest in women's rights issues (*'I am interested in women's rights and feminisms and in meeting feminists from different countries'*);
- chance visits, curiosity, or passing by (*'I stopped because of the discussion going on in the networking zone.'*);
- affiliation to one of the organising partners; and/or
- Email, flyers, attractiveness of the Zone, (*'Looking around – I stopped because of the discussion going on in the networking zone.'*)

Nearly all the respondents said that their expectations on visiting the WNZ had been met or exceeded. *'Yes, concrete experiences have been very few in 'official sessions'; 'I didn't expect this would be such an exciting experience.'* Most respondents also claimed to have learned something from the experience of visiting the WNZ. Where stated, learning again ranged from specific new information (for example on *'substitution therapy'* or *'Austrian law'*), to more generally about the WNZ (*'I did not know about WNZ before; 'I learned that we need to push more for our rights'*); or meeting people and making contacts (*'It's always good to know other people working in same area'*).

Overall impressions of the Zone were overwhelmingly positive, describing the Zone as (among other comments): *'Informative,' 'Very interesting and professional,' 'Very well organised,' 'Very inspirational,'* and *'Very positive, fresh and happy energy in this zone. The workshops are very interesting.'*

#### **Recommendations**

About half of the respondents didn't make recommendations for improvement. Among those that did, suggestions included more time to be given to sessions / presentations for discussion; the involvement of more partner organisations; bigger stage and more space for audience to sit; and, more space to be made for resources. Noise was identified as a problem, especially for non-English speakers. (A comprehensive sound system was in use, but this was often in competition with the sound system of neighbouring zones, and a great deal of background noise in the immediate environment). A further suggestion was to leave time free (unprogrammed) for breaking news: *'Maybe reserve 2 time slots for breaking news? Eg it would have been great to have a discussion session in WNZ on microbicides trial results and what we say to other women about it when we go home (it is a headline).'*

In fact, the programme did include a daily 'conference update' session for exactly this kind of discussion, but the sessions were late in the day and were not effectively used. In future, having other organisations volunteer to host these sessions might increase their utility; the WNZ team did not have the capacity to mobilise around these sessions.

#### **4.3 Short-answer presenter feedback form**

The purpose of this form was to develop a sense of who was using the WNZ to stage activities, whether they had presented in the WNZ on previous occasions, whether they had felt adequately informed prior to the event and to elicit information about the overall experience of presenting in the WNZ2010, including meeting their session objectives.





Eleven forms were filled out by presenters, the majority of whom were presenting in the WNZ for the first time. They represented eight different nationalities, and ages ranged from 29 to 54. Three out of the 11 respondents were women living with HIV.

All of the respondents said that they felt they had received adequate information prior to the conference, and only one reported a technical problem occurring during her session.

Overall impressions of the WNZ were that it was *'great,' 'welcoming,'* and *'well-prepared, the zone was very special.'* The experience of presenting activities in the zone was described as a *'great opportunity,'* and *'a productive experience,'* and most of the respondents felt that their session objectives had been met. (One respondent gave no information about this, and another didn't yet know.)

Short written feedback was also received from two presenters by email. Both reported having made productive use of their time in the WNZ and felt that the experience had been positive, and hoped to see *'women with an even more prominent voice not only at the global village but through out the conference in 2012 as our needs are very specific to us'.*

#### **Recommendations**

Respondents mentioned that the *'sound issues'* in the zone caused distraction, including noise and feedback from the Zone's own speakers. This was seen as a hindrance to a more inclusive and participatory session. One respondent also recommended having longer sessions to provide more time for discussion and participation. (See also section v below on challenges and recommendations)

#### **4.4 Long-answer feedback and mini-interviews**

The long answer feedback forms were returned by 14 respondents in writing (in either hard or electronic forms) and by 12 respondents in interview forms. Interviews were recorded on an electronic voice recorder and transcribed, as far as possible, verbatim. Of these respondents, most could be said to identify as supporters of the women's networking zone; they included members of the steering committee (2), programming team (2), and coordinating team (1); volunteers working in the Zone (2); session/activity lead presenters (4); participants affiliated with either WNZ partners or lead session presenters (5); members of the Twinning Project<sup>3</sup> (2); and long-standing supporters of the WNZ and work of the ATHENA Network (2). The remaining respondents were WNZ visitors and participants, including two Austrian women parliamentarians.

<sup>3</sup> A pilot 'Twinning Project' was launched at Vienna 2010 in association with the WNZ and WECARE+ through German Foundation GSSG – Gemeinnützige Stiftung Sexualität und Gesundheit (Foundation for Sexuality and Health), to enable activist women living with or working in the field of HIV to attend the International AIDS Conference. Five women from Germany were paired with five women from Eastern Europe or Central Asia with the aim of both providing support to women who otherwise may feel overwhelmed and isolated by their first conference experience, and also to engender longer lasting regional networking between East and West.



The purpose of the long-answer forms and interviews was to inform our accountability, learning and advocacy through gathering perceptions of WNZ2010 in terms of:

- i) Overall impressions of the Zone
- ii) Content: emerging issues and gaps in the agenda
- iii) Ways to increase engagement around women's issues
- iv) HIV-positive women's leadership, and
- v) Challenges and recommendations

The conclusions are also drawn from feedback regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of the Zone, and the on-going need for a women's networking space at international conferences

### ***i) Overall impressions of the Zone***

#### ***i.i) The Space***

The WNZ aims to provide an attractive, inviting space for women from all over the world and all walks of life to meet and dialogue. Respondents found that the WNZ was vibrant, colourful, welcoming and comfortable with a lot of positive energy. It was always busy *'with a good flow of women'* (WNZ Steering committee member, Germany) going through. The *'Panting line'* attracted a lot of positive attention, and in general the interior design was felt to be feminine and inviting; *'visually it pulls you in,'* (WNZ visitor, South Africa). A couple of the respondents felt that the Zone needed to be bigger; *'it's a shame it's not bigger because women's issues are so broad that I think it deserves a much bigger space.'* However at the same time, *'the fact that it's smaller gives it a level of intimacy that you don't get elsewhere,'* (WNZ visitor, UK). It was seen as a place to come and rest or read, as a meeting point, as well as a place to network, listen, participate and learn. In addition to the aesthetic aspects of the furnishings, respondents also felt that it provided, at a glance, *'a quick overview of diverse aspects of women's politics in the broad context of HIV and women in a compact space.'* (parliamentarian, Austria).

#### ***i.ii) Young Women***

The Young Women's Networking Zone was coordinated by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and was comprised three distinct components: A Young Women's Networking Corner; a daily Young Women's Hour run by and for young women; and, the meaningful involvement of young women and young women living with HIV throughout the WNZ programme, in relation to objectives 1.2 and 1.3. With these in mind, and emphasis was placed on ensuring that young women were strongly represented across the organising teams, through the Working Groups and by having a dedicated Young Women's Working Group, and particular emphasis was placed on the focus and involvement of young women in our call for Proposals. The main local focal point for the WNZ in Vienna, Sabine Lex, was a young woman, and a young HIV positive woman, Anca Nitulescu, was recruited to lead the on-site WNZ media team. Several other key roles were undertaken by women under 30, including the design of the WNZ Vienna 2010 artwork and interior design by young Austrian artist, Mirjam Schweigkofler; on-site volunteer coordinator, Jacque Stevenson; and, translation support by two young women language graduates of Exeter University, Hollie Murphy and Ellie Townsend.

Feedback from WNZ participants indicated that these efforts resulted in the raised visibility of young women and issues particularly affecting young women in the WNZ, and offered



opportunities for cross-generational dialogue. However, the effect of having young women and issues affecting young women both integrated into and separated from the main WNZ programme (via the separated networking space) gave rise to mixed feedback.<sup>4</sup> Generally it was felt to be a positive feature, *'I like the fact that the young women's networking zone is part of it,'* (WNZ Programming Committee member, Netherlands); and that the WNZ *'accommodates all ages,'* (WNZ volunteer, UK).

The WNZ programme was intentionally inclusive of young women including young women living with HIV, with well over 50% out of scheduled sessions either led by young women or incorporating a strong emphasis on issues specific or relevant to young women, and both the programme and the space were designed to facilitate and advance cross-generational dialogue. As one participant mentioned,

*'From my perspective I think they are issues that can be dealt with regardless of age. I think a lot of these connections between different ages of women is what a lot of the ... presentations have been about. I think it's nice that it's a space where people can – women regardless of age can come and participate,'* (WNZ Visitor, South Africa).

The intentional focus on women and young women was successful in raising the visibility of young women, including young women living with HIV in the WNZ.

*'I'm very happy about the young people coming in – there's so many young people, it's so great. We have to know that young people get infected and we're willing to fight for them but they also have to take charge of their lives,'* (WNZ Presenter, USA)

*'I'm very happy to see a lot of young women – it's very hard to find HIV positive women openly living with and talking about it and being a leader and an example, and what I find here there's a lot of young blood you know and they're very excited and they're from many different areas and they're from many different colours and that's important because we need positive voices in leadership,'* (WNZ Visitor, Netherlands)

*'I met several young women who I trust will grow into great leaders at WNZ,'* (WNZ presenter, Sweden)

On the other hand, there was a perceived disjuncture between the Young Women's Corner area of the zone; *'I think the young women's zone is a little neglected,'* (WNZ visitor, Zambia). *'When I first saw the young women's networking zone I thought yeah ok this is cool – a space for young women but I don't know ... it just seems kind of dead compared to the other sites.'* There was also the feeling that the dual integration and separation of the Young Women's Networking Zone was *'disjointed – and to be honest, isolationist ... The young women held some of their sessions in the main WNZ space, which was great – but they also seemed to want to keep to themselves at their end of the whole space quite a lot, which seemed a shame,'* (Member of WNZ Coordinating Team, UK).

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<sup>4</sup> Note – a separate evaluation of the Young Women's Networking Zone will soon be available from WAGGGS.



### *i.iii) Regional Representation and Diversity*

The WNZ aims to present a regional balance of issues affecting women regionally and globally in relation to HIV, and promote cross-regional dialogue and exchange, with a particular focus on the region in which the conference is held, encouraging local community participation (see aims and objectives 2.1, 2.3, 2.7 and 2.8). This was reflected in the preparation of the Zone and the programme content. A consultation held in Vienna in October 2009 identified 17 emerging issues affecting women in the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region, 14 of which were represented in the final WNZ programme. The WNZ works on the principle of local organisations and communities leading and informing the particular efforts around the Zone according to where it is being held. In both Toronto and Mexico City, there were a number of strong local organisations to take this task on board. In Vienna the capacity to take on this work was extremely limited. Thus, this time, two Vienna-based Focal Points (Sabine Lex from AIDS Hilfe and Witrut Stefanek from PULSHIV) were supported by a Europe-wide team of coordinators and Steering Committee. Meanwhile, 7 other WNZ Working Groups<sup>5</sup> included broader global participation including from WNZ partners. Likewise the programme, while including a distinct ECA focus (see next section below), also ensured the representation of other regions, as well as several panels made up of cross-regional presenters.

*'I guess participation wise this Zone looks like it's drawing from everywhere – it looks like it's America, Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa,' (WNZ Visitor, South Africa).*

Perhaps due to a stronger presence of European and Central Asian contingent of participants, it was perceived by one visitor to the Zone that, in contrast with previous WNZ events, there was a significantly different regional representation at WNZ2010, and that the global South, including Sub-Saharan Africa, was under-represented.

There was an understanding that Vienna had been chosen to host the Conference so as to open the door to more delegates from Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Without having conducted any formal analysis, there was a strong perception among the WNZ team that these latter countries were, on the contrary, direly under-represented. At the same time as it was felt that the whole conference was attended by fewer delegates from Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa than in previous years. This was certainly true for the WNZ, which saw a marked (though anticipated) drop in participation from Latin America, in particular.

At the same time, local community participation in the WNZ – and indeed the Global Village on the whole – was far less than in previous conferences. In Mexico City (2008) the aisles of the Global Village were congested with many visitors from Mexico City most of the time. In contrast, the 2010 Global Village felt empty. Although the WNZ felt busy and well-attended

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<sup>5</sup> Seven Working Groups were established to be responsible for different areas of the organisation of the WNZ. These were: Logistics, Fundraising, Programming, Media, Visibility, Young Women and Monitoring and Evaluation. Participation in the Working Groups was voluntary and not restricted to one Group, varying from 3 (M&E) – 13 (Programming) participants per Group. Every effort was made to ensure that young women and women living with HIV were represented in each Group. The Working Groups met regularly as needed by skype conference and each had a lead representative who fed back decisions to the Steering Committee. For summaries of Working Group outputs and achievements, see the [WNZ2010 Executive Summary](#) report, and for more detailed coverage of the work of each Group, refer to the [WNZ2010 Monitoring Report](#).



at most times, there were far fewer passers by, and the number of left-over resources and materials at the end of the conference week is testimony to how many fewer visitors there were throughout the Global Village.

In terms of geographical diversity, the short-answer visitor form indicated that visitors to the Zone represented a broad spread of nationalities from all regions of the world, and that these visitors came from a range of professional backgrounds in relation to their interest in HIV and AIDS and women's rights (see section 4.2 above). Among both visitors and participants, women living with HIV and young women (including young women living with HIV) were extremely well represented (see the previous sub-section above, and sub-section *iii* below), and an overall age range from 20 to about 75 was recorded (not including a few small children), with most participants falling within the 30 – 50 age range. Men and transgender people were positively welcome in the Zone and men accounted for approximately 10% of the visitors, although only one man participated as a speaker. However, only one transgender person visited the Zone.

*'I understand we wanted to address gender diversity and include [transgender people] in our work. During the Conference, I attended a very interesting session at which it was explained that gay movements started to integrate transgender people in their work when they realised that it meant more funding without actually sharing the money with transgender movements, so they don't want to be associated to them and insist not to be perceived as men who have sex with men but as a specific gender closer to that of a woman. They also regretted not having any platform at which to speak and network,' (WNZ Coordinating Team member, UK)*

If the WNZ wants to be a truly diverse and engendered space, and to ensure that it offers a space where marginalized populations can come to the centre, find a platform to voice their specific needs and priorities, and network safely, there needs to be a more dedicated effort to attract transgender visitors. A Spanish-language film with English subtitles about transgender people in Mexico was available in our audio-visual lounge ('Ahora toca a mi' / 'Now it's my turn').

Other often-marginalized groups that the WNZ hoped to represent include women and men who use injection drugs, lesbians and gay men, sex workers, and people who have been in prison, among others. Without asking people to identify themselves as belonging to one or other group it is impossible to say whether they were there. Attempts at inclusivity of these groups were therefore made primarily through the programme and the participation of organizations of or representing marginalized populations in the WNZ partnership. which included two sessions on harm reduction and drug use; two films ('Zindalash' and 'You must know about me: sex worker rights in Macedonia') and two sessions addressed sex worker rights. Austrian organisation Sophie, and the Network of Sex Worker Projects were participating entities in the Zone. A further two sessions addressed issues around women's sexuality.

Unfortunately issues affecting people in prison and migrant populations were not well represented in the WNZ programme, though they may have been touched on in the content of some sessions.





## **ii) Content: emerging issues and gaps in the agenda**

The WNZ aims to represent issues that are often under-represented or marginalised in other fora (aims and objectives 2.1, 2.2, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9); traditionally, the WNZ has had a strong focus on sexual and reproductive rights, including the sexual and reproductive rights of HIV positive women, and these issues continued to be strongly represented on the programme of WNZ2010. In addition to an emphasis on young women's issues, the WNZ2010 programme also aimed to highlight issues affecting women in relation to HIV in Europe and Central Asia, especially those identified through a consultative process involving women from across Europe and Central Asia that began in 2009. 14 out of 17 issues identified through the consultation were covered in the WNZ, and about 13 of the 50 sessions scheduled for the main stage or parallel networking areas had a focus that was specific or relevant to issues facing women in the region, and/or led by women from the Europe and Central Asia region. These included the launch of the new positive women's network for Europe and Central Asia, WECARE+, and the showcasing of a 'Twinning' project between Germany and various Eastern European / Central Asian countries to increase women and positive women's involvement at the Conference. Four sessions were conducted wholly or partially in German and involved the participation of Austrian and German women parliamentarians. Five sessions were conducted wholly or partially in Russian; several of these focused in particular on gender issues surrounding injection drug use and harm reduction.

The WNZ has also traditionally been a platform for particular messaging. The areas of focused messaging in the WNZ2010 were:

- Criminalisation of HIV transmission
- HIV and motherhood
- Violence as both cause and consequence of HIV transmission
- Gender aspects of harm reduction
- Sex worker rights

On the whole the programme was considered to be *'interesting,'* (WNZ programming committee member, Mexico); *'inspiring and informative,'* (politician, Austria); *'I love the content of the stuff you're doing and I think the subjects that you've covered are phenomenal,'* (WNZ visitor, South Africa). Other sessions and issues that raised a lot of interest were those addressing the criminalisation of HIV transmission and sex work; provider-initiated testing during pregnancy; gender aspects and implications of medical male circumcision; various aspects of gender based violence, including violence against women living with HIV; female condoms; and stigma and discrimination. For veterans of the field, the focus on Eastern Europe and Central Asia provided fresh insight to some of the issues facing women in relation to HIV. *'I was especially struck and moved by the huge issues facing women, including young women, in E Europe and C Asia around drug use,'* (WNZ Coordinating Team member, UK); *'In Eastern Europe the people there are getting more and more involved this year – that I noticed and that's exciting – that's good.'* (WNZ visitor, Netherlands); *'For me I've been working in this area for 30 years or so and so I keep up with what's going on through the internet with everything that's going on – but I think it's so great that – this last [session] – East meets West – I think that's a really great thing,'* (WNZ presenter, USA).



The feedback form and interviews asked respondents what they felt were the most pressing issues facing women in relation to HIV and AIDS in their countries, and whether they felt these had received adequate coverage in either the main conference or the WNZ. In responses from participants from the UK and Western Europe, some of the main issues to be cited were on-going stigma and discrimination around HIV and fear of disclosure. There was also a perceived lack of debate about HIV and AIDS in the public realm, such that the subject had almost become taboo in some areas, and this was increasingly accompanied by a lack of education on the subject. *'Many people don't really know what AIDS really is and they are afraid of something they don't know so it's a big taboo,'* (WNZ visitor, Austria). Prevention, including female condoms, vaccines and microbicides were another area of high priority; *'Prevention – negotiation of the use of prevention methods. The ability to say when and with whom to have sex,'* (WNZ presenter, Sweden). Violence against women, including state-censured violence such as forced sterilizations and forced HIV-testing during pregnancy, criminalization and human rights violations were also raised, but in general the question highlighted the point that *'HIV never comes by itself – there's always something else. I think if there was one kind of really key message that I would want delivered it's just that no-one should live in fear of persecution and isolation due to a medical condition which I think people living with HIV do,'* (WNZ visitor, UK).

### **iii) Ways to increase engagement around women's issues**

The WNZ seeks to increase engagement (see aims and objectives 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9) around women's issues by offering a wide range of sessions and activities that will be inclusive and attractive to women and men working at different levels. Activities at the WNZ2010 ranged from panel discussions to films, story- and poetry-based performances, installations, very informal discussions, 'game-show' sessions, drop-ins, demonstrations, training workshops, show-casing, participatory dialogues, networking, a 'Town Hall' session and a vast array of literature and materials from a broad range of organisations in several different languages (primarily English, German and Russian, but also Spanish, French and other languages).

The WNZ2010 had an extensive media campaign running in Germany and Austria prior to the Conference, and the six [press releases](#) produced in German and English as part of this media roadmap were used as the basis for about 100 media packs which were distributed at the media centre of the main conference, with additional information on some of the topics, and details of when these topics would be addressed in the WNZ itself. The WNZ partnership also produced six editions of the daily newsletter [Mujeres Adelante](#), and contributed 23 articles and daily blogs for on-line journal [openDemocracy](#). The WNZ on-site media team leader Anca Nitulescu also created a WNZ Facebook page which attracted 150 friends, and used her personal blog to write about the daily highlights in the Zone. Workshops at the WNZ included a Media Training for HIV positive women, with the aim of producing retrospective editions of UK [Positively Women](#) and German [DHIVA](#) magazines relating to the Vienna Conference. A special combined edition of *ALQ/Mujeres Adelante* reviewing the Conference will also be issued in Autumn 2010. The 'Panting Line' in the WNZ attracted a lot of media attention, and impromptu press and audio-visual interviews were given daily, including to the Austrian national radio and to Voice of America, among others.





The WNZ has also created a Vienna 2010 [resource page](#) on the Women in Europe [website](#) by up-loading papers and presentations from the WNZ and other Conference fora, and providing links to other web-based resources relating to issues around women and HIV.

Responses through our feedback questionnaire and interviews highlighted the success of the 'panting line' as a device for bringing women's issues to the attention of others, and as a starting point for dialogue. *'It's so colourful and the line with the bras and everything – I think it's so cool,' (WNZ Visitor, Germany)*. Respondents also felt that the WNZ had been successful in covering certain topic areas, such as stigma and discrimination, and HIV-related social harms. Networking, inter-regional dialogues, targeted informal and formal conversations, including through the use of questionnaires and interviews, as well as media coverage of the issues and cross-generational dialogue were put forward as ways to further increase engagement around women's issues; all of these are ways the WNZ has traditionally used to encourage engagement.

Additional suggestions for greater engagement around these issues, which could be used to inform WNZ planning at future conferences, include:

- Cross-fertilisation with the main conference. *'I think within the WNZ stigma and discrimination as well as social harms were very much addressed. To assure that these essential topics are equally represented at the main scientific conference remains a big challenge,' (WNZ Coordinating Team member, UK)*.
- Education, information, media and political consciousness-raising were felt to be in particular need in Europe, particularly Western Europe where complacency is seen to have replaced the scare campaigns of the 1980s, with very little happening in between. *'[In Austria] knowledge about sexuality in general and the disease in particular is only rudimentary,' (Parliamentarian, Austria)*. On a global level, there is a perceived need for more education around rights and rights violations such as forced / coerced sterilisations and testing. *'... because the very fact that the topic here is about rights – rights here rights now – more women need to be educated around their human rights, their civil rights...,' (WNZ Visitor, UK)*.
- The women's movement needs to be united in demanding more accountability from governments and donors. *'I think we should stand together and sit on the table of negotiations and say enough is enough we're here we're not invisible.'* (WNZ Visitor, Netherlands).
- Dialogue- and alliance-building at and between different levels. *'Care and support issues need to be taken up by the women's movement in the AIDS Response, and we look forward to having dialogues and building partnerships with allies in the women's movement to ensure grassroots home-based caregivers have space to speak for themselves about the issues that are affecting them and the kinds of partnerships that would make a difference to them,' (WNZ Presenter, USA)*
- Further linking and alliance-building between different networking zones within the conference setting, and linking up with other social movements beyond the conference, such as the trade unions and housing rights movements to increase activism, solidarity and greater negotiating power.
- Stronger regional representation of women's issues and responses; there was a disappointingly low level of local and regional representation at the Global Village, and the opportunity to really address issues affecting women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia was missed. *'The Eastern representation focused on I[njection] D[rug] U[sers] and*



- misrepresented the fact that HIV incidence in most places is very much linked to heterosexual transmission. Again, women are underrepresented,' (WNZ Coordinating team member, UK)*
- Encourage women living with HIV to submit abstracts and apply for scholarships to Washington 2012. The WNZ has a history of continuity and consultation from one International AIDS Conference to the next.
  - More feminist analysis and greater focus on structural drivers of gender inequality and how these operate within different contexts and localities of the epidemic to perpetuate similar outcomes for women. *'I would have liked to see more of the conversation ... around structural drivers and how those structural drivers can be used to address gender inequality thereby giving women more voice,' (WNZ Visitor, South Africa).*
  - Finally, one visitor felt that *'more anger,'* was needed to increase engagement around issues affecting women in relation to HIV. *'I've been really upset by what I think is fatigue probably among the activist and the feminists and generally across the conference – it really seems like the anger has died,' (WNZ Visitor, South Africa).*

#### **iv) HIV-positive women's leadership**

The WNZ seeks to promote the principles of the Greater involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS (GIPA) and, in particular, the meaningful involvement of women living with HIV and AIDS (MIWA), through meaningful participation, decision-making and leadership (see aims and objectives 2.3, 2.4, 2.7 and 2.9).

Women living with HIV have been an integral part of the process, from the earliest stages of consultation towards WNZ2010. This began with a meeting held in Köln in May 2009, hosted by GS-SG, with members of ICW from the UK, and positive women and other activists from Germany. A consultation was then held in Vienna in October 2009, which brought together 30 women, mostly HIV-positive, from E and W Europe. At this meeting a new positive women's network for Europe and Central Asia ([WECARE+](#)) was conceptualised. The WECARE+ network and the highlight results of a survey, which one of its members conducted, were both launched at the WNZ during Vienna 2010.

Many of the founder members of WECARE+ have been involved at every step of the way during the lead-up to WNZ2010. The Coordinating team, Steering Committee and each of the Working Groups (except for the smallest group – M&E) included at least one woman living with HIV. Efforts were made also to ensure the involvement of young women living with HIV in the organisation of the Zone; Anca Nitulescu, a young woman living with HIV from Romania (now living in the UK) was invited to lead the on-site WNZ media team and was also involved in several of the Working Groups (Media, Young Women and Programming). The call for proposals strongly encouraged the submission of proposals from women and young women living with HIV, and the stated objectives of the WNZ include the promotion of positive women's leadership.

The final [programme](#) had a strong emphasis on positive women's leadership and positive women's rights, with at least 50% of the scheduled sessions including a strong focus on the rights and concerns of women living with HIV and/or at least one woman living openly with HIV among the presenters.



To further increase the presence and visibility of women living with HIV in the WNZ, the Steering Group actively recruited primarily positive women activists with a history of involvement with the WNZ to act as 'hosts' of the Zone, to welcome visitors, greet and thank presenters, and announce the beginning of sessions.

The WNZ Coordinating Team also put forward the names of several positive women to act as speakers or moderators at the Human Rights March and Rally, two of whom were selected (Silvia Petretti as a speaker and Rolake Odetoyinbo as a moderator). The WNZ was also invited to take part in the official opening of the Global Village and positive women participants formed part of the WNZ delegation.

The WNZ itself was opened by Wiltrut Stefanek, one of only two women living openly with HIV in Austria, and Wiltrut was joined by one former and one future positive woman coordinator of the WNZ (Shari Margolese, Toronto 2006, and Naina Khanna, Washington 2012, respectively). The first of the daily Young Women's Hour sessions, on 'Growing up with HIV' was co-facilitated by Stephanie Raper, a young HIV positive woman from Australia who was born HIV-positive.

The WNZ also held close links with and provided a host area to the *Twinning Project*, a pilot project launched at Vienna 2010 by the German Foundation [GS-SG](#) – Gemeinnützige Stiftung Sexualität und Gesundheit (Foundation for Sexuality and Health), to support paired delegates from Germany and Eastern European/Central Asian countries to attend the conference. The 5 pairs of 'twins' were not exclusively HIV positive, though the selection criteria specified that applicants have close links to their respective country's HIV community. More than half of the selected 'twins' were living openly with HIV, and spoke openly about the issues facing them in their home countries during a session to showcase the project.

The launch of the WECARe+ network in the WNZ was well attended by women living with HIV in the region and others, and provided an opportunity to headline the results from a [survey](#) designed to coincide with the launch from HIV positive women across Europe and Central Asia. 165 women living with HIV from 18 different countries in Europe and Central Asia responded to the survey, which was conducted in four languages (English, Russian, German and Portuguese). Some of the key findings of the survey included relatively low rates of disclosure, including to intimate partners; very high rates of gender based violence, and significant mental health issues among women living with HIV in the region, with over 40% of the women not having had access to counselling services upon diagnosis. Approximately one third of the respondents were or had been injection drug users and/or partners of injection drug users; one eighth were or had been sex workers; and one tenth had spent time in prison. Heterosexual intercourse was the dominant route of transmission, even in countries with higher rates of injection drug use. Support from other women living with HIV was identified as one of many strategies for overcoming the challenges and obstacles faced by women living with HIV all over the world, and an important step towards making those obstacles and challenges visible, engaging in advocacy around them, claiming rights and reducing prejudice, ignorance, stigma and discrimination. The network has been supported by Abbott Pharmaceutical Company, which has funded its registration, and enabled the set-up of the seven-language [Women in Europe website](#), which will provide vital on-going communication support to the network.



The potential of positive women's networking was a sub-theme of the WNZ programme with a total of five sessions that focused directly on the value of networks of women (including mixed status HIV-positive and HIV-negative or untested women) to bring about change. The Austrian and German Networks of Women and AIDS held a session on Sunday evening to talk about their work, and also joined a session on *'Positive Women's Networks as a Civil Society Organising, Advocacy and Mobilizing Tool'* on Wednesday. A further session on *'Securing Rights for Women living with HIV'* on Wednesday evening explored the work of the Sophia Network in the UK, which brings prominent women from many different fields together with HIV positive women and parliamentarians to build dialogue and influence policy.

Two workshops for women living with HIV were also held; one was a media training facilitated by Positively Women and GSSG; the other a training to support the implementation of GIPA/MIWA, run by the AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario.

Storytelling and performance narratives were an additional medium employed in the WNZ2010 more than in previous WNZs for highlighting issues and challenges faced by women living with HIV. Three sessions – *'A Garden Full of Life,' 'Read my Story'* and *'Vagina Monologues'* all included stories and narratives written by women living with HIV, either performed/read by the authors or by others.

Several films that were shown in the WNZ also told the stories of women living with HIV from different parts of the world; *Diamonds* followed the stories of four Asian women, and was directed by an HIV-positive woman from the Asia-Pacific region; *Her Decision* is a film by a Canadian woman director, which follows a day in the life of a newly-diagnosed woman living with HIV in Canada coming to identify the kind of support she needs to cope with the change in circumstances brought about by a recent HIV positive diagnosis; two *Lifeboat* series of films focused on issues faced by children and young people growing up with HIV in Europe and reproductive choices faced by women living with HIV in Europe, respectively. An audio project on HIV and motherhood by the Salamander Trust expanded this theme beyond the European region to include twelve positive (and two other) women's voices from across the world as well. Another film, from Ukraine, highlighted the huge difference that a supportive methadone substitution programme has made to the lives of young positive women (and men) with children there.

The visibility of women living with HIV in the planning and delivery of the WNZ is an important aspect of the WNZ philosophy and practice. Most of the feedback respondents were aware of there being a strong presence of HIV positive women in the WNZ, and were struck by the power of positive women's leadership. *'The public face of women and young women with HIV was a present issue,' (WNZ Programme Committee Member, Mexico); 'Earlier I was thinking how strong people are when they stand up front and say I'm HIV positive – I think it's amazing,' (WNZ Visitor, Germany). 'I was here on the opening of the zone and there were different women speaking and one of them ... said she was HIV positive and she seemed like a very strong character ... that somehow made an impression to me that she was so open about her status in this area and that all those people were here,' (WNZ Visitor, South Africa); 'It's very hard to find HIV positive women openly living with and talking*



*about it and being a leader and an example, and what I find here there's a lot of young blood you know and they're very excited and they're from many different areas and they're from many different colours and that's important because we need positive voices in leadership – men and women. (WNZ Visitor, Netherlands).*

However, one respondent felt that women living with HIV from poorer or more marginalised groups were under-represented in the Zone. *'I did not see many women living positively or young women who are from the poorest and most marginalized communities in the Zone,' (WNZ presenter, USA.)* Another respondent was aware of the WNZ commitment to advancing positive women's leadership without feeling that women living with HIV were singled out for special attention in the Zone. *'I mean if you know that you've got that positive women's leadership and it's not in my face... I mean the ultimate aim of equality is that we just have equality – so the ultimate aim of integrating positive women into leadership is that it should just be there – just normalized,' (WNZ Visitor, South Africa).*

The value of hearing the voices of women living with HIV and creating opportunities to network with women living with HIV was felt strongly by both HIV positive and HIV-negative or untested women participating in the WNZ2010, and also seemed to be an existing and recognised feature of the WNZ. It was felt that the strong representation of women living with HIV in the Zone *'strengthens women and gives them courage and hope,' (WNZ Visitor, UK); 'It makes you feel confident that your voice is heard,' (WNZ Presenter, Ukraine).* The creation of an enabling environment for meaningful participation also represents an important political commitment and practice. *'If we are talking about HIV and AIDS (or anything!) the people who are infected and affected need to be given space to speak for themselves, and need to be brought into decision-making and agenda setting in a meaningful way,' (WNZ presenter, USA).*

As mentioned above, the International AIDS Conference presents an important opportunity for positive women activists to come together, and within that, the WNZ is becoming recognised as a space to host and facilitate some of these meetings. *'This [is a] place where you feel safe and I can be with women and I don't have to pretend and it's about issues that concern me and the women that I work with and it's not about just that we are a minority and a special group because no, we're not,' (WNZ Visitor, Netherlands).* *'There is a huge sense of solidarity around universal issues facing us all wherever we live in the world. It is always wonderful to feel that shared sense of identity as women share many "aha" moments of recognition of one's self in others' stories,' (WNZ Coordinating Team member, UK).* The WNZ aspires to also nurture the leadership potential of younger women or new activists including women and young women living with HIV. *'As a positive woman, who is not so young anymore, I still very much need to have other positive women around me and also have the sense that young women are ready to contribute and find their place. Given the stigma, I think we can do a lot in fostering young women to feel strong and stand up for themselves,' (WNZ Steering Committee member, Germany).* This is an important aspect of the model of leadership that the WNZ endorses, whereby new leaders are encouraged, supported and nurtured by more experienced peers. *'It's often the same people and there are so many women living with HIV that it would be equally important that we try to get new blood in the movement,' (WNZ Programme Committee Member, Netherlands).*





#### **v) Challenges and recommendations**

The biggest factor that was perceived as inhibiting the effectiveness of the WNZ in the aims described above was noise. The audio system used in the Zone itself was very loud, and this was in constant competition with other sound systems being used throughout the Global Village. This created a hindrance to inclusion and participation in the sessions, especially for non-native speakers of the main language of the session (primarily English) and translation efforts.

Translation is in itself a huge challenge. The official languages of the International AIDS Conference change with each venue, and despite the Conference being hosted by a German-speaking nation in 2010, the official languages were English and Russian. In contrast to the Mexico City IAC, no translation services were offered by the Conference infrastructure. The question of what and how much translation to offer created a great deal of anxiety and consternation for the WNZ organisers. Politically we felt that it was important to at least offer German as well as Russian translation given that the Global Village where the WNZ is located is specifically intended to encourage and facilitate local community involvement. However, professional translation fees for even one language let alone two were prohibitive. At the same time it was very difficult to estimate how many local people were likely to visit the WNZ, and it seemed that the number of registered Russian-speaking delegates may have been much lower than anticipated. In the end, the WNZ was given the use of some translation headsets as an in-kind donation by the audio equipment company Quiet-Vox. Four local interpreters then volunteered their time, which would have provided a basic coverage of translation from English into Russian and German and vice versa. Two language graduates from Exeter University were also recruited as volunteers to give translation support in the Zone (their transport and accommodation was covered by the WNZ). One of the WNZ organisers from Mexico offered to provide translation during a session that was conducted in Spanish. However, at the last minute, the local volunteer translators pulled out, leaving a significant gap in terms of Russian and German translation. This was covered as far as possible by ad hoc voluntary translation by delegates, volunteers or visitors who happened to be multi-lingual and the young women from Exeter.

The Zone, though more than double the size of other networking zones, was also very busy, and at times a little chaotic. There were usually between 4 and 6 'staff' in the zone, including one coordinator and one host, but it was not always possible to identify them, and they could be trying to deal with a lot of requests at once. Despite the huge efforts that had gone into recruiting volunteers in advance, there were once more many calls on the time of those who offered to help. Thus coverage in the Zone was not ideal. An even clearer division of labour and allocation of tasks would, as ever, be recommended in future.

Spaces for resources and materials were often very crowded and could become messy. With a 25+ member partnership making up the WNZ, as well as several donor-supporters and over 50 entities represented through sessions and activities, there were a great many organisational stakeholders in the WNZ who all had materials to display, in addition to the materials produced specifically by and for the WNZ, including the [Mujeres Adelante](#) newsletter and the [Women and AIDS Delegate Guide](#) to the main conference.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A comprehensive booklet highlighting sessions with a women's rights or gender focus throughout the Conference compiled for the third successive IAC by ATHENA in collaboration with the Global



Seating in the main-stage area was sometimes insufficient, although there was an area of cushions on the floor, which tended not to be used. *'I don't know how they'll do that but I'm hoping that in the States they'll have a bigger networking zone and you know the way this is done, it's nice but they need a bigger stage and they need a few more chairs. People stand up or they tend to move away or go if they can't sit down somewhere,'* (WNZ Presenter, USA).

The WNZ has traditionally been heavily programmed, and that was also the case this year. Un-programmed times tended to feel 'empty' and 'dead' and it was sometimes a challenge to maintain an audience from the end of one session to the start of the next. In parallel with this, some of the parallel programme activities, such as the films and audio projects, the female condom demonstrations and the self care sessions were under-attended/utilised and needed greater publicising, including through posters and announcements between sessions. Films or excerpts from films could have been shown between sessions, for example. It was also suggested that lively music could be played between sessions to enhance the atmosphere in the Zone during intervals.

Most of the sessions were well attended (between 20 and 30 audience participants) but morning sessions before 9.30 / 10.00 and evening sessions after about 6.00pm were under-attended. This could be attributable to competing sessions – in particular the plenary sessions in the morning – and simply to the length of the day, when satellite sessions in the main conference started as early as 7.00am. Sessions in the WNZ often started with few participants and attracted more people as they gathered momentum. Various strategies were attempted to maintain momentum from one session to the next, such as announcing the next session at the close of the previous one, but it is a perennial challenge to keep sessions well attended, and certainly depends in part on the session presenters carrying out their own publicity. In developing the programme, the programme committee also tried to keep mornings and evenings either un-scheduled or more lightly scheduled, but as late proposals came in, these times also filled up.

*'It was a useful venue, but a shame that there were some very excellent sessions ... where there were not also a large number of participants. I think this is due to the huge number of parallel competing sessions – both in the main conference and within the global village. If so much effort is going into high quality sessions, often with 3-4 presenters, how can you try to get as big an audience as possible?? No easy answer there.'* (WNZ Visitor, UK).

While the WNZ coordinators use a number of different avenues to create publicity around the Zone in general, communications with session presenters should emphasise the need for them to carry out their own publicity and mobilise audiences for their activities.

Another way of addressing the above problem might be to develop stronger alliances with other networking zones in the Global Village, thus bringing sessions to a potentially larger audience and reducing (albeit minimally) the number of competing parallel sessions. As

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Coalition on Women and AIDS. The 2010 Guide used WNZ artwork as its front cover motif, and included the entire WNZ programme, as well as details of other Networking Zones in the Global Village.





mentioned above, there are a number of 'natural' alliances that could be exploited further for the next conference; these include the Human Rights Zone, Caregivers, Sex Workers, People living with HIV, and Youth Pavilion. Co-hosting sessions would address both the practical challenge, and potentially also bring a gender, women's rights or feminist framework to areas that would otherwise perhaps be less gender-focused.

*'If there was a challenge for [the WNZ] I think it would be identifying the other sectors that don't seem to be coming to the table and talking to them also like caregivers – so what's going on with the caregivers network – why aren't the WNZ here? I think that would be an interesting challenge – to identify those sectors that should be working together – not necessarily merging because I realize you have to keep separate voices,' (WNZ Visitor, South Africa).*

One significant and successful area of linkage with the Human Rights Zone was around the March and Rally; while attempts were also made to coordinate with the Human Rights Zone at a programme level, in the end the extra logistics, coordination, person-power and costs involved meant that these were kept to a minimum.

A yet greater challenge is to bring the ethos, values and messaging of the WNZ into the main conference. *'For me there was still a disconnect between the global village and the main conference and a real need to address this in some way; many of the questions and issues emerging in the WNZ also needed to be brought up in many of the main sessions,' (WNZ Visitor, UK).* There was very little – if any – duplication of sessions held in the WNZ and also held in the main conference. This means that engagement with feminist thinking and women's rights in relation to most HIV-related issues remains marginalised and often restricted to those already engaging with gender / feminist / women's rights approaches and issues.

Attempts to bridge the Global Village – Main Conference divide included:

- Development of the Women and AIDS Delegate Guide, which provided a comprehensive index of sessions in both the main conference and the WNZ. This was distributed during various times at registration, throughout the week from the WNZ and from other booths such as the Women ARISE booth in the main conference hall.
- Publication of the WNZ daily newsletter *Mujeres Adelante*, and distribution throughout the Global Village and within the main conference
- ATHENA-led advocacy campaign '[10 Reasons Why Criminalization of HIV exposure or transmission Harms Women](#)' including a petition against the criminalization of HIV transmission
- Collaboration with the [Women ARISE](#) coalition of international women's organizations to mutually reinforce efforts to increase the visibility of women and girls throughout AIDS2010.

A more concerted and coordinated effort needs to be made to ensure greater visibility of the WNZ within the main conference, whether through targeting of selected sessions, lobbying women with powerful platforms within the main conference, increased publicity / materials distribution, or coordinated actions. The WNZ partnership and alliances could be used to better effect for specific, coordinated messaging, such as the successful collection of signatories to the petition to stop Criminalization mentioned above.



The area that presented perhaps the biggest political challenge to the WNZ was objective 2.5 of holding European donors to account both domestically and globally. Having the IAC hosted by a Central European nation opened up an opportunity to highlight Europe as a mirror *of* the world, and offered us a chance to shine a mirror *on* the world. Issues facing women with HIV globally are all relevant in Europe, and issues facing women in Europe in relation to HIV are *affecting* women globally also. Although the WNZ was able to effectively highlight the issues affecting women in Europe in relation to HIV and illustrate how these are often under-represented, under-funded, and under-addressed by policy makers, programme makers and donors alike, it was a challenge to hold European donors to account, and this objective was only partially met, despite the fact that accountability to women and girls constituted an important and well represented thematic area within the WNZ programme. However, there was relatively little opportunity for engagement between WNZ participants and Austrian or other European policy makers. Two sessions on Universal Access and Human Rights, and Discrimination and Criminalisation, involved a multi-disciplinary panel including parliamentarians from Austria and Germany, but sadly audience numbers were low, perhaps engendering the feeling among these guests that they were not especially welcome or important. On the one hand this highlights an important challenge for future coordinators of the WNZ – that of mobilizing both among partners and supporters to attend sessions, and – to a much greater degree than we achieved in Vienna – among the host community at various levels. As discussed earlier in the report, participation from the host community as a whole, not only its leaders and policy makers, was weak and it was beyond the capacity of the already overstretched Austrian Team to carry out further mobilization. On the other hand it is evidence of the lack of European donor and government commitment to the issues affecting women in Europe and globally around the world, that their engagement in the WNZ from these stakeholders was so limited. From the very positive response of two Austrian parliamentarians who did participate in the Zone, this was clearly a lost opportunity.

*'[The WNZ] gives a low-threshold access to a lot of very important information... Concerning the issue of criminalization of HIV/AIDS in our society I got much more sensitized.'* (Austrian parliamentarian on participating in WNZ2010)

*'I will at least speak more, and more often, on this subject than I have up till now,'* (Austrian parliamentarian on participating in WNZ2010)

Closely linked to this point is the sense that as an opportunity to empower women living with HIV from Austria, the WNZ has had limited success to date, as capacity to reach out to this community was also extremely limited. However the launch and recent registration of WECARE+ marks an opportunity for greater and more continuous outreach and engagement both at the Community level and at the policy level in Austria and across Europe and Central Asia, building on these small beginnings.

## **5. Conclusion: Usefulness, effectiveness and on-going need for a women's networking space at international conferences**

It was very clear from the response to the WNZ2010 is that there is still a strong need for a women's networking space, and that the WNZ promotes learning and exchange through



several specific overlapping and mutually reinforcing roles that remain, at best, partially duplicated elsewhere within the realm of the International AIDS Conference The WNZ:

- Promotes positive women's leadership and celebrates diversity;
- Creates a safe space;
- Focuses on women's rights issues;
- Is underpinned by feminist agenda and analysis;
- Provides advocacy platform for selected issues;
- Is committed to addressing marginalised and controversial issues;
- Builds partnerships and alliances; and,
- Facilitates networking, dialogue-building and problem-solving.

Working in collaboration with positive women's networks and organisations, the WNZ remains the only significant space within the international AIDS conference that specifically and actively **promotes positive women's leadership** (see section iv above). *'It gives women a chance to sit and listen to positive women speakers, in a comfortable atmosphere.'* (WNZ Volunteer, UK); *'I do think that it's invaluable that there was a space to allow for women living with HIV to meet [and] share their views/experiences/research within a safe and welcoming environment, and for there to be dedicated focus on promoting key issues which affect positive women.'* (WNZ Visitor, UK). At the same time, the WNZ **celebrates diversity** and inclusivity. *'It is also a safe space for positive women to meet other positive women while not being exclusive to any minority. On the contrary, a space that is open to all diverse groups of women and that is what makes it safe and very important!'* (WNZ Steering Committee member, Germany).

The WNZ is perceived as a **safe space** in which to challenge personal / political, public / private dichotomies. *'The zone itself is wonderful – it's a very safe space here,'* (WNZ Presenter, USA). The WNZ aims to create an informal, dynamic and fun atmosphere through which to engender lively, intimate and cutting edge debate. *'Someone from UNDP on Austrian Radio described the main conference as "death by power point", which I think is a great description of some of the main conference sessions! A lot of "talking-at" gets done there, whereas in the WNZ, there is much more engagement between speakers and audience at a much more intimate level,'* (WNZ Coordinating team member, UK).

The WNZ provides a space in which to address **women's rights issues**. *'The opportunity to explore issues which are key to women's rights and yet are not addressed in the main conference, is essential. As Shirin Heidari, Editor of the IAS Journal said in one WNZ session: "Absence of evidence does not equal evidence of absence" – and yet many in the main conference often assume that this is the case,'* (WNZ Coordinating Team member, UK). In a recent study<sup>7</sup>, researchers found that fewer than a fifth of papers published by the International AIDS Society in two leading HIV journals included research that was clearly relevant to women. Despite broad recognition of gender inequality as both a cause and consequence of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, research often fails to include a detailed gender analysis, disaggregate data by sex, or consider the implications of a problem or proposed solution on women. The WNZ counters this obvious gap. *'It is very much a space to update on current events and a place where one can gather information on women and human rights as well as SHRH/rights,'* (Steering Committee member, Germany). At the same time,

<sup>7</sup> E Collins, F Hale, J, Gahagan, L Binder and T Crone, 2010, Gendered Neglect: how relevant is HIV research to women? Poster Presentation 6172, Vienna 2010.



the WNZ, while welcoming men, recognises the need for women to claim spaces, to organise, and to raise issues without fear of being ridiculed, co-opted or undermined. *'Women must have a space to organize in order to claim power, as well as discuss their own issues and have important dialogues,' (WNZ Presenter, USA). 'I think if you are interested in women's issues this is the place to be,' (WNZ programme committee member, Netherlands).*

It is not always enough to talk about women's rights or women's issues without an underlying understanding of the structural relationships of power at the heart of gender inequality issues. The WNZ philosophy is informed by a **feminist agenda**. *'The WNZ is indispensable precisely because of the need to make the feminist aspects [of the AIDS pandemic] visible,' (Parliamentarian, Austria).* Much of the debate in the WNZ goes further than to highlight issues facing women or make a call for women's rights; certain issues, such as violence against women and sexual and reproductive rights have gained a lot of currency over recent years and are edging their way into mainstream fora and agendas. However, these are frequently accompanied by confusing or missing analyses of the issues, which results in women being portrayed as victims, lacking in personal agency, or often as agents of reproduction, valuable only as producers of the next generation. *'[The role of the WNZ is] to keep the feminist agenda alive in the AIDS conferences because I think that is really dying ... I think a lot of the conversations around gender are very ... [my husband] was complaining about the focus on gender based violence but without an analysis of what drives that – it's almost like the AIDS world has hooked into that because it's relatively easy for them,' (WNZ Visitor, South Africa).* At the same time, the WNZ tries to keep the level of debate accessible, through a range of comprehensive and coherent messaging and media. *'I like our zone – the women's network zone because it ... all things here have meanings that make a connection to our rights and that we have rights' (Twin, Tajikistan).*

The WNZ provides a **platform for selected advocacy issues**, as well as representing a broad range of issues that meet at the intersection of HIV and Women's Rights. By employing a range of tools and media, specific advocacy campaigns and issues can be highlighted and given multiple platforms through the programme, printed, audio-visual and electronic media campaigns, actions such as the Human Rights March and Rally, even the design of the Zone and related printed materials. In particular at Vienna 2010, the issues of criminalisation, motherhood, gendered approaches to harm reduction, and sex workers' rights were among the advocacy pieces that the WNZ sought to highlight through a variety of media. In addition, the WNZ seeks to provide a space for controversial or neglected issues that offer new insights and perspectives into women's realities, even if these challenge conventional thinking or mainstream policy. *'[The WNZ] allows informal conversations around topics we struggle to get on the main conference agenda,' (WNZ Visitor, anon).*

The WNZ **commitment to addressing marginalised or controversial issues** remains strong. Issues that in the past had fewer platforms, such as sex work and violence, have begun to move towards the mainstream. Other areas, such as abortion and sexual pleasure remain side-lined. Some of the more mainstream issues, such as medical male circumcision, criminalisation of transmission, and injection drug use, often fail to provide gendered analyses of these issues, and these are gaps that the WNZ aims to fill. Similarly, issues like violence against women, whose currency in mainstream fora is increasing, need to be continually (re-)contested and (re-) negotiated so as to expand the understanding of the issues. Violence against women, in the context of HIV, for example, is not limited to the



intimate or community realm, but needs to encompass state-sanctioned and institutional forms of violence, such as those encountered by women who have been forcibly sterilised due to an HIV positive status, or women who are forced to test for HIV due to pregnancy, and are subsequently neglected or mis-treated by service providers. The WNZ provides an ideal space to test and contest those boundaries, in the sense that it is seen as a genuinely open, diverse and yet safe space where personal experiences are considered respectfully and meaningfully alongside traditional forms of empirical evidence. Debates taking place in the WNZ are likely to include the voices of those most directly affected by the issue, be it living with HIV, experiences of violence, use of injection drugs, engagement in sex work, and so on, while avoiding tokenistic 'personal testimony' involvement. The meaningful involvement of women (and others) directly affected by issues means that, even when issues aren't necessarily new to an audience, the audience's understanding of the issue is still deepened. When asked whether their experience in the WNZ2010 had opened their eyes to any new issues, several of the feedback or interview respondents answered 'No, but...'

- *'...it's been interesting to hear more about people's experiences,' (WNZ Visitor, anon)*
- *'...it did deepen my understanding of some of them (such as women IUD, female sexualities and lesbians living with HIV),' (WNZ Programme Committee member, Mexico)*
- *'...[it] extended my knowledge about positive women in Africa considerably.' WNZ Volunteer, Austria)*
- *'...on a meta-level I've learned a lot about myself and female cooperation,' (WNZ Steering Committee member, Germany)*
- *'...I'm hearing a lot about what's going on even if it is with the same subject it's about how it differs in different countries,' (WNZ Visitor, UK)*
- *'...I always learn different things and what is important is need for promoting gender equality in really the fieldwork and not just at policy level – a lot of efforts to try to unwrap that,' (WNZ programme Committee member, Netherlands)*

Among the areas that were new to women participating in the zone were: abortion related issues; higher rate of domestic violence amongst women living with HIV; criminalisation of HIV transmission; and female condoms and issues of negotiation. Of all the sessions presented in the WNZ, forced sterilization was possibly the issue that had the greatest impact.

*'I was rushed throughout but happened to be there when Jennifer Gatsi reported on the forced sterilizations which are still taking place on positive women in Namibia, and are being uncovered in the neighbouring countries as well. I stood up my HIV in the workforce group, since I could not tear myself away. I collected the photos from the OSISA group and asked Jennifer what kind of coverage would be helpful on this. I will make sure that I get this information out. Here we are in Vienna talking about Human Rights, I am not aware that this was covered in the main conference. If it was not, it definitely should have been,' (WNZ Steering Committee member, Germany)*

Some of the issues particularly pertinent to the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region seemed to have a particular resonance, and the greater presence of women from this region in comparison to previous conferences, although smaller than anticipated, was nevertheless striking. *'This year I was especially struck and moved by the huge issues facing women,*





*including young women, in E Europe and C Asia around drug use. The Ukrainian substitution therapy film and how this has helped young positive mothers get back on course with their lives was especially powerful for me,' (WNZ Coordinating Team member, UK). And the setting of the conference in Europe also had the effect of illuminating some of the issues still pertinent to Western Europe which tend to be overlooked while Europe's gaze is directed to other parts of the world. 'For me it was especially illuminating to learn more about the everyday discrimination that women living with HIV are fighting – that I hadn't held to be possible. The conversation with an erstwhile sex worker also enabled me to see things differently,' (Parliamentarian, Austria). Further, it was possible to see how issues seen to be particular to one region or area are often reflected back in another. 'The notions of "violence" or "stigma" have almost the same meaning all over the world and women understand problems and sufferings of each other very well, they could give helpful advices, were not afraid of sharing their own thoughts and stories from private lives,' (WNZ Presenter, Ukraine).*

The WNZ enables **partnership- and alliance-building**, both by bringing together women from networks, organisations, agencies and institutions working on similar topics, and also through deliberate efforts to create continuity from one WNZ event to the next, working through the ATHENA Network and other global and regional networks and listservs. The principle of local organisation around the women's networking zone ensures that the drive and leadership of each event is taken up by different organisations and individuals at each conference, while previous coordinators or partners lend experience, guidance and input into the process, thereby building always on what has gone before and strengthening the WNZ partnership with both new and longer-term partners. The principle of consultative process means that planning for the next conference begins almost immediately after the end of the previous one, thereby providing a 18-month-to-two-year period over which new alliances are consolidated around the WNZ.

Many of the women involved in the WNZ as organisers, contributors, volunteers or visitors are long-term women's rights activists in the field of gender and HIV and/or international development more broadly. Strong networks and alliances often already exist between them; the WNZ as a physical space at international conferences offers a space to strengthen and deepen these alliances, networks and friendships. However, as seen above, the WNZ continues to attract new visitors, presenters and supporters, in part due to the change in regional and thematic focus brought about by the different conference locations; in part due to advances and emerging issues in the field; and in part due to a growing recognition of the gender drivers of the epidemic and the increasingly urgent need to address these.

The primary objective of the WNZ as a networking space goes beyond the point about partnership- and alliance-building above, although it is clearly related. **Networking, dialogue-building, and problem solving** occur at the individual level but may have impacts at personal and organisational/institutional levels, and at the level of movement building. As mentioned above, the WNZ included several sessions that looked at the values, benefits and (potential) outcomes of women's organising through networks, and at networks as tools for civil society mobilisation. At the individual level, networking can be validating and reduce isolation for women activists working in an area that is often little understood and can bring them into confrontational or conflict situations. The sessions on the launch of the WECARe+ network and the Twinning Project amply illustrate this, and indeed the Twinning Project was



conceived precisely to facilitate networking between women who otherwise may have faced an experience of isolation and impotence at the vastness of the International AIDS Conference. *'The WNZ is a safe space where women and young women can gather not just to participate in different activities, but to network and get to know other activists from the world,'* (WNZ Programme Committee member, Mexico); *'[The WNZ] is a safe space for women to meet other women, to participate in ongoing discussions and network,'* (WNZ Steering Committee member, Germany). By reducing the sense of isolation, women are not only empowered to fulfil their own potential, but contribute to fulfilling each others' potential as well, and expand and deepen their own potential as activists and advocates. *'We need this space for dialogue, problem identification and solving,'* (WNZ Visitor, anon); *'The WNZ are a special place on the conference and the Global Village where women from all ages and all countries have a safe space for networking, discuss, engage and feel renovated and re-committed with the response to HIV,'* (WNZ Programme Committee member, Mexico); *'I think the WNZ should be at every single conference – it's a place you can come and network – it's a place you can come and be empowered come and network meet new people and there's places for everyone – make sure it's at 2012!'* (WNZ Visitor, UK). Another element of this is the element of cross-regional and cross-sectoral exchange and fertilisation that the WNZ offers by deliberately seeking to include representation from a variety of regions, sectors and levels of organising – from grassroots activism to national and international policy making. *'We consider WNZ to be a very important component of the global village's activity and a unique platform for communication and exchange of experience between representatives from different countries or professional sphere, who have various backgrounds,'* (WNZ Presenter, Ukraine).

Networking was actively encouraged and facilitated by the WNZ through: the WNZ partnership; the programme content with a significant seam of sessions on networks and networking (see section iv above); 'internal' collaborations, such as with the Young Women's Networking Zone, the Twinning Project, and the World Pulse Media Lab; and collaborations that went beyond the physical boundaries of the Zone itself, such as with the Women ARISE coalition and the Human Rights Networking Zone. *'The WNZ provided a beautiful space for the Twinning Project!'* (WNZ Steering committee member, Germany).

Networking at huge events like the International AIDS Conference can be challenging because of the vast number of people present, the amount of things going on and the formal lay-out of the main conference session halls. The WNZ aims to provide a space that is both stimulating and 'safe;' welcoming and engaging; and that lends itself to building and deepening dialogue. Most of the respondents had made lasting contacts and/or developed thinking around new areas of work or engagement. *'I am now engage[d] in working on lesbians and HIV,'* (WNZ programme Committee member, Mexico); *'I've met a girl from Denmark who I still speak to now, and have met some inspirational women who I hope to stay in contact with,'* (WNZ Volunteer, UK);

*'For me it was a great pleasure to meet the many faces that I only knew from e-mails from the programming group. Yes, and the time spent at the WNZ also gives me a perspective on what and how I want to spend my time in the future. My paid job won't allow immediate changes but I very much have a perspective on where I want to see myself in 5 years!'* (WNZ Steering Committee member, Germany);





*'From interactions with the women's organizations at the International AIDS Conference, leaders in our network have determined that it will be very important to organize good, in-depth dialogues with core leaders in the women's movement to determine how we can best work together to empower all women working at all levels in the AIDS response,' (WNZ presenter, USA).*

*'I am convinced that opportunities to have open face-to-face discussions, especially from affected and infected people (for example in schools and so on) are important, and help to reduce fear and judgement,' (Parliamentarian, Austria)*



The aims and objective of the Women's Networking Zone are not quantifiable in nature, so can never be said to have been wholly met. However, on the basis of the feedback received, and the content of sessions and activities carried out in the Zone, the majority of the aims and objectives articulated in section 2 above were amply met and surpassed. The WNZ is an organic entity which sets itself increasingly ambitious expectations and goals, and with these – as well as integral to the nature of this kind of organizing – come a number of challenges, as outlined in section 4.4. In spite of – or in some instances because of – these challenges, a clear and strong rationale emerges for continuing to build on these efforts to provide space for women's networking at the international conference events.

*"Fund the WNZ and you are funding critical sessions where women's rights are truly aired. This dynamic space is critical to lively debate, ideas sharing, and the blossoming of new ideas to spread round the globe." (WNZ Coordinating Team member, UK)*

*'Keep this space – there's nothing else like it here!' (WNZ Visitor, anon)*



The Women's Networking Zone is coordinated by the ATHENA Network.  
*Celebrating 10 years of parallel women's fora.*