Combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the neighbouring countries, 2006-2009

2006/2232(INI) - 15/12/2005 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: the presentation of an EU strategy on combating HIV/AIDS both within the Community and in neighbouring countries (2006-2009).

CONTENT: this Communication sets out the EU's main line of action in combating HIV/AIDS covering the period 2006-2009. The Communication is centred along six main axes: Involving civil society; Surveillance, Prevention of new HIV infections; Counselling, testing, treatment, care and support; Research; and the Neighbourhood countries. With rising numbers of HIV/AIDS cases the Commission emphasises the importance of prevention, which as it points out, is the cornerstone for all other activities. Without the vigorous promotion of primary prevention measures, such as education and the use of condoms, any other target set will be much harder to achieve. As there is no vaccine or cure, prevention remains one of the top priorities in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

1. Involvement of Civil Society

The aim of this priority will be to strengthen the involvement of civil society in all aspects relating to policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The Commission invites regional and national authorities to facilitate the sustainability of the non-governmental and community-based organisations. Similarly, the Commission invites European businesses via UNICE to strengthen their response to the epidemic and to play their role in implementing this strategy.

2. Surveillance

The aim of this priority is:

- to improve and harmonise surveillance systems which track and monitor the epidemic, risk behaviour and groups vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

- to monitor the incidence and prevalence of other sexually transmitted infections such as hepatitis C, hepatitis B and to monitor diseases associated with HIV/AIDS such as tuberculosis. Particular attention will be given to high risk and vulnerable groups.

- to support the surveillance of HIV testing.

To realise these aims the Commission will collaborate closely with the ECDC, with the Member States and with the EU's neighbouring countries. More specifically the Commission, will help complete the geographic coverage of HIV case reporting; it will reassess the objectives of AIDS surveillance; it will design a standardised approach on prevention indicators; it will develop estimates of HIV incidence in Europe; it will help set-up sentinel surveillance in high-risk groups and lastly it will seek practical solutions to current obstacles associated with confidentiality.

3. Prevention of new HIV infections

The aim of this priority is:

- to implement population-wide targeted HIV prevention measures;

- to ensure that all citizens have access to information, education and services;

- to improve access to prevention, drug dependence treatment and harm reduction services for injecting drug users;

- to address the specific needs and requirement of migrant population in terms of offering them support to information, prevention methods, treatment, care and support.

In order to help increase preventative measures the Commission proposes a number of actions. These include, inter alia, the implementation of comprehensive prevention programmes and their expansion; supporting innovate strategies promoting safe sex and preparing a situation report on mother-to-child transmission in Europe. In addition the Commission promises to develop tailor-made curricula for health care personnel and other professionals dealing with HIV/AIDS patients. Lastly, the Commission will help implement a skills-based approach which promotes youth behaviour change in schools and other youth settings.

4. Voluntary counselling and testing, treatment, care and support

The aim of this priority is:

- to combat stigma and discrimination;

- to support universal access to effective, affordable and equitable treatment and care, including safe antiretroviral treatment;

- to promote social and labour market integration for those living with HIV/AIDS.

The Commission will support Member States in building up their capacities and will provide them with a toolkit of possible models for comprehensive HIV/AIDS services. This toolkit will also be offered to European Neighbourhood Policy partners. The Commission will ensure the availability of affordable ARVs to the Member States.

5. HIV/AIDS Research

The aim of this priority is:

- to increase commitments to research and development for vaccines and microbicides;

- to invest in the development of affordable and easier to use therapeutics and diagnostics;

- to support research driven by public health needs;

- to support private sector involvement and participation;

- to support research into behavioural and preventative methods.

The Commission proposes to implement this action through the EU's 7^{th} Research Programme, where an increase in HIV/AIDS research funds is being supported by the Commission. Research centres on three main pillars, namely biotechnology; translational research and the delivery of health care to European citizens.

6. Neighbourhood

Geographically, “Neighbourhood” covers the following countries: the Russian Federation; Algeria. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine. Under this heading, the Commission will continue dialogue at a political level in a bid to develop collaboration between the different authorities responsible for tackling HIV/AIDS. In addition, the Commission will sponsor ENP partners’ activities within the HIV/AIDS think tanks and within the Civil Society Forum.

To conclude, the Commission together with other organisations involved in HIV/AIDS prevention such as UNAIDS and the WHO will develop a set of appropriate core indicators for monitoring the development of this disease.