

Brussels, 26 October 2009

## **A strategy for combating HIV/AIDS in the EU and neighbouring countries 2009-2013**

*Today, the Commission has renewed its efforts to fight HIV/AIDS in the EU and neighbouring countries by adopting a strategy for the period 2009-2013. Effective HIV treatment exists but there is still no cure or vaccine against AIDS. The number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the EU and neighbouring countries has increased from 1.5 million in 2001 to 2.2 million in 2007. Approximately 730,000 of these people live in the EU. With 50 000 newly diagnosed HIV cases in the EU and the neighbouring countries alone in 2007, there is no time for complacency. Disparities exist between the numbers of HIV cases and the different modes of transmission across Europe. The strategy tackles these differences by concentrating on 3 key areas: HIV prevention and HIV testing, priority groups most at risk of HIV and priority regions. The strategy is accompanied by an action plan which illustrates concrete steps, target groups and evaluation tools that can be used to measure progress.*

EU Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou said "We need to continue the political momentum in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We need to encourage people to take responsibility for themselves and their partners by talking about and practicing safe sex and going for HIV testing. However, this needs to go hand in hand with the respect for the human rights and non discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS. We have treatment options today that can delay the outbreak of AIDS for many years".

### **Objectives**

The overall objectives of this Strategy are: (i) to reduce new HIV infections across all European countries by 2013, (ii) to improve access to prevention, treatment, care and support and (iii) to improve the quality of life of people living with, affected by or most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS in the European Union and neighbouring countries.

The strategy calls on all key actors including national authorities and NGOs to work on:

- improving information for all, especially targeting young people who have missed the successful HIV communication campaigns in the past
- addressing migrants from countries with a high prevalence of HIV to make them knowledgeable on preventing transmission, HIV testing and treatment options
- improving policies targeting, in particular, the populations most at risk, emphasising human rights, and addressing discrimination and stigma associated to HIV/AIDS

## **Priority regions**

HIV infections are particularly high in the neighbouring countries of the Union. Exchange of good practices on prevention, testing, treatment and care between countries is important. This is especially beneficial in times of budget constraints. The cooperation and **know how transfer** of doctors, nurses and public health experts as well as the **sharing of quality data** will help colleagues in neighbouring countries to improve evidence based prevention, state of the art testing and treatment services, and to improve surveillance. Such joint efforts will reduce new infections and improve the life of people living with HIV/AIDS and underline the value of good cooperation between neighbours.

## **Priority groups: most at risk populations**

The strategy reiterates the fact that the biggest impact on the epidemic can be achieved when the situation of the most at risk populations is efficiently addressed. The major at risk populations in Europe are men having sex with men, accounting for about 40% of all new infections in the EU, migrants from high prevalence areas, and injecting drug users, with a share of up to 70% of all new infections in EU neighbouring countries. Tailor-made approaches to reach these groups are essential towards containing the epidemic in Europe.

## **Early testing and timely access to treatment save lives**

Of particular concern is the high number of persons who are not aware of their infection. About 30% of people in the EU and up to 70% of people in several neighbouring countries do not know their HIV status. This presents a serious concern for policy makers. Late diagnosis usually leads to late treatment and hence to a reduced life expectancy, a lower quality of life and to an increased danger of transmitting the virus to partners.

## **Background**

The European Commission is involved in the fight against AIDS at European and Global levels. The first strategy on combating HIV/AIDS in the EU and neighbouring countries, adopted in 2005 laid the foundations for today's updated strategy. A number of key achievements relate to a stronger political commitment, involvement of civil society at European level, the operational centralisation of HIV/AIDS surveillance by the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC), efforts to facilitate access to affordable antiretroviral medicines, funding of prevention projects and programmes, investments in research, and a close cooperation between partners.

## **More information:**

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_threats/com/aids/aids\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/com/aids/aids_en.htm)

[http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/health\\_problems/hiv-aids/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/health_problems/hiv-aids/index_en.htm)

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