

HIV Policy

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We are glad that HIV/AIDS as public health issue remains high up on the political agenda and that the new communication demonstrates a very positive sign of continuity. It was mentioned in the past many times by the Commissioners for health that there's no room for complacency and that we all need to stay active and engaged in combating HIV/AIDS across Europe and beyond.

The current Commission communication focused very much on promoting prevention as a most important cor-

nerstone of any comprehensive HIV policy. Political leadership, partnership and the involvement of civil society were identified as additional essential elements that need realisation if one really intends to turn down the epidemics. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has changed its face and its speed across Europe over the last couple of years. The epidemic has shown its social dimension and it has become more and more evident that a co-operation across politics and societies is indispensable for a meaningful response.

Several of these elements are under discussion for the design of the next strategy on combating HIV/AIDS in the EU and the neighbourhood. Prevention remains the key priority and we have to promote better that successful prevention strategies need resources but that effective prevention strategies are always cost-effective and finally save resources and lives. A second key priority will be a focus on priority groups, and a third priority is the focus on those geographical areas where HIV/AIDS pose the biggest burden now and potentially over the next five years. This of course does implement that the policy will keep its general aspects and addresses basically all aspects that comprise a meaningful response.

It is without doubt, that only a strong cooperation helps to bring down the numbers of new HIV infections over the next years, helps to improve the lives of PLWHA and helps to overcome different expressions of stigma and discrimination that particularly people belonging to most at risk groups face. Another important aspect for a future development towards the better is that the knowledge and awareness around HIV/AIDS needs urgently improvement across all layers of society and in particular among young people.

It sounds simple, but it seems to be a long way to go forward. Surveillance needs to be strengthened to deliver even more meaningful data that serve as basis for policy development and implementation. The right investment of scarce resource needs more attention and solidarity needs to be strengthened among all societal groups, politics and industry. All need to deliver in order to reverse the trend and the speed of the epidemic.

We have always seen the Portuguese HIV/AIDS policy as exemplarily. It shows that determination and cooperation among stakeholders leads to results and admirable achievements, of course without creating "un monde parfait". But organising a meaningful and effective response is very much linked to the determination of many people, including the national coordinators, civil society, politics and all citizens that care.