

TIME TO ACT:
**DELIVERING
ON EUROPE'S
COMMITMENT
TO SDG 3.3**

- AN EU ACTION PLAN ON
HIV/AIDS IS URGENT

17 December 2024 08:00 - 09:30

European Parliament, Strasbourg, Building WEISS S0.3

Enhancing long-term health
and wellbeing among
people living with HIV

Co-hosted by:



**MEP Vytenis
Andriukaitis**

PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE OF
SOCIALISTS AND DEMOCRATS,
LITHUANIA



MEP Tomislav Sokol
EUROPEAN PEOPLE'S PARTY, CROATIA

Organised in collaboration with:



Steering group:



Summary Report

“Time to Act: Delivering on Europe’s Commitment to SDG 3.3 – An EU Action Plan on HIV/AIDS is Urgent?”

17 December 2024, European Parliament, Strasbourg

On 17th of December 2024, Members of European Parliament (MEPs) **Vytenis Andriukaitis** (*S&D, Lithuania*) and **Tomislav Sokol** (*EPP, Croatia*), HIV Outcomes Champions, co-hosted a breakfast discussion on the urgent need for an EU-wide Action Plan on HIV, held in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The event was organised in collaboration with HIV Outcomes, the European AIDS Clinical Society (EACS), and UNITE Parliamentarians Network for Global Health.

Objectives of the event

- Advocate for the prioritisation of HIV-related issues in the new European Parliament and Commission and calling for an EU Action Plan on HIV/AIDS.

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- Raise MEPs' understanding on HIV-related topics and encourage them to bring HIV to the Parliament's public health agenda.
- Address the complex needs of people living with HIV, including comorbidities, stigma and discrimination, mental health, and promote healthy ageing.

The discussion followed HIV Outcomes' Call to Action for an EU Action Plan on HIV/AIDS, which urges the EU to deliver on its commitment to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 3.3 to the end the AIDS epidemic by 2030. Participants highlighted the paramount importance of adopting such an Action Plan and called for concrete actions, summarised below.

1. Funding and policy challenges

Funding remains a major challenge, with speakers highlighting the need for increased financial investment in healthcare, including HIV initiatives. The reduction of the EU's health programme budget (EU4Health) by 20% since 2019 was a significant concern. As **MEP Vytenis Andriukaitis** and **MEP Tomislav Sokol** noted, budget allocations are a direct reflection of political priorities. Funding must be restored and enhanced to address gaps in HIV care. Joint Actions, such as collaborative funding initiatives between EU Member States aimed at addressing common challenges, were also identified as a cost-effective tool that require revitalisation and support. **MEP Krzysztof Śmiszek** (S&D, Poland) stressed that funding should reflect the importance of human rights in healthcare and inspire changes at the national level.

“The EU has an opportunity to demonstrate the power of collective, evidence-based action in ending the (HIV) epidemic, and it should seize the moment provided by the SDGs deadline.”

MEP András Kulja
(EPP, Hungary), in a written statement

2. Collaboration as a strength

Caroline Sabin (HIV Outcomes Co-chair) recognised that collaboration among stakeholders —academia, policymakers, civil society, and healthcare providers— is a cornerstone for HIV progress in Europe. Several speakers noted the significant achievements realised through collective efforts despite limited budgets. **Nikos Dedes** (HIV Outcomes Member) emphasised the need to reintroduce initiatives such as the former EU Think Tank on HIV to foster cooperation among EU Member States, while strengthening these mechanisms with additional funding and political commitment. **MEP Krzysztof Śmiszek** added that collaboration should inspire national parliaments to engage in HIV-related legislative efforts. Networks involving civil society and parliamentarians can help prioritise the HIV agenda and push for innovative treatments and policies. On this, **Mafalda Infante** (UNITE Network, Head of Parliamentary Engagement) announced the relaunch of the

Informal Working Group on HIV in the European Parliament, aiming to unite science, healthcare, communities, and policymakers across Europe to combat stigma and drive progress.

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3. Standardisation of HIV care across Europe and comorbidities management

The lack of standardised HIV care practices across Europe was identified as a significant barrier. **Mitosz Parczewski** (*EACS President*) emphasised the disparities in access to care, especially among undocumented migrants and mobile populations. Recent geopolitical instability, such as war, further highlights the urgency of addressing demographic and healthcare shifts within EU populations.

The need for unified protocols and better integration of comorbidities, including mental health support, into HIV care was underscored. Particularly, **Christoph Boesecke** (*EACS Treasurer*) emphasised that over 50% of people living with HIV attending his clinic have at least one comorbidity. While medical advancements have enabled people living with HIV to live longer and healthier lives, ageing with HIV presents complex healthcare needs that many clinics across Europe are ill-equipped or, in some cases, reluctant to address. This reluctance often arises from insufficient training and education, compounded by persistent stigma and misconceptions about HIV. To address these challenges, EACS has developed a Standards of Care project, a valuable resource that should be considered in an EU Action Plan on HIV/AIDS.

4. Addressing discrimination and stigma

The persistence of stigma and discrimination faced by people living with HIV was a recurring theme. **MEP Tilly Metz** (*Greens/EFA, Luxembourg*) highlighted that 1/3 of Europeans living with HIV experience discrimination, deterring individuals from seeking necessary care. This requires a multi-pronged approach, including:

- Creating a legal framework to protect individuals from discrimination.
- Revising national laws to eliminate HIV-related biases.
- Training healthcare professionals to reduce stigma in medical settings.
- Promoting awareness campaigns on “Undetectable = Untransmittable” to improve understanding of HIV transmission and reducing stigma and discrimination.

5. Human rights and intersectionality

MEP Marc Angel (*S&D, Luxembourg*) joined other participants in stressing the human rights dimension of HIV care, advocating for stronger alignment with EU values of equality and social justice. Joining The Global Partnership for Action to Eliminate all Forms of HIV-related Stigma and Discrimination was proposed as a vital step for EU countries. **Mario Cascio** (*HIV Outcomes*) noted how overlapping stigmas exacerbate the challenges faced by individuals, calling for a more inclusive and human-rights-oriented approach. These phenomena contribute significantly to Europe’s ongoing struggle to address late HIV diagnoses. Over the past decade, the percentage of people diagnosed late has remained persistently high (50%), with little progress in reducing this figure.

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6. Data collection and privacy protections

The collection and protection of data for people living with HIV was a key topic among speakers, especially in the context of healthcare system digitalisation. Participants emphasised the importance of an opt-out system in the upcoming European Health Data Space (EHDS) legislation, allowing individuals to decline sharing their health data.

Trust, transparency, and strong safety measures were highlighted as essential for safeguarding privacy, anonymity, and individuals' control over their health data, helping to prevent stigma and discrimination. These systems have the potential to enhance the availability of reliable data, support the monitoring of individuals' health-related quality of life, and improve health interventions.

“The EHDS addresses HIV data gaps with anonymized, aggregated data and enhances patient control over privacy to reduce stigma.

MEP Tomislav Sokol
(EPP, Croatia), Rapporteur on the EHDS

Conclusion

Discussions underscored the need for a comprehensive, collaborative, and well-funded approach to tackle the ongoing challenges of HIV care and policies in Europe. As published by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), several countries in Europe are off-track and will not achieve the UNAIDS' targets by 2030, unless increased efforts are made



across from prevention to quality of care in the region. However, by prioritising efforts towards HIV/AIDS policies, the EU can lead by example and show that it is possible to reach targets. Multiple EU stakeholders have already voiced the need for prioritisation, including the Romanian, Polish and Spanish delegations, which presented a Call to Action at the EU and national levels at the EPSCO Health Ministers Council meeting on 21 June 2024.

By allocating appropriate funding, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, addressing discrimination, standardising HIV care across Europe, and implementing robust data collection systems, the EU can continue to lead global efforts in improving the health-related quality of life for people living with HIV. These actions, combined with sustained advocacy and political will, are essential to achieving long-term progress and meeting the UN SDG goal of eliminating HIV/AIDS by 2030.

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