

Executive Summary from the 22nd meeting of the HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum

The HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum (CSF) has been established by the European Commission as a working group to facilitate the participation of NGOs, including those representing people living with HIV and AIDS, in policy development and implementation and in information exchange activities. Below is a short overview of the meeting (Luxembourg, November 23 & 24, 2015). The full meeting report and all presentations are available for download at <http://www.aidsactioneurope.org>.

Roadmap towards a policy framework and action plan

CSF members highlight the recommendations from the evaluation of the Communication on HIV/AIDS to draft a new European Communication on HIV/AIDS in order to ensure that it remains on the policy agenda of the Commission. The Communication has also helped to foster increased civil society involvement in policy discussion at national level. CSF also highlights the need to get EU member states to recommit and update the Dublin Declaration. A new policy framework should address gaps in the EU and cooperation with neighbouring countries in the Eastern part of Europe where the epidemic is raging. Political leadership of the European Commission does make a difference in those situations where counter-productive policies are being discussed. A political document is also a tool to ensure continuity of work in a politically volatile environment. The Commission would thereby also signal the continued importance of addressing HIV and co-infections through evidence and rights based policies and programmes. A mere Commission technical document working as a checklist would not be sufficient. The EC officials stressed that presenting the practical and essential added value of an EC instrument (whatever it may be) it is crucial to convince the Commission leadership to develop a policy document.

Connection between European and national level

There was a consensus across the CSF that we need to strengthen the connection between the policy discussions at European level taking place in the CSF and Think Tank and the realities and work at national level.

Testing

The WHO recommends the provision of testing by trained lay providers as an important strategy to scale up testing and linkage to care. Member States should therefore ensure that the legal and regulatory frameworks enable decentralised and demedicalised testing and counselling by trained community providers. Good practice examples from Portugal, Italy and Finland on Community Based Voluntary Counselling and Testing were presented. The Commission has supported work in that area and there was a discussion around possible further support.

Migrants with irregular status

AIDS Action Europe presented the preliminary results of the HIV Legal Forum. The Forum is monitoring the current status and progress of the situation of undocumented migrants in Europe as regards their access to HIV care.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia – Needs, challenges and strategies to support CSO in EECA countries

The CSF also listened to a presentation on the deterioration of the situation of in the East-Europe and Central Asia region and the position towards the EECA AIDS Conference. Vinay Saldanha from the UNAIDS office in Russia, who joined by teleconference gave UNAIDS perspective on the state of the epidemic in EECA and position of the agency towards the Moscow conference. The CSF understands of standpoint of organisations calling to boycott the EECAAC. However, the CSF also wants to show support to the communities of people living with or affected by HIV in the region, and does not want to abandon these communities. We stand in full support of the Conference, and decided not to actively boycott it, even if some members of the CSF may decide not to participate.

UNGASS on drugs

We are supporting activities to make the UNGASS on Drugs a historic event and do everything we can to improve the life of persons who use drugs. We support a strong EU position on a comprehensive harm reduction package. We will support initiatives as requested.

Access to quality treatment:

The EMCDDA reported on their preliminary results and data on access to DAAs for people who use drugs. There was a presentation of community involvement to ensure access for all at affordable price. The CSF heard a detailed presentation on how Portugal, through cooperation across different stakeholders and the active mobilisation of civil society in the price negotiations, helped to ensure good planning and lower prices in terms of DAAs, based on the strategy that everyone will be treated, including people who use drugs.

