

## WORLD AIDS DAY 1 December 2016, Bratislava

### Statement by the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU

In connection with the forthcoming World AIDS Day, which is marked annually on 1 December, we wish to bring attention to and pledge our support for activities in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Europe, which are an important part of the health policy of European countries, as well as to highlight the opportunity for all of us to express our support for and solidarity with people living with HIV.

HIV/AIDS continues to be a grave issue that concerns the whole of society, affecting states, communities, families and individuals alike. Worldwide, approximately 36.7 million people were living with HIV in 2015, and an estimated 1.9 million more adults become infected each year.

The number of new infections in the European region of the World Health Organization (WHO) is on the rise. After more than three decades of the HIV epidemic in Europe, HIV remains a major problem, especially in the eastern part of the region. Regional investments are not adequately targeted at the key populations that are most affected by the epidemic. Early diagnosis, counselling and treatment play an instrumental part in curbing the spread of HIV infections. Given the growing number of people with HIV/AIDS and the incurability of the disease, it is clear that prevention is the most effective means of combating the spread of HIV/AIDS among the population.

The action plan for the health sector response to HIV in the WHO European Region for 2016-2021, as adopted by the World Health Assembly, sets out a European vision for ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030. It is supported by the UNAIDS strategy for 2016-2021. The vision for the European Region by 2030 is zero new HIV infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero HIV-related discrimination.

The primary goal remains to curb the spread of HIV and to limit the impact of HIV and AIDS in the parts of society that are most affected by it. Preventive measures must be based on the principle of protection of human rights and scientific

knowledge. Prevention, sexual and reproductive health and the rights of people with HIV are important aspects of national policy planning and programmes. Particular attention needs to be paid to key high-risk population groups, sex education, the treatment of drug addiction and communication with people with HIV/AIDS. It is important to ensure adequate treatment and health care, antenatal care and the testing of women during pregnancy and after delivery, and to ensure early diagnosis of infants and immediate treatment for all infants diagnosed with HIV and congenital syphilis. Psychological and social care, the quality of HIV diagnosis, laboratory monitoring of treatment efficiency, and the prevention of gender-based discrimination and sexual violence are also of major significance. Delayed diagnosis of HIV infection for the groups most at risk remains among the greatest obstacles to initiating adequate treatment and contributes to the spread of HIV.

The Slovak Republic currently has the lowest prevalence of HIV in Europe, and we therefore view prevention as one of the most effective ways of curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS. The Slovak Republic, as the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, welcomes and greatly appreciates the initiative of Malta, as the next Presidency in the first half of 2017, in organising a technical meeting on HIV in collaboration with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.