

CoR INTERREGIONAL GROUP ON HEALTH & WELL-BEING

21 NOVEMBER 2024, 13h30-14h30

“Antimicrobial Resistance”

Minutes

13.30 Welcome, introduction by the Chair, Birgitta Sacrédeus.

The session opened with an introduction emphasizing the urgency of addressing antimicrobial resistance (AMR). This phenomenon was described as one of the most pressing global health challenges, with devastating impacts not only on human lives but also on the economy and food security. **Birgitta Sacrédeus** highlighted the importance of coordinated interventions and integrated approaches involving all sectors affected by AMR.

13:35 – 14:00 Antimicrobial Resistance in Europe and globally: setting the scene and multi-stakeholders perspective.

Ariane Vander Stappen, *Head of Unit for Antimicrobial Resistance and Human Nutrition at DG Sante, European Commission*, presented the European Commission’s strategy for combating AMR. She highlighted the importance of the "**One Health**" approach, which integrates human, animal, and environmental health to tackle the interconnected drivers of AMR. Vander Stappen highlighted alarming statistics, including the annual toll of at least 35,000 deaths in the EU and projections of over 200 million deaths globally by 2050 if no action is taken. The economic impact in Europe alone is estimated at €12 billion annually.

The Commission has made significant progress toward its ambitious goals. By 2030, it aims to reduce antimicrobial use in food-producing animals by 50%, a target almost achieved and decrease total antibiotic consumption in humans by 20%. Vander Stappen emphasized the improvements in reducing bloodstream infections and MRSA cases, supported by robust monitoring systems to track antibiotic use and effectiveness.

Laura Cigolot, representing the *European Network for Infection Prevention and Antimicrobial Resistance (ENIPAR)*, presented an insightful perspective on the essential role of infection prevention and antimicrobial stewardship in addressing the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). She began by highlighting that healthcare settings, such as hospitals and long-term care facilities, are key

battlegrounds where the fight against AMR must be waged due to their high density of vulnerable patients and frequent antibiotic use.

Cigolot stressed that education and awareness are fundamental components of any strategy to reduce AMR. Patient engagement was another critical point in her intervention. Cigolot noted that many patients lack basic awareness of how antibiotics work, particularly the fact that they are ineffective against viral infections. She highlighted the role of public health campaigns and patient education in dispelling these misconceptions and encouraging responsible behaviors, such as completing prescribed antibiotic courses and avoiding self-medication.

A significant portion of Cigolot's presentation focused on infection prevention in healthcare facilities. She also discussed the broader systemic challenges in combating AMR. She called for the implementation of antimicrobial stewardship programs across all healthcare levels to monitor and optimize the use of antibiotics.

AMR: The patients perspective and what can be done in partnership with regional and local authorities - Yann Heyer, Policy Officer, European Patients' Forum (EPF).

Yann Heyer, from the *European Patients' Forum*, emphasized the lack of public understanding about the difference between bacterial and viral infections, which often leads to inappropriate antibiotic use and worsens resistance. He called for improved health literacy through campaigns featuring personal stories to make AMR relatable and highlight its serious health consequences.

Heyer advocated for tailored communication to reach diverse audiences, partnerships between patient organizations and local authorities to co-create community-specific solutions, and campaigns driven by local proximity and patient insights. He also addressed AMR's mental, emotional, and social toll on patients and caregivers, emphasizing the need for balanced messaging that encourages responsible antibiotic use without fear.

14:00 – 14:10 Focus on Regional Practices

Isabelle Johansson, *Head of Office at the Region Östergötland EU Office*, shared Sweden's experience, a country renowned for having one of the lowest levels of AMR globally. Sweden's success lies in its long-term commitment to a One Health approach, addressing human, animal, and environmental health in tandem. Johansson detailed the implementation of the Strama program in the Östergötland region, a strategic initiative aimed at managing antibiotic resistance in primary care.

A key innovation of the program is the development of a data-driven "Dashboard" tool, which allows healthcare providers to analyze and compare antibiotic use across primary care centers. This tool facilitates informed discussions among healthcare practitioners, fostering trust and collaboration. Each care center has a designated Strama-responsible physician who uses these data insights to identify issues and propose corrective actions. This approach has proven highly effective, demonstrating the value of transparency and data sharing in achieving sustained improvements.

Johansson also emphasized the importance of collaboration at the regional and national levels, which has enabled the development of shared policies and tools for AMR containment. Sweden's low antibiotic usage in both humans and animals showcases the success of its coordinated, long-term strategy.

14:10 – 14:30 Open Debate and Q&A

The session concluded with a dynamic and interactive debate. Participants discussed the critical need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, involving governments, healthcare professionals, patients, and civil society organizations. They emphasized the importance of public awareness campaigns designed to educate people about the responsible use of antibiotics and the risks associated with AMR. Innovative tools like data visualization and best practices from regions such as Östergötland were highlighted as key strategies for improving surveillance and reducing inappropriate antibiotic use.

There was also a focus on the potential for partnerships between local health authorities and patient organizations to enhance capacity-building programs, share infection prevention expertise, and advocate for robust health initiatives at the EU level. Participants called for co-creation of solutions, recognizing the complexity of AMR and the necessity of addressing it from all angles to mitigate its growing threat effectively.