

# Driving Collaboration in the Fight against Antimicrobial Resistance: Going Further, Aiming Higher

EU Parliament in Bruxelles - 15 November, 11am-12.30pm CET

*“Fighting paradoxes on AMR in the age of Covid-19 from a citizen perspective”*

*Opening remarks*

*Mariano Votta, Director, Active Citizenship Network*

Good morning and welcome also from myself and my organization, very proud not only to support this initiative but first of all to provide a citizen’s perspective on the topic of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).

We are talking about one of the ten most urgent threats for Global Health but totally underestimated among the populations; more impactful than car accidents<sup>1</sup> but not enough prioritized in the EU and National public health policies. Interlinked with Covid-19 pandemic but almost ignored by the media. The world is losing one of the most powerful tools in healthcare, antibiotics, and in the meantime, research is still waiting for EU incentive mechanisms as well as an overall strategy to integrate the development of - and access to - affordable and of quality antimicrobials.

Despite the fight against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) requires policies focused on the immunization and extension of vaccinations, the health expenditure for prevention programmes is the “Cinderella” of the public health budget, and in several countries the National Plan on AMR is still missing or expired.

Patient engagement efforts on increasing awareness on AMR are not accompanied by more widespread initiatives targeted to citizens: how do we behave at the supermarket with regards to foods produced “without any use of antibiotics”?

These are some of the paradoxes on AMR that we still need to address, and justify the commitment of [Active Citizenship Network](#) (ACN), the European branch of the Italian NGO [Cittadinanzattiva](#),

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<sup>1</sup> Road accidents: 20,000 fatalities in Europe in 2021 (IT language). [www.aci.it/archivio-notizie/notizia.html?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=2555&cHash=3ea251c1c72893be884adc50ab8267df#:~:text=Nel%202021%2C%20nell%27Unione%20Europea,Transport%20Safety%20Council%20\(ETSC\)%20.](http://www.aci.it/archivio-notizie/notizia.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=2555&cHash=3ea251c1c72893be884adc50ab8267df#:~:text=Nel%202021%2C%20nell%27Unione%20Europea,Transport%20Safety%20Council%20(ETSC)%20.)

established in 1978 to promote citizens' activism for the protection of rights, the care of common goods, the support for people in conditions of weakness.

Coming from Italy, please let me remember that before the pandemic, the AMR phenomenon caused about 33,000 deaths in Europe each year from infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria<sup>2</sup>: of these, more than 10,000, or one-third of the total, occur in Italy. This is the sad record held by my country, which tops the continental rankings for the number of deaths linked to antimicrobial resistance, according to a report published by the Italian National Health Institute (Istituto Superiore di Sanità) on the occasion of the annual 2019 World Antimicrobial Awareness Week<sup>3</sup>.

Among the causes is certainly an inappropriate use of antibiotics, not only in the human but also in the veterinary field, and still today the epicenter of this drama is the hospital, where a series of incorrect behaviors, such as infrequent hand washing by healthcare workers, also affect it. According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), in 2019 the risk - in Italy - of contracting infections during a hospitalization was about 6%. On an absolute level we are talking about 530 thousand cases each year, data that put Italy in last place among all countries in Europe<sup>4</sup>.

To all this should be added that antibiotic consumption in Italy is higher than the European average (both at the territorial and hospital level, especially in the age groups between 2 and 5 years old, and over 85 years old) and that, above all, in my country antibiotics are inappropriately prescribed in a quarter of cases, according to the 2020 National Report on Antibiotic Use in Italy, edited by the Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Quotidiano Sanità: Antimicrobial resistance, draft Plan expected in 2021. 40 mln euro funding each year. The announcement at Camerae Sanitatis, October 2021 (IT language). [www.quotidianosanita.it/studi-e-analisi/articolo.php?articolo\\_id=99360](http://www.quotidianosanita.it/studi-e-analisi/articolo.php?articolo_id=99360)

<sup>3</sup> Il Fatto Quotidiano: "Antibiotic resistance, ISS: "Italy first among EU countries in number of deaths"", November 2019 (IT language). [www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/11/19/antibiotico-resistenza-iss-italia-prima-tra-i-paesi-dellue-per-numero-di-morti/5571058/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/11/19/antibiotico-resistenza-iss-italia-prima-tra-i-paesi-dellue-per-numero-di-morti/5571058/)

<sup>4</sup> Quotidiano Sanità: Antimicrobial resistance, draft Plan expected in 2021. 40 mln euro funding each year. The announcement at Camerae Sanitatis, October 2021 (IT language). [www.quotidianosanita.it/studi-e-analisi/articolo.php?articolo\\_id=99360](http://www.quotidianosanita.it/studi-e-analisi/articolo.php?articolo_id=99360)

<sup>5</sup> Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA): 2020 National Report on Antibiotic Use in Italy (IT language). [www.aifa.gov.it/documents/20142/1664282/Rapporto\\_Antibiotici\\_2020.pdf](http://www.aifa.gov.it/documents/20142/1664282/Rapporto_Antibiotici_2020.pdf)

In a nutshell, experts warn that by 2050, globally, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) could cause more deaths than cancer<sup>6</sup>, but more importantly, without effective action, AMR will take us back to a pre-antibiotic era when death from infection was much more common: and this is for all of us a first key message not to be overlooked.

It would be enough to become aware of this scenario to recognize its urgency and thus the need for action, also in light of the principles established by the European Charter of Patients' Rights<sup>7</sup>, including:

- the right to compliance with quality standards<sup>8</sup>;
- the right to information<sup>9</sup>;
- above all, the right to safety<sup>10</sup>: *"Everyone has the right to be free from harm resulting from the malfunction of healthcare services, malpractice, and medical errors, and has the right to access healthcare services and treatment that ensure high standards of safety"*. In order to guarantee this right, the Charter claims *"hospitals and health services must continuously monitor risk factors. All healthcare professionals must be fully responsible for the safety. Doctors must be able to prevent the risk of errors through background monitoring and constant education"*.

The year 2025 will mark 10 years since the adoption of the WHO Global Action Plan against AMR<sup>11</sup>, and despite the progress made to date, there is still a need to increase concrete and effective actions to eradicate this phenomenon, which is still too little widespread in the collective consciousness, as already said: it is no coincidence that some experts label it with the name "silent tsunami"<sup>12</sup>, while

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<sup>6</sup> Epicentro Istituto Superiore di Sanità: Epidemiological Aspects, 2021 (IT language). [www.epicentro.iss.it/antibiotico-resistenza/epidemiologia-europa](http://www.epicentro.iss.it/antibiotico-resistenza/epidemiologia-europa)

<sup>7</sup> Active Citizenship Network: European Charter of Patients' Rights. [www.activecitizenship.net/files/patients\\_rights/charter-of-rights/the-charter-in-several-languages/full-text/Italy.pdf](http://www.activecitizenship.net/files/patients_rights/charter-of-rights/the-charter-in-several-languages/full-text/Italy.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> "Everyone has the right to access high-quality healthcare services, based on the establishment and adherence to precise standards. The right to quality healthcare services requires that healthcare facilities and professionals practice satisfactory levels of technical performance". [www.activecitizenship.net/charter-of-rights/rights/121-8-right-to-the-observance-of-quality-standards.html](http://www.activecitizenship.net/charter-of-rights/rights/121-8-right-to-the-observance-of-quality-standards.html)

<sup>9</sup> "Everyone has the right to access all kinds of information concerning both his or her health status and health services and how to use them, as well as all the information that scientific research and technological innovation make available". [www.activecitizenship.net/charter-of-rights/rights/126-3-right-to-information.html](http://www.activecitizenship.net/charter-of-rights/rights/126-3-right-to-information.html)

<sup>10</sup> "Each individual has the right to be free from harm caused by the poor functioning of health services, medical malpractice and errors, and the right of access to health services and treatments that meet high safety standards". [www.activecitizenship.net/charter-of-rights/rights/120-9-right-to-safety.html](http://www.activecitizenship.net/charter-of-rights/rights/120-9-right-to-safety.html)

<sup>11</sup> WHO Global Action Plan against AMR. [www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789241509763](http://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789241509763).

<sup>12</sup> The silent tsunami: stemming the tide of AMR in the Covid-era. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ak8RzFFNCE&ab\\_channel=PublicPolicyProjects](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ak8RzFFNCE&ab_channel=PublicPolicyProjects)

others speak of a "neglected pandemic"<sup>13</sup>, and also this is another key message that should not be overlooked, and a more than valid reason to be daily engaged in the fights against AMR, and not only during the starting World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW) promoted by World Health Organisation<sup>14</sup>.

Against this background:

1. at the national level in Italy, we joined the "AMR multidisciplinary Task Force" promoted by Farindustria (involving representatives of the academic world & scientific societies, civic & patients associations, pharmaceutical industry), to provide - in occasion of the drafting the new National Plan to fight AMR - recommendations focused on the following three pillars: the role of vaccine prevention as a tool to combat antimicrobial resistance; the value, access and innovation of new antibiotics against bacterial resistance; the appropriateness of use of antibiotics.
2. At the European level, as official member of the HERA Civil Society Forum, the expert group of the HERA Advisory Forum, we have encouraged and obtained by the new born European Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) to prioritize the topic on AMR in its 2023 Annual Workplan that will be officially announced next month. And I am glad to anticipate that about antimicrobial resistance (AMR), HERA will further work on the priority list of resistant pathogens and a pipeline analysis for AMR medical countermeasures. Working closely with Member States, HERA will aim to improve the continuity of supply by stockpiling and early identification of demand surges or supply issues. HERA will work on establishing an EU strategy tailored to this need and incentivising the development and availability of countermeasures, both at regional and international levels, in line with the initiatives on AMR under the Pharmaceutical strategy for Europe. Funding will also be available through Horizon Europe to develop improved medical countermeasures<sup>15</sup>.
3. At the international level, together with the International Alliance of Patients' Organizations (IAPO) we are committed to the "[AMR Patient Alliance](#)", a global advocacy initiative of more

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<sup>13</sup> Infezioni Obiettivo Zero: "The neglected pandemic of antimicrobial resistance", February 2022 (IT language). [www.infezioniobiettivozero.info/10-antibiotico-resistenza/139-pandemia-trascurata-antimicrobico-resistenza-ars-2022](http://www.infezioniobiettivozero.info/10-antibiotico-resistenza/139-pandemia-trascurata-antimicrobico-resistenza-ars-2022)

<sup>14</sup> World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW) runs in 2022 from 18 to November 24<sup>th</sup>. [www.who.int/campaigns/world-antimicrobial-awareness-week/2022](http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-antimicrobial-awareness-week/2022)

<sup>15</sup> To be officially announced next December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

than 50 PAGs from 22 Countries that aims to cooperate on patient empowerment, health literacy and citizen engagement for preserving the effectiveness of antibiotics.

Appropriate antibiotic use is everybody's business, if we want to preserve the antibiotics and other antimicrobials effective for as many patients as possible, for as long as possible.

All we are aware that "One Health Approach" is planned, as well as multi-stakeholder actions are required and the collaboration is a key, as highlighted in the title of the today's initiative.

According to me, to go further aiming higher, we need to involve as much as possible the number of the intermediate bodies of the society, as well as to recognize - in support of initiatives, both institutional and non-institutional, to counter AMR - the active role of PAGs & citizen organization dealing with health as our main common good to be safeguarded.

We are in the right place at the right time to start a multistakeholder dialogue on this important topic and look forward to this discussion.