European One Health action plan against antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

2017/2254(INI) - 12/07/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted an own-initiative report by Karin KADENBACH (S&D, AT) on a European One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).

Members noted that the excessive and incorrect use of antibiotics and poor infection control practices in both human and veterinary medicine have progressively rendered antimicrobial resistance (AMR) a massive threat to human and animal health. The misuse of antibiotics is eroding their efficacy. In terms of human health, 50 % of antibiotic prescriptions written for humans are ineffective.

Stressing that the correct and prudent use of antimicrobials is essential to limiting the emergence of AMR, the committee made the following key observations and recommendations:

The EU as a best-practice region: Members stressed that the One Health principle must play a central role in tackling AMR, reflecting the fact that the health of people and animals and the environment are interconnected. They called for measurable and binding AMR objectives with ambitious targets, both in the European One Health Action Plan and in national action plans, to enable benchmarking. They also called on the Commission to publish a mid-term evaluation and ex-post evaluation of the One Health Action Plan.

Some of the many antimicrobials used in both humans and animals are critical for preventing or treating life-threatening infections in humans, and Members considered that the use of these antimicrobials on animals should tbe banned. These antimicrobials should be reserved for the treatment of humans alone in order to preserve their efficacy. The Commission should specify which antibiotics are to be reserved for the treatment of certain infections in humans. In addition, Members called for the promotion of public health messages regarding the responsible use of antibiotics, particularly prophylactic use.

In terms of animal health, the report noted that high-density farming may involve antibiotics being improperly fed to livestock on farms to promote faster growth, and that they are also widely used for prophylactic purposes. It called for the phasing out of the routine prophylactic and metaphylactic use (i.e. treating a group of animals when only one shows signs of infection) of antimicrobials in groups of farm animals and called for the use of last-resort antibiotics to be banned altogether in food-producing animals. Instead, Members stressed the importance of good animal husbandry, hygiene practices, farm management and investments in these areas The Commission was urged to present a new EU strategy on animal welfare.

With regard to prophylactic use in humans, the committee called on Member States to review all existing protocols, especially for prophylactic use during surgery. It cited the examples of good practice, such as the PIRASOA programme, and encouraged the development of mechanisms through which to share best practices and protocols.

Boosting research: Members felt that, in order to encourage research into new antimicrobials, incentives are needed, including longer periods of protection for technical documentation on new medicines, commercial protection of innovative active substances, and protection for significant investments in data generated to improve an existing antimicrobial product or to keep it on the market. They called on the Commission to analyse current R&D incentive models, including the transferable market exclusivity model, with a view to designing new ones and defining the regulatory pathway. Members also called for:

- the launch a public platform for publicly funded R&D projects in AMR and for the coordination of all R&D actions;
- a fast-track procedure whereby the use antimicrobials approved for industrial or agricultural purposes but suspected of having a severe negative impact on AMR may be temporarily prohibited until further studies have been carried out;
- the development of non-antibiotic alternatives for animal health, including growth promoters, and in the development of new molecules for the development of new antibiotics.

Shaping the global agenda: the committee asked for a clear commitment on the part of the EU and the Member States to launching a crosscutting global strategy to combat AMR, covering policy areas such as international trade, development and agriculture. It noted that the use of antibiotics as growth promoters in food-producing animals has been banned in the EU since 2006, but that in countries outside the EU antibiotics can still be used in animal feed as growth promoters. It called on the Commission to include a clause in all free trade agreements stipulating that food imported from third countries must not have been produced using antibiotics as growth promoters, with a view to ensuring a level playing field for EU livestock farming and aquaculture and in order to mitigate AMR.

Lastly, the report called on the Commission to implement collaborative research programmes with third countries to reduce the overuse of antibiotics.