



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 30 May 2016
(OR. en)

9593/16

SAN 228

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council**
meeting on 17 June 2016
Commission support to Member States' response to Zika
– *Information from the Commission*
(Any Other Business item)

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Commission on the above mentioned subject.

Commission support to Member States' response to Zika

The Zika virus outbreak in the Americas infected several hundred thousands of people leading to severe health effects on pregnant women and new-born babies. On 1 February 2016 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared microcephaly cases and other neurological disorders associated with the Zika virus a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' under the International Health Regulations, triggering obligations related to surveillance and to information, e.g. to travellers to affected areas.

The Zika virus is transmitted by mosquitos which are present in several southern European countries. So far, only imported cases or cases through sexual transmission were reported in the EU. It is uncertain how the epidemic will develop in the EU over the summer season and it is important to remain vigilant and be prepared.

The World Bank estimated that Zika will have an economic impact on Latin American countries of USD 3.5 billion in 2016 (approximately EUR 3 billion), and countries dependent on tourism could have losses of up to 1% of GDP.

The European Union has joined WHO and the international community in a coordinated response effort aiming to support countries dealing with the disease. Such support includes reinforced research regular risk assessments and risk management measures, such as the control of the mosquito transmitting the virus, as well as information to travellers and to healthcare providers. Member States are mobilising their forces to prevent the extension of the Zika epidemics. Should additional needs arise, the Commission will mobilise its forces accordingly.

The Commission provides its support specifically through:

- coordinating public health measures through the Health Security Committee, in line with the EU Decision on serious cross border threats;
- supporting internationally coordinated research on knowledge gaps regarding Zika virus infections, diagnostics, treatments and vaccination;
- supporting the surveillance of Zika related microcephaly in Europe;
- contributing to the international coordination of the Zika response by WHO with the possibility to launch crisis response measures.

The Commission also coordinates the work of the European Agencies. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is in charge of surveillance and provides risk assessments with options for precautionary measures, including: information to travellers; safety of substances of human origin; vector control strategies; laboratory capacities for diagnosis; improvement of surveillance mechanisms.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has established a task force of European experts to advise on scientific and regulatory matters for the research and development of medicines or vaccines against the Zika infection and is reaching out to companies planning to work on investigational vaccines.

Since there is no vaccine and no treatment against the Zika virus available, the following aspects appear crucial in controlling the spread of Zika in the EU:

- 1. Minimise the risk of autonomous transmission of Zika virus in the EU¹ through vector control measures:** *Based on ECDC monitoring of the spread of the relevant mosquitos in Europe, the Commission will support Member States in mosquito control measures by sharing good practice and raising awareness among relevant sectors such as the health professions, transport and tourism at EU level.*

¹ Autochthonous transmission of Zika virus was recorded in certain Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) or Outermost Regions (OMR) from the Caribbean and Polynesia.

2. **Information to the public and to medical professionals:** *The Commission will continue to help ensure that risk communication is coherent across the EU and will continue to coordinate with Member States through the Health Security Committee.*
3. **Reinforced research and knowledge about the Zika virus:** *The Commission has mobilised EU research budget into relevant aspects of Zika related research and coordinates EU efforts with the international research community.*
4. **Ensure the virus is not spread through blood or other substances of human origin**
This includes a deferral of donors of blood, tissues, cells or organs who present risk factors (e.g. travel to affected areas), and cooperation with Member States on the safety of blood, tissues, cells and organs along the established legal framework.

On a global level, the Commission and the EU Member States support the health systems of third countries through development cooperation. The Commission is reviewing its on-going programmes in the affected regions to assess the need for additional support. Cooperation with the WHO and other international agencies will be pursued and crisis response mechanisms such as the European Medical Corps will be deployed if needed.

In conclusion, the development of the situation in the EU is difficult to predict and needs a close and continuous follow-up in a fully co-ordinated manner. The Commission will continue to monitor the epidemiological situation, and is ready to develop, in cooperation with Member States, adequate measures to control to the extent possible the spread of the mosquitoes and the Zika virus in Europe.