

## News Analysis: Doctors, agriculture blamed for high level of antibiotic resistance in Italy

ROME, Nov. 25 (Xinhua) -- Italy's mortality rate from resistance to antibiotics is by far much higher than the EU average level. Analysts said it will take wide-ranging reforms to bring it back to within the continent's norms.

According to Italy's High Institute for Health (Istituto superiore di sanità, ISS), the country suffered more than 10,000 deaths last year due to infections by antibiotic-resistant bacteria, nearly a third of the total of 33,000 in Europe as a whole.

That means that nearly one-third of the continent's deaths from antibiotic-resistant bacteria take place in a country with around one-ninth of Europe's population.

The death totals for Europe as a whole or for Italy are not exact since they are based on probabilities determined during the autopsy process, analysts told Xinhua.

"Resistance to antibiotics isn't a problem only in Italy; it's a global problem," Gianni Sava, a pharmaceutical sciences professor at the University of Trieste who specializes in issues related to antibiotics, said in an interview. "But in Italy, the problem is particularly serious by the standards of industrialized countries."

Sava said there are multiple reasons for the high level of antibiotic resistance in Italy, including the excess use of antibiotics in some parts of the country, as well as the improper disposal of antibiotics and their use in agriculture -- both of which can have them enter into the food and water supply.

Over time, problematic bacteria can evolve to become immune to the effects of antibiotics, and that process is sped up when people are overexposed to antibiotics.

The problem in Italy is serious enough that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris earlier this month called on Italy to take urgent action to combat the "excessive and inappropriate prescription of antibiotics."

"There is a need to implement policies to combat the spread of antimicrobial resistance," the OECD's statement said.

In its statement, the organization noted that in Italy in 2017 doctors prescribed 28 full doses of antibiotics for every 1,000 people. That compares to an average of 18 full doses per 1,000 people across the residents of the OECD's 36 member states.

There is a reason for optimism, however, according to Annalisa Pantosi, director of the antibiotic resistance unit at the High Institute for Health.

Pantosi told Xinhua that after years of taking little action against the problem of resistance to

antibiotics in Italy that the government created a National Action Plan in 2017.

"It's starting to make a difference," Pantosi said. "We see a decrease in deaths from antibiotic resistance between 2017 and 2018, and there will probably be another decrease between 2018 and 2019. But this is not a problem that is resolved between one year and the next."

Pantosi said the strategy to reduce the number of deaths attributable to resistance to antibiotics is to educate practitioners.

"I don't think we have many cases of misuse of antibiotics in hospitals, but in other areas, including doctor prescriptions, there is room for improvement," Pantosi added.