

Fighting TB post-Brexit

Help ensure that funding to fight TB remains in via UK collaboration with the EU.

TB is the world's biggest infectious killer disease, taking the lives of 1.5 million people in 2018. It is preventable and curable; however, we will not be able to end the epidemic without new treatments, vaccines and diagnostics. This means that significant scientific research and development (R&D) is needed to ensure that health systems can tackle diseases such as TB into the future. Globally, funding for R&D into diseases of poverty such as TB, HIV and malaria are at the highest levels ever, providing funding and research programmes that play a huge part in combating public health threats around the world.

Up until now, the UK has been a major contributor to and beneficiary of vital European Union (EU) research and development funding programmes. By pooling funding in this way, more money has been mobilised and research projects are better coordinated than ever before. But now, new EU arrangements for funding R&D for global public health are being renegotiated by Member States. Following Brexit, it is not clear how or whether the UK will remain involved in EU-led global health R&D programmes. With negotiations over trade deals taking centre stage in politics, it's vital that funding arrangements for global health R&D are not forgotten in the coming months. World TB Day (24 March) is a good moment to let the UK Government know that there is strong public support for its world-leading R&D efforts to continue via a renewed commitment to EU-led research funding mechanisms.

The fight against TB

TB is the world's leading cause of death from an infectious disease. [In 2018](#), over 10 million people fell ill with TB and 1.5 million people died from the disease. The most vulnerable and marginalised are at greatest risk of TB. Even when people can get medication, the long treatment and social stigma associated with TB have huge impact on individuals and their families. And Rising drug-resistance poses a threat right around the world, with multidrug-resistant TB set to cost an estimated US \$16.7 trillion by 2050.

The Sustainable Development Goals commit us to [ending AIDS, TB and malaria by 2030](#). But progress has been insufficient, and the diseases continue to kill millions of people and limit the life chances of the most vulnerable people. The fight against TB has been particularly neglected. However, the first ever [UN High-Level Meeting on TB](#) ('HLM') in September 2018 saw world leaders committing themselves to taking action.

Research and development for global health

Poverty-related and neglected diseases ('PRNDs') such as HIV and AIDS, TB and malaria, and a range of neglected tropical diseases affect more than a billion people worldwide. They impose an unacceptable burden on individuals and societies, costing lives, and hampering human and economic development. Yet

tools to prevent, diagnose, treat and cure these conditions are lacking due to chronic underfunding of research and development (R&D). Investments in discovering new ways to fight these diseases are crucial in order to create a 'pipeline' of potential new treatments and diagnostics to test in clinical trials, with some eventually entering into medical use.

Resourcing for global health R&D is at its [highest level ever](#), but there are still big funding gaps, with research into TB being particularly under-funded. The current tools to prevent, diagnose and treat TB are not effective enough, so that people with TB are often not properly diagnosed or are unable to complete their treatment. For drug-resistant TB, the outdated drugs currently available have a wide range of side-effects and are only effective in about 50% of cases. Unless new, more effective and accessible tools become available by 2025, the target to end TB by 2030 [cannot be reached](#).

European Union funding for global health R&D

Investing in R&D into diseases of poverty saves lives, combats epidemics, and prevents future outbreaks. European Union (EU) funding programmes have played a major part in global efforts to deliver new treatments, accelerate vaccine research, strengthen health systems and fund a new generation of global health researchers. For example, they have developed potential new Ebola

and TB vaccines, and trained over 600 African researchers. 70% of new potential TB vaccines are developed by European organisations, many of which have received EU funding. Thanks in part to EU R&D investment, the possibility of having a new TB vaccine by 2030 is a real one.

Since 2003, the EU and a number of European and sub-Saharan African countries have been collaborating under the 'European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership' ([EDCTP](#)) to speed the development of treatments, vaccines and diagnostics for PRNDs. The EDCTP provides funding for clinical trials that would otherwise not get funded, and aids coordination between researchers across Europe and Africa.

With the EDCTP programme set to end in 2020, a successor programme is being developed to carry on this work, to reduce the burden of infectious diseases and increase health security. Civil society organisations in Europe are calling for the new programme to continue the EDCTP's focus on poverty-related and neglected infectious diseases; provide at least 1 billion Euros in funding for this; increase participation by African states, foundations and the private sector; and improve collaboration and transparency.

UK participation in European R&D

The UK is [by far the largest contributor to EDCTP](#), currently providing a significant proportion of its funding. UK research institutions are also the [biggest beneficiaries of its grants](#). Researchers from the UK collaborate with a total of 14 European countries and 26 sub-Saharan African countries in EDCTP projects. Between 2014 and 2018, 18 UK research institutions received 58 grants, totalling over 60 million Euros.

UK financial support to EDCTP counts towards the UK's Official Development Assistance and to the target of spending 0.7% of our national income on overseas aid. The UK remains committed to this target, and spending

on R&D into global health is an essential part of our international development efforts and our contribution to achieving [SDG3](#) (good health and wellbeing).

Continued UK support is in question

The new EU-Africa global health research partnership will be part of a part of a much bigger EU R&D budget called 'Horizon Europe'. The European Commission and EU Member States are currently negotiating the new arrangements for Horizon Europe, and the UK has previously expressed an interest in its continued involvement in EU-led R&D. However, [doubts have been cast](#) about whether this is feasible, given the time available for post-Brexit trade negotiations between the UK and the EU, and the new Government's policy to pursue a completely new arrangement for future collaboration. It is vital that these uncertainties are resolved as soon as possible to avoid funding gaps and to ensure that the UK can continue to be part of future partnerships on global health research.

A clear and strong commitment from the UK Government to be fully engaged in the Africa-EU global health partnership that it will fund, will help to inform negotiations so that the UK and EU's longstanding cooperation in research and innovation can continue.

March 24 is World TB Day – a good moment to remind the UK Government of the importance of R&D in combating TB and other neglected diseases of poverty. Please write to the new Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), the Rt. Hon. Alok Sharma MP (who until recently was the Secretary of State for International Development). BEIS is the Government department responsible for the UK's publicly funded scientific research. Please ask him to ensure that the UK is committed to participating in future EU R&D programmes for global health after 2020, in order to continue its vital role in combatting diseases of poverty and neglected diseases such as TB.

Take action!

To mark World TB Day (24 March), please write to the new Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), the Rt. Hon. Alok Sharma MP about the importance of R&D to combat TB. Please ask him to ensure that the UK is committed to participating in future EU R&D programmes into global health after 2020.

Contact details: Rt. Hon. Alok Sharma MP, Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 1 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET. Email: enquiries@beis.gov.uk

Please let the Campaigns team know that you've taken action by emailing Dela at delanderson@results.org.uk.