

MEPs endorse call for increased action on R&D to fight diseases of poverty

In Strasbourg today, MEPs signed off on the deal struck with EU member states on the future EU research programme Horizon Europe.

Strasbourg, April 17, 2019: The European Parliament plenary meeting in Strasbourg today voted overwhelmingly to endorse an ambitious EU research agenda for the period 2021-2028. Today's vote is an endorsement of the deal reached by the Parliament's negotiators and EU member states represented by Romania, holders of the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU. While difficult negotiations on the size of the final budget will continue into the rest of 2019, the vote today confirms that Horizon Europe will include explicit support for the fight against diseases of poverty such as HIV & AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.

“An ambitious Horizon Europe budget would supercharge EU leadership of fight against the global diseases burden”

Speaking after the vote, Cécile Vernant, Head of Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW)'s EU office, said: “Despite the scale of the challenge facing us –over 1 billion people around the world live with these diseases – R&D for these diseases are still chronically underfunded. We hope that today's vote will be the first step towards a more ambitious EU agenda against diseases of poverty. Not only would R&D for new vaccines or drugs funded by the EU save lives, it would also support high quality, added value employment in Europe – and supercharge much-needed EU leadership on global health.”

While the vote today was generally a good day for EU research, the current budget proposal for Horizon Europe risks leaving EU health research underfunded relative to the budget of the current research agenda—down from 9.7% of in Horizon 2020, to 8.2% under its successor. The InvestEU programme, that will be voted on tomorrow, may partly offset this shortfall. Through this new instrument, the EU will provide guarantees up to €11.25bn to address market failures and sub-optimal investments, for example in research, product development and innovation of new healthcare products, including medical devices, diagnostics and new antimicrobials. However, questions remain around the affordability and accessibility of the results of publicly funded R&D supported by the EU, and to what extent research targeted at public goods will be compromised by industrial competitiveness concerns. Civil society groups will be watching warily to make sure that public funding goes to public health needs and that the societal impact of EU research remains the priority objective.

Looking to the final phase of negotiations

Looking towards the next steps, Cecile Vernant said: “With the vote now signed off, we'll be looking to the end-stage of the MFF negotiations. The big outstanding question is still whether or not we'll have an ambitious research budget, and one that invests sufficiently in health. And there are other issues that still need to be resolved if Europe is going to lead on global health R&D. For example: what role will civil society have in defining the research agenda? How much wiggle room is there in the new “moonshot missions” when they come up for review in 2023? And, how a new partnership dedicated to fight against diseases of poverty will look like once the current (and second) European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership comes to an end? A lot has been achieved, but there's still plenty more to do.”

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Notes to the Editor

- The European Commission announced its plans for Horizon Europe in June 2018, and has proposed a budget of €94bn to fund EU research programmes for the period 2021-2027. As part of the Horizon Europe proposal, funding has been set aside for what the European Commission calls “global challenges”, of which health is one (other clusters include digital, climate, and natural resources).
- While the “health challenge” in the ongoing Horizon 2020 programme makes up almost 10% (9.7%) of the overall R&D budget, the European Commission’s proposal for Horizon Europe foresees only 8.2% of the total budget for the health research cluster in the future research framework programme, while increasing funding for other thematic clusters such as “digital and industry”. According to the Commission, some health-related R&D funding will be provided also from other Horizon Europe pillars. Yet the health cluster, in addition to what is currently financed in the Societal Challenge on health under H2020, will also support the development of medical devices.
- InvestEU will provide up to €38bn from 2021-2017 in guarantees from the EU budget to address market failures and sub-optimal investment situations in four policy widows: sustainable infrastructure (€11.5bn); research, innovation and digitalisation (€11.25bn); SMEs (€11.25bn); and social investment and skills (€4bn). Eligible areas for funding in the research policy window include collaborative research and innovation projects, research in the field of Key Enabling Technologies, or new effective and accessible healthcare products.
- European Union funding for vital research into new vaccines, treatments, and diagnostic tools for diseases like HIV & AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other neglected diseases increased by \$40m to \$119m, a 50% increase on the previous year. This increase places the EU behind the UK and US as the world’s third largest funder of research into diseases of poverty” link to report: <https://www.policycuresresearch.org/g-finder-2018/>
- **Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW)** is a global development organisation that focuses on the needs and potential of the largest youth generation in history. We are committed to creating demand for and access to health information, services, supplies, and economic empowerment for youth. We achieve this by engaging in advocacy, capacity development, and reproductive health initiatives, so that young people are empowered to lead healthy and self-determined lives. With our headquarters in Hannover, Germany, DSW operates two liaison offices in Berlin and Brussels, as well as maintaining a strong presence in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. DSW also advocates for investment in research and innovation to fight poverty-related and neglected tropical diseases.