European commitments to TB R&D investments: Promises made to be broken?

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BACKGROUND

The 2018 UN High-Level Meeting on Tuberculosis raised hopes that the promises made at this landmark event would rectify the decades-long neglect for TB research and development (R&D). However, reality has failed to measure up to these commitments. The world remains woefully behind the €1.7 billion annual investments needed to make substantive progress on TB R&D, including for TB vaccine research. This is particularly true for European funders.

METHODOLOGY

Expenditure data from European public funders for TB R&D pre- and post-COVID (2019 and 2020) gathered by TAG through the annual global survey for its annual funding trends was examined against global targets for TB R&D investments agreed together with European stakeholders and compared to identify changes in funding levels due to the pandemic-related shocks.

At the country-level, annual investments to TB R&D from both national contributions and, where relevant, proportional contributions at the level of European Union (EU) were set against the Fair Share (FS) target of 0.1% of gross expenditure for research and development (GERD). At the level of the EU, total investments made through EU programmes were set against FS targets calculated as 0.1% of the EU annual budget. FSs achieved are compared across years since the benchmark's inception in 2018.

The proportions of European and global investments to TB vaccine R&D in 2020 were compared against that provided for COVID-19. TB vaccine candidates currently under development in Europe are listed.

RESULTS

In 2020, European public funding for TB R&D totaled just €139.7 million compared to €127.4 million the previous year; with €91.5 million coming from the EU and member states. Nearly one third of total European investments were made by the United Kingdom (30%). Compared to funding in 2019, there is an increase in overall investments in 2020 in spite of the economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this increase is due primarily to a doubling of funding to the European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP); overall, national level investments, including those from the UK, decreased.

Regarding FS, only one European country, the United Kingdom, has ever managed to achieve its target and only one EU member state has managed to achieve even 50% of its FS since the measurement was introduced. The EU dramatically misses the mark, especially when compared to the United States which is meeting 90% of its FS.

Of the 15 TB vaccines currently under investigation, 6 are being developed by or in partnership with European research institutions. However, only 16% of all funding from EU public funders supported TB vaccine R&D. COVID-19 vaccine investments in 2020 by comparison were more than 700 times what the world spent on TB vaccine R&D in the same time period.

CONCLUSIONS

Governments have failed to deliver on the promises made in 2018 and the world remains woefully behind achieving the funding levels required to make real progress in TB R&D. The gap in funding is particularly stark for European public funders. European leaders must commit to funding TB R&D, and particularly for vaccines, by meeting FS targets, increasing proportional support for vaccine candidates – for example, through mechanisms like the EDCTP – and to plan jointly to fill the anticipated funding gap that will be left in the wake of anticipated declines in R&D funding from the UK.

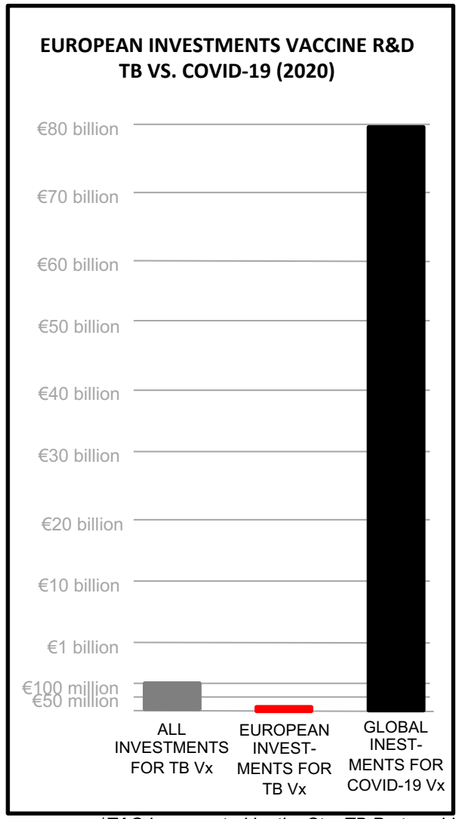
> "Who would have thought in a year, you could have a vaccine for a disease we'd never even heard of?
>
> *- Jennifer Furin, The Sentinel Project on Pediatric Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis*

> "Do I expect a [TB] vaccine coming up anytime soon? … You can't get a Ferrari when you only have the money [to] buy a bike."
>
> *— Timur Abdullaev, TBpeople*

		FAIR SHARE ACHIEVED BY YEAR			
	COUNTRY	2017	2018	2019	2020
EU & MEMBER STATES	European Union	24,1%	25,5%	23,2%	39,8%
	Denmark	9,1%	18,3%	12,7%	16,4%
	Finland	7,6%	19,4%	8,3%	21,9%
	France	12,5%	17,7%	23,0%	30,3%
	Germany	23,3%	24,3%	26,0%	26,4%
	Ireland	62,1%	72,2%	41,9%	53,2%
	Italy	16,6%	21,3%	15,8%	28,3%
	Netherlands	37,9%	44,7%	29,7%	30,4%
	Spain	18,7%	20,9%	21,3%	39,8%
	Sweden	20,4%	6,9%	30,5%	23,8%
NON-EU COUNTRIES	Norway	40,4%	34,3%	30,8%	19,0%
	Switzerland	24,5%	30,6%	14,3%	45,0%
	United Kingdom	89,8%	141,1%	120,9%	149,5%

EU & MEMBER STATES	TB R&D FUNDING (2019)	TB R&D FUNDING (2020)
European Union	34.308.891,49	61.069.750,00
Denmark	482.133,29	358.149,20
Finland	--	531.570,00
France	6.530.144,82	6.327.870,90
Germany	21.454.951,55	15.262.611,65
Ireland	1.234.325,83	1.373.680,79
Netherlands	3.881.225,77	3.096.862,49
Spain	425.406,68	1.097.820,42
Sweden	4.012.260,03	2.376.322,69
SUB TOTAL	72.329.339,47 €	91.494.638 €
NON-EU COUNTRIES		
Norway	2.406.032,03	1.387.509,13
Switzerland	2.937.280,97	4.905.700,82
United Kingdom	49.742.566,55	41.939.688,5
TOTAL	127.415.219,01 €	139.727.536,59 €

VACCINE CANDIDATE	PHASE	EUROPEAN RESEARCH PARTNER(S)	COUNTRY
VPM1002	III	Vakzine Projekt Management GmbH	Germany
MTBVAC	III	University of Zaragoza; Biofabri	Spain
H56IC31	IIb	Statens Serum Institut; IAVI	Denmark
RUTI	IIb	Archivel Farma	Spain
ChAdOx1 85A + MVA85A	IIa	University of Oxford	UK
BCG (aerosol)	I	University of Oxford	UK



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