

Research for maternal and child health



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In 2015, estimated 216 women died per 100,000 live births, and 45% of total deaths among children under five occurred in the first month of life. Leading causes of death in under-five children are preterm birth complications, pneumonia, birth asphyxia, diarrhoea, malaria, and malnutrition. These deaths are disproportionately concentrated in low and middle-income countries, but maternal and child health in Europe and other high-income countries is similarly challenged by growing health inequities. Lifestyle-related conditions that are prevalent in high-income countries (e.g. obesity, diabetes, hypertensive disorders) also negatively influence pregnancy and child development.

The research projects funded by DG Research and Innovation cover a wide range of the challenges faced by mothers and their infants all over the world: premature newborn, prevention and treatment of infectious and non-communicable diseases, reproductive and sexual health promotion, improved guidelines and evidence base for safer deliveries. Through its *FP7* and *Horizon 2020* framework programmes, the European Commission has supported 35 projects with a total budget of 82 million EUR.

Project examples

OPTIBIRTH develops an evidence-based intervention that helps future mothers and their gynaecologists to reach an educated decision on whether to use caesarean section for the delivery. This contributes to reducing the number of unnecessary C-sections, an intervention that increases the risk of mortality, morbidity, and postnatal infection, compared with vaginal birth.

EPICE identified evidence-based interventions and best practices that lead to lower mortality and morbidity of very preterm newborns in Europe. The project aims to improve the rate of compliance with these best practices.



Together for the Next Generation was an international conference organised by the Health directorate of DG Research and Innovation in December 2015. It gathered high-level stakeholders and researchers from all over the world to discuss the present situation and challenges in the field of maternal and child health, and to define specific recommendations and actions. The findings and conclusions of the discussions are captured in the **final report**.

Global health research

Global health research contributes to reducing the growing inequities in health, notably in terms of access, availability, affordability and acceptability of quality health care. The *Sustainable Development Goal 3*, adopted by the United Nations summit in September 2015, is dedicated to improving global health by ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

DG Research and Innovation

The *FP7* and *Horizon 2020* framework programmes provided around 135 million EUR worth of funding for 45 global health-related research projects. These multi-disciplinary projects addressed important topics influencing global health, including

- health literacy
- disease prevention and treatment
- health system and workforce strengthening
- governance and management capacity-building.



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Through these research actions, the European Commission reinforces the impact of its actions by involving all relevant stakeholders, and by providing data and evidence-based recommendations to policy makers.

Project examples

SURE examined how policymakers can link healthcare resources to medical and administrative needs for maternal and child health, mental health and improving access to health services in low-income countries. The project developed policy briefs for 7 African countries, addressing priority problems, which had a positive effect on the policy dialogue.

HEFPA provided insights into the complexities of reaching universal health coverage in six Asian countries.

Key initiatives

The **European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership** (EDCTP) was launched in 2003 by 16 European countries and the European Commission to support clinical trials and capacity building to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in Africa. The first EDCTP programme (2003-2013) supported 254 projects with 383 million EUR, involving 190 African and 70 European research institutions, where 49% of the trials were led by African researchers. The EU commitment has been extended to cover neglected infectious diseases and to work with an increased budget of 1,3 billion EUR for the EDCTP2 programme (2014-2024).