

Statement of the Slovak Republic
150th Executive Board
Items: 9 Global Strategy for TB Research and Innovation,
10 Road Map for Neglected Tropical Diseases 2021-2030

Chair,

Slovakia aligns itself with the EU statement on the agenda items 9, Global Strategy for TB Research and Innovation and 10 Road Map for Neglected Tropical Diseases 2021-2030.

Also, we would like to thank the Secretariat for the reports on these items. Similarly, in relation to other non-COVID agendas, we acknowledge the negative impact of COVID-19 on the progress in TB and NTDs, the efforts to leave no one behind and the SDGs.

TB:

Collateral nature of the tuberculosis epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic is the cause of significant failures in the provision of services and care, as well as financial constraints, rising global trend of mortality and disease incidence.

In the EU countries, we observed a continuous decrease of tuberculosis between 2009 and 2019 by 36% of cases. On the contrary, data on the number of persons not born in a given country demonstrate the opposite trend, when an increase was observed between 2009 and 2019 from 23.8% to 34.5% of the total number of notified cases.

Simultaneously, high concentration of the disease is recorded in certain risk groups (poor people, the homeless, migrants, prisoners, ethnic minorities and people living with HIV infection or other diseases, people with alcohol abuse, drug addicts and other marginalized groups) with the men dominating in all age groups over 14 years. We would like to stress at this point that in times of increased population migration, TB will not be permanently removed in any country, unless it is eliminated worldwide.

Slovakia thanks WHO for its meaningful activities aimed at presenting the best practices and championing TB success stories in order to encourage MSs' further action and mutual experience sharing. It is equally important to learn from the bad experiences and design the appropriate preventive measures in order to avoid their repetition. From this perspective, we are grateful for the WHO effort in the field of addressing misinformation and tackling the myths.

The combination of COVID-19 and TB contributes to clinical complexity in patient management. As patients usually report similar symptoms, it is recommended that the patients are screened for both diseases in the form of rapid molecular testing for TB and COVID-19, whenever possible. From the clinical perspective, it is appropriate to treat both conditions as soon as possible.

Indeed, the examples of low-incidence countries show the possibility of combating tuberculosis in an efficient manner. It is crucial to acknowledge that countries can only move forward when they adopt a comprehensive approach to both infectious diseases, while working closely with vulnerable communities, investing into strong diagnostics, treatment and prevention, including vaccination. The experience of countries with a low incidence of tuberculosis also shows that in one moment, they can decide to stop vaccinating against TB the whole population because it is no longer necessary. On one hand, such expertise manifests that vaccines contribute to the success of the fight against the disease. On the other hand, the history has proven that the vaccines are an efficient tool for countering the spread of communicable diseases.

NTD:

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) represent ancient diseases related to poverty and stigmatization, which impose a devastating human, social and economic burden on more than 1 billion people worldwide, including marginalized communities in Europe.

In the light of the fact that the **COVID-19** has had a negative impact on the health systems and non-COVID agendas, including NTDs, which require preventive chemotherapies linked to evidence-based policy, public-private and NGOs initiatives, the correspondent action is urgently needed. More importantly, we would like to point out at the existing gap between the highly ambitious Road Map and the resource constraints.

Slovakia perceives the necessity to look for collective answers when referring to the NTDs and other non-COVID agendas, including coinfections and disabilities.

Alongside, NTDs serve as an important tracer in identifying disparities, underestimated prevalence and undervaluated economic burden in progress towards both, the universal health coverage and equitable access to high-quality health services.

We continue to call on MSs to work together on removing barriers for at-risk and hard-to-reach populations in accessing prevention and eradication programs, early diagnosis and healthcare, through an appropriate adaptations of the health systems as well as the implementation of the UHC and up-to-date clinical and social guidelines.

Thank you