Role of the European Union in global health

Author’s reply

We are grateful for the interest in our Comment shown by Lies Steurs and colleagues. Given the constraint of word limit, it is only possible to address selected aspects of the complex issues raised.

We appreciate the reference to the previous attempt by the European Union (EU) to address global health, as those of us who were present at the discussions on this initiative recall the enthusiasm with which these first tentative steps were greeted. However, as Steurs and colleagues note, calls for action by both the European Commission and Council failed to deliver a strategy. We believe that there is scope to learn from this experience, placing it within the broader context of the changing nature of EU responsibilities and, specifically, the abolition of the three-pillar system that existed between 1993 and 2009. Arguably, the adoption of a shared competence between the EU and member states in areas such as development assistance might make such an initiative more likely to succeed now. However, this needs to be balanced by suggestions in the 2017 Commission White Paper on Effective Ways of Investing in Health and has undertaken research funded by the European Commission and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. All other authors declare no competing interests.

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