

Resolution on plans and actions to accelerate the transition to innovation without the use of animals in research, regulatory testing and education

2021/2784(RSP) - 16/09/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 664 votes to 4, with 16 abstentions, a resolution on plans and actions to accelerate the transition to innovation without the use of animals in research, regulatory testing and education.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR and The Left groups.

In 2017, the use of animals for scientific purposes was reported 9.58 million times, the main purpose being research (69 %), followed by regulatory use to satisfy legislative requirements (23 %). In a single year up to 12 million animals are bred and killed for the purpose of animal testing without being used in actual experiments.

While formal encouragement for non-animal methods is unique to the EU, there are bureaucratic hurdles to their acceptance, their use is not properly enforced and funding for their development remains inadequate. Certain Member States have adopted national implementing measures that ensure a high level of protection of animals used for scientific purposes, while others only apply the minimum requirements laid down in Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes.

Moreover, despite the fact that previous animal testing has contributed to advances in developing treatments for human health conditions, as well as medical devices, anaesthetics and safe vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, European citizens have consistently demonstrated support for an end to the use of animals for scientific purposes.

According to the resolution, the replacement of animal testing by advanced non-animal methods will be necessary to achieve the Commission's ambitious health and environmental goals set out in the NextGenerationEU recovery plan and the European Green Deal, and where validated non-animal alternatives are already available, these must be given priority.

EU-wide action plan

Parliament called on the Commission to improve coordination to achieve the goal set out in Directive 2010/63/EU by establishing a **high-level inter-service taskforce**, involving all key Directorates-General and agencies, to work with the Member States and relevant stakeholders to draw up an EU-wide action plan, with the aim of driving the active phase-out by **reducing, refining and replacing procedures on live animals** for scientific and regulatory purposes, as soon as scientifically possible and without lowering the level of protection for human health and the environment, while accelerating the development of the alternative animal-free methods, technologies and instruments necessary for change.

Experiments that are carried out on animals because of the unavailability of non-animal methods must only take place in optimal conditions that minimise pain, distress and suffering and protect the welfare of the animals concerned.

Funding

Parliament highlighted the need to deepen the European Research Area and for the plan to build on research undertaken in the EU to date and to include mechanisms for the preferential funding of non-animal methods across all EU research and innovation initiatives, as such alternative methods bring additional costs and investment needs. It stressed the need for **increased and targeted funding under Horizon Europe** for advanced non-animal models. Sufficient medium- to long-term funding should be made available to ensure the fast development, validation and introduction of alternative testing methods to replace animal testing methods, particularly for key toxicological endpoints.

The resolution highlighted that the private sector can be actively involved in the plan, in particular companies willing to switch to non-animal models, as well as start-ups developing and perfecting them, through participating in collaborative approaches to phasing out animal testing. It called for a better coordinated, cross-sectoral and EU-wide approach across all Member States and all EU agencies, including via the cross-sectoral European Partnership for Alternative Approaches to Animal Testing.

Education and training

Parliament urged the Commission and the Member States to prioritise actions to educate, train and retrain scientists, researchers and technicians in using advanced nonanimal models and in sharing best practices, and to raise awareness of validated non-animal models both among safety assessment experts and among those involved in evaluating project proposals and attributing funding.

The resolution pointed out that academic institutions have an essential role to play in terms of promoting alternatives to animal testing in scientific disciplines and disseminating new knowledge and practices, which are available but not always widely used. It highlighted the need to work within international structures to speed up validation and acceptance of alternative methods, ensure knowledge transfer and provide financial support to non-EU countries, where scientists may be unaware of alternative methods and where testing facilities may lack the necessary research infrastructure.