

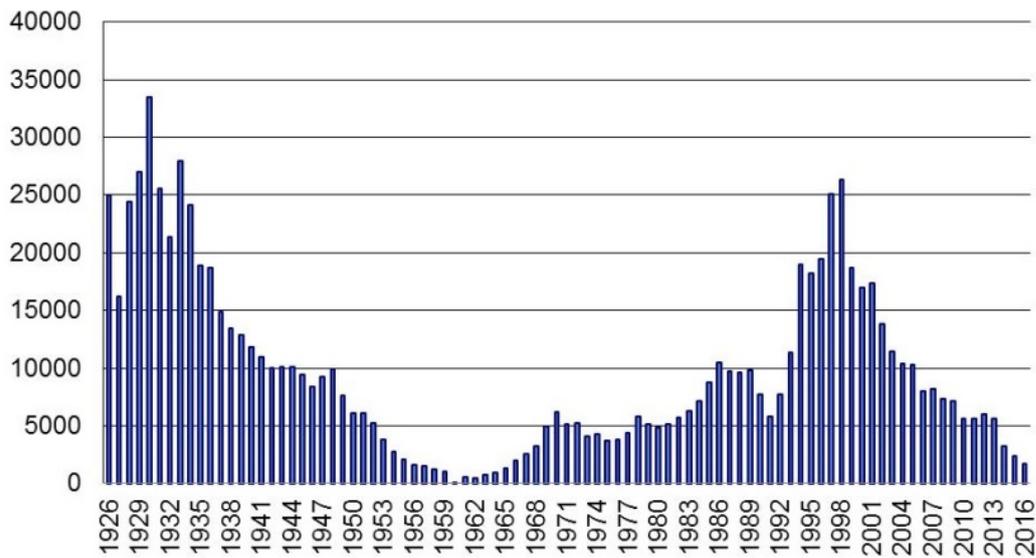
GOODNIGHT TO SLEEPING SICKNESS

Fact sheet on the elimination of sleeping sickness by 2025

Background

- Sleeping sickness (officially called Human African Trypanosomiasis) is a **deadly disease caused by parasite transmitted by the tsetse fly**. This fly is only found in Africa.
- The initial presentation of sleeping sickness is characterized by fever and general weakness. **In an advanced stage, sleeping sickness leads to coma**, which is where the disease gets its name. Untreated, the disease is always deadly.
- **Diagnosis is complex, the available medicines are toxic and difficult to administer, and often have severe side-effects**. Therefore, combating sleeping sickness requires significant resources and specially trained personnel.
- According to the World Health Organization, up to **20,000** people may be infected worldwide. If the disease is not eliminated, **65 million people are at risk of contracting sleeping sickness**.
- The disease used to occur in 24 countries, and still affects 13. **Over 85% of new cases are located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**.
- **Combating the disease mainly consists of active identification and treatment of infected people before they fall ill**. Because most cases occur in remote rural areas, mobile teams are deployed for this purpose. History has shown that the disease quickly flares up when efforts to combat it flag and the last case has not yet been eliminated (see figure 1).
- The World Health Organization has described sleeping sickness as **one of the “neglected tropical diseases” that qualifies for elimination**.

Figure 1: Sleeping sickness cases per year in DR Congo, 1926-2016



The historical role of Belgium

- Belgium is recognized internationally as a pioneer in combating sleeping sickness. In addition to the **world-renowned scientific expertise of the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp**, this is largely due to the **important efforts made by our country in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the primary reservoir for sleeping sickness. Thanks to these efforts, which continued until the country's independence, sleeping sickness was almost eradicated in the Congo.
- **During the first years of independence, the problem was neglected** and the number of cases gradually rose. By 1998, over 25,000 cases had been reported.
- The **most commonly used diagnostic test for sleeping sickness**, the CATT test, was developed by the ITM over 40 years ago, and has been produced by the Institute for decades.
- **Belgium renewed its offer of support for combating sleeping sickness in 1994**, initially via an urgency programme deployed by three non-governmental organisations (MEMISA, Doctors Without Borders and FOMETRO). Between 1998 and 2013, support was provided via the Belgian Development Aid Agency BTC, and the *Programme National de Lutte contre la Trypanosomiase Humaine Africaine* (PNLTHA) came into being. As of 2014, this support has been provided via the Institute of Tropical Medicine as part of the framework agreement with the General Directorate for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD). Every year, 2 million people are tested for sleeping sickness in the field.
- This renewed Belgian support was successful, and resulted in a sharp decline in the number of newly diagnosed cases each year. **The permanent elimination of sleeping sickness is now within reach.**
- **Since 2013, the ITM has been leading a research programme on combating sleeping sickness**, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and in cooperation



with international consortia. The renewed approach is based on new (rapid) diagnostic tests, more effective fly traps, digital data processing and more efficient population screening.

Why this is the time to permanently eliminate sleeping sickness

The permanent global elimination of sleeping sickness is now within reach because the number of cases is dropping and significant progress is being made in a number of terrains:

- **Diagnosis**

There are **rapid tests** available that allow new cases to be identified more quickly and precisely.

- **Treatment**

Starting in 2018, treatment using **medication in pill form** rather than injections will be possible. This medication will also be **much safer** than it used to be.

- **Control**

The tsetse fly can be controlled **more efficiently** via *tiny targets* that attract and destroy the flies. Converting the mobile teams into smaller, more flexible units increases the efficiency and sustainability of the population screening programme.

- **Digital revolution**

Population screening is more efficient thanks to digital data registration. Using a combination of these digitized data and satellite information about the natural environment allows a more targeted approach to identifying the sources of contaminations.

- **International coalition**

For the first time, a **broad international coalition** is ready and waiting to permanently eliminate sleeping sickness. Belgium, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Institute of Tropical Medicine and partners in the pharmaceutical sector have joined forces to achieve this goal. The ambition is supported by the [London Declaration of 2012](#), under the leadership of the World Health Organization.



“Goodnight to sleeping sickness”: Belgian Development Cooperation, Gates Foundation and ITM join forces

- **The Sustainable Development Goals are clear: eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 and leave no-one behind.** SDG 3 defines a healthy life for everyone as a goal. This can only be achieved through the eradication of neglected tropical diseases that primarily affect the world’s poorest inhabitants.
- Following the **efforts of the Minister of Development Aid Alexander De Croo**, Belgium has decided to take the lead in eliminating sleeping sickness. This is a logical choice: Belgium not only has a **proven track record in combating the disease**, we also have the **scientific expertise** required to succeed.
- **Belgium has allocated 25.3 million Euro to eliminating sleeping sickness over the next nine years** (27 million US dollars) Based on Belgium’s efforts and credentials, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation promised to match this figure.
- **Congolese authorities fully support this international initiative**, as the programme will also strengthen basic health care and combating of other diseases.
- **The Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp will coordinate the programme** with the General Directorate for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD), the Belgian Development Aid Agency BTC, Congolese authorities and other Belgian and International partners.

More information:

- [Neglected tropical diseases \(WHO\)](#)
- [Sleeping sickness fact sheet \(WHO\)](#)
- [London Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases \(2012\)](#)
- [The ITM and sleeping sickness](#)

