

SEVEN DAYS

POLICY

Swiss–EU accord

Swiss-based scientists regained full access to European Union research programmes on 1 January, after Switzerland's parliament agreed in December to water down controversial immigration controls. Switzerland is not a member of the EU, but has bilateral agreements with the bloc on areas including research. In 2014, the Swiss public voted to limit immigration in a legally binding referendum. The result threw the agreements into confusion, because members of EU research programmes must allow the free movement of EU citizens. See go.nature.com/2ipa0ij for more.

China ivory ban

In a step praised by conservationists, China will phase out commercial trading of ivory by the end of 2017. The State Council, the country's highest administrative body, announced the move in a 29 December notice. The notice goes beyond previous restrictions by forbidding the registration of businesses

that are involved in the sale or carving of ivory. Policies that allowed legal sales had in the past created havens for illegal trade. The government previously supported ivory carving as an intangible cultural asset, but the latest notice calls for ivory specialists to work in museums or to use other materials, such as teeth or bone. Carving techniques will be filmed for posterity. Sales of ivory after 2017 will be restricted to antique items in auction houses, a similar policy to that in the United States.

PEOPLE

Vera Rubin dies

US astronomer Vera Rubin, who discovered evidence for the existence of dark matter, died on 25 December, aged 88. Rubin (pictured) collaborated with astronomer Kent Ford in the 1960s at the Carnegie Institution of Washington to measure the speed of stars in spiral galaxies. Standard gravitational theory suggested that stars on the outskirts of such galaxies orbit slower than those near the centre — but Rubin and Ford



found that the stars orbited at around the same speed. By the 1970s, Rubin and her colleagues realized that the best explanation was that the galaxies were embedded in a halo of dark matter, an invisible substance that makes up about 90% of the matter in the Universe.

EVENTS

Argentina protests

Hundreds of researchers in Argentina occupied their country's science ministry in Buenos Aires in December. Budget cuts meant that many scientists did not receive the permanent jobs that they thought they had secured

for 2017 with the country's National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET). After a week of occupation — in which around 200 people slept overnight in the ministry building, and more than 1,000 joined rallies outside — officials agreed to one-year extensions to hundreds of CONICET fellowships, but no extra jobs. See go.nature.com/2i5mcyq for more.

PUBLISHING

No journal access

Thousands of scientists in Germany, Peru and Taiwan are starting 2017 without online access to journals from the Dutch publisher Elsevier. Contract negotiations between Elsevier and academic consortia in Germany and Taiwan broke down in December, but negotiations are expected to resume this month. Peru's government has cut off funding for a national licence. See page 13 for more.

PHARMACEUTICALS

Spinal drug

The US Food and Drug Administration approved the first treatment for spinal muscular atrophy — the most common genetic cause of death in infants — on 23 December. Spinal muscular atrophy is caused by low levels of a protein called SMN, which results in a loss of neurons that control movement. The drug, called Spinraza (nusinersen), increases production of SMN; in a phase III clinical trial Spinraza improved motor skills in 40% of patients. Spinraza was developed by Ionis Pharmaceuticals of Carlsbad, California.

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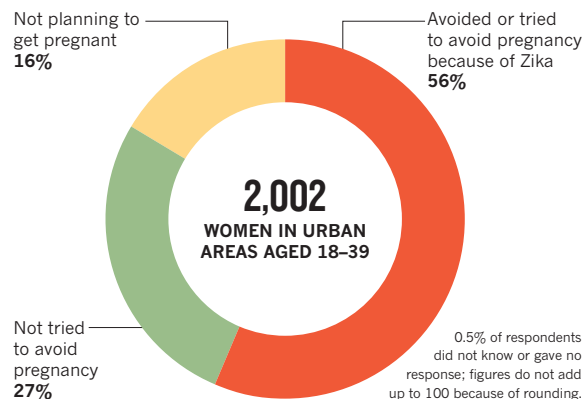
LINDA DAVIDSON/WASHINGTON POST/GETTY

TREND WATCH

More than half of women in Brazil are avoiding pregnancy because of the Zika virus outbreak, a nationally representative survey of 2,002 women in urban areas suggests. In northeastern Brazil — where Zika infections have been concentrated — 66% said that they were trying to avoid pregnancy. The study's authors say that the government must ensure better access to contraception and review its criminalization of abortion (D. Diniz *et al.* *J. Fam. Plann. Reprod. Health Care* **43**, 80; 2017).

ZIKA'S EFFECT ON FAMILY PLANNING

More than half of Brazilian women are avoiding pregnancy because of the Zika outbreak, a survey suggests.



SOURCE: D. DINIZ *ET AL.* *J. FAM. PLANN. REPROD. HEALTH CARE* **43**, 80 (2017)