

EU4Health Civil Society Alliance – Joint statement on sustainable funding for (health) civil society organisations (CSOs)

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) across the EU are facing barriers in the implementation of their activities, as outlined in the [2022](#) and [2023](#) European Commission's rule of law reports, and a [European Civic Forum report](#).

In addition to a shrinking civic space, CSOs are facing difficulties in securing safe, regular and sustainable funding. Access to sustainable and regular funding allows CSOs to plan their activities, advocate in the public interest in policy-making processes, and give a voice to the citizens, in particular vulnerable groups. Operating grants from the European Commission are a vital source of funding for European CSOs that allows them to efficiently and sustainably support EU policy making while guaranteeing their independence from vested interests. The discrepancy in the availability of sustainable funding for CSOs across policy sectors is currently putting health civil society organisations at a particularly disadvantaged position.

In 2021, health CSOs faced the prospect of losing access to Operating Grants from the European Commission via its health programme. Operating grants were only reinstated after an advocacy campaign by health CSOs, [supported by 50+ MEPs](#) and several Member States. However, since then, the Operating Grants have been awarded on a year-by-year basis leaving health CSOs with an uncertain landscape and no guarantee that the programme will be maintained in the future. The absence of a multiannual framework leaves health civil society especially vulnerable and disadvantaged despite the increasing challenges and workload faced by the sector after the COVID pandemic. In addition, too restrictive eligibility criteria mean that some CSOs who benefitted from these grants in the past can no longer apply for them, thereby further sustaining dependence on non-public funding.

To discuss these challenges and ways forward to ensure sustainable funding of civil society across sectors, the EU4Health Civil Society Alliance organised an event in the European Parliament on June 26th, 2023, gathering representatives from CSOs from different sectors (the European Environmental Bureau, Civil Society Europe, SAFE Food Advocacy, Healthcare Without Harm, EuroHealthNet and FEANTSA), who shared insights from different European Commission Operating Grants programmes such as the LIFE, CERV, ESF+/EaSi, and EU4Health. Insights from the event:

- CSOs across all sectors consider that Operating Grants are an essential funding programme.
- Multiannual frameworks for Operating Grants allow CSOs to stick to their core work, advocacy and policy, as well as supporting their watchdog role, and contribute to the policy debate by representing the public interest. Multiannual frameworks particularly enable CSOs to adapt to the changing realities and adjust to crises as they occur, thus providing flexibility while keeping a long-term vision.
- CSOs from all sectors are facing challenges with the funding programmes, including the lack of multiannual financial frameworks, the imbalance of co-funding rates across programmes and the need, or the request to diversify their funding.
- Consistent, reliable funding through multiannual frameworks is necessary to support policy and advocacy work and maintain democracy. Without such a framework, health CSOs are currently left in a disadvantaged and uncertain position, risking dependence from commercial actors and interests.

Calls for stronger funding mechanisms are part of the [EU4Health Civil Society Alliance manifesto](#) and the one from [Civil Society 4 EU](#). In line with these, and based on our joint work with CSOs from the health as well as from other sectors we call for:

- The European Commission Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) to reinstate a multiannual framework for Operating Grants for health CSOs to correct the current imbalance health CSOs are facing compared to other sectors.
- The European Commission to take clearer and more coherent action to support civil society in accessing sustainable funding, and to protect civil society from existing threats. For the future of democracy, Operating Grants must be secured and improved to strengthen civil dialogue and representation, including that of citizens, patients, and marginalised groups.
- The European Commission to organise a dialogue between different DGs, the European Parliament and civil society to discuss and review the funding programmes, with the aim of breaking silos and supporting CSOs with more sustainable funding.

Signatories:

- European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
- European Patients' Forum (EPF)
- Alzheimer Europe
- EURORDIS - Rare Diseases Europe
- Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)
- Association of European Coeliac Societies (AOECS)
- Digestive Cancers Europe
- EUROCAM
- EuroHealthNet
- European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG)
- Eurocare
- European Central Council of Homeopaths (ECCH)
- European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC)
- European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA)
- European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Association (EFA)
- European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA)
- European Health Management Association (EHMA)
- European Heart Network (EHN)
- European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA)
- European Liver Patients' Association (ELPA)
- European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP)
- European Public Health Association (EUPHA)
- European Respiratory Society (ERS)
- Health Action International (HAI)
- International Diabetes Federation Europe (IDF-Europe)
- International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA)
- International Federation of Anthroposophical Medical Associations (IVAA)

- Mental Health Europe (MHE)
- Psychedelic Access and Research European Alliance (PAREA)
- Smoke Free Partnership
- TB Europe Coalition (TBEC)
- Wemos
- Correlations European Harm Reduction Network (C-EHRN)
- AIDS Action Europe
- Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)
- Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

