Crises, cuts and civil society: reclaiming public health leadership in Europe

A European dialogue with global perspectives

Virtual international roundtable • 20 October 2025, 14-16h CET

Satellite webinar of the ISDE International Conference - A healthy planet for a healthy life

(Sansepolcro-AREZZO, Italy, 23 – 25 November 25 2025)

Concept note

Convenors

- International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE)
- European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

Background

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are indispensable to Europe's public health and democratic resilience. They connect institutions with communities, extend the reach of health systems, and help safeguard trust and equity. During the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises - from climate-related health threats to conflict and forced migration - CSOs proved their capacity to deliver, mobilise, and counter misinformation.

Today, that capacity is at risk. In Europe, recent budgetary shifts have left CSOs without structural funding, undermining preparedness and weakening public health infrastructure at a time of multiple emergencies. Globally, where CSOs have received sustained support, they have been crucial in driving equity, service delivery, and knowledge exchange.

This roundtable will bring together CSO leaders, policy-makers, and international partners to reflect on how to safeguard civil society's role in health, and to gather shared messages for advocacy in Europe and beyond.

Objectives

- Showcase how CSOs strengthen resilience, trust, and preparedness, drawing on global perspectives
- Spotlight the public health risks of defunding civil society in Europe

Expected outcomes

- A concise outcome paper capturing the key messages, to be circulated to European and international institutions
- A recorded video highlighting core reflections, disseminated through ISDE, EPHA, and partners' channels

Structure & format

- Fully remote, 2 hours, recorded for later dissemination
- Concise interventions followed by moderated dialogue
- Focus on CSO perspectives, complemented by institutional reflections

Draft programme

Opening (10 min)

- Welcome and framing - **Dr Paolo Lauriola** (EPHA/ISDE)
- Keynote intervention - **Dr Hans Kluge**, Regional Director, WHO EURO (recorded)

Civil society voices: on the frontline of public health (35 min)

Moderated by Dr Paolo Lauriola (EPHA/ISDE)

CSO leaders highlight the value of civic space in health and impacts of funding cuts.
Opening intervention by **Prof. Kjeld Hansen**, member of the Steering Committee of the WHO CSO Commission (recorded)

- **Ms Valentina Strammiello**, Interim Executive Director, EPF
- **Ms Federica Margheri**, Executive Director, EHMA
- **Ms Anne Stauffer**, Deputy Director, HEAL, Belgium
- **Prof Henrique Barros**, President, ASPHER
- **Ms Charlotte Marchandise**, Executive Director, EUPHA
- **Prof. Raman Bedi**, Vice-President, WFPHA

Partners' reflections (25 min)

*Moderated by **Dr Peter van den Hazel** (ISDE)*

Institutional leaders respond to the role of CSOs in resilience and health governance

- **Dr Pieter Agius**, MEP, Malta
- **Dr Vesna Kerstin Petrič**, Ministry of Health, Slovenia
- **Dr Michael van den Berg**, OECD
- **Dr Maria Neira**, WHO

Dialogue and exchange (35 min)

*Moderated by **Dr Milka Sokolović** (EPHA)*

Roundtable with CSO and institutional speakers; input from online participants

- Identification of 3–4 shared advocacy messages
- Reflections on opportunities for collaboration
- Key takeaways (30 sec per speaker)

Closing (10 min)

- Summary of key takeaways – **Dr Peter van den Hazel** (ISDE)
- Next steps and dissemination