

## European Health Forum Gastein statement in favour of Civil Society Organisations' funding via European Commission operating grants

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The EU4Health programme, which entered into force on 26 March 2021, represents a welcome and unique opportunity to build stronger, better resourced, and more resilient health systems. The Programme addresses many crucial issues that will lead to stronger EU action in the field of health and represents a key pillar towards a true European Health Union bringing real added value for all Europeans. However, we are deeply concerned about a gap in terms of concrete support to civil society organisations (CSOs) through operating grants.

Health CSOs play a crucial role at many levels. They are a vital partner to both European and national institutions to shape and implement public health strategies and policies. CSOs are essential in bridging the gap between policymaking and the communities they represent in a professional, efficient, and democratic manner. This has become even more apparent during the current COVID-19 pandemic. CSOs were able to rapidly adapt to the situation, dedicating expertise and capacity to help policymakers in developing and communicating their pandemic response strategies to the public, while feeding back essential information for better decisions based on people's diverse needs and concerns. It is through their core operational activities that CSOs can carry out this fundamental work, and operating grants in the past have consistently demonstrated their significant added value.

It is therefore crucial that the 2022 Work Programme foresees a specific budget allocation for operating grants for CSOs. As the current operating grants framework comes to an end this year, the absence of operating grants would create a major gap that would strongly hinder the sustainability of many CSOs, hampering their capacity to deliver in a timely and independent way on their essential role as partners in EU health policymaking.

As similar mechanisms are still active for European organisations active in other fields, such as social policies (e.g., disability and non-discrimination) or the environment, it is essential that the EU does not forget health NGOs. As highlighted by the European Parliament in its work on the EU4Health proposal, with an EU that is looking at developing even stronger collaboration and action in the field of health, from EU4Health to the European Health Union and the Conference on the Future of Europe, health CSOs must be recognised and supported as an integral part of EU health policy development and implementation.

The European Health Forum Gastein therefore calls on the European Commission to guarantee the continuation of health NGO funding via operating grants.



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