

Press Release – for immediate publication

Following formal complaint by NGOs, European Ombudswoman calls on European Commission to address concerns over 2025 Operating Grant withdrawal

Brussels, 19 February 2026 – European Ombudswoman Teresa Anjinho has formally asked the European Commission to provide a written response to concerns over the lack of timely and transparent communication surrounding the withdrawal of 2025 operating grants under the EU4Health Programme.

In a [letter](#) dated 16 February 2026, the Ombudswoman notes that “the Commission’s failure to communicate in a timely and transparent way with the complainant and other FPA holders is problematic and not in line with standards of good administration”.

The 25 members of the EU4Health Civil Society Alliance who submitted this formal complaint welcome the Ombudswoman’s letter, which recognises both the importance of operating grants to support health NGOs’ functioning and the need for predictable and transparent funding processes.

The request comes just days before the Commission meets on 24 February to discuss the 2026 EU4Health Work Programme with Member States, where we count on Member States’ support to reinstate operating grants as a democratic imperative that safeguards civil society’s contribution to the implementation of EU public health priorities.

Ombudswoman’s Findings

- While the Commission was not legally obliged to publish operating grant calls for 2025, it retained a duty to communicate decisions that directly impacted stakeholders in a timely and transparent manner.
- Budgetary cuts to EU4Health were identified as early as December 2023 following the revision of the EU 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). Still the FPAs were signed, indicating an intention to allocate funding to operating grants, at least initially. The failure to timely inform FPA holders of the decision not to publish calls for operating grants prevented NGOs from planning activities and managing budgets effectively, breaching standards of good administration.
- The Ombudswoman has therefore asked the Commission to submit a written reply to her assessment **by 15 May 2026**. Her office will monitor the response and, if necessary, further pursue the inquiry.

The health civil society community welcomes the Ombudsman’s intervention and remains ready for dialogue and a smooth resolution with the Commission.

Background

In October 2024, 30 health civil society organisations signed Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) with the European Commission, expecting the publication of calls for EU4Health operating grants for 2025.

In April 2025 the Commission asked FPA holders to amend the agreements, without communicating about potential impacts on the availability of operating grants. Nonetheless, in July, the European Commission published the 2025 EU4Health Work Programme, seven months into the year, with no provision for and no budgetary allocation for operating grants.

As a result, in September 2025, 25 health and patient advocacy organisations members of the EU4Health Civil Society Alliance submitted first a [formal complaint to the European Commission](#), and then a [formal complaint to the European Ombudsman office](#), regarding this procedure.

After analysing the complaint raised by health civil society, Ms Anjinho brought forward the inquiry and [found](#) that the Commission had failed to keep interested organisations adequately informed about how budgetary cuts would affect operating grants. This raises concerns on three core principles of the [European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour](#): the duty to provide reasoned decisions, the obligation to respect legitimate expectations, and the requirement to handle requests for information properly.

The withdrawal of operating grants has had dramatic consequences for many organisations, leading to closures, office shutdowns, staff cuts, and reduced activities and programmes. As a result, NGOs' ability to provide independent, cross-cutting input into EU policy is critically strained at a pivotal moment for EU health policy. Operating grants fund not only overheads, but also the time and resources needed to represent patients and consumers in EU fora, consult communities on EU law and policy, and build momentum on overlooked issues such as (digital) health literacy, access to healthcare, and antimicrobial resistance.

ENDS

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