



Letter from the European Ombudsman to the European Commission on how it handled concerns about operating grants under the 2025 EU4Health work programme

Correspondence - 16/02/2026

Case 2668/2025/FA - Opened on 13/10/2025 - Institution concerned European Commission |

President
European Commission
1049 BRUSSELS
Belgium

Dear President,

I would like to thank the Commission for having informed my Office that it replied to the complainant on 20 October 2025 in the above-mentioned case concerning how the Commission handled operating grants under the 2025 EU4Health Work Programme.

In its reply, the Commission explained that it was not possible to publish a call for operating grants in 2025 due to the absence of a corresponding call reference in the 2025 Annual Work Programme. The Commission clarified that this was due to the budgetary cuts to the EU4Health programme following the revision of the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF), and that it took time to analyse the consequences of these cuts.

The complainant was not satisfied with the reply received from the Commission and provided comments to my Office on 5 November 2025.

After a careful assessment of all the information provided, I have decided to pursue the inquiry on substance into this case, for the reasons stated below.

NGOs in the health sector rely on operating grants to function and expected, by signing Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs), that a call for operating grants would be published and operating grants awarded. This is because the sole purpose for the Commission to sign FPAs was to facilitate the allocation of funding through operating grants. The fact that the Commission signed the concerned FPAs meant that it, at least initially, intended to allocate funding to operating grants and publish the corresponding calls.

That said, I am aware that the Commission had no legal obligation to allocate funding to operating grants in its 2025 Annual Work Programme, nor to publish calls for operating grants, even if there are corresponding FPAs. This falls within the Commission's margin of discretion. However, the Commission still has a duty to communicate in a timely and transparent way with stakeholders on decisions directly affecting them, in particular when these actions have a direct impact on their financial capacity.

From the information available in the case file, it appears that the Commission failed to clearly communicate its decision to FPA holders and provided no updates on how the budget cuts to the EU4Health programme would potentially affect operating grants.

In this regard, I note that the budgetary cuts affecting the EU4Health Programme were known to the Commission as early as December 2023.^[1] Despite this, it appears that, on 30 October 2024, the Commission signed FPAs with NGOs in the health sector without giving any indication as to whether the cuts to the EU4Health Programme could potentially affect the provision



of such grants. Further to this, in April 2025, FPA holders were requested to amend their FPAs in line with new institutional guidance, again with no apparent mention of how operating grants may be affected.

FPA holders, including the complainant, contacted the Commission on several occasions in 2024 and 2025 seeking clarification regarding the delayed publication of the 2025 Work Programme and calls for operating grants. It appears that such requests remained unanswered.

The Commission then adopted the 2025 EU4Health Annual Programme on 23 July 2025, which did not include operating grants. Again, the Commission appears to have failed to explain this choice and its implication to FPA holders. The Commission only seems to have clarified the situation months later, on 20 October 2025, after my intervention in the context of this inquiry.

I find 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. While, during the process of adopting the 2025 EU4Health Annual Programme, the Commission may not have been in a position to provide precise information on the implications of these budgetary cuts on operating grants, the Commission should still have responded in a timely manner and kept the NGOs informed of relevant developments. This would have enabled the NGOs concerned to adjust their expectations, plan their activities accordingly, and make informed decisions on how to manage their budget.

In light of the above, I have decided that it would be useful to receive from the Commission a **written reply** on substance to this complaint. In particular, I would appreciate it if the Commission could provide its comments on my above assessment of the matter.

I would be grateful if the Commission could provide a reply by 15 May 2026. Information or documents that the Commission considers to be confidential will not be disclosed to the complainant or any other person without the prior agreement of Commission.^[2] Please note, however, that the Commission's reply will be shared with the complainant and published on our website. If the Commission wishes to provide the Ombudsman with confidential information in its reply, such information should therefore be put in a confidential annex to the reply.

The inquiries officer responsible for the case is Ms Francesca Abbo.

If, in the course of this inquiry, the Commission becomes involved in court proceedings concerning the same subject matter as this complaint, I would ask you to let us know.

Yours sincerely,

Teresa Anjinho
European Ombudsman

Strasbourg, 16/02/2026

^[1] As reflected in the [MFF negotiating box](#) of December 2023, which provides that *"the MFF Revision [...] is firmly supported by 26 Heads of State or Government", the following consequences (among others) are foreseen: "An amount of EUR [10.6 billion] will be reassigned to the priorities mentioned above while not undermining any political priority within the current MFF; EUR [1 billion] will be redeployed from the EU4Health programme."*: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/68901/st00023-en23.pdf>. The MFF was then formally adopted in February 2024 through Regulation (EU) 2024/765.

^[2] Please clearly mark such material 'Confidential'. Encrypted emails can be sent to our dedicated mailbox. Information and documents of this kind will be deleted from the European Ombudsman's files shortly after the inquiry has ended.