



Plateforme européenne de la société civile pour l'éducation tout au long de la vie
European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL)

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CIVIL SOCIETY: SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR DG EDUCATION AND CULTURE?

In many EU funding programmes today including the [Lifelong Learning Programme](#), European civil society organisations are financed via operating grants from the European Commission. Operating grants are administrative support allocated under a very competitive process. Thanks to them, European organisations can play their role in EU democratic life by organising actions to inform EU citizens about what happens in Brussels and voice their concerns to EU institutions. In the future this support could disappear for education stakeholders whereas it will continue for other sectors such as social affairs, citizenship, health, sustainable development, justice or gender.

While elaborating the next funding programme for education, training, youth and sport for 2014-2020 called [Erasmus for all](#) (or [YES Europe](#) by the European Parliament), the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture decided to **replace operating grants by project-based funding**. Over and above the threat that it represents for the daily work of European organisations, this funding scheme reduces them to service providers by narrowing the scope of their activities to very specific EU objectives and **kills their political independence**. Indeed, even though both funding schemes come from the EU, operating grants allow much more flexibility and freedom of speech for civil society organisations. On the other hand, operating grants beneficiaries are submitted to highly selective calls for proposals through a fair competition echoing the main EU strategies and strict financial rules. It is therefore a **win-win situation** that could be terminated at the expense of a genuine civil dialogue in education and training. Besides, **a platform of European organisations such as EUCIS-LLL would simply disappear** because project running would make it lose its mission of resource centre and advocacy player on European education and training policies.

Today we would like to highlight the fact that the suppression of operating grants has not been consistent with other sectors as **they have been maintained in several Commission's proposals for 2014-2020** funding programmes, notably in [Europe for citizens](#), the [Programme for Social Change and Innovation](#), [LIFE](#) and the [Health for Growth Programme](#). DG environment in the LIFE proposal acknowledges that operating grants are essential to help NGOs "*making effective contributions to Union policy, as well as building up and strengthening their capacity to become more efficient partners*". The proposed legal basis stipulates that those grants will be allocated through "*competitive and transparent awarding*", as they have always been for education and training. DG Health and Consumers seeks to improve them in the future Health for Growth Programme by reducing administrative burden and recommends to keep on using them as "*they are more suitable for such activities*" (financing networks).

This particular position of DG EAC is even more surprising considering that the [Rules of Application](#) of the **EU Financial Regulation specifically mention operating grants** (article 121) to finance "*the functioning of a body which pursues an aim of general Union interest or has an objective forming part of, and supporting a Union policy*". The choice of DG EAC is therefore a purely political stand that is hardly justifiable and we call for **a similar and equitable application of the EU Financial Regulation in all sectors**.

European civil society organisations and platforms in education and training contribute every day to deliver on the EU strategy and have always maintained a fruitful collaboration with DG EAC. Yet the

partnership approach with stakeholders promoted in its last communication on [Rethinking Education](#) can only work if the Commission has partners to talk to. The **European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee support the reintroduction of operating grants in Erasmus for all/YES Europe**. We thus call the Council to endorse this position in current triologue negotiations and **the Commission to provide guidelines in this direction in the future users' guide**.

Notes to the editors: The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) gathers 31 European organisations working in education and training. Together, they cover all sectors of education and training including networks for secondary and higher education, vocational education and training, adult education and popular education; networks for students, school heads, parents, HRD professionals, teachers and trainers. www.eucis-lll.eu

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