

EU's regions and cities praise increase in EU health budget



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European Committee of the Regions back €5.1 billion deal negotiated by the European Parliament.

The European Committee of the Regions has warmly welcomed a political agreement, endorsed on 12 November by the European Parliament, that would see the European Union dedicate over €5 billion to its flagship health programme over the next seven years. Creation of the 4Health programme was announced in May as a direct response to the coronavirus, which has now killed over 200,000 people across the 's 27 member states.

The sum is less than the 's regions and cities had called for, but it is triple the budget that member states had wanted. The CoR, like the European Parliament, had pressed for a budget of €9.4 billion, but member states said in July that they were prepared only to accept a budget of €1.7 billion. Under a compromise reached on 10 November and endorsed by the European Parliament on 12 November, the new 4Health programme will be able to spend €5.1 billion between 2021 and 2027 on ensuring the is equipped to prevent, prepare for and respond to health threats and crises.

The agreement with representatives of the 's 27 member states now needs just the endorsement of national leaders.

The CoR's rapporteur, Nathalie Sarrabezolles (FR/PES), president of President of the Finistère Departmental Council, said after the European Parliament's vote: "The did it! Following the key demands of my opinion and thanks to the European Parliament's perseverance, the future budget of the 4Health programme will be reinforced by €3.4 billion compared to the position of the European Council in July 2020.

We must now make sure that 4Health will promptly deliver and contribute to the reinforcement of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the reduction of health inequalities. The reference to the regional dimension could have been stronger, even though the inclusion of cross-border corridors is already an important first step in this direction."

Members of the European Committee of the Regions adopted the report by Ms Sarrabezolles when they met on 14 October. The CoR also adopted recommendations to introduce a European health emergency mechanism and to improve cross-border health care.

Ms proposals to ensure the full participation of local and regional authorities and to bolster cross-border cooperation and telemedicine. Her arguments were supported by evidence collected by the CoR on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the 's regions, and on the preparedness of health-care systems at the regional level. The report found wide regional differences in policy, spending and infrastructure in the health-care sector, with –for example – the number of hospital beds per 100 000 inhabitants varying by a factor of 10.

An opinion poll commissioned by the CoR found in September that two-thirds of Europeans believed that local and regional authorities do not have enough influence on decisions taken at the level. They said they would most like cities and regions to have a say on health-related decisions made by the .

The findings – including the opinion poll – were collected and presented in October in the CoR's Annual Regional and Local Barometer. The Barometer is available in full and in a summary. Data-based accounts on the impact of the pandemic on local and regional health systems and on regional economies are also available.

The 4Health opinion drafted by Ms Sarrabezolles and the Annual Regional and Local Barometer contribute to the wide-ranging effort by the European Committee of the Region to ensure that the 's recovery from the pandemic helps to build resilient communities, helps the development of local

economies, and promotes efforts to deepen European democracy.

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