



13 – 15 March 2019
LAUNDHAUS ST. PÖLTEN, LOWER AUSTRIA
CONFERENCE AND STUDY VISIT

 

**HEALTHCARE IN
CROSS-BORDER
REGIONS** | EUHPP
THEMATIC
NETWORK

Thematic Network

“HEALTHCARE IN CROSS-BORDER REGIONS”

Conference and 2-days Study Visit

13-15 March 2019, Lower Austria

The event was the first gathering of the thematic network “**Healthcare in Cross-border Regions**”.

The Thematic networks are collaborative networks that bring together different stakeholder organisations **to produce joint statements** on health-related developments. The networks are hosted on the EU health policy platform and supported by DG SANTE.

The “**Healthcare in cross-border regions**” thematic network, led by EUREGHA and Healthacross initiative” (Lower Austria Region), aims to support the European Commission in its exercise of mapping building cross-border and regional cooperation in healthcare through the identification of crucial challenges and successful existing experiences to be scaled up.

13 March: Conference

Hannes Schaffer, *Chair of the event*

Mr Schaffer welcomed the participants and explained the importance of the production of the Joint Statement on “Healthcare in Cross-Border Regions” in the framework of the **EU Health Policy Platform**.

Dr Martin Eichinger, *Minister of the provincial government of Lower Austria*

Mr Eichinger opened the first session explaining **the importance of cross-border policies for a region like Lower Austria**. The region has a very strong commitment to European integration, especially due to the key role that the EU plays for cross-border integration. **Since the establishment of the Healthacross initiative, eleven years ago, Lower Austria has been working intensively in health cooperation with the Czech and Slovak regions**. A great example of this cooperation is the use of cross-border ambulance services with the Czech Republic. **Every Country involved wants to share knowledge and offer the best possible healthcare systems to the population**. Lower Austria will also establish the first European “Cross-border Health Centre” Gmund with doctors from Austria and the Czech Republic. Mr Eichinger concluded saying that Lower Austria is a proud member of EUREGHA being its vice chair since 2012.

Nick Batey, *Chair of EUREGHA*

In his introductory remarks, Mr Batey pointed out that **EUREGHA’s initiative is not only about healthcare, but it is also a platform for building relationships, links and connections to address common global challenges**, particularly in terms of health inequalities. He noted that one of the fundamental benefits across all the European networks is to give an **opportunity to learn from best practices, and also to adopt and implement that learning**. The European Commission has a significant role in creating opportunities that sometimes we would not otherwise be able to fulfil. Mr Batey highlighted that thanks to this Thematic Network we will hear and learn from a variety of experiences and leave with a much stronger community of practitioners and professionals, who are working towards a common set of goals to further improve cooperation across Europe. For this reason, EUREGHA is very grateful that the proposal on Healthcare in cross-border Regions was adopted.

Balazs Lengyel, *Legal Officer, DG SANTE, European Commission*

Mr Lengyel described how cooperation, in terms of healthcare, is not an easy task in the EU. In fact, Healthcare is a competence of the Member States, and there are 28 different National Health systems in the EU. However, **article 168 of the treaty emphasises that the EU should encourage cooperation between the member states to improve the complementarity of the health systems in cross-border areas**. The ultimate reason is to help regions that face more obstacles in receiving regular services, also because of their borders. Mr Lengyel presented the EU legislation regarding Healthcare in cross-border region explaining that the legal framework is provided by the “**Directive on patients’ rights in cross-border healthcare**” ([2011/24/EU](#)) and by the “**Coordination of social security systems**” ([Regulation \(EC\) 883/2004](#)). In particular, DG SANTE is working to implement Directive 2011/24/EU since, being a directive and not a regulation, it needs transposition measures from the Member States. Mr Lengyel continued saying that besides the legislative framework, there are **many funding mechanisms** within the European Structural and Investment Funds to help cross-border cooperation. Lastly, the EU Commission provides **tools which can be used for the cooperation in the practices**, such as the Commission’s Studies, the conferences, the Health Policy Platform and the Border Focal Point. In particular, the “[Study on Cross-Border cooperation](#)” that maps EU-funded cooperation projects in the period 2007-2017 in 28 EU Member States, EEA countries and Switzerland. The principal object of this document is to provide a toolbox and general documented support for stakeholders and authorities interested in cross-border cooperation.

Please find the Presentation [here](#).

Valeria Cenacchi, *Desk Officer for European Cross-Border Cooperation programmes, DG REGIO, European Commission*

Ms Cenacchi thanked EUREGHA and its members for the commitment in the Thematic Network. She outlined that DG REGIO started working on the cooperation on cross-border healthcare two years ago with the communication on [boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions](#). **Ms Cenacchi warmly welcomed the Thematic Network “Healthcare in cross-border regions” because it represents the beginning of a process and a success after two years of cooperation and dialogue**. Ms Cenacchi emphasised that **it is a quite favourable momentum for cross-border cooperation in healthcare**. There are many ongoing initiatives around the EU to promote this important topic by providing policy support. Some examples are the [EU Health Policy Platform](#), the [Border Focal Point](#), the [b-solutions](#) project and the [Regiostars awards](#). All these initiatives can contribute to the definition of **the agenda of the next European Commission**. Ms Cenacchi stressed that the joint statement that will be produced by the Thematic Network represents a very interesting input that will be further developed by the Commission. Moreover, there are still on-going negotiations to prepare for the future Multiannual financial framework of the EU. For the 2021-2027 period, the

new Cohesion Policy includes, besides its horizontal objectives, the cooperation between regions and across borders. Ms Cenacchi explained that regarding **INTERREG**, the discussion will probably be finalized by the end of the year. Some changes will happen. In particular, there will be a **simplification of the rules, a reinforcement of a results-oriented approach and a much stronger role for cooperation**. Ms Cenacchi concluded her speech describing a new legal tool, the **European cross-border mechanism**, that will help overcome some of the administrative and legal obstacles. For specific projects, it will help by allowing the application of the administration framework of one country in another country.

Please find the Presentation [here](#).

Kick-off the debate session

EUHPP Thematic Network: Valentina Polylas, Operations Manager, EUREGHA

The debate session was opened by Ms Polylas who explained the functioning of the EUHPP Thematic Network and presented the Thematic Network on “Healthcare in cross-border Regions”. EUREGHA’s Thematic Network will involve a broad range of different stakeholders such as patient organisations, regional and local authorities, service providers and others. Ms Polylas explained that the future **joint statement will not be just a list of recommendations for the Commission and the Member States, but also a collection of best practices and inputs**. For this reason, Ms Polylas applauded the presence of both Healthacross initiative and La Cerdanya Hospital to share their interesting and innovative practices. Ms Polylas highlighted the role of the Thematic Networks in giving the opportunity to **establish cooperation and dialogue with different stakeholders, but also with the institutions, in order to disseminate important messages in an effective way**. Regarding the process of drafting the joint statement, Ms Polylas stressed that everything will be shared in the [EU Health Policy Platform](#).

Concerning the timeline:

- a **first draft of the document** will be produced in the upcoming weeks;
- the **first webinar to present it** will take place around the **15th of April**;
- on the **26th of June**, EUREGHA will organise a meeting at the **Committee of the Regions (CoR)** with the Interregional Group of Health and Wellbeing to collect more inputs from the members of the CoR;
- **from the 26th to the 28th of June** EUREGHA will participate in a big event organised by EU prevent, the CoR, the WHO and Regions for Health Network;
- the **second webinar** will take place in **September** with an updated draft version of the Joint Statement.

- **by the end of September, the document will be finalized, and EUREGHA will ask all the stakeholders to support the statement.**

Please find the Presentation [here](#).

Innovation in model of healthcare: Francesc Bonet, Director, Hospital La Cerdanya

Mr Bonet started his speech underlining that **La Cerdanya Hospital is the only bi-national cross-border Hospital in the EU**. He continued describing that the region of interest of the Hospital was very isolated, as it is far from both Barcelona and Perpignan, where the two big nearest Hospitals are. Mr Bonet noted that the project started very slowly. It began in 2005 with a Joint declaration of intent between the French Health minister and its Spanish counterpart. Then in 2007, the process moved on with the Declaration of intent towards the constitution of a GECT and in 2010, the construction started with EU funds. **The Hospital started to provides healthcare assistance only in January 2015**. Mr Bonet explained that as a cross-border hospital, La Cerdanya faced **administrative issues** such as **different models of the healthcare system and different levels of administrative decentralisation**. In fact, while France is a liberal model with free doctors and private clinics paid by their activities, the Catalan system provides universal coverage for everybody without the possibility for the patient to choose the hospital, as it is assigned geographically. Mr Bonet stressed that the most critical obstacle that the project faced was the **diversity of the social security systems**. Other **day to day difficulties** are the **transportation of patients from France, body repatriation, multilingualism, insurance systems, prescription of drugs and the cooperation with French police** that cannot cross the border.

Please find the Presentation [here](#).

Governance of cross-border healthcare projects: Julia Winkler, Healthacross initiative

Ms Winkler addressed the topic of the management of projects, describing Healthacross' experience. Healthacross has **more than ten years of experience with projects in the cross-border area**. Regarding the governance of projects, Ms Winkler explained that what makes their projects successful and sustainable are attributes like the **transparency** both in the decision and communication process, the **integrity** and the **participation** of all the people involved, the **accountability** and the **co-production**. Ms Winkler continued her speech describing **six steps that, in her experience, are crucial for the success of a project**. The first step is the **networking** for buy-in from cross-border partners; the second is the importance of the **feasibility studies**. Other important aspects are the understanding of the **legal and administrative context**, the importance of doing **pilot testing** and initial evaluation, and eventually is **putting the full implementation in place**. For Ms Winkler the **main challenges** that the Healthacross initiative faced during their projects were **financing**, obtaining **political support**, the **demographic change** of doctors, keeping the hospital **staff motivated** and the **language issue**.

As for **facilitating factors**, Ms Winkler described the excitement about the **novelty of the project**, the **networking** activities and the support that implicated, the **educational growth** for hospital employees and the **willingness to make cross-border health work**.

Please find the Presentation [here](#).

e-health and data collection: Brigitte van der Zanden, Director, EU Prevent

Ms van der Zanden affirmed that there is a **strong need for comparable regional data in cross-border cooperation**. Then, she described the EU Prevent work on data collection regarding the **Euregion Meuse-Rhine (EMR)**, an area with five regions, 4 million inhabitants, 3 borders, 3 languages and huge policy differences, but also many similarities. Ms van der Zanden explained that the region has had a strong interest in cross-border cooperation, and one of the main topics was the cross-border collection of data. **The collection of data is not a goal itself but is strongly needed for cross-border cooperation**. Moreover, Ms van der Zanden specified that cooperate in the collection of data it is not only sharing information but also **creating new knowledge together**. Since 2001, the collection started with the Euregional youth survey with the use of questionnaires that are similar to the ones used by the WHO, with around three hundred questions. The analysis has been repeated over the years, **and the result is a set of comparable data, that allowed an analysis of EU-regional trends**. Ms van der Zanden underlined that **the analysis shows how sometimes there are more similarities with neighbour regions than with the national ones**. EU Prevent collected data about demographics, health, disease, lifestyle and use of Healthcare. They are working on a [Platform of Euregional health data](#) where the data are shown on a regional level and where it is possible to analyse trends. She stressed that the collection of data about the EMR is not a project, it is something that EU Prevent is doing without project funds.

Please find the Presentation [here](#).

14 March: Study visit to the hospital of Melk

PROJECT: UNLIMITED HEALTH TOGETHER

- Cooperation partners:** Lower Austria (AU), South Bohemia (CZ), South Moravia (CZ)
- Focus area:** Cross-border hospital cooperation in radiotherapy, gynaecology (endometriosis) and emergency cooperation.
- Short Summary:** “**Unlimited Health Together**” is an EU co-founded project between Lower Austria, South Moravia and South Bohemia focusing on cross-border hospital cooperation in radiotherapy, gynaecology (endometriosis) and emergency cooperation. The project, that will run until 2019, has achieved several goals:
- Through close cooperation between the Lower Austrian Melk clinical centre and the Znaim hospital, both of which are located near the border, the Melk clinic became the sole centre for endometriosis care in Lower Austria.
 - Cross-border cooperation between the Hollabrunn clinical centre in Lower Austria and the Znaim hospital has been established in the radiotherapy specialism sector.
 - Cross-border cooperation by the emergency services.

PROJECT: BRIDGES FOR BIRTH

- Cooperation partners:** Lower Austria (AU), Slovakia
- Focus area:** Hospital cooperation in neonatology and establishment of rescue services for neonatal emergencies
- Short Summary:** “**Bridges for Birth**” is a project between Lower Austria and Slovakia, funded by the INTERREG V-A programme for the period 2014-2020. Due to the partnership between the Hainburg clinical centre and the University Children's Hospital Bratislava, neonatal emergencies can be transferred

from Hainburg to the nearby University Children's Hospital Bratislava if necessary. The project is still ongoing.

15 March: Study visit to the hospital of Gmünd

PROJECT: HEALTHACROSS FOR FUTURE

Cooperation partners: Lower Austria (AU), South Bohemia (CZ), South Moravia (CZ)

Focus area: Cross-border patient care; Inpatient treatment of Czech patients at the Gmünd clinical centre; testing the feasibility of sharing medical services between Austria and the Czech Republic; sharing of knowledge between specialists in the health care sector; planning and implementation of a cross-border health centre.

Short Summary: The “**Healthacross for future**” project aims to set further steps to improve the quality of life for the population in the border regions and to guarantee and expand access to high-calibre health care, close to where they live. The project is co-funded through the INTERREG V-A Austria – Czech Republic programme, and it includes all relevant stakeholders from the health sector in the border regions. The project focusses on two main pillars, cross-border health care provision and cross-border health cube. The main objectives are to ensure inpatient cross-border healthcare and expand it to inpatient care for CZ patients and to prepare a "Cross-border health centre" for the border region.

Please find the Presentations:

[Healthacross](#)

[Unlimited Health Together](#)

[Bridges for Birth](#)

[Healthacross for future](#)