

EU Health Policy Platform Proposal for a Thematic Network on Healthcare in cross-border regions

Scope

There is a specific need for growth in border areas, home to 30% of the European population. The socio-economic development of border regions is often hampered because of their peripheral location and the differences in legislation compared to their neighbouring countries. Border regions experience hindrance of free movement of labour and services which leads to disadvantages in the economic, social and cultural development. **All these factors significantly affect healthcare systems in border regions.** The geographical working area for enterprises and their markets, healthcare providers and institutions, skills and training services for the workforce, educational institutions and regional governments often encounter more obstacles than in non-border regions, **which makes the delivery of health care services less efficient. Furthermore, citizens are limited in their choice of and accessibility to health care and there is less room for cooperation,** which can potentially create **health inequalities.** The **Directive 2011/24/EU on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare** was an important step forward for European health policies, responding to the needs of EU citizens. The directive ensures patients' rights to access safe and high-quality healthcare across national borders in the EU and their right to be reimbursed for such healthcare. The effectiveness of the directive varies between Member States and regions and more needs to be done to overcome some of the challenges related to documentation, reimbursement, translation and equal access, to name only a few. While a number of good practices already exists in the field of cross-border care, it shall be noted that cross-border cooperation does not include new challenges such as differences in structures and legislation, fragmented roles and various responsibilities in healthcare, and a more complex setting for health care providers and their markets. To better address such challenges, on 20 September 2017 the Commission adopted its Communication "**Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions**", which highlights ways in which the EU and its Member States can tackle the issue by promoting the pooling of services along internal borders. The Communication proposes a set of actions to enhance competitiveness and cohesion in border regions, notably by addressing some of the legal and administrative barriers currently hampering closer cooperation and interaction. Moreover, the recently-published **(21/09/2018) report of the Commission on the operation of Directive 2011/24/EU** on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare stresses the need to **map and build cross-border and regional cooperation.** To this end, **on 4 December 2018,** the European Commission intends to organise **the strategic event "Enhancing Healthcare Cooperation in Cross-Border Regions"** and gather stakeholders from border regions to explore ways in which exchange of information and best practices can be further developed throughout the Union. The event aims to create a stronger collaboration among border regions to improve the socio-economic condition of border areas.

Objectives and Outcomes

Against this background, EUREGHA proposes **to establish a thematic network on "Healthcare in cross-border regions"** under the EU Health Policy Platform. The aim is to create synergies and build upon the already-existing different tools in order to come out with a **Joint statement which can support the European Commission in its exercise of mapping and building cross-border and regional cooperation in healthcare.** To this end, EUREGHA will:

- Use the outcomes of the **4th of December event**, in which the network will take part as a speaker, as a basis for the Joint statement and to look for potential new partners interested in joining the thematic network;
- Work within the already-established **internal WG on Cross-border healthcare**: update and add new best practices to EUREGHA's booklet, which had already been disseminated through DG REGIO [FUTURIUM platform](#). Inputs exchange and drafting of the Joint statement will be done through exchange of e-mails and 3 physical/virtual meetings within the WG;
- Use the next **EUREGHA General Assembly and study visit in Lower Austria** (to be held in March/April 2019) as an opportunity to discuss (2nd physical meeting) the first draft of the Joint statement and collect inputs from both EUREGHA members and external stakeholders invited to the event.
- Take advantage of the fact that EUREGHA is running the **Secretariat of the European Committee of the Regions - Interregional Group on Health and Well-being** to organise a dedicated meeting and collect inputs from CoR members in the coming year.
- Maximise the impact of the Joint statement through the recently-launched **EUREGHA campaign** "[Health in all Regions](#)"

Stakeholders may include EU regions, local and regional health authorities, healthcare providers, enterprises, research and development centres, the higher education sector and regional development agencies.

About the leader and network:

[EUREGHA](#) is a Brussels-based reference network of European regional and local health authorities comprised of 15 full members and 4 observers, including an association of border regions dealing with healthcare ([EU Prevent](#)). Its mission is to promote collaboration amongst regional and local health authorities in Europe within the framework of policies related to public health and health care. The network's main purpose is "Bringing Regional and Local Authorities together for Better Health" and guaranteeing "Health in all Regions".

Thematic Network partners:

- **EUREGHA Working Group on cross-border health care**: Lower Austria (lead partner), Vysocina, German speaking community of Belgium, Flanders, Catalonia, Veneto, South Limbourg, Skane, Occitanie (observer), EU prevent (observer).
- **European Committee of the Regions - Interregional Group on Health and Well-being**

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European Regional and Local Health Authorities

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