

CoR INTERREGIONAL GROUP ON HEALTH & WELL-BEING

4 MARCH 2026, 09h00-10h00

Constitutive Meeting 2026

Minutes

09:00 Welcome, introduction by the Chair, Birgitta Sacrédeus.

The Chair, **Birgitta Sacrédeus**, opened the constitutive meeting of the Interregional Group on Health and Well-Being (IRGHW) by welcoming attending participants. She emphasised that the meeting marked the start of the group's activities for 2026 and provided an opportunity for members to collectively identify priorities and thematic areas for discussion throughout the year.

Participants briefly introduced themselves, representing a range of regions and institutions, including regional representations in Brussels, members of the European Committee of the Regions, and the EUREGHA Secretariat.

09:05 – Roundtable introduction and overview of the IRGHW working method

Mr Marco Di Donato (EUREGHA's Policy and Projects Manager) provided an overview of the functioning of the Interregional Group. The IRGHW operates as an informal platform within the Committee of the Regions, enabling CoR members with an interest in health policy to exchange views and strengthen cooperation with other European institutions and stakeholders. The group works closely with the NAT Commission and aims to support policy dialogue on health-related files under discussion at EU level.

Mr Di Donato explained that the group typically meets four to five times per year, including one closed-door constitutive meeting and several public sessions involving external stakeholders such as researchers, healthcare professionals, industry representatives, and international organisations. One meeting is traditionally organised during the European Week of Regions and Cities in collaboration with the NAT Commission.

The IRGHW also serves as a platform to support CoR opinions and to connect regional perspectives with broader European health policy developments. The secretariat reiterated its role in facilitating exchanges between members and relevant stakeholders and in supporting the organisation of meetings and thematic discussions.

09:15 – Open debate: Themes and actions for the IRGHW Work Plan 2026

The Chair opened the discussion on possible thematic priorities for the group's 2026 activities. The secretariat presented several suggested areas for consideration, including cardiovascular health, mental health, women's health, the role of culture and arts in health, digital health developments related to the European Health Data Space, and broader policy discussions linked to the future Multiannual Financial Framework.

Members engaged in an open exchange on these topics, sharing regional perspectives and experiences.

A strong interest emerged around **mental health**, particularly with regard to young people and the growing challenges related to bullying and social pressures affecting students. One participant representing Banská Bystrica Region (SK) described recent initiatives implemented in their region following a tragic case of student suicide linked to bullying. A regional strategy was developed to improve the identification and reporting of bullying cases in schools, including the designation of trusted staff members to whom students can safely report concerns. As a result of these efforts, cases previously unreported are now being addressed through a coordinated approach.

The initiative also includes the development of a national pilot project involving multiple ministries to improve institutional cooperation between schools, healthcare providers, social services and law enforcement authorities. Participants highlighted the importance of coordinated action and early intervention mechanisms, particularly for cases requiring multidisciplinary responses. The experience prompted interest from other members in learning from similar practices across Europe.

Several participants suggested that the IRGHW could facilitate further exchanges on this topic by organising a dedicated session or discussion involving professionals working directly on youth mental health and bullying prevention. The issue of long waiting times for psychological services was also raised as a broader challenge affecting healthcare systems across Europe.

Another topic discussed extensively was **cardiovascular health**, particularly in relation to the newly unveiled **EU cardiovascular health plan: the Safe Heats Plan**. Members highlighted the opportunity for the Interregional Group to contribute to discussions linked to the upcoming CoR Opinion and the broader European policy debate on cardiovascular disease prevention and care. Participants emphasised the importance of prevention, including promoting healthy lifestyles, sport, and nutrition. The role of food policies and urban initiatives supporting healthy diets was also highlighted as a relevant example of regional action.

A member from **Lazio Region (IT)** also proposed linking cardiovascular health discussions with related topics such as **obesity prevention**, noting its status as a chronic condition with significant implications

for public health and healthcare systems. Regional initiatives promoting healthy eating in schools and encouraging physical activity among young people were cited as examples of preventive action.

Representatives from Umbria Region (IT) further underlined the importance of considering the **relationship between health and environmental conditions**, recalling that environmental policies and their implementation can have direct consequences for human health, healthcare systems, and broader ecosystems.

The discussion also touched upon **women's health** and **digital health**, including the growing importance of digital technologies and data-driven healthcare solutions. Members stressed the need to identify specific thematic angles within these broad topics to ensure focused and productive discussions during future meetings.

Throughout the exchange, participants agreed that prevention represents a cross-cutting priority across many health challenges and should remain a focus of the group's discussions.

Closing remarks

In her closing remarks, Chair Birgitta Sacrédeus thanked participants for their active engagement and constructive contributions. She noted that the discussion demonstrated strong interest in several health priorities relevant to regions across Europe, particularly mental health, cardiovascular health and prevention.

She emphasised the importance of continued collaboration between regions and institutions to address these challenges and highlighted the role of the Interregional Group as a platform for exchange, policy dialogue and advocacy on health and well-being within the Committee of the Regions and the wider EU policy environment.

Next meetings of the Interregional Group on Health and Well-Being (tentative)

The Chair and the Secretariat concluded the meeting by presenting the indicative calendar of upcoming meetings for 2026:

1. **6 May, 09:00–10:00** – Cardiovascular health, in connection with the CoR opinion on the Safe Hearts Plan.
2. **1 July, 09:00–10:00** – Women's health (scope to be further defined).
3. **European Week of Regions and Cities (12–16 October)** – Topic to be defined depending on EWRC themes (not public yet), potentially linked to digital health.

4. **2 December, 09:00–10:00** – Mental health, including youth mental health and bullying prevention.

The Chair concluded by expressing her appreciation for members' commitment to the group's work and looked forward to continuing the discussions in the upcoming meetings throughout 2026.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00.