

## Chances and possibilities for cross-border health care co-operation: the Euregion Meuse-Rhine ( Belgium / the Netherlands / Germany)

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The Euregion Meuse Rhine (EMR) is a geographical area at the borders of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands which harbours 3.7 million inhabitants. The EMR consists of five participating regions, *viz.* the two Belgian provinces of Liège and Limburg, the German Speaking Region of Belgium, the Regio Aachen in Germany and the Dutch Province of Limburg. With 5 participating regions in 3 countries, with 3 national law systems, 3 different languages, 4 different cultures and a great asymmetry in size and competence between the participating regions the Euregion Meuse Rhine represents a “Europe in miniature”.

Visiting a doctor on the other side of the border, or working in a hospital abroad is certainly not unusual for the inhabitants of the EMR. Supported by regional, national and European authorities a network of 15 Belgian, German and Dutch health care insurances and hospitals was set up in order to optimize the possibilities for cross-border patient mobility and cross-border co-operation of hospitals, sickness funds and other health care actors. The Interreg-III project “Cross-border Health Care in the Euregion Meuse Rhine” is one of the joint activities of these project partners, some of which also have effective bilateral cross-border co-operation and contracts.

An important example of the (18) projects performed by the network is called IZOM. It allows insured ones from the EMR to be referred directly to a doctor abroad for ambulant medical specialistic care and, if needed, for admission to and treatment in the hospital abroad. Also, insurance companies / sickness funds developed an International Health Card which facilitates the access to and payment procedures for cross-border care. Many thousands EMR citizens make use of the cross-border possibilities each year, especially when they are encountered with long waiting lists in their own country.

Cross-border co-operation alliances exist between (university) hospitals, both for patient care, teaching and research. Euregional centres for specific disease diagnosis and treatment are being formed (Vascular surgery, metabolic diseases, etc.). Also, a Euregional Hospital Quality Circle with an own quality Charta exists. Another project focuses on spreading of antibiotic resistance, which is a major concern in cross-border care; a Euregional MRSA network of hospital hygienists has been set up for this. Other cross-border health care projects include ambulance care, transparency and comparison of hospital costs, medical aids, chronic diseases, psychiatric care and so on.

Information about cross-border health care and cross-border projects in the Euregion(s) is now being offered to citizens and professionals via a website, the Euregion Health Portal ([www.euregiogesundheitsportal.de](http://www.euregiogesundheitsportal.de) and [www.euregiogezondheidsportaal.nl](http://www.euregiogezondheidsportaal.nl); the Belgian version is under construction).

In conclusion, the Euregion Meuse Rhine is one of the border regions most active in cross-border health care development within Europe.