

High-Level Conference on Patients' Rights and the European Reference Networks in the European Union

Date: Thursday 26 March 2026

Time: 09:00 – 16:30

Venue: Sparks Meeting, Rue Ravenstein 60, Brussels

Link for registration:

<https://eu.eventscloud.com/ereg/newreg.php?eventid=200295777&>

Agenda

09:00 – 09:30 *Registration and welcome coffee*

09:30 – 10:00 High-Level Opening Address

Moderator Antonio Parenti (Director, DG SANTE)

- Olivér Várhelyi, Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare
- Anastasia Christodoulidou, Director of Health Services and Expert Group member for Cross-border Healthcare, on behalf of the Cyprus Presidency
- MEP Vlad Vasile-Voiculescu, SANT Committee, European Parliament

10:00 – 10:30 **Session 1: Patients' rights in cross-border healthcare**

Moderator Josep Figueras (Director Emeritus, European Observatory Health system and Policies)

Keynote Input:

- Overview of the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive (Directive 2011/24/EU) and the Social Security Coordination Regulations: Implementation and Gaps – *Ewout Van Ginneken (European Observatory Health system and Policies)*
- Role of the National Contact Points (NCPs) in informing patients – *Catherine Donohoe (National Contact Point of Ireland)*

10:30 – 11:30 **Interactive forum I: Accessing healthcare abroad: Achievements, Challenges and innovative solutions for the future**

- Natalia Zampieri; Martin Dorazil (DG SANTE)
- Tomáš Tvarožek (NCP CZ); Mira Rantakeisu (NCP FI); Catherine Donohoe (NCP IE); Modesta Visca (NCP IT); Vincet Gatt (NCP MT)
- Claudia Louati (European Patients Forum)

11:30 – 11:50 *Coffee break*

11:50 – 12:10 Session 2: Crossing Boundaries – EU Boost for Healthcare in Border Regions

Moderator Andrew Lansley (Strategic Counsel, Low Associates)

Keynote Input:

- Cross-border healthcare in border regions: EU support – *Simona Pohlova (DG REGIO)*
- Regional cooperation in the EU – achievements and challenges – *Gyula Ocskay (Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives)*

12:10 – 13:00 Interactive forum II: Unlocking Healthcare in border regions: Key Achievements, Challenges, and Solutions for Easier Access

- Giulio Gallo (DG SANTE)
- Caitriona Mullan (Association of European Border Regions)
- Chris Segaert (NCP BE); Maria Kirimi (NCP EL); Andreta Livena (NCP LV); Liesbeth Gerretsen (NCP NL); Veronica Radu (NCP RO)

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:30 – 15:00 Session 3: Discovering European Reference Networks: Benefits for Rare Disease Patients and Their Families

Moderator Luca Sangiorgi (ERN Coordinator – ERN BOND)

Keynote Input:

- ERNs in support of rare disease's patients: Success stories – *Donata Meroni (DG SANTE)*
- ERNs in Action: Making Healthcare Excellence a Reality – *Ruth Ladenstein (ERN Coordinator – ERN PaedCan)*

15:00 – 16:20 Interactive forum III: Let's talk about the European Reference Networks for rare diseases: success stories and future opportunities

- Donata Meroni (DG SANTE); (DG RTD – tbc)
- Birute Tumiene (Board of Member States co-Chair)
- Mar Manu Pereira (ERN Coordinator – ERN-EuroBloodNet)
- Till Voigtländer (Coordinator – Joint Action JARDIN)
- co-chair of the ePAG Steering Committee - tbc
- Massimiliano Raponi (Health Director - Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital)

16:20 – 16:30 Closing remarks European Commission – Sandra Gallina (Director-General for Health and Food Safety)