



Old Bridge, Maastricht



Euregio Meuse-Rhine

General overview

Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) covers five partner regions across three countries: Region Aachen-Zweckverband in Germany; the Province of Limburg in the Netherlands; and the Province of Limburg, the Province of Liège, and the German-speaking Community in Belgium.

EMR covers a total area of 11 000 km² and has a population of 3.9 million. The region comprises 150 municipalities, 49 of which border with another country (1,2). The gross domestic product per capita at the national level is as follows: Belgium – €33 880; Germany – €34 310; the Netherlands – €40 160 (3). As regards life expectancy at birth, no comparable data are available for EMR.

Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work

The following activities are linked to the three core priorities of the European Programme of Work (EPW): ((i) moving towards Universal

Health Coverage (UHC); (ii) promoting health and well-being; and (iii) protecting against health emergencies.



Moving towards UHC

The goal of universal health care is that all people shall have access to quality care without financial hardship. To this end, EMR has been striving for many years to maximize the capacity of the health-care system at the euregional level.

In general, all three EMR countries have relatively good health-care systems, which are effective compared to the European average; hence, the unmet medical needs of the population are low. In addition, they all have compulsory insurance, which is well implemented in practice, despite differences in their insurance arrangements. As a result, more than 99% of the EMR population is covered by insurance, which keeps population out-of-pocket costs low (4–6). A large portion of the health expenditure in these countries is paid through public sources (4–6).

The aim of EMR collaboration is to provide extra support for the already well-established domestic systems, with a special focus on facilitating health services across borders (7).



Promoting health and well-being

As is the case in other parts of the world, EMR citizens place great value on living in a safe and healthy environment. In this respect, collaboration through euPrevent partnerships focuses on environmental health with the aim of improving local living environments to safeguard health and well-being.

There is also a focus on healthier lifestyles and the promotion of ways to achieve better living. Through a study involving the application of the so-called social norms approach, euPrevent and partners targeted health problems related to various population groups while looking at the behaviour of peer population groups (8). Various channels (domestic and regional media campaigns and training) were used to disseminate the findings of the study and inform and involve the population.

As far as possible, euPrevent strives to include a deprived group as a separate target group in every euregional health project. The special needs of the deprived group in question require special attention both in relation to policy-making and in designing a living environment and health-care system (8). Thus, its inclusion in a health project means that its particular needs are heard and opens the possibility of adapting accordingly at all levels to meet them.

More broadly, citizens are invited to become involved in euregional collaboration as partners. They can share their experiences and opinions on an equal footing during citizen summits, and their insights contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of the different health issues (10).



Protecting against health emergencies

Health emergencies are more likely to occur as the risks from climate change and environmental pollution (including transboundary pollution in border regions) increase. EMR has taken initiatives to combine

the forces of the public health authorities, health professionals, scientists and experts to examine the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic as experienced in the region (8–10). A quantitative study on the prevalence of the infection in the EMR population was carried out, and the results of the data collected were associated with the different national prevention and response measures (8,10).

Meanwhile, in a qualitative study, in-depth interviews with professionals and experts were structured to acquire their perspectives on the pandemic, especially the implications of the different national policies (9).

In addition, several regional citizen summits were organized to acquire direct population insight into the relationship between the disease, the national response policies, and people's behaviour. The outcome can be of great use for future collaboration in the region (10).

In the case of a large-scale health emergency, the population in a border region is confronted with more challenges than its domestic counterpart. Therefore, euPrevent is currently seeking more opportunities to collaborate with various stakeholders (scientists, health authorities and policy-makers) to build up a structured mechanism for coordinated emergency response and preparedness to better protect the EMR population.

Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

Initiatives relative to the Mental Health Coalition

Mental health is the topic of one of the six working programmes of euPrevent. Regional collaboration in this area has included depression, dementia, and the mental health of different age groups. Recently, a mental-health issue common to older people in EMR – loneliness – has become the

priority (8). The Coalition promotes the exchange of knowledge about the effects of loneliness and ways of preventing and combatting it, as well as information about best practice and implementation measures.

Initiatives relative to empowerment through digital health

Although this is not the main theme of EMR collaboration at this stage, the region has established a Euregional Health Atlas with

demographic illustrations of the health and well-being of the population (1).

Initiatives relative to the European Immunization Agenda 2030

Through qualitative research on the insight of the EMR population concerning vaccination against COVID-19, it has become apparent that the priorities and approaches of the different

population groups vary according to cultural background (9). This insight can be further used by the health authorities in promoting vaccination campaigns.

Initiative relative to healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insight

In EMR, cultural differences often lead to different approaches in health management at all levels. Awareness about behavioural and cultural differences was included, for example, in a study on the impact of COVID-19 in the border region

(9). This has contributed to a better understanding of the relationship between behaviour and the spread of the disease, and between behavioural change and national health policies, constituting evidence for better regional collaboration.

Initiative specific to EMR

Civic participation in environmental-health-and climate-related health issues

Involving citizens in decision-making processes related to their health is crucial. With increasing risks of pollution and climate change, addressing issues, such as how citizens in border regions will be impacted and what they can expect of the health systems (for example, protection against

health emergencies) is becoming urgent. Pollution is often transboundary and climate impact is not restricted to country borders. Therefore, close collaboration in EMR can provide solutions that are more efficient than reliance solely on efforts at the national level (7).

The three most important topics for collaboration within the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. strengthening public health through structural and sustainable partner collaboration;
2. promoting health and facilitating access to quality health care through social inclusion;
3. coordinating health-emergency crisis management and preparedness for the whole region.

Main partners and collaborators

Forty partners and collaborators in EMR, including health-related public and governmental organizations, private organizations, universities, and patient and civic organizations.

(For more information: [https://euprevent.eu/about-euprevent/network/partners-euprevent/.](https://euprevent.eu/about-euprevent/network/partners-euprevent/))

Contact list

Technical representatives

Brigitte van der Zanden

Director, euPrevent

Email: vanderzanden@euprevent.eu

Michael Dejozé

Director

EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine

Email: michaeldejoze@euregio-mr.eu

Political representative

Luc Gillard

Chairman of the Board

EGTC Euregio Meuse-Rhine

Provincial Deputy Chair of the Province of Liège

Email: luc.gillard@provincedeliege.be

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all URLs accessed 12 June 2022.

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