

17 October 2019

# Special Report N°07/2019:

**EU actions for cross -  
border healthcare:  
significant ambition but  
improved management  
needed**



EUROPEAN  
COURT  
OF AUDITORS



**Why did we do this audit?**



**Audit scope and approach**



**Observations**



**Recommendations**

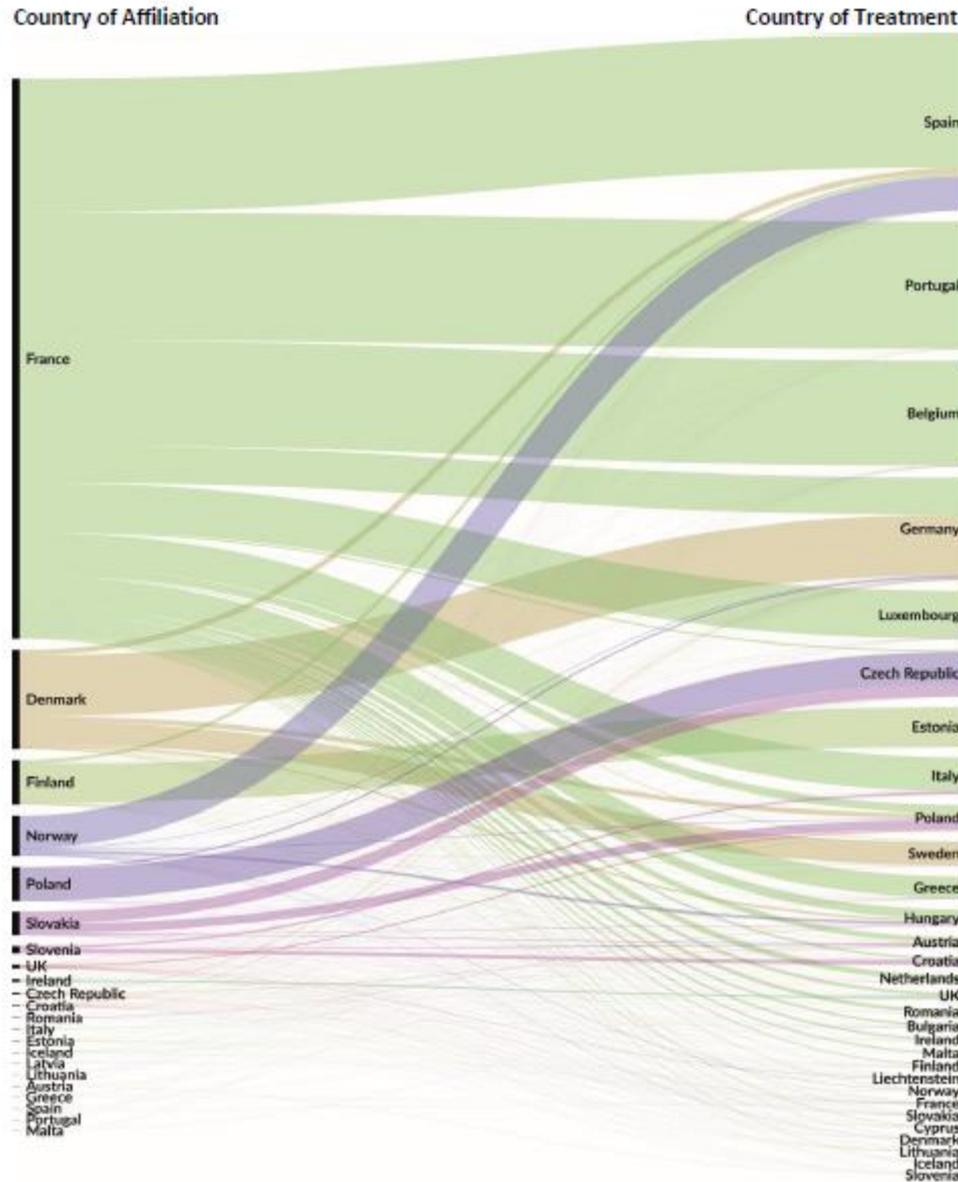


# Why did we do this audit?

**Access to  
healthcare  
matters to EU  
citizens**

- EU citizens still face challenges in accessing healthcare abroad
- Only a minority of patients is aware about their rights to cross-border healthcare
- Digitalisation in healthcare and readiness to exchange data across borders varies among Member States
- There is an added value in EU actions on rare diseases and the Commission created the European Reference Networks

# Patient mobility under the Directive in 2016





# What questions did we ask?

Healthcare is  
national  
competence

Commission  
supports MSs  
cooperation

We examined whether:

1. The Commission oversaw the implementation of EU cross-border Healthcare Directive in the Member States well ...and guided the National Contact Points (NCPs) in providing clear information to patients?
2. The results achieved so far in terms of cross-border exchanges of health data (e-Prescriptions and Electronic Patient Summaries) are in line with expectations?
3. EU actions on rare diseases add value to Member States efforts to facilitate patients 'access to cross-border healthcare?



# What did we look at?

## Cross-border Healthcare Directive

We looked at EU actions under the Cross-border Healthcare Directive that include:

1. Commission's **monitoring** of the Directive's implementation by the Member States and supporting the NCPs in providing clear **information** on patients' rights
2. Facilitating the **exchange** of patients' health data electronically across borders
3. Initiatives for **rare diseases**, namely creation of European Reference Networks and EU wide platform for rare disease registration



# What did we find?

**EU patients still do not benefit enough**

**Better management is needed to deliver on high ambitions**

1. The Commission **monitored** well the implementation of the Directive and provided guidance to NCPs, but this **information** remains difficult to access in some areas
2. The benefits of cross-border health data **exchanges** could not yet be demonstrated. Member States were only just starting to exchange patient data
3. Initiatives for **rare diseases** patients lacked updated strategic framework, sustainability, and a spending plan

## Observations

1

## Information to patients on their rights to cross-border healthcare

## Recommendation

**Insufficient  
/unclear  
information to  
patients**

- The complexity of the framework makes it difficult to provide patients with clear information
- National Contact Points give limited information about European Reference Networks on their websites

**Better  
guidance to  
the NCPs**

- Further support the work of National Contact Points
- Follow up on the use by National Contact Points of the 2018 toolbox
- Provide guidance on presenting information about European Reference Networks

### Delays in the deployment of cross-border exchanges of health data

- The Commission underestimated the difficulties in deploying EU-wide eHealth infrastructure
- The Commission did not properly assess the potential use or cost-effectiveness of exchanging cross-border health data

### Prepare better for cross border exchanges of health data

- Assess the results achieved so far
- Assess whether eHealth actions have provided cost-effective and timely solutions, and meaningful input to national healthcare systems

## Observations

# 3

## Initiatives for rare diseases patients

## Recommendations

### Reference Networks for rare diseases not yet sustainable

- The Commission has not taken stock of its progress in the implementation of the EU rare disease strategy since 2014
- The ERNs face significant challenges to ensure they are financially sustainable and are able to operate effectively
- The Commission did not set out a spending plan for the ERNs

### Improve support for and management of European Reference Networks

- Assess the results of the rare disease strategy
- Set out ways forward to address the challenges faced by the European Reference Networks
- Work towards a simpler structure for any future EU funding to the European Reference Networks

**Thank you  
for your attention!**

**Find out more about the other  
products and activities of the ECA:**

**[eca.europa.eu](http://eca.europa.eu)**

**[ECA-InstitutionalRelations@eca.europa.eu](mailto:ECA-InstitutionalRelations@eca.europa.eu)**

**[@EUauditors](https://twitter.com/EUauditors)**

**EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS**

12, rue Alcide De Gasperi  
1615 Luxembourg  
LUXEMBOURG



EUROPEAN COURT  
OF AUDITORS