

Abstract

Demographic change presents a threat to the economy and welfare system of the European Union (EU). Cross-border regions in the EU face similar challenges: quality and coverage of health care services are deteriorating. Cross-border health care can tackle this problem by expanding the access to health care services from EU neighbour states.

About a third of the EU population lives in cross-border areas and could profit from cross-border health care. To facilitate cross-border patient mobility, the EU published a directive in 2011 and decreased administrative obstacles. But only 3-4% of the Europeans make use of this option. This deficit is due to the lack of cross-border health care services. A few services have been established, but no comprehensive cross-border health care infrastructure exists yet. Objective of this work is to identify causes for success of cross-border health services and to derive implications for realizing cross-border health care.

Based on a literature review, we propose an overview of 21 existing cross-border health care projects in German cross-border regions from 2008 to today (# of patients a year: 3-1000). These projects were locally initiated municipality partnerships or EU-subsidized pilot projects. For this paper we analysed their impact, patient numbers and success rates.

80% of the analysed projects were successful and established long-term health care services. These projects identified local needs, kept commitment of stakeholders, received political support and handled competition issues between partners. The remaining 20% were not able to establish health care services. This was due to complicated bottom-up dynamics in cross-border cooperation, administrative differences and lacking political support. Despite the success rate of 80%, the number of affected patients remains insignificant. It became

clear, that efficient cross-border health care requires standardized policy protocols and top-down governance at EU level.