



Lower Austria, Austria

Wachau Cultural
Landscape

General overview

Lower Austria is situated in the middle of Europe in the north east of Austria. A border of 414 km connects this federal province with its neighbouring countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. With a land area of 19 174 km² and a population of 1.6 million, it is the largest province in Austria (1). The main economic sectors are those for industry, commerce, company services, catering/tourism, agriculture and forestry. In 2016, life expectancy at birth was 78.8 years and 83.6 years for males and females, respectively (2).

The Austrian health-care system is characterized by the federal structure of the country, the delegation of competencies to stakeholders in the social-insurance system, and cross-stakeholder structures in the federal regions, which possess competencies in cooperative planning, coordination and financing. Competencies in the health-care sector are generally regulated by law. The health system is financed through health-insurance contributions and deductibles, as well as subsidies provided to hospitals at the federal, regional and municipal levels.

The Government of Lower Austria is responsible for the provision of health care and social services in the province. The Niederösterreichischer

Gesundheits- und Sozialfonds (Lower Austrian Health and Social Fund) (NÖGUS), which is a body governed by public law, is responsible for planning, controlling, funding and assuring the quality of the health-care and social systems in Lower Austria. Since 2008, all 27 hospitals in Lower Austria have been part of the Niederösterreichische (NÖ) Landeskliniken-Holding (the Lower Austrian State Hospital Holding).

Lower Austria is the only Austrian province in which all hospitals are legal entities of the province itself. NÖ Landeskliniken-Holding offers clinical health-care services, from basic to specialist, and handles the operative management of the hospitals.

Lower Austria's geographic location is favourable to cross-border cooperation due to its long border with the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Since 2008, the province has conducted six projects in the field of cross-border health care (co-funded by the European Union (EU)) and is currently running two EU projects started in 2016; it also participates in three transnational networks. To ensure long-term sustainability, in 2017, NÖGUS set up "Initiative Healthacross", which combines

all cross-border health-care activities in Lower Austria.

The first EU-cofinanced cross-border project, entitled “Healthacross” (2008–2010), involved the border areas of Lower Austria and South Bohemia (Czech Republic). Its aim was to ensure optimum usability of the health services by, and equal accessibility to health care for, the population living in these border areas through the close cooperation of their health-service providers. A follow-up project entitled “Healthacross in practice”, initiated in 2012, has to date enabled more than 4000 Czech patients in the border region to access medical treatment at the hospital in Gmünd, Austria, in a simple, uncomplicated way. A new EU-cofinanced project, “Healthacross for the future” (2017–2020), is focused on ensuring that Czech patients receive outpatient treatment in the Gmünd hospital on a permanent basis. It expands on the initial projects (“Healthacross” and “Healthacross in practice”) to include the provision of inpatient care and the search for opportunities of long-term cooperation by establishing a cross-border health-care centre in the border region of Gmünd–České Velenice.

Cross-border cooperation on the provision of health care has also been established between Lower Austria and the Czech regions of South Moravia and Vysocina. A project entitled “Health without borders” was set up in 2012 with the aim of elaborating strategic opportunities for cross-border cooperation between hospitals and organizing a cross-border contract for emergency services. The project addressed language barriers by providing language courses in health-care facilities and publishing a phrasebook. A follow-up project entitled “Unlimited Health Together” is focusing on cross-border cooperation between hospitals in the areas of radiotherapy and gynaecology (endometriosis). It is also aiming to develop software that links emergency coordination centres on the cross-border scheduling of emergency vehicles.



Strengths

In Lower Austria:

- ✓ all hospitals are legal entities of the federal province;
- ✓ there is vast experience in running cross-border health projects co-funded by EU;
- ✓ in addition to the Czech Republic, cross-border cooperation has been initiated with a second EU Member State (Slovakia).



Aspirations

Lower Austria is interested in:

- ✓ finding new possibilities for networking;
- ✓ gaining new input in the field of public health;
- ✓ identifying examples of good practice for new projects in the field of cross-border health care.



Challenges

These are:

- ✓ an ageing population (demographic change);
- ✓ a lack of health professionals in hospitals in rural areas; and
- ✓ regional disparities (increasing/decreasing population development).



Potential areas of collaboration

Lower Austria is interested in collaborating with other regions on:

- ✓ cross-border health care in general;
- ✓ building new cross-border projects; and
- ✓ sharing experience in the field of cross-border health care.



Working groups

Lower Austria is interested in participating in working groups on:

- ✓ women's/men's health;
- ✓ health systems/primary health care;
- ✓ the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action.



People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

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References

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