



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

## 2026 CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

### Affiliated Partner within the European Reference Networks

**Reference: ERN-AP-2026-CALL**

**Publication date: 13 April 2026 – 09:00 CET**

**Deadline for submission: 01 September 2026 – 23:59 CET**

**Applications may be submitted as of the publication date of this call and until the submission deadline indicated above**

#### 1. Background

European Reference Networks (ERNs) were established under Article 12 of Directive 2011/24/EU<sup>1</sup> on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, their functioning being based on the Commission Delegated Decision 2014/286/EU<sup>2</sup> and on Commission Implementing Decisions 2014/287/EU<sup>3</sup> and (EU) 2019/1269<sup>4</sup>.

ERNs connect healthcare providers and centres of expertise across the European Union and Norway to improve access to highly specialised care for patients with rare, low-prevalence and complex diseases.

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<sup>1</sup> Directive 2011/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, OJ L 88, 4.4.2011, pp. 45–65. [Directive - 2011/24 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Delegated Decision 2014/286/EU of 10 March 2014 setting out criteria and conditions that European Reference Networks and healthcare providers wishing to join a European Reference Network must fulfil, OJ L 147, 17.5.2014, pp. 71–78. [Delegated decision - 2014/286 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Implementing Decision 2014/287/EU of 10 March 2014 setting out criteria for establishing and evaluating European Reference Networks and their Members and for facilitating the exchange of information and expertise on establishing and evaluating such Networks, OJ L 147, 17.05.2014, pp. 79–87. [Implementing decision - 2014/287 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/1269 of 26 July 2019 amending Implementing Decision 2014/287/EU setting out criteria for establishing and evaluating European Reference Networks and their Members and for facilitating the exchange of information and expertise on establishing and evaluating such Networks, OJ L 147, 17.05.2014, pp. 79–87. [Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2019/1269 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

For Member States that do not have any member within an ERN, Affiliated Partners allow the Member State to participate in the ERN activities. Affiliated Partners are healthcare providers designated at national level to collaborate with one or more European Reference Networks.

Affiliated Partners may take the form of:

- **Associated National Centres:** healthcare provider, with some special expertise matching the global thematic domain of a given reference network, that concentrates primarily on the provision of healthcare directly related to the activities and services of this specific network, including any type of diagnostic contribution supporting this provision of healthcare<sup>5</sup>.
- **National Coordination Hubs:** any type of institution with the appropriate knowledge and the legal and organizational capacity to link the national healthcare system to a number or all European Reference Networks. National Coordination Hubs function as interfaces between the national healthcare system and those networks where a given Member State is neither represented by a full member nor by an Associated National Centre. National Coordination Hubs do not need any specific medical expertise or knowledge<sup>6</sup> in rare diseases.

## 2. Objective of the Call

The call aims to:

- Improve geographical coverage of ERN expertise across Member States and Norway
- Facilitate access to specialised care in countries or disease areas where full ERN membership is not yet present
- Strengthen the integration of ERNs into national healthcare systems
- Support cross-border knowledge exchange and clinical collaboration

## 3. Minimum recommended criteria

For Associated National Centres, the minimum recommended criteria<sup>7</sup> are:

- General:
  - evidence of a clear and well-defined organisation
  - measures in place related to respect patients' rights and to ensure patient-centred quality care
  - measures in place related to patient safety.
- Specific:

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<sup>5</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the BoMS on the definition and minimum recommended criteria [...], Nov 2017, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the BoMS on the definition and minimum recommended criteria [...], Nov 2017, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the BoMS on the definition and minimum recommended criteria [...], Nov 2017, pp. 8-11.

- dedication, general knowledge of and some special expertise in the thematic area of the ERN
- availability of human resources and organization of care
- equipment and facilities
- processing of patient data, coding and participation in patient registries.

For National Coordination Hubs, the minimum recommended criteria<sup>8</sup> are

- General:

- evidence of a clear and well-defined organisation
- listing of the different ERNs the coordination hub should be linked to
- description of the capacity and the ways to link the different ERNs with the national healthcare system, in particular to centres dealing with rare diseases.

#### 4. Scope

The call for Affiliated Partners is limited to Member States that do not currently have a healthcare provider already approved as a member in an ERN<sup>9</sup>, including Norway.

Based on the objectives of this call for Affiliated Partners, its aim is to address countries that do not yet have full coverage of all ERNs on their territory, namely:

Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia.

**Indicatively, a maximum of three Affiliated Partners per missing ERN should be submitted for application by a Member State or Norway.**

#### 5. Tasks, rights and obligation of Affiliated Partners<sup>10</sup>

- Support the ERN objectives established in Article 12 of Directive 2011/24/EU on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare.
- Fulfil the Minimum Recommended Criteria.
- Respect the rules of the Network to which the Affiliated Partner will be linked and participate and share the tasks and work related with the cooperation activities of the Network.
- Act as a hub-node at national level in the area of expertise of the ERN to which the Affiliated partner is linked including the referral of patients to the ERN Clinical Patient Management System.
- Contribute through their relationship with the ERNs to pool and disseminate expertise for the benefit of patients and Member States.

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<sup>8</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the BoMS on the definition and minimum recommended criteria [...], Nov 2017, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the BoMS on the definition and minimum recommended criteria [...], Nov 2017, p. 14

<sup>10</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the BoMS on the definition and minimum recommended criteria [...], Nov 2017, pp. 12-13.

- Follow the rules and strategies established in an ERN-Affiliated partner bilateral cooperation agreement that should describe how affiliated partners interact, participate and contribute to the specific ERN.

## 6. Application Procedure

The **National Competent Authority** are invited to identify and select Affiliated Partners considering their national situation and planning<sup>11</sup> using the relevant documents depending on the type of Affiliated Partner applied for:

- Annex 1: Associated National Centre
- Annex 2: National Coordination Hub
- Annex 3: National Designation Letter: Associated National Centre
- Annex 4: National Designation Letter: National Coordination Hub

The **National Competent Authority** are responsible for coordinating at the national level the identification and selection of Affiliated Partners as well as the consolidation and submission of the applications for the Affiliated Partner call.

The submission of the application is the responsibility of the **National Competent Authority**. This will be done via electronic submission of the National Designation Letter and the corresponding Technical Annex using the dedicated IT Application Platform<sup>12</sup> supporting the Call [application platform link not yet available], and fill in the following administrative information regarding the applicant:

### Administrative HCP information

ERNA AFP data collection web-form  
AFP

Form data

Form for ERN AFP

Hospitals

HCP Official Name: \*  100 This field is required

HCP Official Name (en): \*  100 This field is required

Country: \*  Belgium

Language: \*  This field is required

Latitude: \*  30 This field is required

Longitude: \*  30 This field is required

Website: \*  100 This field is required

Mailbox: \*  100 This field is required

DPO Functional Mailbox: \*  100 This field is required

Address line 1: \*  50 This field is required

Address line 2: \*  50 This field is required

Address line 3:  50

Address line 4:  50

Comments:  500

<sup>11</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the ERN BoMS on affiliated partners, 20 May 2016

<sup>12</sup> Training webinars and guidance materials will support applicants in using the IT application platform.

## Additional administrative HCP information and designated ERN information

### Hospital CEO

First Name: *	Last Name: *	Title:
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<small>This field is required</small>	<small>This field is required</small>	
Telephone:	Primary Email: *	Backup Email:
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<small>003200000000X or +320000000X</small>	<small>This field is required</small>	
Profession:		
<input type="text"/>		

### Designated ERN

Designation		
Network: *	Centre Type: *	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
<small>This field is required</small>	<small>This field is required</small>	
Representative		
First Name: *	Last Name: *	Title:
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<small>This field is required</small>	<small>This field is required</small>	
Primary Email: *	Backup Email:	Telephone:
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<small>This field is required</small>		<small>003200000000X or +320000000X</small>
Profession:		
<input type="text"/>		
Sub-representative		
First Name: *	Last Name: *	Title:
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<small>This field is required</small>	<small>This field is required</small>	
Primary Email: *	Backup Email:	Telephone:
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<small>This field is required</small>		<small>003200000000X or +320000000X</small>
Profession:		
<input type="text"/>		

**DESIGNATION LETTER** >

Designation letter is mandatory.

**TECHNICAL ANNEX** >

Technical Annex is mandatory.

**OTHER DOCUMENTS** >

Clear Form Close Form Save Form Submit

**DG SANTE** will undertake a document eligibility check of the documents submitted by the Board of Member State representatives.

Following the document eligibility checks, the **ERN Coordinators who have received an application to their ERN** will undertake an assessment/review of the submitted applications. In case of technical questions or clarifications of the applications, ERN Coordinators are invited to contact the relevant Board of Member State representative for required information.

After the assessment/review of the submitted applications, the **ERN Coordinators** will provide a final evaluation (positive or negative, substantiating their position).

**DG SANTE** will submit the complete assessment/review of the applications by the ERN Coordinators to the ERN Board of Member State representatives.

The **ERN Board of Member States** will be convened for a meeting for final endorsement of applications, considering the assessment/review of the ERN Coordinators.

In the event of a disagreement between an ERN and a Member State on a candidate Affiliated Partner within the Network, the Board of Member States will take the final decision on the inclusion or non-inclusion of this candidate Affiliated Partner into the network<sup>13</sup>.

**DG SANTE** will publish the outcomes of the Board of Member States endorsement.

**ERNs** are then required to<sup>14</sup>:

- Have a written ERN Bilateral Cooperation Agreement (Annex 5) signed between the Chief Executive Officer of the Healthcare Provider, representatives of the Healthcare Provider and the ERN Coordinator.
- Upload the signed bilateral cooperation agreement in the dedicated IT Application Platform, making it available to the concerned ERN coordinator, the concerned Board of Member State representative and DG SANTE.

The ERN bilateral cooperation agreement will be used only once the outcome of the Board of Member States endorsement has been formally communicated by DG SANTE.

**Incomplete applications may be declared inadmissible.**

## 7. Indicative Timeline

Information sessions	30 March, 9 April, 20 April (if necessary)
Publication of the Call	13 April 2026
Deadline for submission of applications	1 September 2026 – 23:59 CET
Eligibility check	September 2026
ERNs assessment/review	October 2026 – January 2027
BOMS meeting to vote on outcome	March 2027
Submission of signed bilateral cooperation agreements	April 2027

**These dates are indicative and may be subject to adjustment.**

<sup>13</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the BoMS on the definition and minimum recommended criteria [...], Nov 2017, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the ERN BoMS on affiliated partners, 20 May 2016.

## 8. Selection Procedure

The final designation of Affiliated Partners is endorsed by the European Commission, following the positive outcome of the technical assessment of the ERN and the opinion of the ERN Board of Member States.

DG SANTE reserves the right to request additional information during the assessment phase.

The submission of an application does not create any entitlement to be designated as an Affiliated Partner.

DG SANTE reserves the right to amend, suspend or cancel this call at any stage of the procedure where duly justified.

## 9. Termination of the Affiliated Partner<sup>15</sup>

The membership of an Affiliated Partner is terminated if a healthcare provider from the same Member State is approved as a member in the same ERN. In such a case, the Affiliated Partner may liaise with the newly approved member.

In addition, Affiliated Partners may also be terminated in the following cases:

- Voluntary withdrawal
- Decision of the national authority of the Affiliated Partner
- Termination of the ERN where the centre is affiliated
- Decision of the ERN where the centre is affiliated for lack of fulfilment of essential parts of the work plan-agreement.

## 10. Data Protection

Personal data submitted in the context of this call will be processed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies.<sup>16</sup>

Applicants must also ensure compliance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> [Statement](#) adopted by the BoMS on the definition and minimum recommended criteria [...], Nov 2017, p. 14

<sup>16</sup> [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1725](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC (*OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 39*).

<sup>17</sup> [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons regarding the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (*OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1*).

## 11. Conflict of interest and transparency

Applicants, evaluators and all parties involved in the assessment and designation process must ensure that the application and evaluation of Affiliated Partner are conducted in a transparent, impartial and objective manner.

Applicants shall disclose any situation that could give rise to a real, potential or perceived conflict of interest that may influence or appear to influence the preparation or submission of their application.

Experts, members of ERN coordination teams, and any individuals involved in the technical assessment or review of applications must declare any conflict of interest related to the applicant institution or its personnel. Where such a conflict exists, the individual concerned shall refrain from participating in the evaluation or decision-making process for the relevant application.

The European Commission reserves the right to take appropriate measures to prevent or remedy any conflict of interest identified during the procedure, including requesting additional information, excluding a conflicted evaluator from the assessment, or rejecting an application where the conflict of interest compromises the integrity of the process.

All information provided in the context of the call will be handled in accordance with applicable EU rules on transparency, integrity and data protection.

## 12. Contact Information

For questions regarding this call, please contact: [SANTE\\_ERNCALL2026@ec.europa.eu](mailto:SANTE_ERNCALL2026@ec.europa.eu)

### Annexes

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|----------------|---|
| <b>Annex 1</b> | Technical Annex: Associated National Centres                          |
| <b>Annex 2</b> | Technical Annex: National Coordination Hubs                           |
| <b>Annex 3</b> | Template: National designation letter - Associated National Centre    |
| <b>Annex 4</b> | Template: National designation letter - National Coordination Hub     |
| <b>Annex 5</b> | Bilateral cooperation agreement ERN-Associated Partner                |
| <b>Annex 6</b> | ERN Strategy for the Integration of Affiliated Partners               |
| <b>Annex 7</b> | One-pager: key information regarding the application to the 2026 Call |
| <b>Annex 8</b> | Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)                                      |