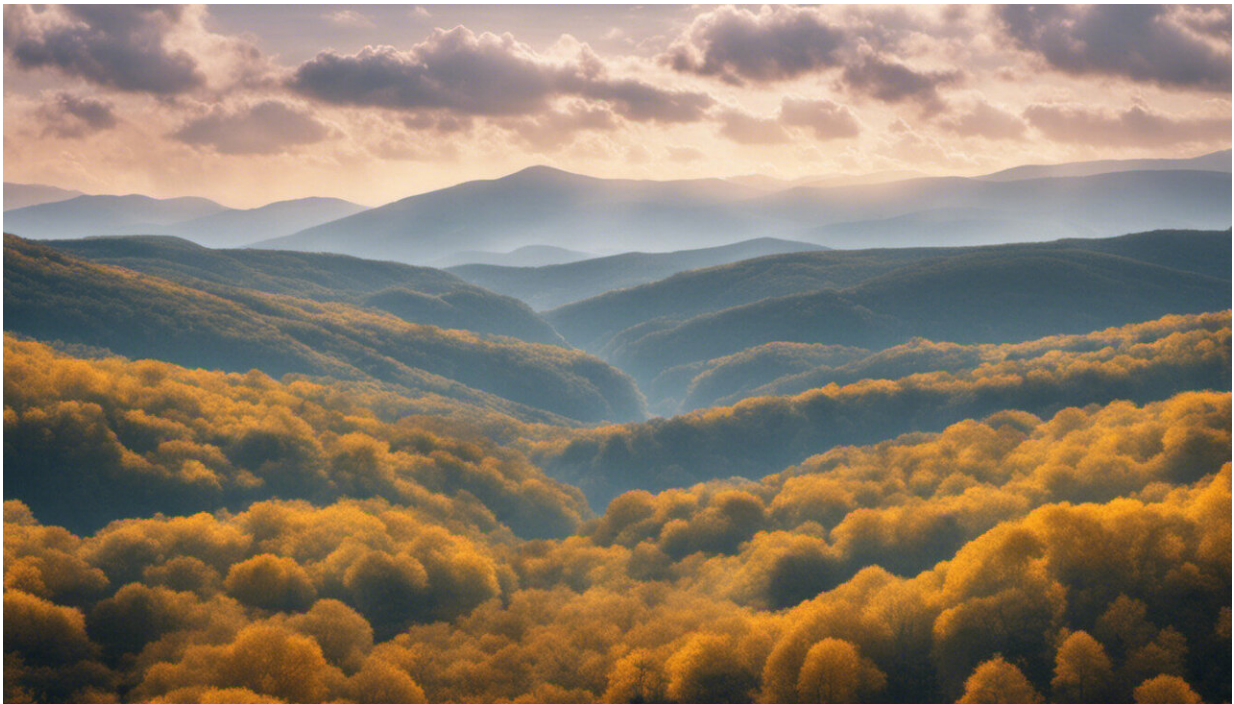


Tackling allergies through collaborative research and education

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The EU-funded Global Allergy and Asthma European Network (GA²LEN), launched in 2004, has become a leading force in the battle against allergic diseases. The network is still expanding, with over 60 centres in more than 20 European countries.

Indeed, the latest addition to the network is Ospedale Pediatrico Bambino Gesù, a unit specialising in rhinitis, [bronchial asthma](#) and allergic conjunctivitis, located in the Vatican City. By bringing together centres of excellence like this, the network aims to accelerate the application of research results in clinical practice.

There is certainly a need for action. Allergies can be fatal. Asthma, a common inflammation of the airways that can be triggered by allergens, kills someone in Europe every hour, says the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Allergy sufferers also experience major inconveniences in their daily lives. For example, children often have to miss school or stop doing sport, and breathing and skin problems can dent confidence.

The problem is not going away. According to the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations, asthma alone accounts for an estimated nine billion work days lost in the EU annually. GA²LEN researchers estimate that allergies cost the EU economy some EUR 100 billion a year.

The GA²LEN Network seeks to help by integrating European research activities and encouraging better cooperation among those working in the field. The researchers also compiled a European database of comparable studies - known as cohorts. In the future, this should help scientists conduct more reliable analyses of the genetic and environmental factors that cause allergies.

The project has also established a network of '[allergy](#) schools', in collaboration with the European Academy of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (EAACI). These schools, which take place in winter and summer, aim to stimulate social contacts between young people interested in allergy and [clinical immunology](#).

The courses are organised together with the EAACI national membership society of each host country. These include lectures on epidemiology - the study of disease patterns within populations, risk factors, diagnostics and treatments. Interactive practical demonstrations of skin tests and immunotherapy are also carried out.

Finally, the [network](#) aims to raise the profile of allergies at the European policy level, pushing the issue to the top of the agenda. While progress has been made, further collaborative research is necessary to fully understand the problem.

For example, GA²LEN partners are currently trying to work out why children brought up on farms, or babies fed on unpasteurised fresh milk, are far less likely to develop allergies.

Furthermore, GA²LEN is strongly supporting initiatives for a better understanding of emerging allergy trends throughout Europe - currently not even pollen counts are being analysed for all regions.

The GA²LEN project, which was coordinated by the University of Ghent, Belgium, was completed in January 2010. The EU provided EUR 14 million in funding.

More information: GA²LEN www.ga2len.net/

Provided by CORDIS

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