

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Advancing international cooperation: An Italian survey on epilepsy projects

To the Editor,

In May 2022, Amref Health Africa, Africa's largest non-governmental health organization and the Italian Chapter of the International League Against Epilepsy (Lega Italiana Contro l'Epilessia, LICE) conducted an online survey on international cooperation in epilepsy. The survey was aimed at members of LICE and gathered responses from 103 participants aged 27–79 years ($n = 67$; 65% female). The majority of respondents were adult neurologists (46/103; 44.7%), followed by child neurologists (25/103; 24.3%), other physicians (15/103; 14.6%), and other healthcare professionals (17/103; 16.4%).

Notably, only 13.6% of respondents (14/103) had personally participated in international cooperation activities related to epilepsy within the previous 5 years. **Table 1** provides an overview of their characteristics, detailing the purpose, type, and location of collaboration. Additionally, the table includes information on the number of patients targeted by the collaboration, the availability of equipment resources at the project site, and ratings of the collaboration from both personal/human and professional perspectives.

Those who had not previously participated in cooperation projects ($n = 89$) were surveyed regarding their interest in collaboration. The results indicated that 24.1% (21/89) expressed interest in remote collaborations, 15.7% (14/89) preferred on-site collaborations, and a significant majority (54/89; 60.2%) were open to both types of collaboration. Regarding patient types, 40.5% of respondents (36/89) were interested in collaborating on projects involving children and 39.3% preferred working with adults (35/89), whereas 20.2% (18/89) expressed willingness to collaborate on initiatives involving both categories of patients.

Additionally, participants were asked about the responsibilities of LICE and other entities in enhancing international cooperation initiatives related to epilepsy. These responsibilities include the following:

1. Increase awareness among members and provide training in the field of international cooperation, particularly in middle- and low-income countries. This can be

TABLE 1 Summary of responses of participants who had a direct involvement in international cooperation activities on epilepsy in the previous 5 years.

Qualification of responders	
Neurologist	6 (43%)
Child neurologist	2 (14%)
Physicians	3 (21%)
Other healthcare professional	3 (22%)
Age of responders	
27–35 years	4 (29%)
36–65 years	7 (50%)
>65 years	3 (21%)
Aim of the cooperation activity	
Development project(s)	6 (43%)
Research project(s)	3 (21%)
Both development and research project(s)	5 (36%)
World region where the cooperation activity was carried out	
Italy	1 (7%)
Outside Italy	13 (93%)
Type of activities carried out during the cooperation activity	
Clinical and/or research activity	3 (21%)
Tutoring	1 (7%)
Clinical and/or research + teaching	1 (7%)
Other activity/ies	1 (7%)
Clinical and/or research + teaching + tutoring	6 (43%)
Response not provided	2 (14%)
Site of cooperation activity	
Remote	4 (29%)
On-site	1 (7%)
Both remote and on-site	7 (50%)
Response not provided	2 (14%)
Number of patients to whom the cooperation activity was targeted	
≤100	3 (21%)
100–500 patients	4 (29%)
501–1000	0 (0%)
>1000	2 (14%)
Response not provided	5 (36%)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Availability of equipment resources where the activity was performed	
EEG	5 (36%)
Neuroimaging	0 (0%)
Both EEG and neuroimaging	4 (29%)
Neither EEG nor neuroimaging	1 (7%)
Response not provided	4 (29%)
Routine blood tests	5 (36%)
Dosage of antiseizure medications	0 (0%)
Both routine blood tests and dosage of antiseizure medications	4 (29%)
Neither routine blood tests nor dosage of antiseizure medications	1 (7%)
Response not provided	4 (29%)
How the cooperation activity started	
Thanks to personal contacts	6 (43%)
Initiative of the institution where the respondent is employed	4 (29%)
Other	3 (21%)
Response not provided	1 (7%)
Rating of the experience on a personal/human level	
Very poor	0 (0%)
Poor	0 (0%)
Neutral	1 (7%)
Good	4 (29%)
Very good	7 (50%)
Response not provided	2 (14%)
Rating of the experience on a professional level	
Very poor	1 (7%)
Poor	0 (0%)
Neutral	2 (14%)
Good	7 (50%)
Very good	1 (7%)
Response not provided	3 (21%)

achieved through sharing knowledge and presenting international cooperation projects during conferences.

- Promote comprehensive training activities for healthcare professionals from low- and medium-income countries. These activities should offer both on-site and remote learning opportunities.
- Encourage collaboration at the primary care level by closely engaging with healthcare staff in low- and middle-income countries. This collaboration should include establishing structures for recording electroencephalograms to enhance diagnostic capabilities.
- Advocate for improved access to essential medications in middle- and low-income countries. Engage with drug manufacturing companies to ensure equitable

distribution and affordability of necessary drugs for epilepsy management.

- Support medical education and professional development by providing scholarships to medical residents and young neurologists. These scholarships could enable them to travel to middle- and low-income countries for specialized training and knowledge exchange.
- Facilitate collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to encourage joint efforts, allocate funding, and enhance remote assistance. NGOs play a crucial role in promoting sustainable international cooperation initiatives.

The survey reveals a strong interest among participants, including those with prior involvement in international initiatives, to engage in further international cooperation projects related to epilepsy. Numerous ongoing initiatives already feature active participation from LICE members across various countries and contexts. These engagements occur at different levels and are often voluntary, covering development cooperation activities, research endeavors, and collaborations with diverse entities such as NGOs, research institutes, and healthcare facilities.

The dedicated commitment shown by LICE members deserves recognition and support, and fully aligns with the mission of the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) and the recently endorsed Global Intersectoral Action Plan for Epilepsy and other Neurological Disorders during the 75th General Assembly of the World Health Organization.¹ Close collaboration with local ILAE Chapters also appears highly advisable to enhance the effectiveness of international joint initiatives.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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