



AGORA
CONFERENCE 2026

More Than a Patient: Your Voice.
Your Life. Your RMD Journey.

Sofia, Bulgaria
September 24–26, 2026

Novotel Sofia Hotel

www.agora-platform.eu/conference2026



SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME

Agora

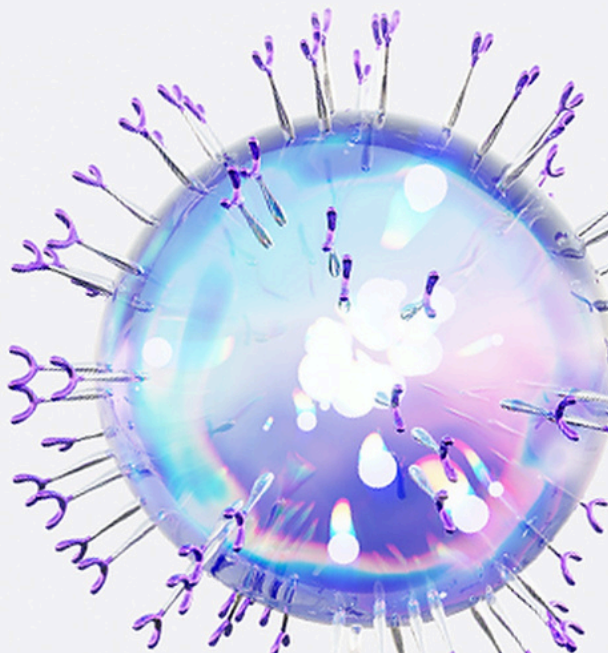


FEDERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS
FOR PATIENTS WITH RHEUMATIC AND
MUSCULOSKELETAL DISEASES
OF SOUTHERN EUROPE



Pursuing bold science

 Bristol Myers Squibb®



Sofia, Bulgaria
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More Than a Patient: Your Voice.
Your Life. Your RMD Journey.

Organised by

Agora



FEDERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS
FOR PATIENTS WITH RHEUMATIC AND
MUSCULOSKELETAL DISEASES
OF SOUTHERN EUROPE

Agora Federation Board

President: **Andri Phoka** (CY)

Secretary General: **Boryana Boteva** (BG)

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AGORA is a Federation representing 18 associations for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases in 13 countries of Southern Europe.

in cooperation with



BOPRD

**Bulgarian Organisation for Patients with
Rheumatic Diseases**

BOPRD supports and represents patients at national and European level. As a founding member of AGORA, BOPRD contributes actively to regional collaboration and advocacy.



Welcome

ANDRI PHOKA

President, AGORA Federation



Dear Colleagues,

As President of the AGORA Federation, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the AGORA Conference 2026, taking place in Sofia, Bulgaria, from September 24–26, 2026.

Building on the strong foundation of our 2025 Conference in Athens — which brought together patient representatives, experts, and organisations from across Southern Europe — this year we take a step further. We move from sharing knowledge to actively co-creating it.

Under the theme “More Than a Patient: Your Voice. Your Life. Your RMD Journey.”, the 2026 Conference places the lived experience of people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases at the heart of every discussion. It reflects our shared commitment to a more person-centred, participatory, and empowering approach to care and advocacy.

This year’s programme is intentionally designed around interactive workshops, forming the core of the Conference experience. Through parallel sessions and collaborative formats, participants will have the opportunity to exchange perspectives, address common challenges, and develop practical ideas that can be applied within their own communities and organisations.

By strengthening dialogue, fostering collaboration, and amplifying patient voices, AGORA continues to unite a powerful network representing millions of people living with RMDs across Southern Europe.

We look forward to welcoming you to Sofia for three days of meaningful interaction, shared learning, and collective progress!

Warm regards,

Andri Phoka

President, AGORA Federation

Sofia, Bulgaria
September 24–26, 2026

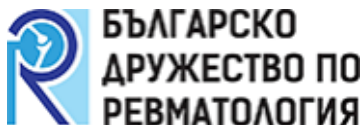
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Auspices & Endorsements



Bulgarian Society of
Rheumatology



BULGARIAN SOCIETY
OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
IN RHEUMATOLOGY

Bulgarian Society of Health
Professionals in Rheumatology



ASIF – Axial Spondyloarthritis
International Federation



EPF – European Patients' Forum



GAfPA – Global Alliance for
Patient Access



Pain Alliance Europe



Destination

Sofia, Bulgaria

Venue

Novotel Sofia Hotel

Novotel Sofia, 115 N, м. Къро, Boulevard "Tsarigradsko shose" Blvd,
1784 Sofia, Bulgaria

Conference Halls

Area	Room	Level
Main Hall	Europe 2/3	1st Floor
Breakout Room 1	Bulgaria	1st Floor
Breakout Room 2	Boyana	1st Floor
Registration & Breaks	Foyer	1st Floor
Lunch & Dinner (Thursday)	Restaurant	Ground Floor

Conference Liaison

Mrs Katy Antonopoulou (communications@agora-platform.eu)

Miss Amalia Ioannidi (a.ioannidi@apr.com.gr)

Administration – Communication – Secretariat

ORGANIZATION | COMMUNICATION | SECRETARIAT

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Workshop Registration

www.agora-platform.eu/conference2026/workshop-registration

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Special Thanks

The organizing committee wishes to acknowledge the financial support provided by the following companies:

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

17:00 – 17:30

Registrations

Foyer, 1st Floor

17:30 – 19:00

General Assembly

Main Hall – Europe 2/3, 1st Floor

AGORA Board Members

GA Agenda – Main Discussion Points

01

Activity Report 2025

Presentation of the main activities and achievements of the year

02

Financial Report 2025

Review of financial results and expenditure for the previous year

03

Activities 2026

Overview of planned actions and strategic priorities for the coming year

04

Budget 2026

Presentation and discussion of the proposed budget

19:15

Dinner

Hotel Restaurant, Ground Floor

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SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME

09:00 – 09:30 *Registrations* // Foyer, 1st Floor

09:30 – 10:00 · *Opening Session*

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Chair: *Andri Phoka, Boryana Boteva*

Opening Addresses

Representative of Sofia Municipality

Prof. Anastas Batalov

Dr. Vladimira Boyadzhieva

Prof. Xenofon Baraliakos

Boryana Boteva

10:00 – 10:30 · *Keynote Speech*

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Chair: *Andri Phoka*

AI and the Future of RMD Care: Hype or Reality?

Mira Ganova

10:30 – 12:00 · *Session 1: Innovation & Personalised Care in RMDs*

Parallel workshops

W1

AI & Digital Health in RMDs — From Hype to Real Impact

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Instructor: Mira Ganova

Facilitator: Katy Antonopoulou

W2

Vaccination and Autoimmune Diseases — From Prevention to Confidence

Hall: Breakout Room 1 – Bulgaria · 1st Floor

Instructor: Ekaterina Kurteva

Facilitator: Chrysanthi Sardeli

W3

Living with Comorbidity — Navigating Complex Care in RMDs

Hall: Breakout Room 2 – Boyana · 1st Floor

Instructors: Souzi Makri, Andri Phoka

Facilitators: Sebastian Micallef, Machi Salamaliki

Friday 25



SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME

12:00 – 12:15 · **Plenary Discussion on Workshops**

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Facilitators: Katy Antonopoulou, Chrysanthi Sardeli, Sebastian Micallef, Machi Salamaliki

12:15 – 13:30 **Lunch Break** // Restaurant, Ground Floor

13:30 – 15:00 · **Session 2: Empowering Patients & Improving Outcomes**

Parallel workshops

W4

From Fear to Confidence — Managing Treatment Concerns in RMDs

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Instructor: Dr. Vladimira Boyadzhieva

Facilitator: Boryana Boteva

W5

Building the Next Generation of Patient Advocates

Hall: Breakout Room 1 – Bulgaria · 1st Floor

Instructor: Simon Stones, PhD

Facilitator: Souzi Makri

W6

Your Daily Toolkit — Strategies to Ease Life with RMDs (Vitamins & Food Intolerance)

Hall: Breakout Room 2 – Boyana · 1st Floor

Instructor: Dr. Svetla Dancheva

Facilitator: Igor Medojevic

15:00 – 15:15 · **Plenary Discussion on Workshops**

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Facilitators: Boryana Boteva, Souzi Makri, Igor Medojevic

15:15 – 15:30 · **How AGORA and its members can engage with, and benefit from, the work of the Global Remission Coalition**

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

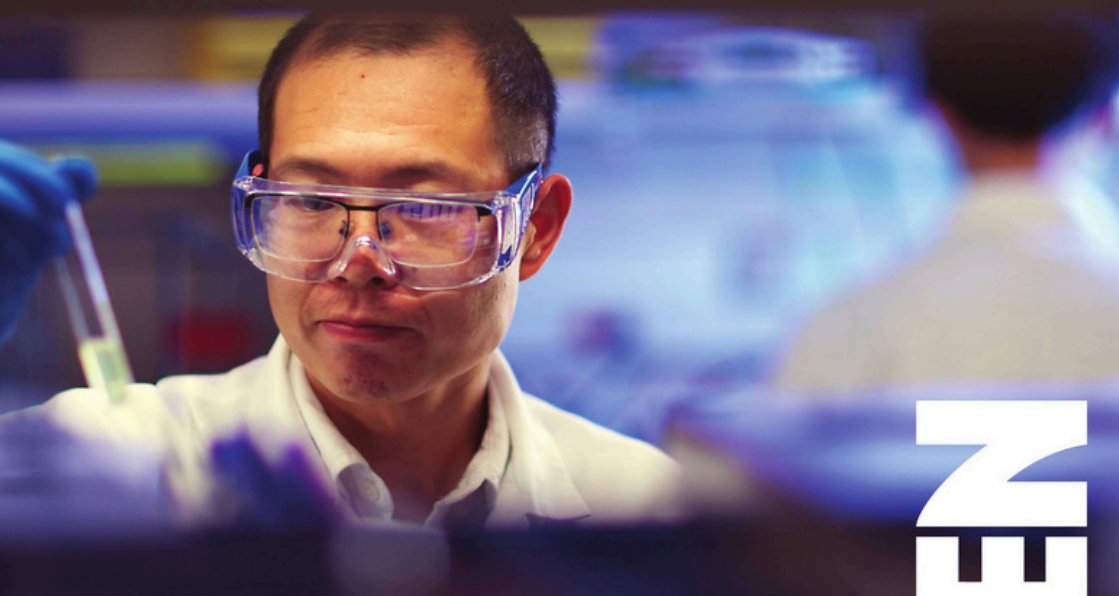
Chair: Andri Phoka · Speaker: Neil Betteridge

16:30 **Cultural Overview of Sofia** // Meeting point: Hotel Lobby

19:00 **Dinner** // Offsite – Restaurant Vodenitzata

(Ресторант „Воденицата“)

Friday 25



AMGEN

Making a Difference in Rare Disease

ADVANCING CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Rare diseases affect more than 400 million people worldwide, including 36 million in the EU, yet only 5% have an approved treatment. At Amgen, we're harnessing biology and technology to drive progress where it's needed most. Because behind every number is a person. Learn more at www.Amgen.eu.



SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME

09:00 – 10:30 · Session 1: Empowering Patients & Improving Outcomes

Parallel workshops

W4

From Fear to Confidence — Managing Treatment Concerns in RMDs

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Instructor: Theognosia Apostolou

Facilitator: Boryana Boteva

W5

Building the Next Generation of Patient Advocates

Hall: Breakout Room 1 – Bulgaria · 1st Floor

Instructor: Deyan Denev

Facilitator: Souzi Makri

W6

Your Daily Toolkit — Wellbeing & Rehabilitation

Hall: Breakout Room 2 – Boyana · 1st Floor

Instructors: Aycha Zaralieva, MD, PhD;

Dr. Elena Nikiphorou (pre-recorded)

Facilitator: Miglena Ivanova

10:30 – 10:45 · Plenary Discussion on Workshops

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Facilitators: Boryana Boteva, Souzi Makri, Miglena Ivanova

10:45 – 11:15 Break // Foyer, 1st Floor

11:15 – 12:45 · Session 2: Innovation & Personalised Care in RMDs

Parallel workshops

W7

Mental Wellbeing in Rheumatic Diseases — Tools, Techniques and Everyday Coping

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Instructor: Souzi Makri

Facilitator: Katy Antonopoulou

W8

Sexual Health & Intimacy in RMDs

Hall: Breakout Room 1 – Bulgaria · 1st Floor

Instructor: Prof. Chrysanthi Sardeli

Facilitator: Andri Phoka

Saturday 26

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SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME

12:45 – 13:00 · *Plenary Discussion on Workshops*

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

Facilitators: Katy Antonopoulou, Andri Phoka

13:00 – 13:35 · *Closing & Recognition*

Hall: Main Hall – Europe 2/3 · 1st Floor

13:00 – 13:15 Best Practice Awards

Chair: Andri Phoka, Boryana Boteva

13:15 – 13:25 Update on Serbia's Initiatives (Hosting Country 2027)

Chair: Andri Phoka, Boryana Boteva

13:25 – 13:35 Closing Remarks

AGORA Federation Board

End of Conference

13:35 – 14:30 *Lunch Break* // Restaurant, Ground Floor

19:00 *Dinner* // Offsite – Staria Chinar (Стария Чинар)

Saturday 26



Speakers – Instructors – Facilitators

Alphabetical Index of Participants

Antonopoulou Katy

Communications Head, AGORA Federation of Associations for People with RMDs of Southern Europe; Public Relations/Health Communications Expert; Patient Research Partner; EULAR PARE Committee Member; President of the Hellenic League Against Rheumatism (ELEANA); President of Sjögren Europe; Secretary General of Pain Alliance Europe, the Hellenic Menopause Society (ELETEM), EOS SPANOPA and the KALYPSO Association

Apostolou Theognosia

General Secretary, Cyprus League of People with Rheumatism (CYLPER); Coordinator of the Parents and Children Group

Baraliakos Xenofon

EULAR President; Professor of Internal Medicine and Rheumatology at Ruhr University Bochum

Batalov Anastas

MD, PhD; President, Bulgarian Society of Rheumatology

Betteridge Neil

Senior Director, GAfPA; Chair, Global Remission Coalition

Boteva Boryana

Secretary General of AGORA; President of the Bulgarian Organisation for People with Rheumatic Diseases (BOPRD)

Boyadzhieva Vladimira

MD, PhD; President, Bulgarian Society of Health Professionals in Rheumatology

Dancheva Svetla

MD, MBA; Endocrinologist

Denev Deyan

Executive Director of the Association of Research-Based Pharmaceutical Manufacturers in Bulgaria (ARPhaM)

Ganova Mira

PhD; Healthcare innovation and digital health ecosystem leader; CEO of Digital Health and Innovation Cluster Bulgaria

Ivanova Miglena

Vice President of the Bulgarian Organisation for People with Rheumatic Diseases (BOPRD)

Kurteva Ekaterina

Immunologist; MD, PhD; Chief Assistant Professor, Department of Clinical Immunology, Medical Faculty, Medical University of Sofia; Laboratory of Clinical Immunology, University Hospital St. Ivan Rilski, Sofia, Bulgaria

Makri Souzi

EULAR Vice-President PARE; Vice-President, Cyprus League of People with Rheumatism; EUPATI fellow, Cyprus

Medojevic Igor

Member of the Board of AGORA; President, Rheumatism Association Montenegro / NGO RAM

Micallef Sebastian

Treasurer of AGORA; Committee Member of ARAM (Arthritis and Rheumatism Association Malta); Member of AGORA's sub-committee which is dealing with the examination of new members applications

Nikiphorou Elena

MBBS/BSc, FRCP, MD(Res), PhD, PGCE, FHEA; Reader in Rheumatology & Medical Education, Centre for Rheumatic Diseases, School of Immunology and Microbial Sciences, King's College London; Consultant Rheumatologist, King's College Hospital

Phoka Andri

President of AGORA Federation & Cyprus League of People with Rheumatism; EULAR PARE Chair-elect

Salamaliki Machi

Member of the Board of AGORA; General Secretary of the Hellenic League Against Rheumatism (ELEANA)

Sardeli Chrysanthi

MD, PhD; Obstetrician-Gynecologist; Clinical Pharmacologist; Associate Professor of Pharmacology – Clinical Pharmacology, Laboratory of Clinical Pharmacology, School of Health Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH)

Stones Simon

PhD, ISMPP CMPP™; Global Patient Engagement Leader & Medical Communications Specialist, Saol & Stones; PARE Committee Chair, European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology (EULAR); Scientific Director, Patient Engagement, Amica Scientific; Honorary Research Fellow, School of Health and Society, University of Salford; Secretary, RAiSE

Zaralieva Aycha

MD, PhD; Assistant Professor, South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Faculty of Public Health, Health Care and Sports, Department of Kinesotherapy; Physical Therapy Specialist

Patient Experience Data is your superpower



PED Essentials is a new online learning hub designed to support patient advocates and organizations in building confidence and capability in generating and analyzing Patient Experience Data (PED).

Co-created with patient advocates and organizations from across the world, the hub explores:

-  **What PED is and why it is important**
-  **How PED can strengthen evidence-based advocacy**
-  **How to collect your own PED**
-  **How to analyze existing PED**

**Start your PED journey
today with PED Essentials**

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See you next year in Serbia

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