# EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration

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The European Parliament has adopted by 522 votes to 49, with 11 abstentions, a resolution on EU border regions: living labs of European integration.

The EU and its immediate neighbours in the European Free Trade Association have **40 internal land borders and internal border regions**. These regions cover 40% of the EU's territory, account for 30% of the EU's population, produce almost a third of the EU's GDP and have a strong potential to boost its economies.

***Specific characteristics of border regions***

Recalling that Article 174 TFEU recognises the difficulties faced by border regions, Parliament called for the Union to pay **particular attention to these regions** in its efforts to strengthen its economic, social and territorial cohesion. It stressed the need for effective use and better coordination of EU funds to ensure a more comprehensive approach to the challenges facing border regions. It called for the involvement of local authorities and communities and for tailor-made, integrated and region-specific approaches within a multi-level governance framework.

Members suggested that the structural disadvantages faced by all border regions should be compensated for by a separate regional aid scheme specifically designed for these regions. They called for 0.26% of the EU's cohesion policy budget to be reserved exclusively for the development of border regions at the beginning of each new programming period, starting in 2028-2034 (‘**borderland billion**’). This amount should be given to European groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTCs) or to border regions where comparable structures exist.

***Resilience through closer institutional cooperation***

Parliament called on the EU institutions and Member States to raise awareness of the possibility for cross-border regions to receive support from the Commission under the ‘**b-solutions**’ initiative, which has provided legal and administrative support to authorities in border regions and resolved 90 cases involving barriers to interaction.

The Commission and the Member States are invited to maximise their efforts to **remove the legal and administrative obstacles** that often hinder access to public services, notably in the areas of health services, transport, education, labour mobility and the environment.

The **European cross-border mechanism** (ECBM) as proposed by the Commission would have contributed to removing more than 50 % of the barriers concerned, including those resulting from the lack of cross-border public transport and limited access to employment, education, cultural and leisure services. However, Members deeply regret the fact that the legislative procedure relating to the ECBM has been **blocked by the Council**.

The Commission is called on to:

- amend the current proposal with a view to striking a balance between the co-legislators’ respective positions;

- ensure that the proposal takes into account the strengthening of cross-border regions, anticipating the foreseeable damage in the regions that will be most affected by the consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine;

- resume negotiations with the Member States with a view to rapidly adopting a system for clearing legal or administrative border hurdles in an effort to make life easier for the inhabitants of cross-border regions.

Parliament welcomed the agreement reached on the Brexit adjustment reserve to provide financial and legal support to Member States and regions affected by Brexit.

***Dynamic cross-border labour markets***

The resolution pointed out that according to the Commission's eighth cohesion report, Interreg indicators show that only **68% of the 2023 targets** for cross-border labour mobility had been met by the end of 2020, while in other areas the targets had been met by up to **495%**. Member States are encouraged to continue on this path in order to reach the 2023 targets.

In the absence of an adequate supply of jobs or other economic opportunities and in view of the low level of salaries, the well-educated workforce tends to migrate to regions where such opportunities are in adequate supply, thus making the situation in remote border areas even more challenging. Therefore, Members called for **investments in innovation, human capital, good governance and institutional capacity** to boost these regions.

The Commission and the Member States are called on to:

- ensure, as a matter of urgency, the proper implementation and enforcement of relevant EU legislation as regards the **rights of cross-border and frontier workers**, to improve their employment, working and health and safety conditions;

- address the need to revise the existing legislative framework including Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the **coordination of social security systems** to **strengthen the portability of rights** and ensure adequate social security coordination;

- **acknowledge the reality of and the difficulties associated with the increase in teleworking**, to guarantee that those teleworking from their country of residence have access to social security rights, labour rights and tax regimes, and certainty as regards the authority responsible for their coverage.

Members stressed the need to ensure faster and fuller recognition of diplomas and other qualifications obtained after training and called on the Commission, in close cooperation with the European Labour Authority, to present a legislative proposal for a **European social security pass** for all mobile workers and third-country nationals who are covered by EU rules on intra-EU mobility.

Members stressed that **more and better cross-border public services** would not only improve the quality of life of border citizens, but also the cost-benefit ratio of these services.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Commission to closely monitor the cross-border component of national and regional **climate change** adaptation strategies, with specific measures to promote appropriate responses.