## Basic information

| | |
|---|---|
| **2021/2202(INI)**<br>INI - Own-initiative procedure | Procedure completed |
| EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration<br>**Subject**<br>4.70.05 Regional cooperation, cross-border cooperation | |

## Key players

European Parliament

| Committee responsible | Rapporteur | Appointed |
|---|---|---|
| REGI Regional Development | OMARJEE Younous (The Left) | 06/09/2021 |
| | Shadow rapporteur<br>DOLESCHAL Christian (EPP)<br>PICULA Tonino (S&D)<br>GOZI Sandro (Renew)<br>ALFONSI François (Greens/EFA)<br>FITTO Raffaele (ECR)<br>ANDROUËT Mathilde (ID) | |

European Commission

| Commission DG | Commissioner |
|---|---|
| Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations | VÁRHELYI Olivér |

## Key events

| Date | Event | Reference | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25/11/2021 | Committee referral announced in Parliament | | |
| 12/07/2022 | Vote in committee | | |
| 27/07/2022 | Committee report tabled for plenary | A9-0222/2022 | Summary |
| 14/09/2022 | Debate in Parliament |  | |
| 15/09/2022 | Decision by Parliament | T9-0327/2022 | Summary |
| 15/09/2022 | Results of vote in Parliament |  | |

| Technical information | |
|---|---|
| **Procedure reference** | 2021/2202(INI) |
| **Procedure type** | INI - Own-initiative procedure |
| **Procedure subtype** | Initiative |
| **Legal basis** | Rules of Procedure EP 55 |
| **Other legal basis** | Rules of Procedure EP 165 |
| **Stage reached in procedure** | Procedure completed |
| **Committee dossier** | REGI/9/07608 |

**Documentation gateway**

**European Parliament**

| Document type | Committee | Reference | Date | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Committee draft report | | PE704.605 | 10/02/2022 | |
| Amendments tabled in committee | | PE731.717 | 05/05/2022 | |
| Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading | | A9-0222/2022 | 27/07/2022 | Summary |
| Text adopted by Parliament, single reading | | T9-0327/2022 | 15/09/2022 | Summary |

**European Commission**

| Document type | Reference | Date | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|
| Commission response to text adopted in plenary | SP(2022)624 | 16/12/2022 | |

# EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration

2021/2202(INI) - 27/07/2022 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Regional Development adopted the own-initiative report by Younous OMARJEE (SUE/NGL, FR) on EU border regions: living labs of European integration.

***Specific characteristics of border regions***

The EU and its immediate neighbours in the European Free Trade Association have 40 internal land borders and internal border regions, and whereas those regions cover 40 % of the EU's territory, account for 30 % of the EU's population, produce almost one third of EU GDP and have significant potential to boost its economies even further.

Border regions, especially those with a low population density and, in particular, rural areas, tend to experience less favourable development conditions and are generally less economically successful than other regions within Member States. Administrative, linguistic and legal barriers are still hampering sustainable growth, socio-economic development and cohesion among and within border regions. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as Russia's ongoing military aggression in Ukraine has made those barriers more difficult to overcome.

The report emphasised the need for EU policies to take more account of the specific characteristics of cross-border regions and for effective use and **greater coordination of EU funds** to ensure a more comprehensive approach to the afore-mentioned challenges.

***Resilience through closer institutional cooperation***

While welcoming the progress the Commission has made thus far in implementing its 2017 action plan, in particular via the 'b-solutions' initiative – which has made it possible to provide legal and administrative support to authorities in border regions and to resolve 90 cases involving barriers to interaction – and via the support provided to improve access to employment, promote multilingualism in border areas and pool healthcare facilities,

Members called on the EU institutions and on Member States to **raise awareness** among cross-border regions about the possibility of receiving support from the Commission under the **b-solutions initiative**.

*European cross-border mechanism (ECBM)*

The report noted that most barriers hindering cross-border cooperation are legal in nature, arising from diverging national laws or general EU laws. The 2018 Commission proposal for a regulation on European cross-border mechanism 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 committee called on the Commission 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.

The report also stressed that border regions are also confronted with the consequences of Brexit, which are creating new barriers to free trade and causing serious disruption to cross-border trade between the EU and the UK, making life more difficult for businesses and citizens in border regions.

*Dynamic cross-border labour markets*

Many important measures have been taken to address the socio-economic asymmetries in border areas. However, the report noted the lack of specific assessments and comparative statistics that would provide an overview of the socio-economic circumstances of cross-border SMEs, something all the more regrettable given that SMEs account for 67 % of total employment and almost 60 % of EU added value.

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. They should also address the need to revise the existing legislative framework including Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of **social security systems** in order to strengthen the **portability of rights** and ensure adequate social security coordination, and to 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.

Lastly, Members called on the Commission, in close cooperation with the European Labour Authority, to put forward a legislative proposal for a **European social security pass** for all mobile workers and non-EU nationals who are covered by EU rules on intra-EU mobility without further delay.

# EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration

2021/2202(INI) - 15/09/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

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.