



Plenary sitting

A9-0222/2022

27.7.2022

REPORT

on EU border regions: living labs of European integration
(2021/2202(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on EU border regions: living labs of European integration (2021/2202(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to Articles 4, 162, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178 and 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora¹ (Habitats Directive),
- having regard to Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood risks²,
- having regard to Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds³ (Birds Directive),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006⁴,
- having regard to the agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015 (the Paris Agreement),
- having regard to the opinion of European Committee of the Regions of 30 June 2017 entitled ‘Missing transport links in border regions’⁵,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 September 2017 entitled ‘Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions’ (COM(2017)0534),
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 May 2018 on a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context (European cross-border mechanism) (COM(2018)0373),

¹ [OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.](#)

² [OJ L 288, 6.11.2007, p. 27.](#)

³ [OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7.](#)

⁴ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

⁵ OJ C 207, 30.6.2017, p. 19.

- having regard to its resolution of 13 June 2018 on cohesion policy and the circular economy⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 September 2018 on boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions⁷,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 April 2020 entitled ‘Guidelines on EU Emergency Assistance on Cross-Border Cooperation in Healthcare related to the COVID-19 crisis’ (C(2020)2153),
- having regard to the Commission’s public consultation conducted between 22 July and 11 October 2020 on overcoming cross-border obstacles⁸,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 entitled ‘Achieving the European Education Area by 2025’ (COM(2020)0625),
- having regard to Decision (EU) 2020/2228 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 December 2020 on a European Year of Rail (2021)⁹,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions of 26 March 2021 entitled ‘Cross-border public services in Europe’¹⁰,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 2 June 2021 entitled ‘A strategy towards a fully functioning and resilient Schengen area’ (COM(2021)0277),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund¹¹,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments¹²,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 14 July 2021 entitled ‘EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration’ (COM(2021)0393),
- having regard to the Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) entitled ‘Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis. Working Group I contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’, published on 7 August 2021¹³,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1755 of the European Parliament and of the

⁶ OJ C 28, 27.1.2020, p. 40.

⁷ OJ C 433, 23.12.2019, p. 24.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/consultations/border-2020/

⁹ OJ L 437, 28.12.2020, p. 108.

¹⁰ OJ C 106, 26.3.2021, p. 12.

¹¹ OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 60.

¹² OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 94.

¹³ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-i/>

- Council of 6 October 2021 establishing the Brexit Adjustment Reserve¹⁴,
- having regard to the resolution of the European Committee of the Regions of 29 October 2021 on a vision for Europe: The Future of Cross-border Cooperation¹⁵,
 - having regard to the three thematic publications of the Commission and of the Association of European Border Regions of 9 December 2021 on obstacles and solutions to cross-border cooperation in the EU, entitled ‘More and better cross-border public services’¹⁶, ‘Vibrant cross-border labour markets’¹⁷, and ‘Border regions for the European Green Deal’¹⁸,
 - having regard to the report of the Commission and of the Association of European Border Regions of 9 December 2021 entitled ‘B-solutions: Solving Border Obstacles. A Compendium 2020-2021’¹⁹,
 - having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2021 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (COM(2021)0891),
 - having regard to the report of the IPCC of 4 April 2022 entitled ‘Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change’,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A9-0222/2022),
- A. whereas the European Union 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;
- B. whereas border regions, especially those with a low population density and, in particular, rural areas, tend to experience less favourable development conditions and

¹⁴ OJ L 357, 8.10.2021, p. 1.

¹⁵ OJ C 440, 29.10.2021, p. 6.

¹⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Brustia, G., Dellagiacomma, A., Cordes, C., et al., More and better cross-border public services : obstacles and solutions to cross-border cooperation in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/912236>

¹⁷ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Brustia, G., Dellagiacomma, A., Cordes, C., et al., Vibrant cross-border labour markets : obstacles and solutions to cross-border cooperation in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/094950>

¹⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Brustia, G., Dellagiacomma, A., Cordes, C., et al., Border regions for the European Green Deal : obstacles and solutions to cross-border cooperation in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/475773>

¹⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Brustia, G., Dellagiacomma, A., Cordes, C., et al., B-solutions, solving border obstacles : a compendium 2020-2021, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/625110>

are generally less economically successful than other regions within Member States, and whereas their economic potential is not being fully tapped;

- C. whereas, despite the efforts that have been made, administrative, linguistic and legal barriers still abound and are hampering sustainable growth, socio-economic development and cohesion among and within border regions; whereas more and deeper cooperation between authorities in neighbouring Member States is called for; whereas border regions would benefit from a supranational legal instrument capable of circumventing negative consequences that might arise from actions of Member States that fragment the single market;
- D. whereas it is recognised that a true bottom-up approach in European cohesion policy still needs to be strengthened and that the institutions and actors that are close to citizens, such as European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, should be entrusted with more direct management of funds from the EU cohesion policy budget; whereas small-scale and cross-border projects have an important role in this regard in bringing people together, and in so doing, opening new opportunities for sustainable local development and cross-border cooperation;
- E. whereas some sectors face very specific obstacles that call for better coordination at EU level, such as the wine and spirits sectors, which are subjected to heavy red tape to trade in neighbouring countries; whereas practical solutions, such as access to one-stop shops, must be made accessible to economic operators when possible;
- F. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has made those barriers more difficult to overcome, and whereas, on a daily basis, cross-border workers are faced with a situation in which different, counterproductive health rules are in place on either side of the border;
- G. whereas national border closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have unveiled the unique vulnerability and interdependency of Europe's cross-border regions; whereas disruption of the free movement of goods, services, people and essential medical equipment resulted in detrimental economic consequences;
- H. whereas the temporary close-down of cross-border public and healthcare services threatened the livelihoods of cross-border workers and resulted in financial hardship for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in border regions; whereas the COVID-19 crisis was responsible for the emergence of new legal and administrative challenges in border regions, such as teleworking, and whereas teleworkers face issues with social protection and tax laws;
- I. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has also given rise to remarkable acts of solidarity among neighbouring Member States, at both national and local level;
- J. whereas some border regions are facing unprecedented critical infrastructure challenges related to the refugee crisis caused by Russia's ongoing military aggression in Ukraine; whereas the new post-COVID situation also contributes to their vulnerability;
- K. whereas all too often, national borders still fragment natural territories, making their protection and management less effective, especially given that different legal frameworks apply;

- L. whereas mass departures from border regions, especially on the part of young people and skilled labour, illustrates the lack of economic opportunities in such regions and makes them even less attractive in terms of employment and sustainable economic development; whereas there is a lack of language learning opportunities, as well as a lack of initiatives raising awareness about the benefits for border residents of learning a neighbouring language; whereas not all administrative documents have been translated into the languages of frontier Member States; whereas the Member States should take steps to remedy that state of affairs and the Commission should advise them in that process;
- M. whereas with the new Interreg Regulation for 2021-2027, border regions now have a clear financial support framework for enhanced cross-border governance so as to kick-start the economic recovery, set up joint environmental initiatives and mitigate the effects of climate change;
- N. whereas the conclusion of Partnership Agreements in the context of the 2021-2027 cohesion policy is lagging behind, undermining the allocation of vital resources in the territories in need;
- O. whereas fragmented and insufficient cross-border cooperation can lead to increased vulnerability to natural disasters and extreme weather events in border regions;
- P. whereas the EU also has maritime cross-border regions in the shape of islands in the Mediterranean and outermost regions in the Atlantic and Indian oceans; whereas the geographic remoteness of some European islands, coupled with their condition as border regions, exposes them to a combination of constraints on the labour market and in the fields of transportation and healthcare, which severely hamper their growth potential;
- Q. whereas it is acknowledged that the unique vulnerability of border regions requires changes to financing methods in border regions in order to finally create a level playing field for border regions vis-à-vis the heartland; whereas it is further recommended that these changes include deducting an inflation-adjusted ‘borderland billion’ from the Union’s cohesion budget and reserving it specifically for border regions;
- R. whereas it is estimated that adopting the proposal for a European cross-border mechanism (ECBM) regulation, published in May 2018 by the Commission on the recommendation of the former Luxembourgish Council Presidency, would have helped to overcome at least 30 %, and likely even 50 %, of the recognised obstacles to cross-border cooperation;
- 1. Welcomes the communication published by the Commission in 2021 entitled ‘EU border regions: living labs of European integration’, which includes detailed information on the barriers faced by border regions in the EU;

Specific characteristics of border regions

- 2. Points out that Article 174 of the TFEU recognises the challenges faced by border regions and states that the EU should pay particular attention to those regions when taking action to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU;

3. Emphasises that the challenges border regions face, in particular those with only maritime borders, as specific borders with their own needs, as well as rural and low-density areas, vary from one region to the next depending on the legal, administrative, linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, environmental, demographic and geographical circumstances that apply in the region concerned; emphasises the need for effective use and greater coordination of EU funds to ensure a more comprehensive approach to the afore-mentioned challenges; calls for the involvement of local authorities and communities and bespoke approaches that are integrated, tailor-made and region-specific, as part of a multi-level governance framework; stresses the need to reflect on the challenges facing some border regions linked to Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine;
4. Recommends an EU initiative to provide language courses for neighbouring languages at low cost to participants in all NUTS-3 regions whose territory borders a neighbouring Member State; urges that this EU initiative also be charged with raising awareness of the benefits of learning the neighbouring language;
5. Stresses that disproportionate burdens such as the inherent structural disadvantages faced by all border regions should be compensated with a separate regime for regional aid designed specifically for border regions;
6. Requests that 0.26 % of the EU's cohesion policy budget be earmarked exclusively for the development of border regions at the beginning of every new programming period, starting with the period 2028-2034 ('borderland billion'); further suggests that where these funds are not called up for use in the border regions, the remaining amount should return to the EU cohesion budget;
7. Suggests that the 'borderland billion' be entrusted to the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) or to border regions where comparable structures exist; calls for the EGTCs or comparable structures to be given a high level of autonomy with respect to the use of funds and the selection of projects;
8. Requests that Member States remove existing barriers and allow the EGTCs a greater level of autonomy with regard to the selection of projects and the use of funds, in particular by identifying EGTCs as managing authorities of Interreg programmes in accordance with Article 45(4) of the Interreg Regulation, enhancing the institutional and financial capacity of EGTCs in line with Article 14(4) of the Interreg Regulation or appointing EGTCs as beneficiaries managing small project funds, in accordance with Article 25(2) of the Interreg Regulation; suggests that the Commission create incentives for Member States to make use of the above options to give a more substantial role to EGTCs in order to truly implement policy objective 5 of the EU cohesion policy for 2021-2027: a Europe closer to citizens;
9. Recommends that changes be made to the EU Regional Aid Guidelines; suggests, given that less than half of the EU's total population are permitted to receive regional aid at the same time, that border regions be given priority within this rule;

Resilience through closer institutional cooperation

10. Welcomes 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;

11. Calls 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; underlines that sharing knowledge about successful b-solutions might contribute to solving and preventing the emergence of new administrative and legal barriers;
12. Underlines, however, that b-solutions alone cannot represent an appropriate and effective response to the legal and administrative barriers affecting border regions;
13. Recognises the important role that macro-regions, Euroregions, non-profit organisations and associations play in promoting collective interests and in cross-border cooperation; calls on the Commission to initiate an in-depth assessment of macro-regional strategies, with the purpose of evaluating their coherence with the EU’s renewed environmental and digital priorities;
14. Points out that, despite the efforts that have been made, administrative, legal and linguistic barriers still abound, hampering sustainable growth, socio-economic development and cohesion among and within border regions;
15. Notes that most barriers hindering cross-border cooperation are legal in nature, arising from diverging national laws or general EU laws; recalls, therefore, that in 2018 the Commission issued a proposal for a regulation on European cross-border mechanism (ECBM) (COM(2018)0373);
16. Points out that access to public services is crucial for the 150 million-strong population of internal cross-border areas, and is frequently hampered by numerous legal and administrative barriers; calls, on the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to maximise their efforts to remove these barriers, especially when related to health services, transport, education, labour mobility and the environment;
17. Emphasises that the 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; with that in mind, deeply regrets the fact that the legislative procedure relating to the ECBM has been blocked by the Council; recalls that this mechanism aims to facilitate cooperation between cross-border regions on joint projects in a variety of fields (infrastructure, healthcare, labour, etc.) by allowing one of them to apply the legal provisions of the neighbouring Member State if the application of its own laws presents legal obstacles;
18. Notes that the ECBM proposal was supported by a large majority in Parliament in February 2019, and during the plenary debate following the oral question to the Council in October 2021; recalls that Parliament’s first reading position on this regulation included specific formulations that would have ensured its voluntary application, thus

allaying the concerns of the Member States;

19. Calls on the Commission to amend the current proposal, taking into account the conclusions of the legal services of the Council and Parliament, with a view to striking a balance between the co-legislators' respective positions; calls on the Commission to ensure that this 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; calls on the Commission to 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;
20. Welcomes the adoption of the Cross-Border Crisis Response Integrated Initiative (CB-CRII) pilot project, intended to bolster border regions' resilience to future crises; urges the Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy to implement the project²⁰;
21. Emphasises that alongside the damage caused by COVID-19, particularly the border closures that it triggered, 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; welcomes, in that regard, the agreement reached on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve to provide financial and legal support to Member States and regions affected by Brexit;

More and better cross-border public services

22. Notes with interest that the public consultation on overcoming border obstacles conducted by the Commission in 2020 showed that the main problems experienced by people living in border areas were, among others, the lack of reliable cross-border public transport services, the lack of digital services and their limited cross-border interoperability, obstacles caused directly by language differences, and obstacles related to legislative processes and to economic disparities;
23. Notes that the attractiveness of cross-border areas for life and investment heavily depends on quality of life, the availability of public and commercial services for citizens and for businesses, and the quality of transportation, conditions which can only be met and maintained with close co-operation between national, regional and local authorities as well as businesses on both sides of the border;
24. Stresses the crucial role that investments in high quality public services have on building social resilience and coping with economic, health and social crises;
25. Points out that bringing in better cross-border public services would not only help improve the quality of life of those living in border areas, but also render those services more cost-effective;
26. Emphasises that the coordination of transport services in cross-border regions is still

²⁰ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/214920/budg2021-doc6-tab-en.pdf>

insufficient, owing in part to links that are missing or no longer in service, hampering mobility and blighting prospects for cross-border development; emphasises, furthermore, that complex legal and administrative rules and regulations are hampering the development of sustainable cross-border transport infrastructure;

27. Underlines that creating additional cross-border transport infrastructure, while being costly and environmentally challenging, might not always be the best solution and therefore underlines the potential of soft measures for boosting cross-border transport links, such as better coordination of public transport schedules, inclusive planning and the use of tailor-made innovations by cross-border local and regional authorities with sufficient autonomy to pursue common goals; emphasises that the development of new public transport infrastructure should comply with sustainability and cost-efficiency requirements; calls, therefore, for the timely allocation of the Just Transition Fund to ensure an active role of border regions in the achievement of the goals of the European Green Deal;
28. Emphasises the role of cohesion policy in addressing the main challenges facing the Union's transport sector, including developing a well-functioning Single European Transport Area, connecting Europe through modern, multi-modal and safe transport infrastructure networks and shifting to low-emission mobility, inter alia through supporting the completion of missing small cross-border rail links, thereby contributing to the European integration of border regions;
29. Calls on the Member States to bring in a stronger, clearer legal framework to improve the quality and efficiency of public services; emphasises that the Commission's mapping of missing rail links is a key tool that will make it possible for progress to be made in this regard;
30. Stresses the need to build an effective political legacy for the European Year of Rail, particularly in the cross-border regions; points out that the European and cross-border aspect of the railways brings people closer together, enables them to explore the EU in all its diversity and fosters socio-economic and territorial cohesion, particularly by improving connectivity within and with its geographical periphery, including by means of cross-border regional connections; welcomes the establishment of partnerships for the development of common services, as well as the harmonisation of timetables and ticketing in some cross-border regions; calls on the Commission to keep supporting this type of initiative and asks it to encourage the carriage of bicycles on cross-border trains;
31. Calls for increased digitalisation of public services and reinforced interoperability policies to ensure that digital public services are interoperable and cross-border by default; highlights the importance of support for digital innovation among public services and companies in cross-border regions and welcomes in this regard the European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH);

Dynamic cross-border labour markets

32. Welcomes the many important measures taken to address the socio-economic asymmetries in border areas; regrets, however, 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;
33. Calls on the Commission to carry out an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic circumstances of cross-border SMEs, gathering specific assessments and comparative statistics;
 34. Points out that, according to the Commission's eighth cohesion report²¹, 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 reached up to 495 %; encourages the Member States to continue on this path in order to achieve the 2023 targets;
 35. Recognises that it is important for Member States to guarantee tax revenues, social security systems and the full range of national taxes; supports and undertakes to closely monitor the implementation of the Commission's tax package of 15 July 2020, which is geared towards ensuring fair, efficient, sustainable and digitally friendly taxation;
 36. Underlines, however that 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;
 37. Believes that cohesion policy should be more geared towards investment in people as border regions' economies can be boosted by an effective mix of investments in innovation, human capital, good governance and institutional capacity;
 38. Believes that border regions experiencing particular challenges should receive tailor-made support (e.g. through greater synergies between the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund Plus and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund) for developing and implementing long-term strategies based on economic diversification, and re-skilling and retraining policies for laid-off workers;
 39. Urges the Member States to play a full part in the Commission's efforts to complete the European Education Area, which, in tune with the European skills agenda and the European Research Area, will ensure access to targeted education and training on either side of borders by providing shared education services, by ensuring the mutual recognition of diplomas, skills and qualifications and by encouraging learning;
 40. Encourages the advancement of programmes for cooperation between the EU border regions at the external borders of the Union and the border regions of the neighbouring countries; recognises the challenges of this cooperation given the regulatory differences between these regions; considers this cooperation to be an important tool for advancing EU enlargement policy; highlights that the promotion of cross-border cooperation between neighbouring regions can crucially contribute to facing major challenges affecting the Union (e.g. ensuring a sustainable future for the Mediterranean, the Baltic Sea and other maritime basins; ensuring a sustainable future for the Alps, the Pyrenees,

²¹ European Commission, *Cohesion in Europe towards 2050 - Eighth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion*, 9 February 2022.

the Carpathians and other mountain ranges; and ensuring a sustainable future for the large river basins such as the Rhine, the Danube and the Meuse);

41. Calls on the Commission and the Member States 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, and to address the need to revise the existing legislative framework including Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems²² in order to strengthen the portability of rights and ensure adequate social security coordination, and to review the role of temporary work agencies, recruiting agencies, other intermediaries and subcontractors with a view to identifying protection gaps in the light of the principle of equal treatment; urges Member States and the Commission 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;
42. Recognises that faster and more comprehensive recognition of diplomas and other qualifications obtained after training, improved healthcare, expansion of local and long-distance transport and better access to information on job vacancies are required in border regions; underlines the need for an increase in funds to facilitate better coordination between neighbouring national legal and administrative systems, especially with regard to the exchange of information on the legislation applicable to workers and the collection of data on cross-border workers, in order to bridge gaps in national practices, gain better access to available information, and create a predictable and accessible internal labour market; stresses that these problems pose an even greater threat to cross-border workers coming to and from non-EU countries;
43. Believes that digitalisation provides an unprecedented opportunity to facilitate labour mobility while making compliance with applicable EU provisions faster and easier to control; calls 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, which would provide the relevant national authorities and social partners with an instrument to ensure the effective identification, traceability, aggregation and portability of social security rights and improve the enforcement of EU rules on labour mobility and social security coordination in the labour market in a fair and effective way, in order to ensure a level playing field in the EU;
44. Points out that, currently, there is no mutual recognition of disability status among the EU Member States, and that this creates difficulties for persons with disabilities, as their national disability card might not be recognised in other Member States; believes that this failure is particularly limiting for cross-border workers and students with disabilities as it undermines their right to good services; recognises the value of the EU disability card, which enables mutual recognition of disability status in all Member States currently participating in the scheme; welcomes the fact that the Commission will propose that a European disability card be introduced by the end of 2023 for recognition

²² Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the coordination of social security systems OJ L 166, 30.4.2004, p. 1.

in all Member States;

Border regions for the European Green Deal

45. Points out that there is already an important EU legal framework – including in particular the Birds, Habitats and Water Framework²³ directives, as well as the EU’s biodiversity strategy for 2030 – that must be fully, systematically and jointly implemented by the Member States in cross-border regions; points out that nature, the climate, natural disasters and diseases do not stop at national borders and calls for coordinated and coherent protection of Natura 2000 sites to ensure more integrated implementation measures; urges the national governments of the Member States to take steps towards further harmonisation and coordination in the application of these and other directives; stresses that disaster risk management and planning is an area in which cross-border cooperation is vital; calls on the Commission to monitor closely the cross-border component of national and regional climate change adaptation strategies by providing for specific measures to favour appropriate solutions;
46. Points out that climate change also has a serious impact on border regions, including by obliging them to develop common cross-border tailor-made preventive measures for natural disasters; recalls that natural catastrophes that occurred in 2021 affected several border regions in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Germany; highlights the obligation for Member States under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to regularly conduct risk assessments and analyses of disaster scenarios, which covers cross-border cooperation as well as reporting on key risks with a cross-border impact; calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase cooperation and information sharing on disaster risk management, with a view also to improving early warning systems across border regions; welcomes, in this regard, the Interreg Rhine-Meuse projects on public safety, data collection, cross-border river management and administrative cooperation in the field of spatial planning for flood risk reduction;
47. Considers that mutual trust, political will and a flexible approach among multi-level stakeholders, including civil society, are vital to overcoming obstacles and boosting sustainable growth and development in border regions; calls, therefore, for better coordination and dialogue, and the further exchange of best practices among authorities; urges the Commission and the Member States to enhance such cooperation; calls on the Member States, furthermore, to ensure the adequate functional and financial autonomy of respective local and regional authorities; stresses, additionally, that all border regions have to play a decisive role in tackling climate change challenges, through coordinated actions with their surrounding regions;
48. Notes that border regions reap too few benefits from the deployment of circular economy, renewable energy and energy efficiency measures; calls on the Commission to build on regulatory advances already made and to finance more cross-border projects to produce, pool and store energy from renewable sources; believes that the opportunities for cooperation that already exist in the applicable EU legal framework must be harnessed to the full, and calls on the Member States to step up coordination in the cross-border regions in order to implement the EU strategy for energy system

²³ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy. OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.

integration; emphasises the potential of the less inhabited border areas to develop sustainable and green economies, and thus to bring added value to local development through the creation of new green jobs;

49. Emphasises that cooperation among neighbouring Member States will be a central element in achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal and calls on the Member States to make the most of existing opportunities for cooperation under the applicable EU legal framework;

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50. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national and regional Parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Border regions account for more than 40 % of the EU's territory and are home to more than 150 million people. Too often, however, they are still plagued by persistent administrative, legal and linguistic obstacles that hamper their economic growth and their social and territorial cohesion. The upshot of this is that border regions are economically less successful than regions situated inside Member States, away from the borders.

In 2017 and 2018, both the Commission and the European Parliament looked into this situation, but at the time no one could have predicted the global pandemic that has now had the entire world – along with Europe and its cross-border regions – in its grip for more than two years. Brexit, too, has been a game-changer. With these issues in mind one thing is clear: people living in border regions need an overhaul of the regulations that takes into account the paralysis of healthcare facilities, barriers to free movement and the inevitable consequences of unilateral decisions to close borders.

In an effort to clarify the situation, on 14 July 2021 the Commission adopted a communication entitled 'EU border regions: living labs of European integration'. Centred in particular around a public consultation involving people living in border areas, that communication made it possible to reflect on the situation of border areas in the light of the new realities in Europe today, and to look at how programmes that are part of the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027 could be used to kick-start the recovery.

The rapporteur congratulates the Commission on its communication and analysis and includes in his report a number of points that need to be reviewed. Specifically, he emphasises the urgent issues that require a swifter response from the EU and the Member States, especially those involving a lack of cross-border public services, which is a major barrier to the development of border regions. Such barriers continue to exist principally because the legal systems of neighbouring Member States differ from one another.

The rapporteur also emphasises how urgent it is that the European Cross-Border Mechanism be revised, making it easier to come up with new, more flexible cross-border initiatives by removing some of the barriers to cross-border development. The European Parliament has already expressed its firm position on this matter.

Finally, the rapporteur points out that national approaches to tackling the health crisis were, in some cases, counterproductive for border regions, in the wake of sudden decisions to close borders. The rapporteur also draws attention to the lack of assessment and the fact that there is no overall picture of the current situation as regards border-region SMEs, which account for more than two thirds of total employment in the EU and one third of Europe's GDP. In order to solve this problem, public policies need to be better targeted and tailored to suit the specific characteristics of each region.

To sum up, the report calls for EU policies to take more account of the specific characteristics of cross-border regions, so as to enable the EU to respond more effectively to the demographic, economic, social and environmental challenges that those regions face.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	12.7.2022
Result of final vote	+: 37 -: 1 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Matteo Adinolfi, François Alfonsi, Pascal Arimont, Adrian-Drağoş Benea, Isabel Benjumea Benjumea, Tom Berendsen, Stéphane Bijoux, Vlad-Marius Botoş, Rosanna Conte, Rosa D'Amato, Christian Doleschal, Raffaele Fitto, Chiara Gemma, Krzysztof Hetman, Peter Jahr, Manolis Kefalogiannis, Constanze Krehl, Cristina Maestre Martín De Almagro, Nora Mebarek, Alin Mituţa, Dan-Ştefan Motreanu, Niklas Nienaß, Andrey Novakov, Younous Omarjee, Tsvetelina Penkova, Maxette Pirbakas, Marcos Ros Sempere, André Rougé, Susana Solís Pérez, Irène Tolleret
Substitutes present for the final vote	Karolin Braunsberger-Reinhold, Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg, Isabel García Muñoz, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Mikuláš Peksa, Stanislav Polčák
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Sergio Berlato, Carlo Fidanza, Billy Kelleher, Pedro Marques

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

37	+
ECR	Sergio Berlato, Carlo Fidanza, Raffaele Fitto
NI	Chiara Gemma, Maxette Pirbakas
PPE	Pascal Arimont, Isabel Benjumea Benjumea, Tom Berendsen, Karolin Braunsberger-Reinhold, Christian Doleschal, Krzysztof Hetman, Peter Jahr, Manolis Kefalogiannis, Dan-Ștefan Motreanu, Andrey Novakov, Stanislav Polčák
RENEW	Stéphane Bijoux, Vlad-Marius Botoș, Billy Kelleher, Alin Mituța, Susana Solís Pérez, Irène Tolleret
S&D	Adrian-Dragoș Benea, Isabel García Muñoz, Constanze Krehl, Cristina Maestre Martín De Almagro, Pedro Marques, Nora Mebarek, Tsvetelina Penkova, Marcos Ros Sempere
THE LEFT	Niyazi Kizilyürek, Younous Omarjee
VERTS/ALE	François Alfonsi, Rosa D'Amato, Anna Deparnay-Grunenberg, Niklas Nienaa, Mikuláš Peksa

1	-
ID	André Rougé

2	0
ID	Matteo Adinolfi, Rosanna Conte

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention