

STUDY

Requested by the EMPL Committee



Employment barriers in border regions

Strategies and EU funding



Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies
Directorate-General for Internal Policies
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Abstract

This study draws primarily on available literature, as well as information gathered from interviews to examine barriers to employment in border regions. The study first outlines cross-border labour mobility trends and drivers. It then looks in more depth at barriers to cross-border labour mobility before assessing measures - including legislation, key programmes and initiatives, and funding structures - adopted at EU-level to address them. The study concludes by presenting a series of recommendations on ways to facilitate cross-border labour mobility going forward.

The analysis was provided by Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies at the request of the EMPL Committee.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	4
LIST OF BOXES	5
LIST OF FIGURES	5
LIST OF TABLES	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
1. INTRODUCTION	8
1.1. What is cross-border labour mobility?	9
2. PATTERNS, TRENDS AND DRIVERS OF CROSS-BORDER LABOUR MOBILITY	10
2.1. Cross-border labour mobility – slow growth and a small share of total workforce	10
2.2. Socio-economic differentials, better quality of life and demand for skills as drivers	13
3. BARRIERS TO CROSS-BORDER LABOUR MOBILITY	16
3.1. A range of diverse and interrelated barriers	17
3.2. Legal and administrative barriers	18
3.3. A number of additional barriers	19
3.4. Barriers identified in the European Commission study are confirmed in other literature	22
3.5. No definitive hierarchy of barriers has been identified	23
3.6. Language differences can be pinpointed as a particularly pervasive issue	24
4. EU POLICIES AND INITIATIVES AT EU LEVEL AND IN THE MEMBER STATES	26
4.1. European Commission: proactive in tackling all types of barriers	26
4.2. EURES plays a key role	29
4.3. But there is a limit to what EURES can achieve	32
4.4. Recent initiatives could help to further support free movement	34
4.5. EU funding plays an active role in supporting labour mobility	36
4.5.1. European Social Fund	36
4.5.2. Employment and Social Innovation Programme	36
4.5.3. European Regional Development Fund (via Interreg)	36
4.6. European Social Fund Plus: more detail needed	38
4.6.1. Relevance of labour mobility in the new ESF+ Proposal	38
5. KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	42

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBP	Cross-border partnership
EaSI	Employment and Social Innovation Programme
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ELA	European Labour Authority
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
MS	Member States

LIST OF BOXES

Box 1:	What is a 'cross-border worker'?	9
Box 2:	What does a 'typical' worker need to do to be able to commute across the border?	16
Box 3:	Overview of section structure	17
Box 4:	Lack of recognition of educational qualifications – barriers and potential solutions	18
Box 5:	Physical access to work – barriers and potential solutions	20
Box 6:	Examples of cooperation between relevant authorities	21
Box 7:	EURES in legislation	29
Box 8:	Importance of cross-border partnerships	30
Box 9:	Key elements of good practice in cross-border partnerships	31
Box 10:	EURES in practice	33
Box 11:	Two options for overall function of new mechanism: legislative transfer or amendment	35

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:	Share of total employment commuting across borders, by NUTS 2 regions, 2015	11
Figure 2:	Number of cross-border commuters (thousands) by region	12
Figure 3:	Typology of cross-border regions and borders in Europe	13

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Severity of given obstacles to cross-border (cb) Labour Mobility	23
Table 2:	Obstacles to labour mobility and EU strategies to overcome them	26
Table 3:	EU funding streams and their roles in addressing barriers	37
Table 4:	Objectives within ESF+	39
Table 5:	Funding allocations for ESF for 2014-2020 and 2021-2027	40
Table 6:	Funding allocations for EaSI for 2014-2020 and 2021-2027	41

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cross-border labour mobility has risen over time, but cross-border commuters **remain a very small proportion (around 0.9 %) of the total European labour force**. The highest rates of cross-border movement tend to be clustered around the middle of Europe, with border regions running from northern France, the Benelux countries, Germany and Switzerland, as well as borders in Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia. Key drivers for cross-border movement include complementary socio-economic conditions, wherein good wage differentials and employment opportunities that match the skills of prospective workers are available across the border. Additional factors include the practical aspects of cross-border movement, including practical transport links and affordable housing options.

Research shows a **broad consensus on a series of barriers** to cross-border workers. These are diverse and interrelated and include a lack of information on job vacancies; non-transferability of qualifications; language and socio-cultural differences; and differences in social security, pension and taxation systems between country of work and country of residence. A lack of trust between different sides of the border and a lack of willingness of public authorities to work together have also been cited as barriers. Although **no definitive hierarchy of barriers** has been identified by looking across available literature on the subject, the **pervasive nature of language** points to it as a particularly relevant barrier, given its impact in intensifying most other types of obstacle.

At **EU level legal, political and operational initiatives** have been launched to facilitate free movement of workers including cross-border mobility, with EURES launched in 1993 and the Erasmus Plus Programme recently celebrating its 30-year anniversary. Additional initiatives include for example, YOUR EUROPE, the Europeans Qualifications Framework, the Bologna Process and the Trans-European Network for Transport, all contributing to the facilitation of cross-border movement. Notably EURES (including cross-border partnerships) plays a **significant role in overcoming barriers relating to information gaps, job search and a lack of cooperative working between public authorities**.

To further improve **coordination and cooperation** across Member States, the Commission has more recently published a Proposal for a **Regulation on a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in cross-border contexts** with the aim of establishing a voluntary mechanism to overcome legislative differences between Member States. In addition, plans for a **European Labour Authority** were announced in 2017 which will have a focus on labour inspection, social security and EURES as well as a **Single Digital Gateway**. Whereas the Digital Single Gateway was adopted by the Council on 27 September 2018, the other two measures proposed remain under discussion at the time of writing. Whilst representing new opportunities to facilitate cross-border labour mobility, their overall impact therefore remains to be seen.

Mobility is supported by a number of **European Funds**: the European Social Fund (ESF) (funding the EURES Network), the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme (funding the EURES portal and cross-border partnerships) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (funding Interreg which can be utilised for coordination between Member States including actions to facilitate cross-border cooperation). Mobility will continue to be an area of focus within the European Social Fund Plus (2021 - 2027) integrating EaSI as well as the ESF within its purview. **Points remain for further clarification** however, above all how labour mobility will be incorporated into the remit of ESF funded activities, and how cross-border mobility will be realised in practice within the remit of the EaSI programme given what appears to be a decrease in overall funding for this stream (from a total of EUR 919 million to EUR 751 million) for the next funding period.

In light of the fact that barriers to mobility remain and require ongoing action from the EU and national levels to reduce them, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1: In order to effectively avoid or reduce existing employment barriers, the active participation of Member States and cross-border regions will be necessary to overcome the barriers outlined above. As such the European Commission should facilitate action within and between Member States e.g. via the organisation of workshops or conferences for key stakeholders from different border regions.

Recommendation 2: A further recommendation would be to ensure greater clarity in the scope and remit of the proposed European Social Fund Plus with regards to how support for cross-border movement will be maintained within the new funding framework.

Recommendation 3: Given the pervasiveness of language barriers, it is recommended that the European Commission should consider providing greater support in border regions for the Erasmus + Programme with regards to its student exchange component, as a way to foster greater emphasis on learning the language of border countries.

Furthermore, given the ongoing relevance of EURES and its cross-border partnerships in promoting and facilitating labour mobility in EU regions, the following recommendations are also made:

Recommendation 1: Cross-border partnerships should continue to be funded, but that a targeted approach be applied so that funding reaches areas conducive to labour mobility i.e. where there is a strong demand/supply for labour.

Recommendation 2: The European Commission should ensure that EaSI funding remains under direct management within the ESF+ as funding cross-border partnerships through shared management would prove more complicated to manage.

Recommendation 3: Consider expanding the implementation period for EaSI funding for EURES cross-border partnerships to more than one year to allow for time for the implementation of actions and reduce the administrative burden.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to analyse cross-border labour mobility by seeking to address the following questions:

- What are patterns in cross-border employment across EU regions and key factors behind it?
- What are key barriers for cross-border workers looking for a job and for those employed in another EU country and elements of good practice to cope with these? Is there consensus across studies? Do barriers and coping strategies differ across regions?
- What is the role of EU funding in promoting employment in border regions?
- How could EU funding and supporting services for labour mobility be improved in the future?

1. INTRODUCTION

Cross-border labour mobility is a growing trend in the EU with significant economic potential that has been quantifiably hampered by a number of obstacles. The aim of this paper is to analyse cross-border labour mobility by seeking to address the following questions:

1. What are patterns in cross-border employment across EU regions and key factors behind it?
2. What are key barriers for cross-border workers looking for a job and for those employed in another EU country and elements of good practice to cope with these? Is there a consensus across studies? Do barriers and coping strategies differ across regions?
3. What is the role of EU funding in promoting employment in border regions?
4. How could EU-funding and supporting services for labour mobility be improved in the future?

To do so, the study draws primarily on available literature on the topic, as well as information gathered from interviews with five key stakeholders involved in national coordination for EURES and cross-border partnerships. Interviewees were from border regions in Northern; Southern; Central-Eastern; Central-Western; and Western Europe and therefore represented a well-distributed geographical spread of viewpoints. In terms of key limitations to the study, only a limited number of interviews could be undertaken within the pre-defined scope of the study, though an effort was made to ensure a geographical balance in those carried out. Moreover, while information was available in recent literature on the drivers and barriers to cross-border labour mobility, there was a lack of definitive insight into how far these could be linked to certain regions in relation to others. Instead issues were most commonly presented in a generalised way with regards to the phenomenon of cross-border labour mobility overall. Furthermore, the resources consulted did not make any extensive comparison between the characteristics of cross-border labour mobility in relation to labour mobility overall. Existing research and the limited number of interviews conducted did however not suggest that there were significant differences in issues encountered. In light of the limitations outlined above, there is therefore scope for further research to be conducted into exactly how drivers and barriers to cross-border labour mobility vary between particular regions, and how this type of movement (and particularly the barriers encountered) differ from labour mobility more generally. Another area warranting further investigation, based on the work undertaken for this note, relates to the need for more quantitative research on the main barriers to cross-border mobility to attempt to establish a more definitive ranking of their relative importance.

The study first outlines the drivers and barriers to employment in border regions, before looking to strategies adopted at EU-level to try to overcome these. Having explored factors that both drive and impede cross-border labour mobility, the paper will go on to consider the concrete policies and initiatives implemented via EU funding to facilitate this kind of movement, before moving to a more in-depth exploration of funding structures at EU level established to support these strategies. It will conclude by presenting a series of recommendations focused on ways to facilitate cross-border labour mobility going forward, drawing on the barriers outlined, and an assessment of the measures introduced in relation to labour mobility to suggest actions to support the ongoing expansion of cross-border movement for work.

1.1. What is cross-border labour mobility?

Put simply '**cross-border workers**' are people who live in one Member State and work in another. Cross-border work differs from migration in that workers' place of residence does not change if they take up employment in a neighbouring country. Instead workers maintain their primary residence by commuting on a regular basis to work on a different side of their national border.¹² The most recent report on intra-EU labour mobility published by the European Commission in 2017 further expands the definition of cross-border workers given below to encompass EFTA (European Free Trade Association) as well as EU-28 citizens who move across a national border for work (but not residence). The publication also makes clear that the definition of "cross-border worker" also encompasses "frontier" and "seasonal" workers (see Box 1).

Box 1: What is a 'cross-border worker'?

According to Article 1(f) of Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004 a **cross-border worker** can be defined as:

'any person pursuing an activity as an employed or self-employed person in a Member State and who resides in another Member State to which s/he returns as a rule daily or at least once a week'

The term "cross-border workers" encompasses **frontier workers** which are defined in Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004 as 'any person pursuing an activity as an employed or self-employed person in a Member State and who resides in another Member State to which he returns as a rule daily or at least once a week'.

In addition, **seasonal workers** are also within the scope of cross-border workers. These workers are defined in Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71, Article 1(c) as 'any worker who goes to the territory of a Member State other than the one in which he is resident to do work there of a seasonal nature for an undertaking or an employer of that State for a period which may on no account exceed eight months, and who stays in the territory of the said State for the duration of his work; work of a seasonal nature shall be taken to mean work which, being dependent on the succession of the seasons, automatically recurs each year'

Source: European Commission, 2018.³

2. PATTERNS, TRENDS AND DRIVERS OF CROSS-BORDER LABOUR MOBILITY

Based upon the available data, the following section gives an overview of cross-border labour mobility with regards to trends, key drivers and facilitators at a broader economic level as well as at the level of individuals.

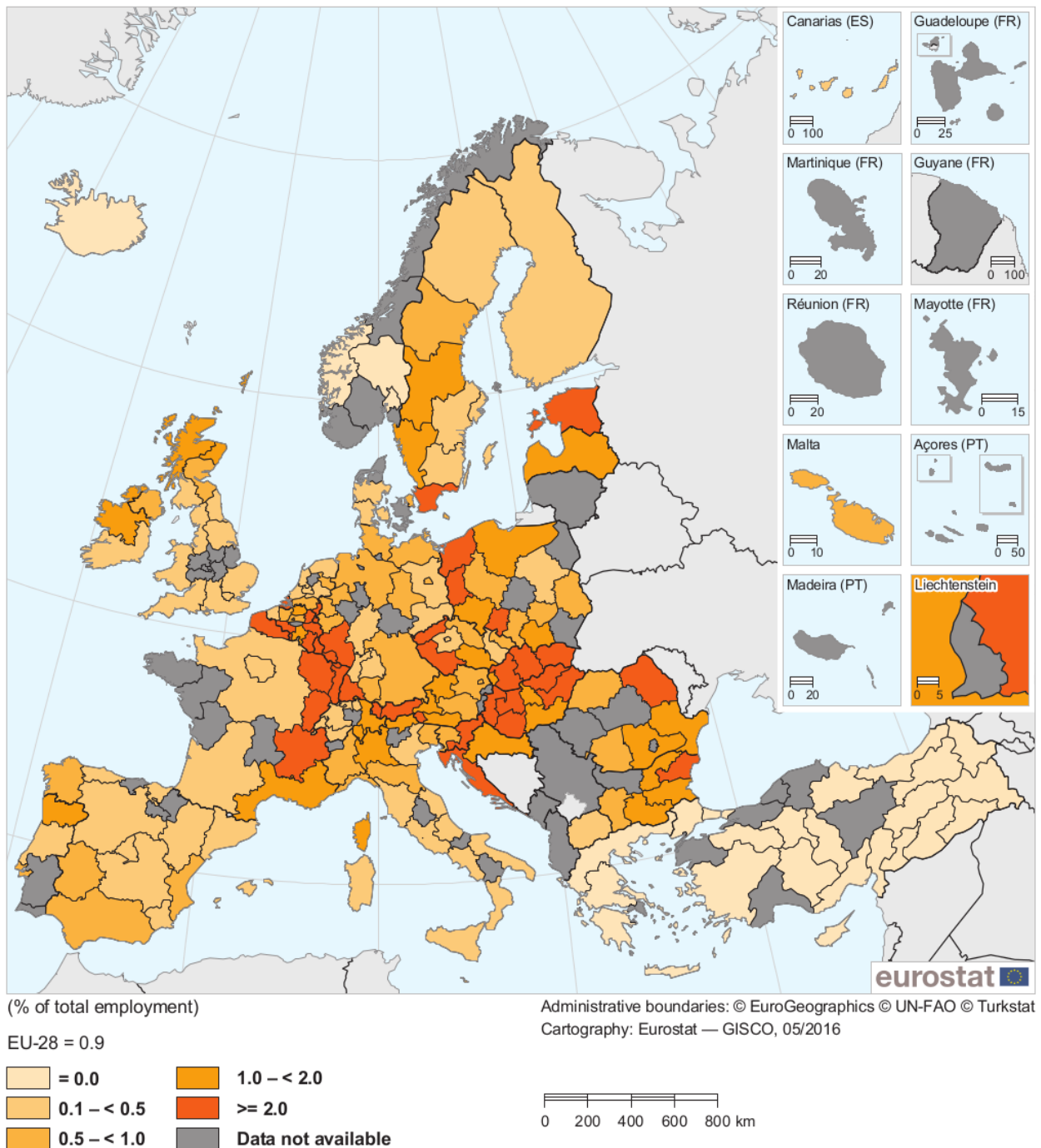
2.1. Cross-border labour mobility – slow growth and a small share of total workforce

Cross-border commuting increased following the 2004 and 2007 European Union enlargements,⁴ but remains a relatively limited phenomenon. In 2016, there was a total of around 1.4 million EU-28 cross-border workers working in another EU-28 country which was an increase of around 8 % compared to the previous year.⁵ If the EFTA countries are included as countries of residence and of work, the total number of cross-border workers rises to 1.8 million in 2016.⁶ Despite the rise in the number of cross-border workers between 2015 and 2016, this form of labour only accounts for **around 0.9 % of the total EU-28 workforce**. 7.2 % of the EU-28 workforce are national commuters who travel to different regions for work but do not cross any borders, with a further 91.9 % of the workforce living in the same region in which they work.⁷

According to Eurostat, higher shares of cross-border commuting were recorded in 2015 for some of the smaller and more central Member States. For example, 6.1 % of the Slovakian workforce was commuted across the border (largely to Austria, the Czech Republic or Germany).⁸ In the same year Luxembourg was the country with the highest proportion of its workforce (42 %) commuting from neighbouring countries, with 181 000 cross-border inbound commuters entering for work. Inbound commuters participating in the Luxembourgish workforce most commonly came from Belgium (39 000), Germany (44 000) and France (97 000). Typical of other cross-border regions, Luxembourg has a high degree of asymmetry in terms of its cross-border commuting patterns, with incoming workers outnumbering local workers by 31:1.⁹

The map below – which was produced by Eurostat¹⁰ - shows data for 168 different regions in the EU and how **rates of cross-border outbound movement** vary across the Union. Of the regions presented, 36 (shown in darkest shade of orange) reported that cross-border outbound commuters represented at least 2 % of employed people in their region, which represents a high rate of movement compared to other places. These regions tended to **cluster towards the middle of Europe, notably border regions running from northern France, the Benelux countries, Germany and Switzerland**, with other prominent areas for cross-border movement spanning **borders in Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia**. According to the map below, cross-border commuting is particularly low as a share of total employment (and even non-existent) at borders between some countries in south-eastern Europe, as well as between parts of Norway and Sweden as indicated by light yellow shading where data is available.

Figure 1: Share of total employment commuting across borders, by NUTS 2 regions, 2015



(*) Bayern, Hessen, Niedersachsen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Sachsen (Germany), Voreia Ellada, Kentriki Ellada (Greece), Bassin Parisien, Sud-Ouest, Méditerranée (France), Noord-Nederland (the Netherlands), Region Północny (Poland), Manner-Suomi (Finland), North East, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber, East of England, London, South East, South West, Wales (the United Kingdom) and Ege (Turkey): NUTS level 1. Yugozapaden (Bulgaria), Calabria, Sardegna, Marche (Italy), Sud_vest Oltenia (Romania), East of England, North Eastern Scotland, Highlands and Islands (the United Kingdom), Région lémanique and Espace Mittelland (Switzerland): 2014. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany), Utrecht (the Netherlands), Kärnten (Austria) and Eastern Scotland (the United Kingdom): 2013. Prov. Namur (Belgium), Wales and South Western Scotland (the United Kingdom): 2012. Includes data of low reliability for some regions.

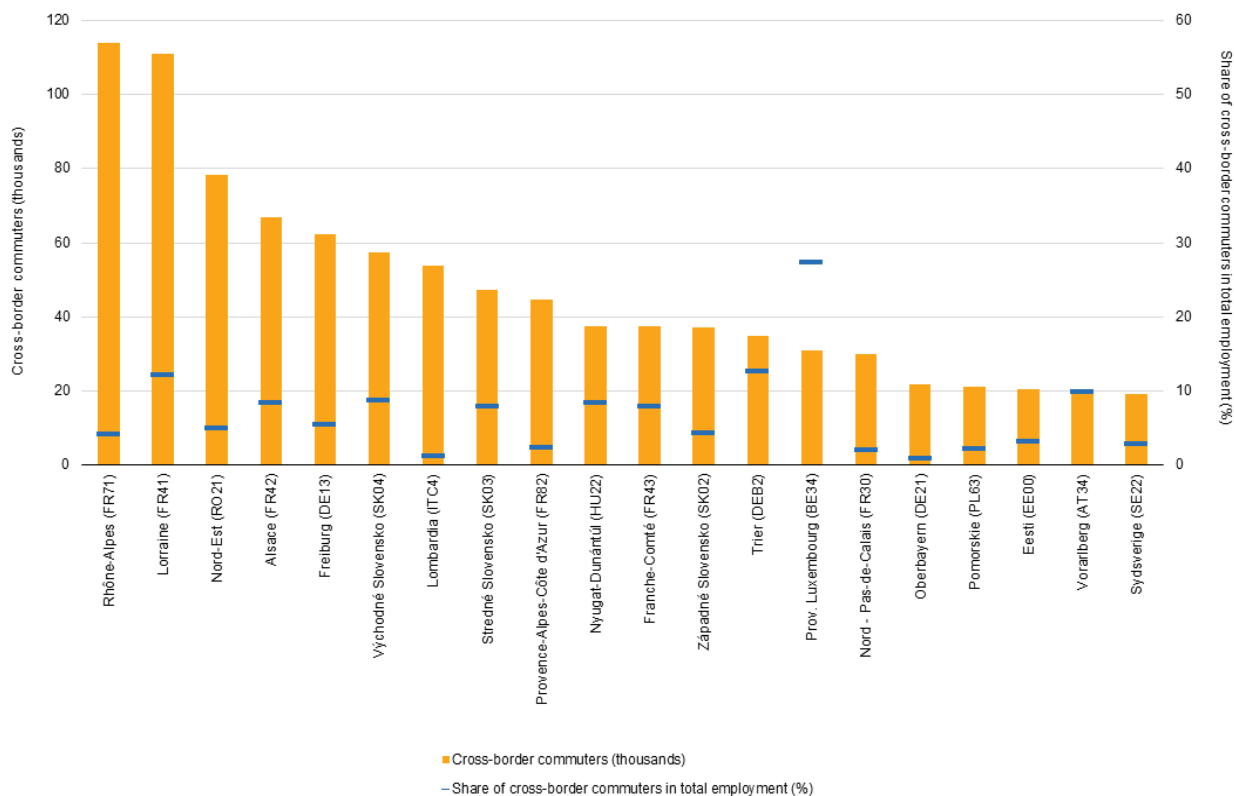
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: [lfst_r_lfe2ecomm](#) and [lfst_r_lfe2emp](#))

Source: Eurostat, 2016.¹¹

According to Eurostat data, in terms of absolute numbers of outbound cross-border commuters, the south-eastern French region of Rhône-Alpes had the highest number of cross-border outbound

commuters with 114 000 regularly travelling to a neighbouring country to work (even though this represented just 1.2 % of the total number of employed people in the region). Other highly ranked regions in terms of absolute numbers of outbound commuters were also situated in France (e.g. Lorraine; Alsace) and Germany (Freiburg) and Slovakia (Východné Slovensko) which was similar to findings for the relative rate of cross-border movement. An exception was the Romanian region of Nord-Est which ranks as the region with the third highest absolute number of outbound cross-border commuters (just under 80 000) although this represents a relatively low share of all those in employment.

Figure 2: Number of cross-border commuters (thousands) by region



(*) Based on data available for 182 regions in the EU, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

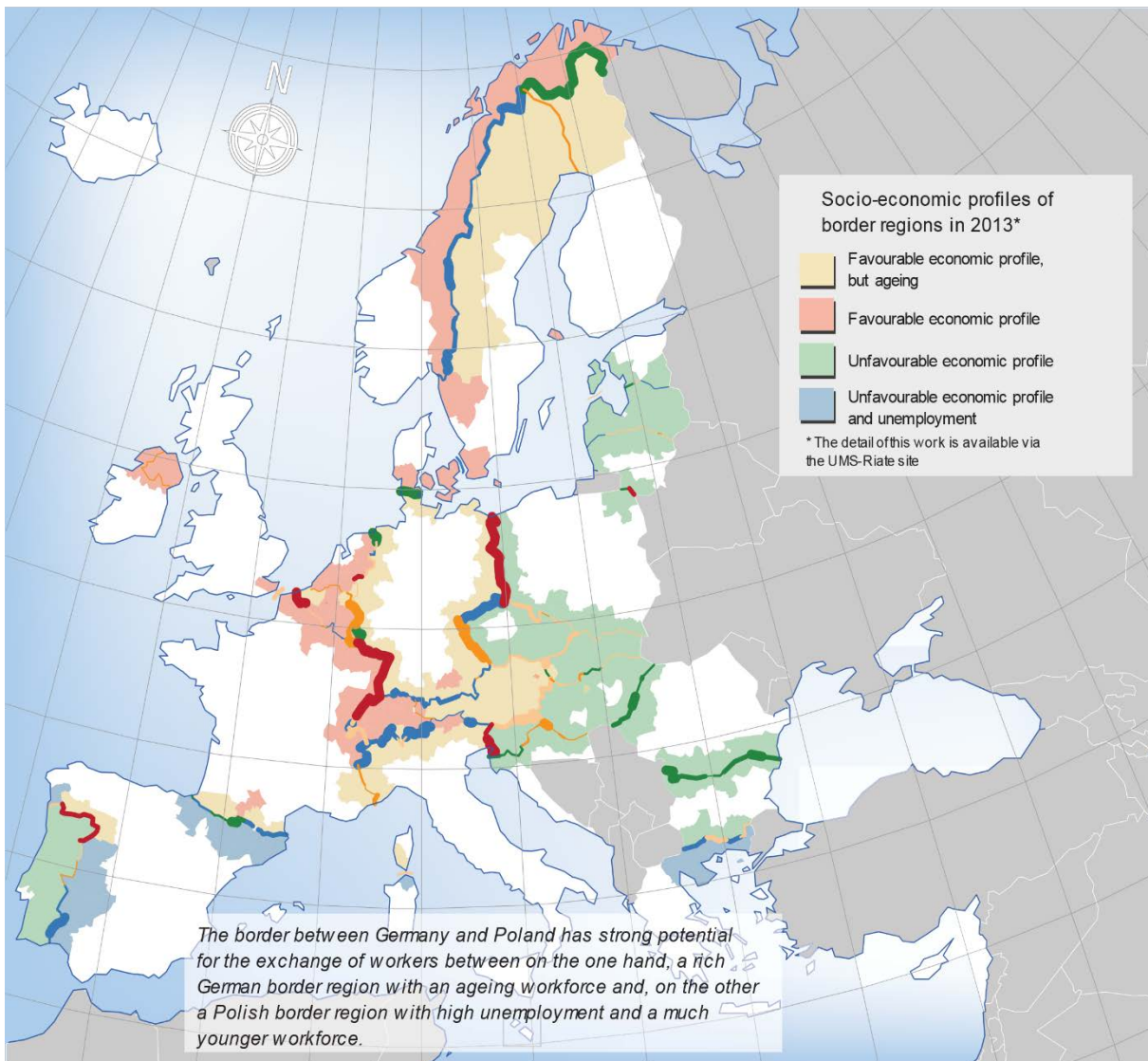
Source: Eurostat, 2016.¹²

2.2. Socio-economic differentials, better quality of life and demand for skills as drivers

A possible explanation for lower rates of cross-border movement is offered by a recent study by the French Commissariat Général à l'Égalité des Territoires (CGET) which presents a typology of border regions as a way to assess how likely cross-border movement is.¹³ The typology considers **economic factors** via GDP per capita, **demographics** via share of young people and share of seniors, and **social conditions** via unemployment rates to assess the likelihood of cross-border movement in a particular region.

Figure 3: Typology of cross-border regions and borders in Europe

Typology of borders and border regions in Europe



Source: Observatoire des Territoires, 2018¹⁴ with image simplified and text translated from FR to EN by Ramboll.

The assumption made is that a good **socio-economic differential** between border regions will trigger an exchange, be it in material goods or people. The typology includes four main categories with some of the most favourable conditions in terms of socio-economic conditions (in red above) found around

the north-south axis from Norway to Switzerland, passing through southern Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. This is linked to particularly high GDP per capita in regions in Switzerland and Luxembourg with low unemployment rates and to a fairly balanced demographic structure. The typology suggests that certain border regions present complementary socio-economic and demographic profiles which favour exchanges. This is the case, for example, of the regions bordering France and Germany, Poland and Germany or the French Pas de Calais region and Belgian region of Flanders, characterised by younger populations on the one side of the border and ageing and richer populations on the other.

In contrast, some regions have **characteristics that are not favourable for cross-border movement** due to one region cumulating all the socio-economic advantages (i.e. higher GDP per capita, lower unemployment rates, fewer elderly people and in particular a younger population) relative to its neighbour. This can be observed in regions such as at the Romanian border with Hungary and Bulgaria, and at the border between northern Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, or between Norway and Finland. In general terms the study concludes that the higher the degree of complementarity across bordering regions, the greater propensity there is for cross-border movement. On the flip side, the absence of this socio-economic complementarity may explain low rates of cross-border labour mobility in certain regions in Europe.¹⁵

Cross-border commuting therefore appears to follow an **asymmetrical pattern** given that the greater the difference in average earnings or in the availability of jobs between two regions, the more likely it is that the region with better labour market conditions will draw in more cross-border commuters.¹⁶ Ultimately an attractive labour market on the other side of the border has a stronger “pull-effect” than “push-factors” experienced in a country of residence such as low employment rates or recession; in sum **it is the prospect of something better that makes people choose to work across the border** rather than poor conditions in their own country that “push” them away.¹⁷

A related driver is therefore the capacity for cross-border labour mobility to **correct imbalances resulting from a surplus of labour in a given occupation with a demand for jobs in those same occupations across the border**. A report by Bertelsmann Stiftung takes up this case, proffering cross-border labour mobility as way to correct such imbalances. The picture painted in this study is arguably rosy in terms of envisioning a situation where workers simply move across borders to gain employment and in doing so fill open vacancies, however the **risk of “jobs-to-skills mismatch”** is also acknowledged in relation to evidence of the underutilisation of human capital of workers from the EU-10.¹⁸ This finding – relating to *labour mobility in general* – is also relevant in the case of cross-border labour mobility, particularly where failure to recognise qualifications on either side of the border leads to workers occupying jobs below their skill level (as explored further in Section 2 on barriers below).

Overall then, there must be a **sufficient degree of labour market complementarity** on either side of the border to make mobility a viable option. In other words, labour market situations in border territories must ultimately match in terms of labour supply and demand (not only in terms of the hard number of vacancies available but also in terms of matching skills and qualifications of workers with the quality of jobs available) for cross-border mobility to meaningfully take place and for potential economic growth in these regions to be realised.¹⁹

A key example highlighted in a study on the French-German Rhine region underlines the fundamental importance of labour market complementarity, where the skills and qualifications of a worker who wants to move have to be in demand in the destination country.²⁰ A series of barriers reportedly exist in the region variously relating to a lack of transport links, language barriers, and lack of skills recognition amongst others. Underlying these barriers however was also the lack of labour market

complementarity in every field on either side of the border, with **qualification mismatch** identified between unemployed French workers and the needs of the German labour market in the vocational sector. This was significant as the typical French cross-border commuter from Alsace was identified as an older male, quite low-skilled and working in the manufacturing profession with barriers arising from the lack of complementarity between their skills and the particular needs of the German labour market. This example underpins the importance of labour market complementarity in terms of skills supply and demand as a key factor when considering cross-border movement. The **conditions in the labour markets on each side** of the border therefore, influence whether cross-border labour mobility happens in practice.

According to **macro-economic estimations**, there is a potential for **untapped growth**, wherein under certain conditions, cross-border regions could be on average 8 % richer if all barriers to cross-border movement were removed. The removal of just 20 % of all potential obstacles (explored in Section 3 below) could still lead to a 2 % gain in GDP. This would represent the possibility of over 1 million jobs on the ground.²¹ As such there is a **broader economic driver** of particular relevance to policymakers for supporting cross-border labour mobility. It should be noted however that moonlighting over the border (i.e. illegal cross-border work) “seems” to cause fiscal losses in countries of work as well as a drop in the number of regularly offered job opportunities in local labour markets.²²

As will be explored below in relation to barriers to mobility, there appear to frequently be a **combination of factors** that make finding a job or hiring an employee from a neighbouring country appear a viable and appealing option. For example, a high proportion of inbound cross-border commuters to Luxembourg, is attributed both to the low linguistic barriers for people living in bordering countries as well as the high number of subsidiary branches of foreign enterprises located in Luxembourg.²³ This example demonstrates the layered reasons why people may decide that commuting to a neighbouring country could be a good option for them.

Whilst there are many motivations to work in a neighbouring border region, one of the most important is the **opportunity for individuals to balance well-paid job opportunities with a good quality of life and affordable accommodation in the country of residence**.²⁴ In the case of cross-border commuting between Sweden and Denmark for example, numerous Danes have reportedly moved to Scania in Sweden due to the lower cost of accommodation, choosing to commute back to Copenhagen for work again.²⁵ Ultimately individuals are rarely driven by an intrinsic desire to work across the border but are instead motivated by rational choices such as salary and job security.²⁶

3. BARRIERS TO CROSS-BORDER LABOUR MOBILITY

The following sections provide a review of key barriers for cross-border mobility as outlined in a selection of key studies conducted since 2009. Box 2 below first presents an outline of what a 'typical' worker needs to do to become a cross-border worker as a way to help visualise the common barriers that people encounter when looking to commute to work in a neighbouring country. The remainder of the section outlines these barriers in more detail, giving examples of instances where these have been experienced and, in some instances, effectively overcome.

Box 2: What does a 'typical' worker need to do to be able to commute across the border?

Taking a cross-border worker commuting every day from Belgium to Luxembourg as an example, an individual will need to ensure that they meet the following requirements:

- **First find a job on the other side of the border.** This requires the availability of suitable jobs based on the skills and experience of the individual and information on corresponding vacancies.
- Once a suitable vacancy has been found, any **certificates detailing skills or qualifications** will need to be accepted as equivalent to national standards by employers across the border. In some cases, the individual will be required to pay for their translation before they are submitted as part of an application.
- The prospective cross-border worker will need to ensure that they can speak the **language of country of work** at a sufficient level for the job they will carry out. This is not only crucial in practical terms (including when figuring out foreign public services and tax obligations etc.) but will also be important for integrating into working life in a different country i.e. in order to build rapport with new colleagues and overcome potential socio-cultural differences.
- A realistic **route to work will also need to be identified** – the financial implications of running and maintaining a car or buying tickets for public transport will need to be factored in as will the quality of road or rail connections to ensure that the journey across the border would be feasible on a regular basis.
- Having secured a job across the border, the individual will also need to **figure out what social security services they are entitled to and what they will be required to contribute** (i.e. how much family benefit is available and how much their pension and overall tax obligations will be). They will also need to find out if they are liable to have their pension taxed in their country of residence. For all of these processes the worker will need to find out how to register in their country of work and how to open a bank account.
- Related to the point above, the individual would need to **take out appropriate accident and injury insurance, as well as health insurance and unemployment insurance if possible**. They should also be aware that the benefits they are entitled to should they become unemployed *may* be lower than those provided in their country of work.

Source: Ramboll based on literature review.

3.1. A range of diverse and interrelated barriers

A large scale 2017 study²⁷ on barriers in border regions published by the European Commission is a good starting point when considering the main barriers to cross border labour mobility. Looking at 37 out of the 40 internal land borders in the EU, the study ultimately compiled an **inventory of 239 obstacles** which variously affect border regions in Europe. As part of this study an open public consultation was conducted which saw **over half (53 %) of all 623 respondents cite legal or administrative obstacles** as relevant to cross border movement (including cross-border labour mobility).^A The nature of these barriers is explored below with reference subsequently made to how these findings resonate with other available literature on barriers to labour mobility in border regions.

Box 3: Overview of section structure

The section is structured around the main barriers identified by the 2017 European Commission study on 'Easing legal and administrative barriers in EU border regions' which identifies the following obstacles:

Legal and administrative obstacles include:

1. **Lack of recognition of education and qualifications** on different sides of the border (including the need to have formal documents officially translated to be sent across the border)
2. **Differences in social security, pension and taxation systems** (e.g. individuals who might be entitled to sick leave to recover from a condition in country of residence but who are considered fit for work in country of employment)
3. **Complexity of administrative procedures** (e.g. working out what you would legally be entitled to as a cross-border worker)
4. General **lack of information** (e.g. gaps or fragmented provision on available jobs vacancies)

Additional obstacles include:

5. **Language differences**
6. **Physical access to work** (e.g. a lack of public transport connections or harmonised ticketing systems)
7. **Lack of interest between public authorities in working together** (i.e. leading to a lack of cooperative measures to facilitate cross-border working)
8. **Economic disparities** (i.e. a stronger pull factor on one side of the border due to stronger labour market conditions thereby impeding labour flow in the opposite direction)
9. **Socio-cultural differences and lack of trust** (e.g. real or perceived differences in working cultures)

Source: European Commission, 2017.²⁸

^A The questionnaire received responses from a total of 623 people, of whom the majority (48 %) identified as private individuals. People responding on behalf of public authorities comprised the second largest group (23 %) of whom most represented regional or local authorities in border areas. In terms of country representation, around half of all responses came from four countries with Germany comprising the largest group of respondents by far (24 %). France (10 %), Poland (8 %) and Romania (7 %) make up the other countries where most responses originated from likely due – at least in part – to the internal borders affecting most of these countries.

3.2. Legal and administrative barriers

Obstacles that were defined within the study as falling within this dominant category of “legal or administrative” obstacles included the **lack of recognition of education and qualifications** on different sides of the border (see Box 4).²⁹ Critically key issues encountered due to this legal and administrative obstacle can manifest in qualifications not being accepted across the border. This can lead to issues getting a job in the first place. If individuals do find work, it can also result in cross-border workers occupying jobs below their skills level because their qualifications are not fully recognised across the border.³⁰

Box 4: Lack of recognition of educational qualifications – barriers and potential solutions

A concrete example of the problem of lack of educational qualification recognition occurs between Portugal and Spain at the border North of Portugal and Galicia where various obstacles are encountered by potential cross-border workers with regards to the recognition of both the professional and academic qualifications. In practice barriers include (but are not limited to) the fact that different entities in Portugal process the recognition of professional qualifications depending on the profession, and the **recognition of university diplomas is lengthy and requires official translations which are paid for by individual citizens**. Overall then the process is complex and acts as a key barrier for many potential cross-border workers.

Action taken to try to alleviate this long and complicated process of skills recognition with regards to VET qualifications in the region has included the establishment of **cooperation between the government of Galicia and the North region delegation of the Portuguese employment service** to work towards a more straightforward comparison of qualifications on either side of the border.

Source: European Commission, 2017.³¹

Differences in social security, pension and taxation systems were also a challenge with open public consultation respondents referring to differences in pension, healthcare and taxation systems that hindered their ability to engage in cross-border work. An example of this relates to unemployment benefits that cross-border workers are entitled to. Despite making social security contributions in their country of work, upon becoming unemployed, individuals typically receive benefits from their country of origin. If national systems differ, this can lead to them receiving a lower level of **unemployment benefits** compared to those provided in their country of work, despite the individual having made contributions to the latter system. This naturally represents a significant drawback for some cross-border workers and can therefore act as a barrier to movement.³² An additional instance where differences in these key systems can come into play is where **national healthcare systems** disagree on whether an individual is fit for work. According to an interviewee from a EURES cross-border partnership in Central-Eastern Europe, challenges can arise where two bordering countries give differing assessments on the fitness of an individual. Whereas the destination country may assess the individual as fit and therefore not entitled to utilise health insurance or other social support, the bordering country of residence may disagree thereby creating tension and potentially compromising the welfare of the individual.

A concrete example of this has been explored in a case study³³ on the **eligibility for and transfer of social security services** to cross-border workers in the Greater Region.^B Of particular significance in this context was the **calculation of pensions** for cross-border workers. Specifically, different countries have different build-up systems for pensions, different private pensions or funds, and different retirement ages. Furthermore, the level of taxation varies between countries and in some instances if a worker accrues a pension in one country they may find that it is taxable in their country of residence.^C As a result, calculating pensions becomes a problematically complex process.

Another key example is the issue of **family benefits** which – according to workers interviewed for a case study³⁴ - in practice have sometimes taken a long time to process and come through. Broadly speaking the challenges here relate to navigating differing social security portfolios and matching the work history of cross-border workers from one country to another. Whilst cross-border workers have access to pensions and family benefits in their country of employment, these examples show that calculating eligibility can still be a challenge when individuals have worked, and continue to live, in another Member State. Working out social security obligations and entitlements can be a complicated process for non-commuting workers. While already presenting something of a brainteaser, this issue is logically exacerbated where there are significant *differences* in social security systems between two countries, as well as when there is a *lack of information* on how different systems work, as outlined in the paragraph below.

The **complexity of administrative procedures** involved with finding work across the border was another highly rated legal or administrative obstacle for cross-border labour mobility by respondents to the open public consultation. This can apply both in terms of a **lack of knowledge** on the part of potential workers in terms of the rules they need to comply with across the border relating to employment, as well as the **unfamiliarity of public administrations** when it comes to hosting cross-border workers.

Finally, and related to the other legal and administrative obstacles highlighted so far, a general **lack of information** on legal and administrative rules applicable on either side of the border was also frequently referenced. This could relate to **taxation and differing social security systems**, as well as simply a lack of information on available **vacancies** in neighbouring regions.³⁵ As with language barriers, this is an issue which may logically have an impact on other barriers outlined in this section. The Association of European Border Regions underlines the significance of information for cross-border movement, arguing for the core importance of well-developed information systems in alleviating barriers related to complex national social security and taxation systems.³⁶

3.3. A number of additional barriers

The second most referenced obstacle (behind the legal and administrative obstacles outlined above) related to **language barriers** (referenced by 38 % of respondents to the open public consultation). As noted above, this is not an isolated challenge however and logically interacts with other kinds of challenges involved with cross-border movement. The inability to speak the language of a Member State across the border not only hinders the chances of an individual to find work in another country, but also limits the extent to which different national administrations can really work together.

^B A border region consisting of the German Federal States of Saarland and Rheinland-Pfalz, the French region of Lorraine, the county of Luxembourg and the Belgian State of Wallonia.

^C According to the case study, this is the case in Spain's border regions and in the Oresund region between Denmark and Sweden.

Language barriers often intersect with other obstacles, exacerbating already complicated procedures and creating a sense of cultural dissimilarity between people living on either side of a border. Examples and the impact of this more nuanced barrier is explored in more detail in a dedicated section below.

Physical access to work across the border was the third most frequently cited issue in the open public consultation (referenced by 32 % of respondents). This can relate to the availability of quick, reliable and importantly affordable transport links to enable workers to realistically commute to work in a different country.

Box 5: Physical access to work – barriers and potential solutions

Non-harmonised ticket pricing systems and the implications this has on cross-border movement between Germany (Strasbourg) and France (Kehl) in the Upper Rhine Area (Germany – France – Switzerland) are explored in a case study accompanying the 2017 European Commission study on key obstacles in border regions. A **cross-border tramline** between Strasbourg and Kehl exemplifies some of the main difficulties faced in terms of public transport infrastructure, including **long waiting times** for cross-border workers which ultimately deters cross-border labour mobility. Infrastructure works for a new cross-border tramline were nearing completion at the time of the case study, with a **common zonal tariff introduced for the cross-border tramway** only as a way to avoid issues arising due to the lack of coordination of domestic public transport fare systems.

Source: European Commission, 2017.³⁷

Just over a quarter of respondents to the open public consultation listed **public authorities' interest in working together** as a barrier. This is possibly due to a lack of political interest on one or both sides of a border as well as socio-cultural and linguistic differences between different regions which can make the entire process harder. A so called "*spirit of cooperation*" between national authorities is necessary for cross-border labour mobility to thrive and a lack of interest or political appetite for working with other national administrations is an additional, more nuanced barrier.³⁸ The two examples outlined in Box 6 below highlight key examples where national authorities *have* in fact worked together and underline the importance of this form of cooperation in the overall facilitation of cross-border labour mobility:

Box 6: Examples of cooperation between relevant authorities

France-Germany: In the French-German Rhine Region a range of barriers to cross-border labour mobility have been identified including lack of qualification recognition and need for further development of the design of cross-border dual vocational education; negative image of dual programmes in France; insufficient language skills; missing transport links and lack of information. While integration of labour markets is ongoing, **cooperation structures** have been created to try to promote cross-border labour mobility and cross-border educational programmes. For example, in 2013 the German Federal Employment Agency and the French Pôle emploi created dedicated cross-border placement services within which employers from both institutions from the two different countries work in partnership to support jobseekers and employers.

Denmark-Sweden: Cross-border labour mobility has been facilitated in the Öresund region by the construction of the Öresund Bridge. However, the role of **regional cross-border organisations** has also been key, in the form of the Öresund Committee and the Freedom of Movement Council. Key interrelated obstacles identified included differences in social security and tax systems and restrictions of work placements across the border. Whilst ultimately legislators were required to solve many of the main barriers, such organisations have highlighted key issues to movement and presented evidence to facilitate the necessary legislative process to resolve obstacles. In addition, a regional information service has reportedly been a key component in overcoming cross-border obstacles. In sum – alongside the physical construction of a bridge - cooperation processes between relevant bodies on either side of the border have been an important aspect of facilitating movement.

Source: IAB, 2018³⁹ and European Commission, 2017.⁴⁰

Economic disparities were the fifth most referenced obstacle, cited by 29 % of respondents. This was described by respondents to the open public consultation as a two-sided issue given that strong economic conditions on one side of the border can act as a driver for mobility (see section 2.2). On the other hand, differences in labour market conditions could lead to a **one-way flow**, inhibiting mobility in the opposite direction and placing one side of the border at a potential disadvantage due to a loss of workers. Whilst the creation of jobs on one side of the border is positive there is nonetheless the risk – as highlighted by respondents – that the other side can come to be seen as less attractive and with diminishing human resources following unidirectional movement to work on the other side of the border. As such economic disparities are described as an additional potential barrier to cross-border labour mobility to regions with weaker economic conditions.

Socio-cultural differences and lack of trust were referenced least often by open public consultation respondents (albeit still mentioned by 20 % and 12 % of respondents respectively). In some instances, perceived cultural differences have been attributed to a lack of appetite for cross-border labour mobility. At the border between Germany and the Czech Republic for example there is reportedly a **lack of understanding on what working conditions are like across the border** which has led to the development of prejudicial attitudes about what work would be like in the Czech Republic.⁴¹ As is often the case, a lack of information (i.e. another common barrier referenced above) has led to a potential misunderstanding of cross-border working culture and conditions: according to a study conducted by the Association of European Border Regions, misguided beliefs about lower wages in the Czech Republic meant that only a small proportion of Bavarians would consider working across the border.

This – as emphasised in the study – even though some German workers in the construction industry receive a higher wage than they would at home.⁴²

3.4. Barriers identified in the European Commission study are confirmed in other literature

Many of the issues outlined in general terms above are referenced in other literature. For example, a 2009 study on cross-border mobility finds that language differences, a lack information (e.g. on responsible offices; taxation systems; transferability of education and qualifications) are some of the main barriers to cross-border labour mobility within the EU-15 and the EU-12.⁴³ Likewise, and also broadly mirroring the findings outlined above, other barriers linked to movement between the EU-15 and EU-12 are reportedly restrictions labour market regulations (e.g. working permits or transition periods); lack of qualification transferability; and different tax and social security systems.⁴⁴

Later studies also corroborate the broad categories outlined at the start of this section. In the French-German Upper-Rhine Region for example, analysis of the cross-border labour market finds that the lack of transferable standardised certificates act as a barrier to cross-border mobility, as does a lack of suitable public transport, insufficient language skills, a lack of information about the neighbouring country and poor qualification recognition as key obstacles to a fully integrated cross-border labour market.⁴⁵

The significance of socio-cultural differences and a lack of trust is also flagged by other sources with reference to a particular mentality or mindset which inhibits people from working abroad^{46,47} and conversely the power of perceived socio-cultural similarities or familiarity as driving cross-border labour mobility.⁴⁸ The significance of cultural (as well as language) differences is made particularly clear when we consider that countries with similar languages tend to have larger migration flows than those with unrelated languages. Key examples include high migration flows between Ireland and the UK, and Estonia and Finland.⁴⁹

Interviewees consulted for this study^D and representing Northern; Southern; Central-Eastern; Central-Western; and Western Europe respectively also frequently referred to the significance of entrenched social or cultural beliefs about working in another country, even if it is just a short distance over the border. A EURES stakeholder from Northern Europe interviewed underlined the challenge associated with “**mental border obstacles**” by which s/he meant the mindset held by some potentially mobile workers regarding the prospect of working in a different country even if it is a short distance away. Whilst service providers can provide potential mobile workers and employers with information on unemployment benefits or how another country’s taxation system works, “*it’s more difficult to work on the mindset*”. In this context, interested jobseekers were invited to visit employers in border countries not only to physically see the opportunities available but as part of efforts to lessen the perceived distance between two countries in terms of workplace culture. Similarly, a stakeholder from a cross-border partnership in Central-Eastern Europe linked the “*nationalistic tone*” of some political discourse in Europe to the hindrance of cross-border mobility due to the related belief that people should remain in their country of citizenship rather than taking up work elsewhere.

^D As part of this study a total of five interviews were carried out with 4 stakeholders from cross-border partnerships and one stakeholder involved in national coordination for EURES.

3.5. No definitive hierarchy of barriers has been identified

Overall, studies that explore or outline barriers to cross-border labour mobility most commonly present a **series of obstacles** without explicitly ranking them in any way. While some form of ranking has been presented, for example in via the open public consultation⁵⁰ preceding the 2017 European Commission study on legal and administrative obstacles in border regions, as well as in an earlier 2009 study commissioned by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion on the mobility of cross-border workers,⁵¹ there is a lack of broader evidence to definitively corroborate the hierarchies presented.

Both studies rank the main obstacles slightly differently which causes an additional challenge and emphasises the need for broader evidence to bolster any definitive conclusions. The 2017 study for example categorises differences in social security systems and the complexity of administrative procedures particularly highly (i.e. within the reportedly most dominant bracket of legal and administrative obstacles) however rights to social insurances and pensions come much lower in the ranking provided by survey respondents in the 2009 study.^E Furthermore while a lack of recognition of educational qualifications is also ranked as a particularly significant issue according to respondents to the open public consultation informing the 2017 study, this issue sits around halfway down the list of issues presented in 2009 (see Table 1 below). In the 2009 study in particular, variation is evident between views on the severity of certain issues across different groups of Member States. For example, though overall a lack of information is the second most significant issue when looking across all cross-border regions, it is nonetheless reportedly a minor obstacle within EU-12 cross-border regions. As such it would be risky to suggest that there is a 'one-size-fits-all' ranking system applicable to the EU and surrounding countries as a whole.

Table 1: Severity of given obstacles to cross-border (cb) Labour Mobility

	All cb regions	within EU-15 cb regions	within EU-12 cb regions	between EU-12 and EU-15 cb regions
Language	3.03	2.86	2.65	3.34
Lack of information	3.01	3.01	2.75	3.26
Tax systems	2.83	2.73	2.96	3.01
Infrastructure	2.74	2.83	2.87	2.40
Acceptance of qualifications	2.69	2.54	1.94	3.11
Other rights to social insurances	2.58	2.65	1.84	2.75
Labour market restrictions	2.44	2.03	1.81	3.34
Rights to pensions	2.40	2.42	1.60	2.74
Mentality	2.24	2.20	2.09	2.45

white minor obstacle (1.00 – 2.25)

yellow medium obstacle (2.26 – 3.00)

orange major obstacle (above 3.00)

Survey on cross-border workers' mobility

Source: MKW, 2009.⁵²

^E "Tax systems" do however still rank highly.

It is also worth noting that both ranking systems emerging from these 2017 and 2009 studies are based on the results of an open public consultation and an online survey respectively^F and as such there is arguably a need to conduct further research based on more in-depth quantitative data to support these views. As such and based on the limitations of the available literature **it has not been possible to present the barriers to cross-border labour mobility in a definitive ranking.**

Naturally **transportation** issues will have a greater significance where distances are larger, or geography simply makes movement harder (as was the case between Denmark and Sweden before the construction of the Öresund Bridge for example). There does **not however appear to be one set of barriers afflicting one region and another set neatly afflicting another**, although the 2009 study does suggest a more pronounced manifestation of barriers in cross-border regions between EU-12 and EU-15 countries⁵³ Instead barriers to mobility seem to overlap and interact which could explain why most studies tend to present a collection of barriers rather than a clear hierarchy of obstacles. Nonetheless, language differences should be noted as a barrier of particular importance given the role they play in aggravating the management of many other obstacles which are created by differences in labour law, social protection etc., as set out below.

3.6. Language differences can be pinpointed as a particularly pervasive issue

Based upon a literature review and interviews conducted with key stakeholders, this note points to the overall importance of **language as a particularly pervasive barrier to cross-border labour mobility.** Whilst admittedly not ranked as the most dominant obstacle based on the open public consultation conducted for the 2017 European Commission study on obstacles in border regions (as presented above),⁵⁴ other literature, as well as interviews conducted as part of this note, point to the overall significance of this particular factor.

For example, a recent analysis on the role of language in intra-EU labour mobility compared to other key drivers and barriers found that – out of all possible obstacles - common language seems to be a particularly key driver for cross-border commuting.⁵⁵ The findings of the analysis, which was based on six case studies - spanning border regions between Slovakia, Czech Republic and Austria; France and Belgium; Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands; Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany; France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany; and Poland and Germany - show that **linguistic obstacles may supersede economic opportunities** potentially available in border regions. This is notably in contrast to long-term mobility for which the pull of particular economic contexts sometimes outweighs language barriers. This finding is supported by a 2014 Eurofound report⁵⁶ which similarly concluded that - based on Eurobarometer evidence - language (as well as cultural) barriers are the main obstacles for cross-border labour mobility.⁵⁷

The results presented in Table 1 above also identify language as a major obstacle. According to respondents of the online survey disseminated to 440 respondents as part of the 2009 study on the mobility of cross-border workers,⁵⁸ **language appeared to pose the greatest obstacle between EU-12 and EU-15 cross-border regions** where it was classified by respondents as a major obstacle.

Within EU-15 cross-border regions and within EU-12 cross-border regions language was still ranked highly but was categorised as a medium obstacle overall.⁵⁹

^F In which 70 % of the 440 respondents came from Germany.

^G As already referenced above, it should be noted that 70 % of respondents were from Germany so does not represent an equally balanced view from across all of the Union and surrounding countries.

As mentioned above, this conclusion is further affirmed by the views of interviewees consulted for this study. When asked about barriers that most affected mobility in their respective border regions three out of the five interviewees consulted, cited **linguistic barriers as a primary or at least significant obstacle** to cross-border labour mobility. The three interviewees who cited language barriers as a particularly key issue represented cross-border partnerships in Central-Eastern; Central-Western and Western Europe.^H One interviewee representing Northern Europe who did not cite language barriers as the most significant issue. S/he described the languages between Norway, Denmark and Sweden as similar which made naturally made linguistic differences less of an issue, although measures to foster intercultural understanding including mutual language learning were still in place e.g. organisation of visits for prospective employees to visit employers across the border.

A further interviewee from a cross-border partnership in Southern Europe stated that the most significant barrier in their cross-border region was instead the dispersion of people along the border (most typically located in towns with small populations) and the existence of micro-markets ("*micro-mercados*") which impeded the larger development of a cross-border labour market. Whilst interview responses confirmed that barriers to cross-border labour mobility are by no means uniform across all regions, language differences were among the first responses to come to the majority of interviewees' minds when responding to this question and supports the argument that based on the available evidence, this appears to be a particularly significant barrier to cross-border labour mobility.

Although the available literature does not point to a clear hierarchy of barriers, language differences are of particular significance in **complicating the management of other obstacles** linked to national differences (e.g. in labour law, social protection or health insurance). Language is thus a unique type of obstacle in that it works by aggravating other barriers. As such it would be inaccurate to simplistically view language as the singular most significant barrier to cross-border labour mobility. Instead it is pervasive because it interacts with so many others. What emerges then is the co-dependent nature of different barriers, and the subsequent scope for future research to further explore whether it is possible (and indeed useful) to try to put together a definitive ranking of key barriers to cross-border labour mobility.^I

^H Cross-border regions represented spanned SE, DK and NO (Northern); DE, PL and CZ (Central-Eastern); DE, BE, FR and LU (Western); FR, DE & CH (Central-Western).

^I Whilst it is unlikely that a ranking could be created that would be applicable for all border regions, it could nonetheless be of value to explore in more depth than has been done currently, what different ranking systems would look like for different types of border regions e.g. in Western compared to Eastern Europe.

4. EU POLICIES AND INITIATIVES AT EU LEVEL AND IN THE MEMBER STATES

Broadly speaking, the following section outlines policy measures adopted by the European Commission to alleviate barriers to cross-border labour mobility. It first presents the range of policy measures in place and shows how these relate to the main barriers to cross-border labour mobility. Focus is then placed on the role of EURES and the degree to which it can (or cannot) overcome these common obstacles. Thereafter more recent initiatives are briefly presented, before EU funding available for labour mobility is outlined in detail. An assessment is made as to the overall relevance and impact of these different streams on cross-border labour mobility. Finally, the relevance of labour mobility within the new European Social Fund Plus is assessed, with key observations made with regards to the potential impact on support available for cross-border labour mobility.

4.1. European Commission: proactive in tackling all types of barriers

A summary of the ways in which the EU-level has sought to address key barriers to cross-border labour mobility are first outlined in Table 2 below.

When considering the barriers outlined above, the European Commission has been active in seeking to help Member States to overcome them by gradually strengthening EU law and developing tools and supporting services via relevant policy measures. By so doing it has sought to reduce employment barriers in the internal market and enhance the free movement of workers in the EU. This section covers such EU level policies and initiatives to alleviate barriers including via relevant legislation, as well as information tools and support services developed with Member States for this purpose. EURES and cross-border partnerships are outlined in detail in this context and EU level funding structures are assessed with regards to their overall capacity to support cross-border labour mobility and how.

A summary of the ways in which the EU-level has sought to address key barriers to cross-border labour mobility are first outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Obstacles to labour mobility and EU strategies to overcome them

Key obstacles to labour mobility	EU policies and initiatives
<p>Lack of information on legal rights to freedom of movement for workers</p>	<p>YOUR EUROPE – An online and advisory service which provides help and advice to EU nationals and their family concerning work and retirement, residence formalities, education, health etc.⁵⁹</p> <p>EURES – the European network of employment services (EURES) seeks to facilitate mobility in the European labour market and support the integration of national employment services as part of this aim. The network provides information and advice as well as matching and placement services for both workers and employers wishing to make the most of the right to free movement. Cross-border partnerships are also a key aspect of EURES wherein networks are established to help</p>

Key obstacles to labour mobility	EU policies and initiatives
	<p>workers overcome barriers to working across borders.</p> <p>SOLVIT – Primarily an online service provided by national administrations to assist citizens when their EU rights as a citizen or as a business have been breached by public authorities in another EU country and they have not (yet) taken their case to court. Typical issues it can help with relate to: getting professional qualifications recognised; visa & residence rights; family benefits; pension rights; working abroad; unemployment benefits; health insurance; access to education; cross-border movement of capital or payments; and VAT refunds.⁶⁰</p>
<p>Lack of sufficient information on available job opportunities</p>	<p>EURES network and Job mobility portal – An online portal advertising job vacancies and providing recruitment resources for job seekers and employers. It aims to help match prospective workers with employment opportunities abroad. Vacancies are uploaded onto the portal at Member State level – via EURES members and partners⁶¹ The requirement that all jobs vacancies posted by PES be made available on the EURES portal (with exceptions possible if employers can prove that a particular role is not relevant for mobility) is made clear in the 2016 EURES Regulation.⁶²</p>
<p>Differences in social security systems</p>	<p>Rules for the coordination of social security systems:</p> <p>Labour Mobility Package proposed by the Commission in 2016 – included revision of Regulation 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems to focus more on linking benefits payments to MS collecting social security contributions to make system fairer and more equitable.</p>
<p>Lack of recognition of professional and academic qualifications</p>	<p>European Qualifications Framework (common European reference framework to translate qualifications to different national systems; includes eight reference levels relating to different possible learning outcomes).</p> <p>Europass Framework - A service to help individuals to communicate their skills, qualifications and experience through the use of standardised</p>

Key obstacles to labour mobility	EU policies and initiatives
	<p>documents templates. At the core of the existing Europass Framework is a portfolio of documents.⁶³</p> <p>Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications, which includes seven specific occupations: doctors of medicine; nurses responsible for general care; dental practitioners; veterinary surgeons; midwives; pharmacists; and architects. Directive 2013/55/EU came into force in 2014 and made a series of amendments to the 2005 version, including the introduction of a European Professional Card – an electronic certificate to facilitate temporary mobility and skills recognition (subsequently available since January 2016).</p> <p>Bologna Process (to facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications and periods of study between different education systems)</p> <p>Building up a European classification of skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO) - ESCO is the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations. The classification identifies and categorises skills, competences, qualifications and occupations relevant for the EU labour market and education and training. It systematically shows the relationships between the different concepts.⁶⁴</p>
<p>Issues with transport links between neighbouring border regions⁶⁵</p>	<p>Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T) - TEN-T is a European Commission policy directed towards the implementation and development of a Europe-wide network of roads, railway lines, inland waterways, maritime shipping routes, ports, airports and rail-road terminals.⁶⁶</p>
<p>Linguistic and socio-cultural differences (including information on living and working in another country)⁶⁷</p>	<p>It is important to note that the EU has made it a priority to protect its linguistic diversity and promote language learning through a dedicated multilingualism policy. This means for example that citizens can use any one of the 24 official languages of the EU in correspondence with the EU institutions.</p> <p>Erasmus+ Programme - Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It provides opportunities for</p>

Key obstacles to labour mobility	EU policies and initiatives
	<p>European citizens to study, train, gain experience, and volunteer abroad.⁶⁸</p> <p>EURES – see above for brief description</p>

Source: Based on European Court of Auditors, 2018 European Commission, 2017.^{69 70}

4.2. EURES plays a key role

Established in 1993, the European network of employment services (EURES) seeks to facilitate mobility in the European labour market and support the integration of national employment services as part of this aim. In practice, the EURES network provides information and advice as well as matching and placement services for both workers and employers wishing to make the most of the right to free movement. The revised 2016 EURES Regulation⁷¹ makes clear its role in supporting cross-border labour mobility – namely in ensuring that workers and employers have access to sufficient information and guidance in an accessible way (see also Box 10 for an overview of EURES manifests in practice, based upon its legislative foundation).

Box 7: EURES in legislation

According to Article 27 of the 2016 revised EURES Regulation, the following is specified in relation to the provision of support in border regions:

- "... In cross-border regions.... [EURES Members or Partners] **shall provide frontier workers and employers with information** relating to the specific situation of frontier workers and of relevance for employers..."
- "... tasks of the cross-border partnerships may include **placement and recruitment services**, the coordination of cooperation between the participating organisations and the carrying out of activities relevant for cross-border activities, including **information and guidance**... with a specific focus on multilingual services"
- "... Member States shall seek to develop **one-stop-shop** solutions for providing information to frontier workers and employers"

Source: EURES Regulation, 2016.⁷²

As highlighted above, EURES has a clear role in attempting to address some of the main obstacles to cross-border labour mobility. As already outlined in Section 3, a lack of information is a key impediment to movement of this kind, but the actions outlined in the updated EURES Regulation **make clear its role in closing information gaps** e.g. via one-stop-shops.

Furthermore and in much the same spirit, the 2015 'Ex-post Evaluation of EURES' which covered the 2009-2013 period, positively assesses the network building capacity of EURES.^J This is again critical

^J Including differing national social security and tax regimes and pension portability; difficulties with respect to recognition of qualifications; language barriers etc. which – as outlined above – echo many of the barriers to cross-border labour mobility.

when considering the role of EURES – and particularly cross-border partnerships which sit under the EURES umbrella - in **addressing barriers relating to a lack of information, and a lack of willingness or capacity for public authorities to work together**. The capacity for EURES to link relevant players in the field of employment strengthens collaboration between different labour market actors, thereby bolstering mutual understanding of how labour markets across borders work and arguably increasing the likelihood for labour mobility (providing there are appealing labour market conditions on one or both sides of the border). This view is also echoed in a 2012 report by the Association of European Border Regions:

Box 8: Importance of cross-border partnerships

“... without these [EURES] cross-border partnership structures the established **cross-border exchange and cooperation** is undermined which, in turn, affects the quality and reliability of **information** available for jobseekers / potential cross-border workers / employers ...”

Source: Association of European Border Regions, 2012.⁷³

This so-called “network effect” is also aligned with the need to foster cooperation between different actors to not only harmonise and clarify procedures affecting cross-border workers (e.g. social security requirements; mutual qualification recognition) but to also build bridges between actors from potentially very different working cultures as a way to **break down some of the socio-cultural barriers** to cross-border mobility. Given that a lack of trust and socio-cultural differences, as well as language differences are also pinpointed as key barriers to cross-border labour mobility, the function of EURES to create networks across border regions is of particular significance when we consider the potential they have to spark cooperation between once disparate stakeholders involved in the employment process and to transfer this mutual understanding in the form of practical information and potentially streamlined processes to workers and employers.

Similarly, a number of best practices are highlighted in a 2017 report published by the European Commission on cross-border partnerships.⁷⁴ The examples are compiled based on elements suggested by cross-border partnerships during 2015 grant applications. While suggestions made by projects themselves will naturally be positive, these examples are arguably still valuable in highlighting some of the relevant activities of cross-border partnerships particularly when compared against prominent barriers to cross-border labour mobility. The eight examples of best practice are outlined in Box 9 below which includes detail on how these actions relate to barriers to cross-border labour mobility.

Box 9: Key elements of good practice in cross-border partnerships

Key elements of good practice reported in the overall function of cross-border partnerships included:

1. The **multi-faceted composition of the partnership** (i.e. the involvement of additional partners such as universities, private employment agencies, SMES, etc.) (involving multiple actors on either side of the border is critical in working towards the mutual recognition of qualifications and mutual understanding or even harmonisation of national social security and taxation systems);
2. The particular **focus on targeted sectors of employment**, such as life science, IT, biotechnology (i.e. potentially providing support to a broader range of prospective cross-border workers and facilitating specialised skills matching with cross-border positions in targeted areas);
3. The development of a **one-stop-shop approach** (as a lack of information is a key barrier this action to gather relevant information into an easily accessible space is of particular relevance);
4. The **stronger cooperation** between Scandinavian countries and the countries of Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal, Spain) (given that the lack of willingness of public authorities to work together is a barrier – this practice is a significant achievement);
5. The **experience sharing** based on similar European projects (e.g. Interreg, ESF, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, etc.) (i.e. to potentially increase synergies in the use of EU funding);
6. The **extensive use of social media** (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter), the creation of blogs and (re)design of websites (given that a lack of information on issues related to working across the border such as jobs vacancies and how foreign social services work information transmitted in an accessible way like via social media is clearly of value);
7. The introduction of more **targeted actions towards youth unemployment or sector-specific actions** tailored to specific identified labour market needs (i.e. facilitating the provision of information and matching skills with employment supply and demand across borders and so supporting mobility of this kind);
8. The focus on **increasing the number of placements** (e.g. via the organisation of specific cross-border recruitment projects) (as outlined in relation to some of the other points above, this focus is invaluable in overcoming information gaps as well as in helping individuals as well as companies to see the potential value in and realistic scope for commuting across borders for work).

Source: European Commission, 2017.⁷⁵

4.3. But there is a limit to what EURES can achieve

The 2015 'Ex-post Evaluation of EURES' is however somewhat cautious about the degree to which EURES can address all barriers to labour mobility. In its conclusion the evaluation notes that while EURES contributes to raising awareness about barriers to labour mobility,^k that ultimately "**there is a limit to what EURES can realistically achieve** in the face of ... [these] barriers".⁷⁶

EURES is unsurprisingly limited in terms of being able to comprehensively remedy all potential barriers to cross-border labour mobility. As already outlined above, barriers rarely seem to exist alone. Rather – and as is most clearly demonstrated in the case of language barriers – different obstacles can overlap and exacerbate each other which naturally makes it difficult for a single initiative like EURES to meaningfully address them in all their complexity.

In a nutshell then, EURES has the capacity to improve the quality and communication of information on living and working conditions, concrete placement and recruitment. It can also help to support cooperation and network building between public authorities on either side of national borders and is linked to laterally breaking down barriers relating to socio-cultural and linguistic differences. The capacity for EURES to support cross-border labour mobility is however reliant on the cooperation of Member States. This may be in ensuring that national public employment services post all relevant job vacancies on the EURES Portal or committing to working with other public authorities to increase mutual understanding of social security systems, for example. Other obstacles however (e.g. physical access to work or economic disparities between two sides of a border), are beyond the remit of EURES and must therefore be addressed by EU Directives or via increased cooperation between Member States.

^k Including differing national social security and tax regimes and pension portability; difficulties with respect to recognition of qualifications; language barriers etc. which – as outlined above – echo many of the barriers to cross-border labour mobility.

Box 10: EURES in practice

EURES network (ESF funded): All EU-28 Member States as well as Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland are part of the network. It consists of the European Coordination Office (ECO), the EURES members, namely the National Coordination Offices (NCOs) of the Member States, EURES partners and associated EURES partners. The EURES partners and associated EURES partners provide the services, whereas the NCOs oversee and coordinate the activity of EURES in the respective Member State or participating country. There are approximately 1,000 EURES advisers across Europe who work within the EURES partners or associated EURES partners. Currently, the great majority of EURES partners are the Public Employment Services (PES) of each member country, as well as some private employment services.

EURES portal (EaSI funded): As part of the network, public employment services in Member States work both with each other and the European Commission to ensure that national vacancies are advertised at EU level via the EURES portal in order to match prospective workers with employment opportunities abroad. The requirement that all jobs vacancies posted by PES be made available on the EURES portal (with exceptions possible if employers can prove that a particular role is not relevant for mobility) is made clear in the 2016 EURES Regulation. These measures are in motions however it is important to recognise that they take time and political support at national level to fully implement. According to the EURES portal, there are currently more than 1.6 million vacancies and 11,520 employers registered to the EURES network.

EURES cross-border partnerships - CBPs (EaSI funded): CBPs are groupings of EURES members and partners and, where relevant, other stakeholders outside the EURES network (including social partners e.g. ETUC). The groupings engage in long-term cooperation across the border to support the mobility of cross-border workers and their employers. They typically involve regional or local employment services, social partners and other organisations such as chambers of commerce, universities, VET organisations, local authorities, etc.) of at least two neighbouring Member States. In 2016 twelve cross-border partnerships were being funded, although this number has since dropped to nine (Galicia/North Portugal (ES-PT); Northern Ireland/Ireland (UK-IE); EURES-T Oberrhein (DE-FR-CH); Scheldemond (BE-NL); Øresund (DK-SE); EURES-TriRegio (CZ-DE-PL); Extremadura-Alentejo (ES-PT); Andalucia-Algarve (ES-PT).

The **cross-border partnerships** provide information, placement and recruitment services. They also monitor mobility flows and obstacles to the mobility of workers in border regions which are a key element in the development of a genuine European labour market.

Source: Ramboll based on desk research - most information can be found via:
<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/en/homepage>.

4.4. Recent initiatives could help to further support free movement

On 13 March 2018 the European Commission published a proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on establishing a **European Labour Authority (ELA)**. According to Article 1 of the proposal the aim of this new decentralised agency will be to “**assist Member States and the Commission in matters relating to cross-border labour mobility and the coordination of social security systems within the Union.**”⁷⁷

According to a Commission impact assessment⁷⁸ the new agency will have a remit consisting mainly of providing technical support for Member States to bolster cross-border systems and services including the EURES portal. Article 2 of the proposal for the ELA states more specifically that it will have a role in **facilitating access to information on the rights and obligations; supporting cooperation between Member States** in the cross-border enforcement of relevant Union law; and **mediating cross-border disputes** between national authorities or labour market disruptions.⁷⁹

There exist diverging views among experts as to the foreseen scope and competences of the ELA, as discussed at a workshop held at the European Parliament in May 2018.⁸⁰ The proposed agency would have a mixed profile combining supporting, operational and supervisory tasks. The workshop raised a number of queries relating to its foreseen enhanced enforcement role, social security coordination, support to labour mobility via EURES, and its profile and governance. As raised in a recent European Parliament briefing note, it remains an open question whether the ELA should be designed to be a targeted EU inspection authority or an agency for free movement which would also incorporate European employment services for placement and recruitment (EURES). From the perspective of European policies for free movement, one agency covering all key areas of free movement would be the adequate model, as set out in the Commission proposal.⁸¹ The briefing note points to a number of points that may need further consideration: 1) how to design effective cooperation mechanisms (e.g. an ELA liaison office in Brussels, ELA observers at committees or network meetings) as pooling entails new organisational split-ups between the Commission and ELA; 2) how to ensure completeness of ELA’s scope in view of the fact that relevant structures, such as the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee are excluded, 3) how to continue all relevant activities of dissolved bodies (e.g. Platform against undeclared work given that ELA’s focus is on its cross-border dimension). The proposal for an ELA is currently **under negotiation in the Council and European Parliament**, with debates ongoing as to the final scope and powers of the new agency. As such the final form and remit of the new agency – and therefore its precise role and impact with regards to barriers to cross-border labour mobility – are yet to be confirmed.

In response to the fragmented and diverse landscape of European online tools, in May 2017, the European Commission published a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing a **Single Digital Gateway** to provide coherent and quality information, procedures and assistance for problem-solving services.⁸² The gateway aims to extend and integrate both national and European portals with a view to creating a user-friendly information system. The online interface will ensure centralised access by EU citizens and businesses to information they need to exercise their rights to mobility in the EU, as well as to full access to online procedures in a non-discriminatory way. On 24 May 2018, a provisional deal was struck with the Council to create this European single-entry point, which will be integrated in the “Your Europe” portal. The Regulation was subsequently adopted by the Council on 27th September 2018. The new gateway will integrate several networks and services that have been established at national and EU level to assist citizens and businesses in their cross-border activities.

These include: EURES, European Consumer Centres, Your Europe Advice, SOLVIT, Intellectual Property Rights Helpdesk, Europe Direct and Enterprise Europe Network.

A third recent initiative is a **mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context** (hereafter “mechanism”) which was proposed by the European Commission in May 2018. The mechanism was proposed as part of an overall package of legislative proposals to establish a new 2021-2027 cohesion policy framework and aims to establish a voluntary mechanism for alleviating legal obstacles in border regions.⁸³ This would be realised through allowing the application of legislation from one Member State into a neighbouring Member State if the laws of the latter were posing a legal obstacle to the overall function of a joint cross-border project.⁸⁴

Box 11: Two options for overall function of new mechanism: legislative transfer or amendment

In terms of overall function, the planned mechanism would include two options that could be adopted to facilitate cross-border labour mobility between two neighbouring Member States:

- The European Cross-Border Commitment - **transfer of laws** by one ‘committing’ Member State to a neighbouring Member State resulting in a derogation from national laws in the latter; or
- The European Cross-Border Statement – a **legislative procedure** in the Member State to formally amend national rules of the given Member State.

Source: European Parliamentary Research Service, 2018.⁸⁵

Whilst the precise legislation involved in border regions will depend on what is [or is not] currently in place at Member State level, the proposal for the mechanism makes reference to key aspects of the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which gives an indication of the types of legislation that could be affected via this new mechanism.⁸⁶ According to the proposal, sections of the Charter of particular relevance relate to the right to protection of personal data; the right to education; the freedom to choose an occupation and the right to engage in work; the freedom to seek employment, to work, to exercise the right of establishment and to provide services in any Member State, freedom to conduct business; access to social security and assistance; access to healthcare; and access to services of general economic interest. As such legislation affected (i.e. in terms of resolving mismatch or a lack of existing legislation between two Member States) is likely going to be able to encompass a broad range of areas including social protection, taxation and data protection.

As with the proposal for the ELA outlined above, the mechanism is currently in the process of being negotiated in the Council and European Parliament. Points for debate have included questions around the voluntary nature of the mechanisms and what to do in instances where there is no transferrable or relevant legislation in either Member State each side of the border.⁸⁷

Overall this proposal for a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context, presents an opportunity to directly address some of the most prevalent barriers to cross-border labour mobility that have been outlined above, namely in situations where there is a legislative mismatch on either side of a border.

4.5. EU funding plays an active role in supporting labour mobility

Overall financial support for labour mobility at national, regional as well as cross-border level can be divided into three main strands as outlined in more detail below. The three strands have slightly different emphases but EaSI and the ERDF (via Interreg) constitute the most relevant funding streams to consider in the context of *cross-border* labour mobility. The three main funding strands are first described below and the ways in which they may have an impact in alleviating barriers to cross-border labour mobility are then subsequently outlined in Table 3.

4.5.1. European Social Fund

Funding for labour mobility *in a broad sense* is available via the **European Social Fund (ESF)** which, for the 2014-2020 period has the promotion of employment and the support of labour mobility as one of its thematic objectives. Funding for ESF for this period is EUR 86.4 billion of which approximately EUR 27.5 billion is allocated to employment and labour mobility.⁸⁸ Broadly speaking the ESF is intended to fund projects to improve access to employment, particularly for vulnerable groups such as young people and long-term unemployed citizens. While the ESF has the capacity to support labour mobility it has inherent limitations given that it requires funds to be spent on particular target groups.⁸⁹ As such this logically impedes the creation of any broad-based mobility programme as funding needs to be targeted towards vulnerable groups.

From 2014, the ESF has funded national EURES activities under shared management – meaning that Member States take on ownership of the implementation of EURES activities at national level from the European Commission.⁹⁰ EURES was established in 1993 as a way to broadly speaking, match workers with vacancies, however the *national level focus* of funding available for the initiative via the ESF – limits the relevance of this particular funding stream when considering *cross-border* labour mobility.

4.5.2. Employment and Social Innovation Programme

Secondly, funding is available for **cross-border partnerships** (see Table 6) - comprising both EURES Members and Partners and other relevant stakeholders - via the **EURES axis of the EaSI (Employment and Social Innovation) programme** which has a total budget of EUR 919 469 000 for the current (2014-2020) period, of which EURES receives 18 %. EaSI is handled under direct management which was regarded favourably by the five interviewees consulted for this study. While the European Commission retains all control of budget implementation tasks, most interviewees consulted for the study, four of whom represented specific cross-border partnerships, nonetheless pointed to the suitability of EaSI to fund cross-border partnerships given the freedom it gives individual projects to apply independently for funding without the need for coordination across national managing authorities.

4.5.3. European Regional Development Fund (via Interreg)

The third possible source of funding for labour mobility is the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** which has two main sections. One is devoted to national and regional programme support, but the other – European Territorial Cooperation and **more commonly known as Interreg** – can be utilised for joint actions and policy coordination between actors in Member States, which is of relevance to labour mobility. Interreg is built around three strands of cooperation, one of which ('Interreg A') focuses on cross-border issues.

In total Interreg A has funded 60 cooperation programmes across 38 internal EU borders with a budget of EUR 6.6 billion for the 2014-2020 period.⁹¹ For the 2007-2013 period, Interreg A had a budget of EUR 6 billion of which 13 % was invested in labour mobility and accessibility in cross-border regions.⁹² A

concrete example of how Interreg funding has supported cross-border labour mobility can be found at the Strasbourg (Germany) – Ortenau (France) border where employment agencies on each side launched a programme in 2016 whose EUR 1.7 million budget was 50 % co-financed by Interreg.⁹³ The action *Towards a 360° Labour Market* (Maison d’Emploi Strasbourg 360°) which was funded aimed to balance labour markets on either side of the border by reducing unemployment on the French side whilst helping German enterprises resolve problems recruiting skilled workers, representing a clear example of how the ERDF (via Interreg) has helped to facilitate labour mobility.^L

Table 3: EU funding streams and their roles in addressing barriers

Funding stream	Main activities	Role in relation to barriers?
DG EMPL	ESF Enhances adaptability of workers and improves access to employment, including for young people, less skilled jobseekers and people from disadvantaged groups looking to find a job. ⁹⁴ Labour mobility is one objective but is support funded is concentrated on the national level e.g. nationally situated EURES activities.	Low/Medium – funds EURES activities at national level, thereby providing much needed information and support services regarding labour mobility but a lack of focus on supporting <i>cross-border</i> labour mobility limits its impact.
	EaSI Promotes quality and sustainable employment in order to ensure social protection, combat social exclusion and poverty and to improve working conditions. ⁹⁵ Since 2014, all EURES cross-border activities have been funded by EaSI.	High – as outlined above, EURES cross-border partnerships (funded by EaSI) are key in <i>providing information, encouraging partnership working</i> where authorities may not have been interested in working together, and through this potentially creating <i>socio-cultural understanding and trust</i> between border regions.

^L The action *Towards a 360° Labour Market* (Maison d’Emploi Strasbourg 360°) does not specify a particular occupation or set of occupations to be targeted but rather provides a general service offering information and advice for anyone looking to work cross-border.

DG REGIO	ERDF (Interreg)	<p>Aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion by correcting imbalances between regions in Europe.⁹⁶</p> <p>Interreg – funded by the ERDF – has a strand focusing specifically on cross-border cooperation.⁹⁷</p>	<p>High – Funds for Interreg address a range of issues linked to making employment more appealing in border regions. Projects focus on <i>innovation, healthcare, education</i> and <i>employment</i> – as well as <i>labour mobility</i> – and therefore have the potential to address most if not all identified barriers.</p>
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Source: Ramboll based on desk research.

4.6. European Social Fund Plus: more detail needed

In May 2018 a proposal for a new European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) was published by the European Commission. The proposal recognises that several social and employment related challenges remain in the EU. The ESF+ would see a series of funding programmes^M merged and in doing so is proposed as a way to consolidate efforts to overcome these issues as part of the Commission’s ongoing commitment to enhance the social dimension of the Union. The proposal emphasises that the purpose of this merger would be to – broadly speaking – streamline and better coordinate existing social mechanisms in the EU and to foster coherence and complementarity between these currently separate funds.⁹⁸ The aim of the ESF+ is to simplify processes related to these funding streams and to allow for a more flexible, comprehensive and complimentary response to social issues in Europe.

4.6.1. Relevance of labour mobility in the new ESF+ Proposal

Mobility will continue to be an area of focus however points remain for further clarification. These relate to (a) how labour mobility will be *incorporated into the remit* of ESF funded activities, and (b) how cross-border mobility will be *realised in practice* within the purview of the EaSI programme given what appears to be a decrease in overall funding for this stream (from a total of EUR 919 million to EUR 751 million) for the next funding period.

Whilst “... labour market matching, transitions and mobility” are referenced in Article 4 of the proposal, there is a need for greater clarity around the position of labour mobility for the next funding period. For ESF this relates more to how and whether there will be any dedicated *thematic* focus on labour mobility as there is presently no textual reference to it - in relation to this funding stream -in the proposal. Whilst there is clarity regarding the *ongoing focus* of the EaSI programme on cross-border labour mobility, there is however a need for clarity around how current activities will be maintained

^M Funding streams to be merged are: European Social Fund (ESF); Youth Employment Initiative (YEI); Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD); Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme; and Programme for the Union’s action in the field of health (Health Programme).

given the *potentially* smaller budget that EURES will receive.^N The table below outlines the projected objectives of both ESF and EaSI within the broader ESF+ framework.

Table 4: Objectives within ESF+

ESF under ESF+ – objectives within shared management strand	EaSI under ESF+ – objectives within direct and indirect management strand
<p>Reference is made in the specific objectives of the ESF+ to “modernising labour market institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and ensure timely and tailor-made assistance and support to labour market matching, transitions and mobility” (Art. 4).</p> <p>Explicit reference is not made to EURES (the only reference to which appears in relation to the mid-term evaluation of EaSI earlier in the proposal).</p> <p>Specific detail on the shared management strand of the ESF+ (within which ESF as well as FEAD and YEI would be gathered) refers to the strand’s focus on addressing material deprivation (Art. 9); supporting youth employment (Art. 10); and supporting relevant country-specific recommendations (Art. 11). It is therefore unclear exactly how EURES and more specifically labour mobility will be placed within this.</p>	<p>Operational objectives within the EaSI strand outline its ongoing purpose to “... provide specific support services to employers and job-seekers with a view to the development of integrated European labour markets, ranging from pre-recruitment preparation to post- placement assistance to fill vacancies in certain sectors, professions, countries, border regions or for particular groups (e.g. vulnerable people)” (Art. 23).</p> <p>Eligible actions go on to make specific reference to “cross-border partnerships and support services in border regions” and “an EU-wide labour targeted mobility scheme at Union level to fill job vacancies where labour market shortcomings have been identified” (Art. 24).</p> <p>The scope of EaSI in relation to cross-border labour mobility is therefore clear and appears to be – at least thematically – preserved.</p> <p>Given the apparent drop in funding within the ESF+ (see Table 6 below) there is a lack of clarity on how far the current EaSI could be altered or maintained within the new framework, and what impact this will have on EURES-focussed funding.</p>

Source: Ramboll based ESF+ proposal⁹⁹

Table 5 and Table 6 below compare funding amount and management mode between the 2014-2020 period and the 2021-2027 period during which the proposed ESF+ would be in place. According to the proposal for the new framework, EUR 101 174 000 000 allocated for the 2021-2027 period; the tables attempt to show how the two mobility related strands that will be incorporated within the structure (the ESF and EaSI; the ERDF is not included) will function compared to the current funding period.

^N Whilst the overall budget for the EaSI programme appears to drop from the EUR 919 million granted in 2014-2020, there is no detail in the ESF+ proposal on how the EUR 751 million allocated to it for 2021-2027 will be divided and so it is not possible to *definitively* say that EURES cross-border activities will receive less funding. Currently EURES receives 18 % of the total EaSI budget but there is no indication of how the new budget will be sub-divided for the next period.

Table 5: Funding allocations for ESF for 2014-2020 and 2021-2027

ESF: 2014-2020	ESF: 2021-2027 ^o	Change in management mode?	Outcome
<p>EUR 86.4 billion of which approximately EUR 27.5 billion is allocated to labour mobility as well as employment.¹⁰⁰</p>	<p>It is not possible to distinguish ESF funding within the European Social Fund Plus Proposal.</p> <p>According to Art. 5 - Total combined funding for three funding streams will amount to EUR 100 billion in current prices (88.6 million in 2018 prices)</p> <p>Of this, EUR 200 million in current prices or EUR 175 million in 2018 prices will be allocated for transnational cooperation supporting innovative solutions. (Art. 5).</p> <p>According to Art. 7 - Member States will be required to allocate between 2 % and 25 % of resources available under shared management (a Union total of EUR 100 billion in current prices) to addressing material deprivation and social inclusion respectively. Member States with high rates of NEET young people will be required to allocate at least 10 % of allocated resources under shared management to alleviate this issue.</p>	<p>No, continuing as shared management.</p>	<p>It is unclear exactly how much funding will be made available for the ESF strand nor how much will specifically be made available for labour mobility within this in the current proposal.</p>

Source: Ramboll based on desk research.

^o Article 23(i) specifies in more detail that this part of the stream will be “to support transnational cooperation to accelerate the transfer of, and to facilitate the scaling of, innovative solutions, in particular for the areas of employment, skills and social inclusion, across Europe”.

Table 6: Funding allocations for EaSI for 2014-2020 and 2021-2027

EaSI: 2014-2020	EaSI: 2021-2027	Change in management mode?	Outcome
EUR 919 million of which approximately EUR 165 million (18 %) is allocated to EaSI-EURES activities. ¹⁰¹	Indicative distribution for the implementation of EaSI will be EUR 761 million (Art. 5). No specific detail given on amount for EaSI-EURES activities. ¹⁰²	No , continuing as a combination of direct and indirect management.	There will be a decrease in overall funding for EaSI according to the current ESF+ proposal. No specific detail is given on allocation for EaSI-EURES activities, so unable to assess whether will decrease relative to the current funding period.

Source: Ramboll based on desk research.

In terms of concrete implications, it is difficult to say with certainty what – if anything – could change should the proposal for an ESF+ go ahead with regards to European labour mobility. The ongoing scope of EaSI in relation to cross-border labour mobility is made clear in Articles 23 and 24 of the proposal for a European Social Fund Plus (see Table 4 above for the precise text). However apparent funding changes (as highlighted in Table 6 above) wherein **total** funding for EaSI looks set to fall from EUR 919 million to EUR 761 million for the 2021-2027 raises questions as to whether cross-border EURES activities (currently funded with 18 % of the 2014-2020 budget of EUR 919 million) could be affected.

Looking to the ESF – there is a lack of clarity in the proposal as to if and how its remit could change for the 2021-2027 funding period. As highlighted in Table 4, general reference is made to labour mobility at an early stage of the proposal, however exactly how this will link to the ESF (as opposed to the broader European Social Fund Plus framework) is not clear.

The lack of clarity in terms of how the ESF and EaSI will support labour mobility exactly within the framework of the European Social Fund Plus at this stage is not necessarily a cause for concern, rather further detail on these points would be welcomed.

5. KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion 1: Barriers to mobility remain and continued action is required at EU and national level to reduce them

Recommendation 1: In order to address some of the most prevalent barriers to cross-border movement, the European Commission should **facilitate action within and between Member States** as the most prevalent barriers to cross-border movement have been identified as broadly relating to legal or administrative obstacles at national and/or regional levels, with a minority of obstacles identified originating from EU legislation.¹⁰³ This action should focus on building cooperative governance via the development of partnerships for the creation of **one-stop-shop services for cross-border workers and exchange between authorities** on different sides of the border. Critically this action should help to alleviate issues relating for example to a lack of information on vacancies or administrative procedures on either side of a border. This action should necessarily involve public administrations at different levels of governance (i.e. national, regional, local) as well as other stakeholders involved in cross-border labour mobility (e.g. cross-border partnerships; training institutions; universities etc.)¹⁰⁴ EU-level funding or support services could therefore focus on supporting the organisation of workshops, conferences or other similar events wherein key stakeholders from different border countries come together to work towards first defining and then overcoming some issues currently impeding cross-border movement.¹⁰⁵

Recommendation 2: While there are **no overt indications that labour mobility funded by the ESF and EaSI will be affected for the new 2021-2027 funding period**, the proposal for the European Social Fund Plus could benefit from greater clarity in this regard to dispel any uncertainty in relation to the ongoing functionality of EURES and cross-border partnerships. This is due to the apparent fall in total programme funding for EaSI and the lack of clarity in terms of how labour mobility will fit within the remit of the ESF (as one of the constituent funding streams within the new framework). Whilst general reference is made to labour mobility within the scope of the European Social Fund Plus in general (Art. 4) there is no specific reference to mobility or EURES in relation to the ESF, therefore leaving its link to mobility somewhat unclear.

Recommendation 3: Barriers relating to language differences are a key factor when considering the overall feasibility and attractiveness of cross-border labour mobility, particularly given the impact that language has on most other kinds of barrier (e.g. in understanding different working cultures or acquiring in-depth knowledge on working conditions in another country). As part of efforts to facilitate communication channels at Member State level, the European Commission should consider providing greater support in border regions for the **Erasmus + Programme** with regards to its student exchange component, as a way to foster greater emphasis on learning the language of border countries to not only encourage multilingualism in a practical sense but also to encourage socio-cultural familiarity with neighbouring countries.

Conclusion 2: EURES and its cross-border partnerships are a relevant means to promote and facilitate labour mobility in given EU regions.

EURES and its cross-border partnerships offer a key service by building cooperative relationships between Member States' key actors across borders and increasing awareness and understanding of processes linked to cross-border commuting. There are however limits to what can realistically be achieved at EU level and ultimately it is up to Member States to take action.

Moreover, due consideration should be given to the fact that promoting labour mobility to the same extent does not necessarily make sense in all border regions. Different border regions display more drivers than others in terms of overall labour market complementarity (i.e. in terms of the labour market situation or infrastructure conditions in place) and as such – in spite of efforts to alleviate other barriers – this factor should also be considered when considering the promotion of cross-border mobility in regions where there may be a fundamental mismatch in the skills available and labour required on different sides of the border.

Recommendation 1: **Cross-border partnerships** continue to be funded as a means to promote labour mobility, but that a **targeted approach** be applied, ensuring that funding is going to those border regions where promoting labour mobility makes most sense, i.e. there is a strong demand/supply factor for labour.

Recommendation 2: The European Commission should ensure that EaSI funding remains under **direct management** within the ESF+ as funding cross-border partnerships through shared management would prove complicated to manage as the operational programmes of given Member States would need to be aligned. Whilst this is already included in the ESF+ proposal it is a key aspect to be followed through should full implementation take place.

Recommendation 3: Consider extending the **implementation period** for EaSI funding for EURES cross-border partnerships to more than one year e.g. three or five years in order to allow more time for implementation of actions and to lessen the administrative burden.

- ¹ MKW, 'Scientific Report on the Mobility of Cross-Border Workers within the EU-27/EEA/EFTA Countries: Final Report', 2009.
- ² IAB, 'Labor Markets and Labor Mobility in the French-German Border Region', 2018.
- ³ European Commission, '2017 Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility', 2018.
- ⁴ European Commission, 'Mobility in Europe', 2011.
- ⁵ European Commission and Information Systems Research in Scandinavia Association, '2017 Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility', 2018.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Eurostat, 'Statistics on commuting patterns at regional level', 2016.
- ⁸ Eurostat, 'Statistics on commuting patterns at regional level', 2016.
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This study draws primarily on available literature, as well as information gathered from interviews to examine barriers to employment in border regions. The study first outlines cross-border labour mobility trends and drivers. It then looks in more depth at barriers to cross-border labour mobility before assessing measures - including legislation, key programmes and initiatives, and funding structures - adopted at EU-level to address them. The study concludes by presenting a series of recommendations on ways to facilitate cross-border labour mobility going forward.

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