

Background document

Public Consultation on overcoming obstacles in border regions (2020)

In the last few years, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) has been drawing attention to the prevailing legal and administrative border obstacles, that hamper interactions across border regions and prevent citizens from accessing work, education, emergency and health care services, business and public transport on the other side of the border.

Despite the key role Interreg has played over the last 30 years, in supporting cooperation across European borders through project funding, many of the difficulties experienced in border regions cannot be solved via Interreg only, as solutions frequently entail changes in laws and/or administrative procedures.

After a 2-year Cross-border review period, the European Commission adopted, on 20 September 2017, the Communication "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border regions" (COM (2017) 534 final). This Communication advocated for the need to address cross-border obstacles and proposed a set of actions to enhance competitiveness and cohesion along internal border regions and borders with Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

The establishment of the DG REGIO's "Border Focal Point" has facilitated the implementation of these actions. Since January 2018, a dedicated team has been working on the creation of solutions to solve/alleviate border obstacles.

Here is a summary of the 10-points Action Plan:



A new European Commission took office and defined its new priorities at the end of 2019. At this stage, it is important to reflect on what has been achieved and to revise the action plan in light of the priorities defined by the new Commission - a Just Green and Digital transition that leaves no-one behind.

In addition, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how fragile internal borders can be and how deeply border regions can be affected. On a more positive note, this crisis has revealed the diversity of cross-border regions and their dynamics, including the valuable input of daily cross-border commuters and the positive outcomes of cooperation. Our crisis response needs to explore the actions that can be taken in the future, to increase our

resilience and capacity to respond, without necessarily always thinking first about closing borders. In other words, we need to learn our lesson and do better next time.

The purpose of this public consultation is to engage in a dialogue with citizens and key stakeholders on cross-border obstacles, in order to

- (1) obtain a **comprehensive overview of the developments** that have been made since the adoption of 2017 Communication on EU Border Regions, and of remaining border obstacles and/or possible new ones;
- (2) set the initial path for formulating constructive **recommendations on the future policy for cross-border regions.**

This public consultation covers both internal EU border regions, as well as border regions encompassing regions in EU countries and EFTA/EEA countries.

This public consultation will be open until 20 September 2020.

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