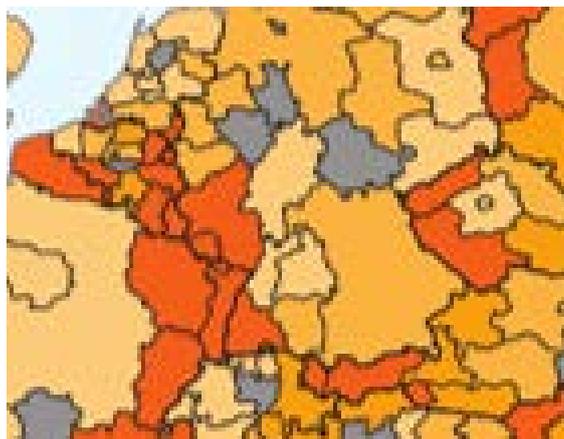


Study in Focus

Employment Barriers in Border Regions

Background

Freedom of movement for workers is one of the founding principles of the EU since its inception. It is laid down in Article 45 of the Treaty and is a fundamental right of workers complementing the free movement of goods, capital and services within the European Single Market. This includes the rights of movement and residence for workers, the rights of entry and residence for family members, and the right to work in another Member State and be treated on an equal footing with nationals of that Member State. In some regions, there exists considerable cross-border labour mobility: 1.8 million workers were cross-border commuters in the EU (including EFTA countries) in 2016.



FOCUS OF THE STUDY

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.

KEY FINDINGS

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.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to effectively avoid or reduce existing employment barriers, the **active participation of Member States and cross-border regions** will be necessary. The European Commission could facilitate action within and between Member States e.g. via the organisation of workshops or conferences for key stakeholders from various regions.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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