



**European Committee
of the Regions**

**Commission for
Territorial Cohesion Policy
and EU Budget**

COTER

Report Public Consultations on the Future of Cross-Border Cooperation



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Isabelle Boudineau
Chair of the COTER Commission

The EU's internal border regions cover 40% of the EU's territory, accounting for 30% of its population, which roughly accounts for 150 million people. Within the EU, there are almost 2 million cross-border commuters, 1.3 million of whom are cross-border workers.

Since the establishment of the single market in 1992, many new opportunities have been created in border regions, and they became places of growth. Nevertheless, many obstacles still remain. Citizens living in border regions continue to encounter difficulties in their daily lives, whether it be finding a job, accessing healthcare, commuting every day or overcoming administrative problems. Similarly, businesses face obstacles that hamper their growth and limit their potential.

A 2017 European Commission¹ study suggests that border regions could on average be potentially 8% richer if all current barriers were removed. However, this scenario will be difficult to achieve: if only 20% of the existing obstacles were removed, border regions would still gain a 2% increase in GDP. Faced with the difficult recovery ahead, the border regions would strongly benefit from the removal of these obstacles.

Following experiences from the COVID-19 crisis and the many experiences we gathered through the CoR's COVID-19 platform, in order to ensure that border regions do not face further setbacks, a new momentum and a long-term vision are needed to make border regions the drivers of European solidarity and cooperation.

Importantly, cross-border cooperation is not only about the remaining obstacles. This EU policy is about the opportunities in a common Europe. It is about unleashing the dormant potential of our continent. In addition, it is essentially about European democracy.

Starting with the direct elections and progressive empowerment of the European Parliament, the creation and development of a European citizenship and the creation and progressive empowerment of the European Committee of the Regions, Europe has chosen the firm path of a Europe of the citizens. The cross-border dimension of European democracy is still underdeveloped but needs to grow if the European Union wants to have a genuine European democracy.

To that end, the CoR, in cooperation with European Cross-Border Citizens' Alliance members, conducted these public consultations, which will be the basis for a CoR resolution planned for adoption at the July 2021 plenary.

I am therefore pleased to present the results of these consultations, which clearly showed Europe's border regions' need for efficient and swift solutions that will foster cross-border cooperation and create new opportunities for citizens and businesses living and operating in those regions.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2017/easing-legal-and-administrative-obstacles-in-eu-border-regions



Karl-Heinz Lambertz

President of the Association of European Border Regions

President of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium

We are pleased to announce another piece of work by the European Committee of the Regions' COTER commission on Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC), a report on the public consultations that is extremely welcome during the current period of uncertainty.

The report sheds further light on the persistent obstacles to CBC, on the need to develop a legal (and intellectual) concept of cross-border regions for policy-making purposes, on how global issues become local in cross-border environments, on the importance of language and culture in these regions, and their effect on trust-building, and on the added value of cross-border cooperation for European integration.

Nobody knows whether after COVID-19 things will go back to how they were or if we will enter a new era of interpersonal, intergovernmental and multilevel relationships. But something has certainly changed forever: rapid access of some sectors to new technologies that would previously have taken a decade, wider-ranging and perhaps more democratic international meetings, fast networking (perhaps softer, but definitely wider), and a certain readiness to listen to new ideas, to stop and consider certain realities (ones that were traditionally overlooked or simply ignored). General and quicker consensus are also built around major challenges, and the pandemic has clearly shown the need for stronger coordination between countries, particularly in border regions.

This report contains very good advice about cross-border governance and economics, life in border regions and the challenges of providing cross-border public services. It is now up to us to put this information to best use and develop better conditions for people living in border areas. However, there is still a lack of public awareness about cross-border issues, which makes it very important to involve the younger generation in these processes.

It is young people who must continue our work, and they will probably have to face old and new challenges. Last but not least, it is important to draw attention to the external borders of the EU, regions where the difficulties and challenges are greater and where deeper analyses and additional action are needed.



Christian Dupessey

Mayor of Annemasse

President of Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT)

The world is facing an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis, which is increasing the pace of various transitions (demographic, ecological, digital, etc.). The crisis has hit border regions hard, and we are still in the midst of the turmoil, but I am convinced that cooperation on each of our borders and at European level is the solution.

Closing the borders is not the answer! On 9–10 November 2020, the European Committee of the Regions, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (CESCI) and the Transfrontier Operational Mission (MOT) took part in the Borders Forum, where we launched the European Cross-Border Citizens' Alliance.

Cross-border regions are Europe's laboratories. The crisis has revealed cross-border interdependencies. It has also shown that citizens, associations, elected representatives and diplomats are able to come up with solutions that recognise the rights of those living in "cross-border population hubs" to have public services and shared cross-border assets, ensuring support and cohesion. The challenges posed by the recovery and the various transitions will require more coordination between neighbouring states: more cross-border and European integration.

There are different time-scales to consider in relation to this prospect. It is important to act now, in the context of the recovery plan and during the 2021–2027 programming period, by putting cross-border territories at the heart of the programmes and fully involving cross-border groups, and, most importantly, citizens. But we also need to look forward to the future.

What sort of dynamic, solidarity-based and sustainable regions do we want?

Our territorial arrangements have been challenged by the crisis at every level. We will have to change our national laws or even the European Treaties. Local stakeholders must be given the resources to carry out their cross-border projects, to identify and overcome obstacles and finally to build genuine cross-border governance, involving key local, national and European players.

Solutions, such as the Treaty of Aachen between France and Germany, are already being put in place. The draft European Cross-border Mechanism (ECBM) Regulation proposed a European approach, but some countries opposed it, in the name of their all too narrow view of national sovereignty.

Let's keep up our efforts! The consultation carried out by the European Committee of the Regions, its resolution of 1 July and the cross-border citizens' consultations that we are due to conduct will provide input to the Conference on the Future of Europe.



Tamás Tóth

Chairman of Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI)

The founding fathers of the present-day European Union based their initiative on closer integration among the European nations due to the harrowing experiences of the cataclysm of World War II. The hostility and the dramatic separation of peoples, as well as the harsh nationalist rhetoric characterising the war years made them realise that the separating effects of static borders should be reduced in order to bring the nations closer to each other and create the conditions for peaceful co-existence and mutual trust.

Seventy years after the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, in the middle of a devastating pandemic and confined once more to national borders, we, who had become accustomed to the EU's achievement of free movement, understood for the first time how much the success of the European project depends on open borders.

In practice, national governments' automatic reaction to the outbreak of the pandemic was to seal borders to each other, radically reducing cross-border mobility, which immediately suspended the EU's biggest achievements – which had been acquired in 1993.

However, as always, the crisis gives us the opportunity to think through where we are, what we have achieved so far, what values are important to us, how to keep these values and what kind of vision we can offer for future generations.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects clearly showed us how we needed each other, especially in times of emergency, that closing the border did not halt the spread of the virus and that if we want to keep and develop our achievements, we have to re-open the borders to free movement; otherwise, the whole European project would no longer make sense.

Consequently, we are happy to be part of the European Cross-Border Citizens' Alliance and we welcome every effort made by the European Committee of the Regions to facilitate the re-opening and vision-making process – in compliance with the original ideas of the EU's present-day founding fathers.

REPORT ON THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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1. Key points of the report

1. Cross-border transport and connectivity remain to be the biggest obstacles in Europe's border regions. A joint development strategy of cross-border transport infrastructure and green mobility strategies could pave the way to solving these obstacles in border regions.
2. Conflicts between national legislations of neighbouring countries are another significant obstacle to cross-border cooperation. National governments should take into account the needs and advantages of border regions and the cross-border territories that include territories of neighbouring states.
3. Concerning the INTERREG programmes - the European Union, and more notably the Member States should work on making rules and procedures less complicated and on reducing the implementation time, as this poses challenges to cross-border cooperation.
4. Local and regional authorities should be given more powers to address and to remove legal and administrative obstacles that burden cross-border cooperation in their regions.
5. Each citizen should have access to the public services across the border, even in cases of future crises that could lead to limitations of freedom of movement.
6. The recognition of documents and qualifications, such as diplomas or citizenship certificates, remains an important barrier to citizens living and working in border areas. For this reason, all such documents should be fully standardised and issued in a common digital EU form.
7. The languages spoken in the border region should be taught in each side of the border to ensure that citizens have the possibility to learn and better understand their neighbours.
8. The economy of border areas needs a cross-border strategy on economic development to see a potential increase in GDP in these border regions.
9. The emergency services must be deployable on both sides of the border to manage Europe-wide crises. Public authorities should set up operational framework agreements between border regions to protect access to healthcare and other important cross-border public services in exceptional border closure cases. The European Union should be given additional competence to manage Europe-wide crises in the future.
10. There is a common support for strengthening of the European Committee of the Regions allocating it with more powers, especially when it comes to cross-border-related issues.

2. Introduction

The EU's internal border regions cover 40% of its territory, accounting for 30% of its population (150 million people) and hosting almost 2 million cross-border commuters including 1.3 million cross-border workers². These regions became places of cooperation and growth with the establishment of the Single Market in 1992. Accordingly, European cross-border cooperation aims to tackle common challenges identified in border regions and to contribute to the socio-economic development and integration of border areas.

Nevertheless, there are many obstacles that citizens in border regions continue to face. These obstacles affect their daily lives, whether it is finding a job, accessing healthcare, commuting every day or overcoming administrative problems. Similarly, businesses encounter difficulties that limit their potential. At the same time, a 2017 study³ suggests that border regions could on average potentially see an 8% increase in GDP if these current barriers were removed.

After decades of prosperity and open borders, the population living in border regions were negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Many Member States decided to close their borders without consulting their neighbours. Consequently, we saw citizens and workers not being able to reach their workplaces or families, leaving border regions in a very difficult position and having a massive economic and social impact.

As a result, the pandemic has underlined the need for central, regional and local governments to adopt common measures on both sides of the border, and highlighted the importance of maintaining the opportunities that open borders offer to citizens even in a crisis situation.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has a particular role to play in cross-border cooperation. For this reason, and to ensure that border regions do not face further challenges, the CoR is working to develop recommendations on the future of cross-border cooperation as part of its contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe. To reach a balanced vision, in December 2020 the CoR launched a public consultation on people's vision of the long-term future of cross-border cooperation in the European Union. The consultations ran for three months, until 14 March 2021.

The purpose of the public consultation was to address a set of questions to entities in cross-border regions regarding their current legal and administrative obstacles as well as the additional challenges that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their views on the future of cross-border cooperation by 2050. The CoR has received 338 responses from regional and local administrations, associations and businesses, among others. Cross-border entities from nearly all the Member States as well as other non-EU countries participated in the survey.

This report analyses the responses from the public consultation to evaluate to what extent different border regions are affected by obstacles, especially those that arose during the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, two COVID-19 periods (from March to May and from September to December) will be compared to assess the measures taken in those months of the pandemic. Finally, the report will set out recommendations based on the participants' opinions and will try to contribute to creating a shared vision of the long-term future of cross-border cooperation in the European Union that will be presented in the CoR's resolution on the topic.

² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2017/boosting-growth-and-cohesion-in-eu-border-regions

³ [Politecnico di Milano \(2017\) Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions](#)

Overview of the survey respondents

The Member States and non-EU countries

Entities from all Member States (except Lithuania) participated in the open consultation. The majority of them are located in Italy, Germany and France, followed by Poland, Croatia, the Netherlands and Austria. Additionally, entities from non-EU countries (Switzerland, Norway, Serbia, Andorra, Ukraine, and United Kingdom) also answered the survey or were mentioned by a participating entity in the EU.

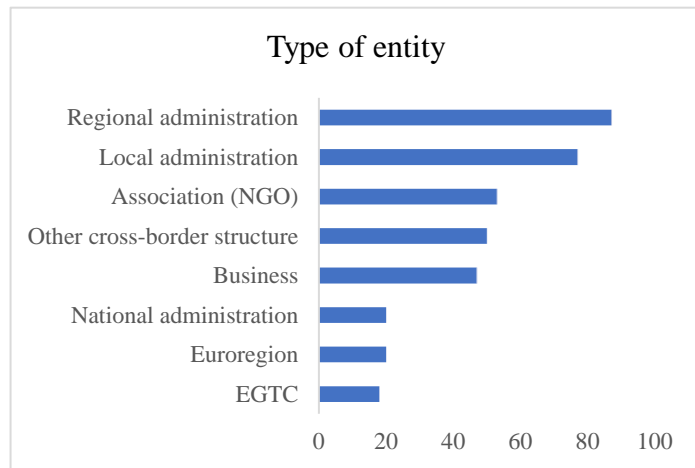
The survey respondents

The entities that participated in the public consultation work in cross-border areas.

Regional and local administrations are the most heavily represented, as can be seen in the chart.

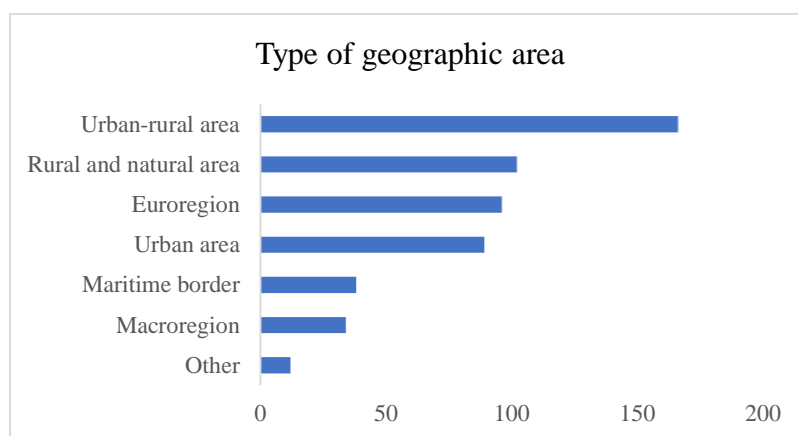
Associations, other cross-border structures and **businesses** participated in a similar ratio.

Euroregions, national administrations and **EGTCs** made up a smaller percentage of respondents, but a relatively large percentage compared to the number of such entities in Europe.



The "**other cross-border structures**" are very diverse, with **universities** the most numerous in this category (*Université de la Grande Région* in BE, DE, FR and LU, *University of Primorska* in SI, and *Eucor - The European Campus* in DE, FR and Switzerland, for example). Other entities include **non-profit organisations** (*EuRegio SaarLorLux + asbl* in BE, DE, FR, LU, *Ente Villa Carlotta* in IT), **schools** (*Zespół Szkół Technicznych w Olecku* in PL, *Deutsch-Luxemburgisches Schengen-Lyzeum* in DE and LU) and **hospitals and emergency services** (*Bayerisches Rotes Kreuz* in CZ and DE, *WCSKJ* in PL). Finally, we also received answers from **cross-border committees**, and **cultural and regional associations**.

Geographic areas



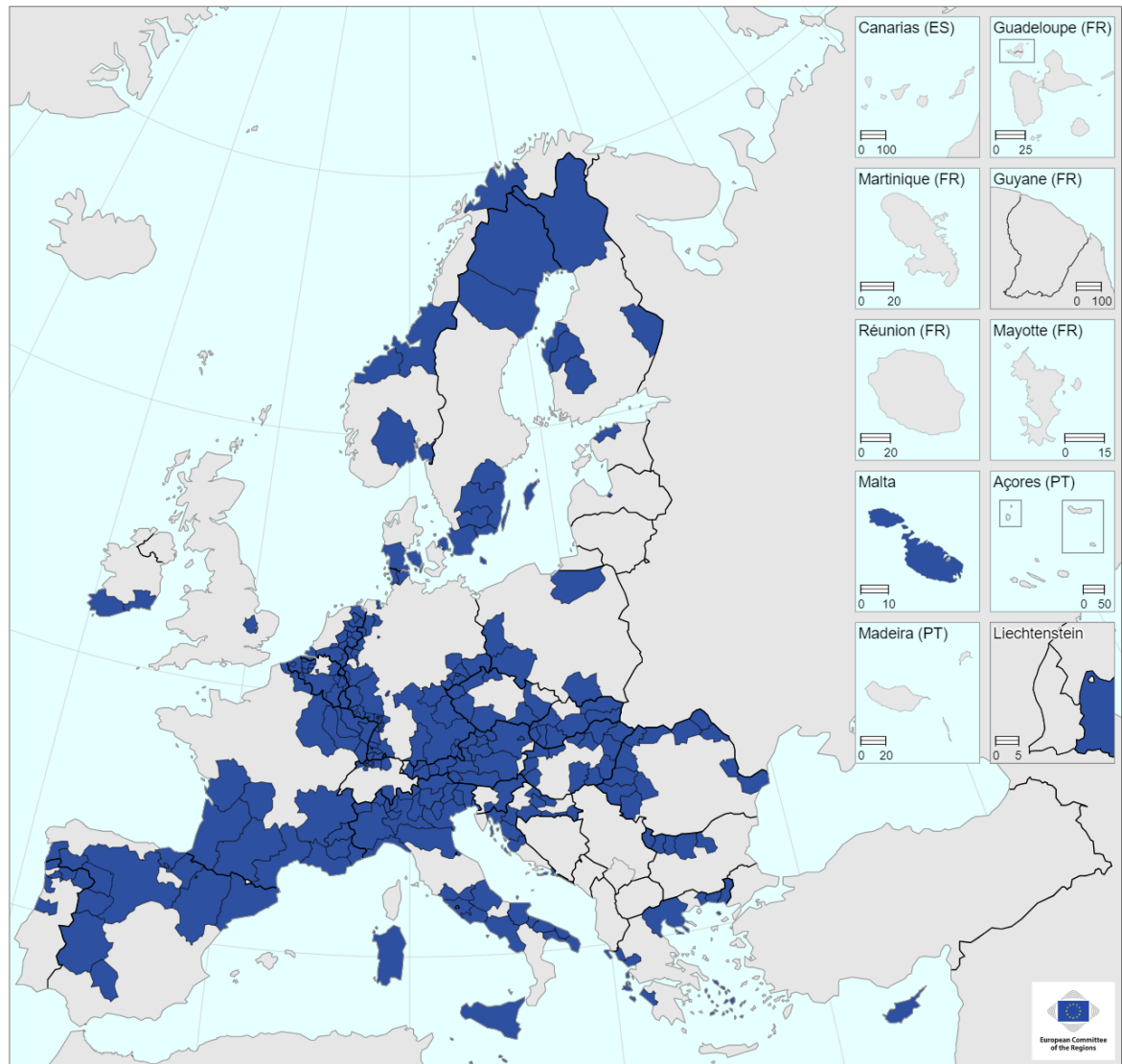
Regarding the type of geographic area along EU's borders, almost half of the respondents live in **urban-rural areas**.

There are also a large number of respondents from a **rural and natural areas** while a similar percentage are based in urban areas.

Entities from **maritime borders** and **macroregions** participated in the survey in smaller numbers.

Territorial representation of the respondents

Representing and/or operating on the mentioned territory



NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 regions

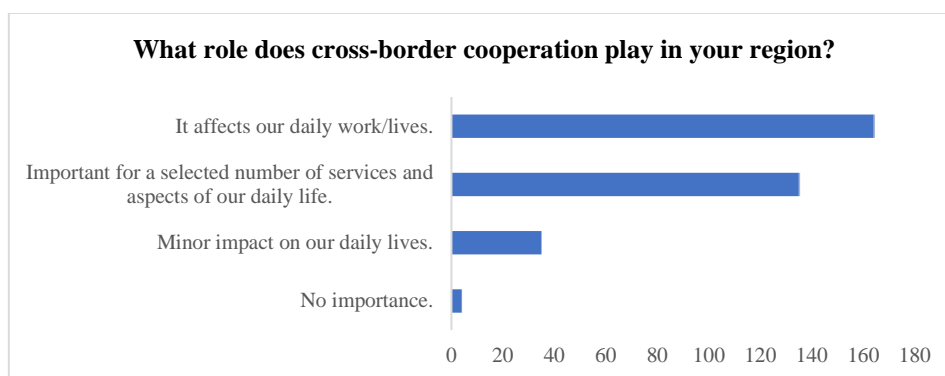
Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turkstat
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 05/2021



Respondents from Andorra, Serbia, Montenegro and Ukraine are not represented on the map
CoR Public Consultations on the Future of Cross-Border Cooperation

3. Obstacles per policy area

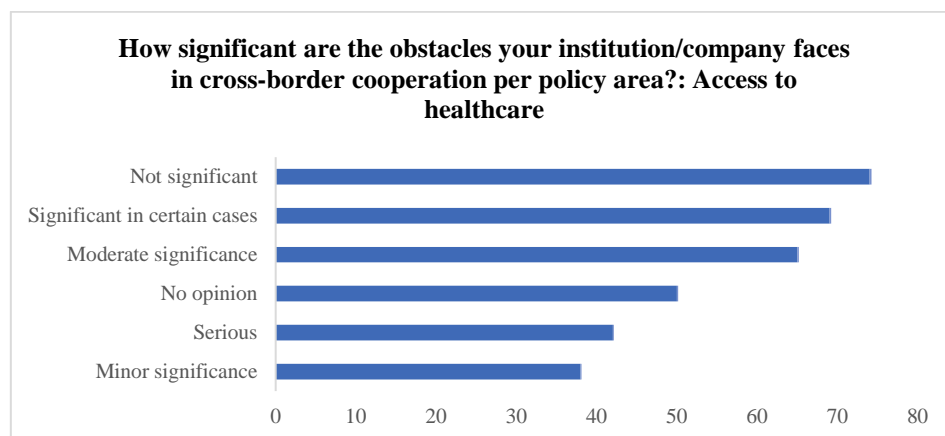
Cross-border cooperation plays a significant role in Europe's border regions. Not surprisingly, when asked about the relevance of it, the majority of participants stated that cross-border cooperation had a significant effect on citizens' daily work and/or lives. A large number of entities said it was important for a selected number of services and aspects of their daily lives. Less than 12% of the participants answered that it had little or no impact on their daily lives.



To shed further light on the matter, the public consultation asked a set of questions to examine the significance of the obstacles in various policy areas. More specifically, the consultation aimed to analyse how often cross-border entities faced obstacles in 19 different policy areas.

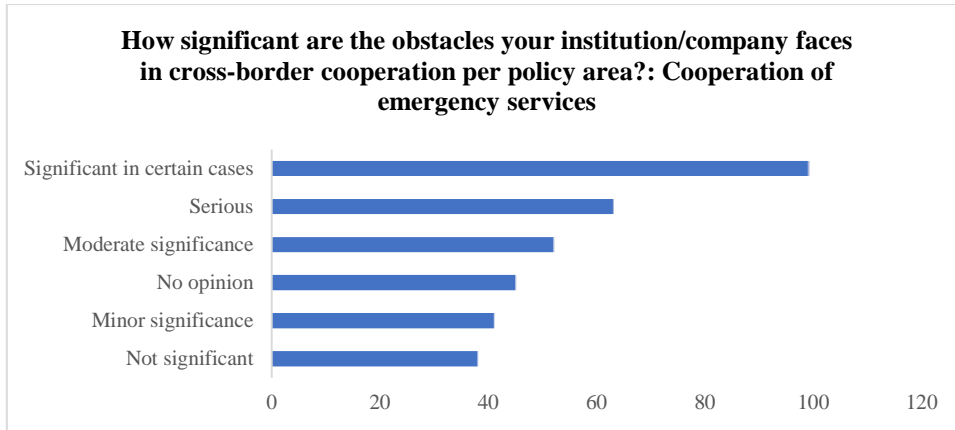
Access to healthcare

Interestingly, while 74 entities said access to healthcare was not a significant obstacle for cross-border cooperation, a similar number of entities, 69, stated that the obstacles were indeed significant in certain cases. In addition, another 65 respondents considered this issue to be moderately significant and 42 said it was a serious challenge in their border regions. As a result, **the general view is that obstacles to access to healthcare do exist.**



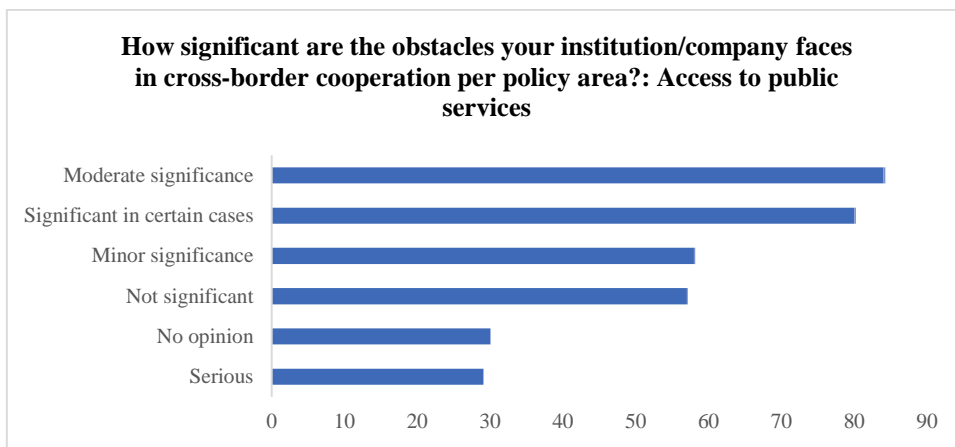
Cooperation of emergency services

Similarly, entities were invited to assess the cooperation of emergency services. In this case, the most frequently selected option confirms that the obstacles are significant in certain cases, with "serious" and "moderate significance" being the next most frequent answers. Thus, the most common view is that **emergency services across borders present challenges** to the entities surveyed.



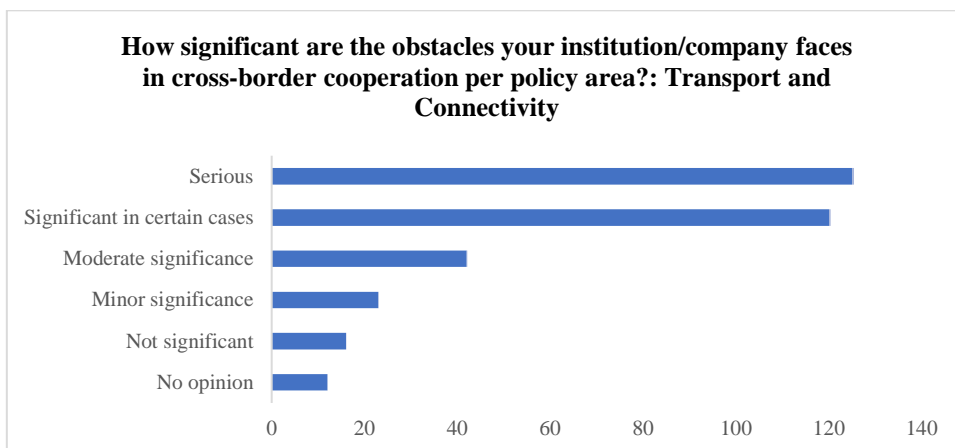
Access to public services

Overall, participating entities consider that the **obstacles are moderately significant, or significant in certain cases, when it comes to access to public services**. Up to 35% of the entities believe this issue has minor significance or is not significant at all. Finally, for some participants (8.6%) these obstacles are serious in their border areas.



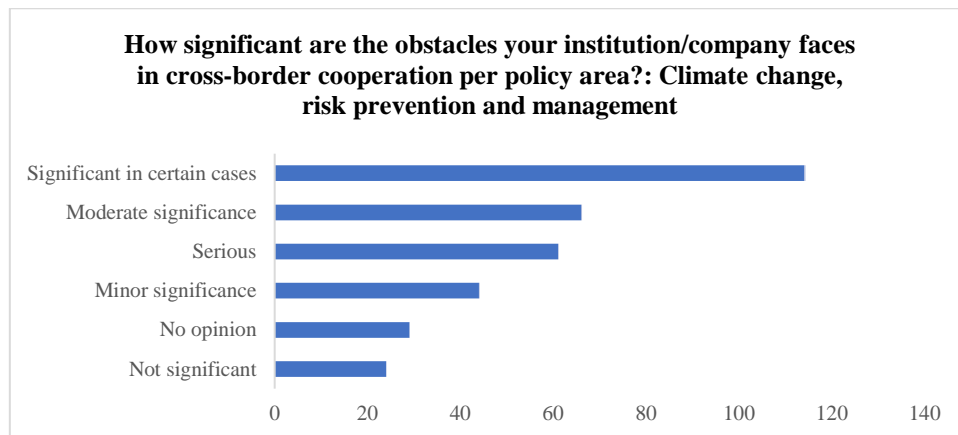
Transport and connectivity

This policy area creates **serious or significant obstacles for cross-border cooperation**, according to the majority of entities involved in the consultation. Consequently, border regions face significant challenges when it comes to cooperating in the areas of transport and connectivity.



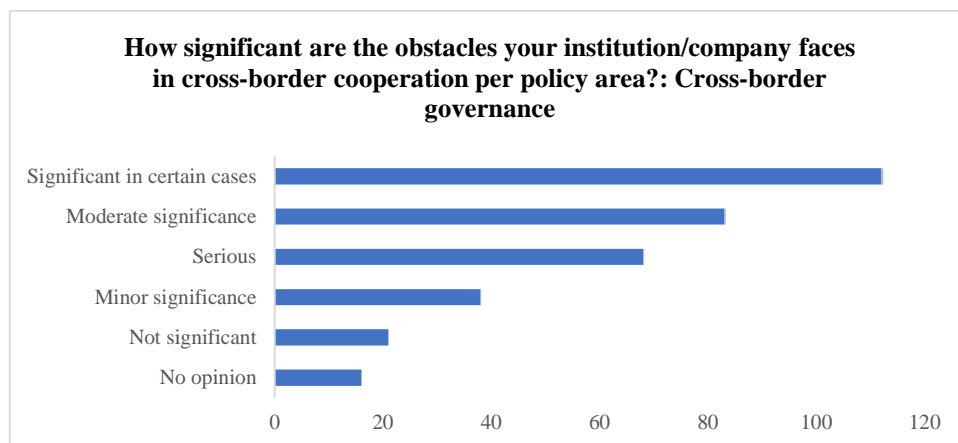
Climate change, risk prevention and management

The most common opinion in the **area of climate change, risk prevention and management is that the obstacles are significant in certain cases**, while approximately equal numbers of entities gave the responses "moderate" and "serious". In contrast, a smaller percentage of the survey respondents think that the obstacles are minor or not significant.



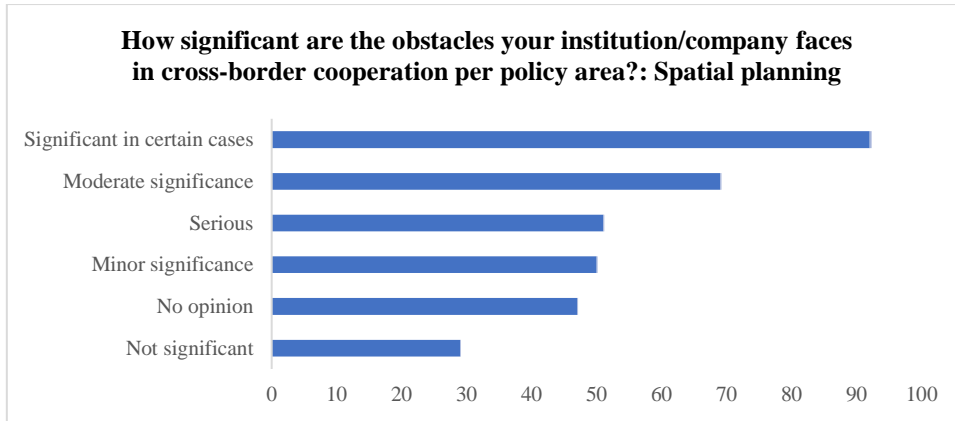
Cross-border governance

Similarly, a plurality of respondents said there were **significant obstacles in certain cases in cross-border governance**. Somewhat fewer described them as moderate (24.6%) or serious (20.1%). Finally, a smaller number of respondents considered cross-border governance to be a minor or insignificant obstacle.



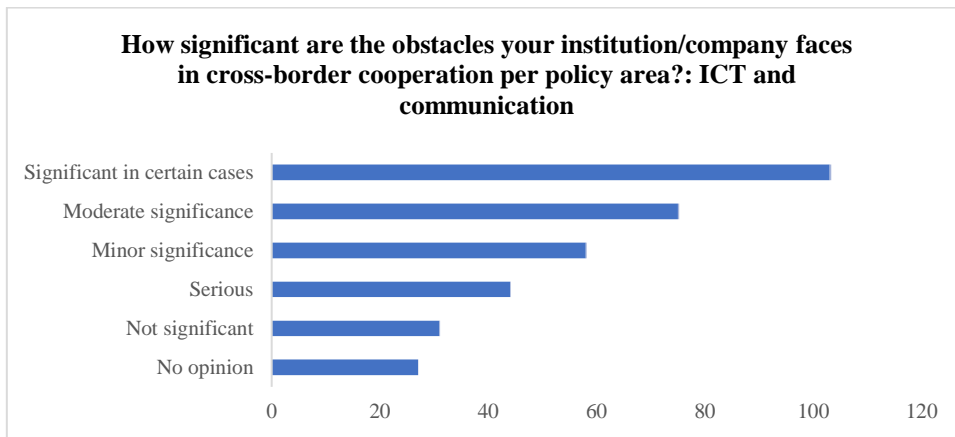
Spatial planning

Obstacles faced in **cross-border spatial planning are significant in certain cases** according to 27.2% of the participants. The second-largest group of entities (20.4%) believe that these obstacles are moderate. The options at opposite ends of the scale received similar numbers of votes: 15.1% think the challenges are serious, but 14.8% say the obstacles are of minor significance in border regions.



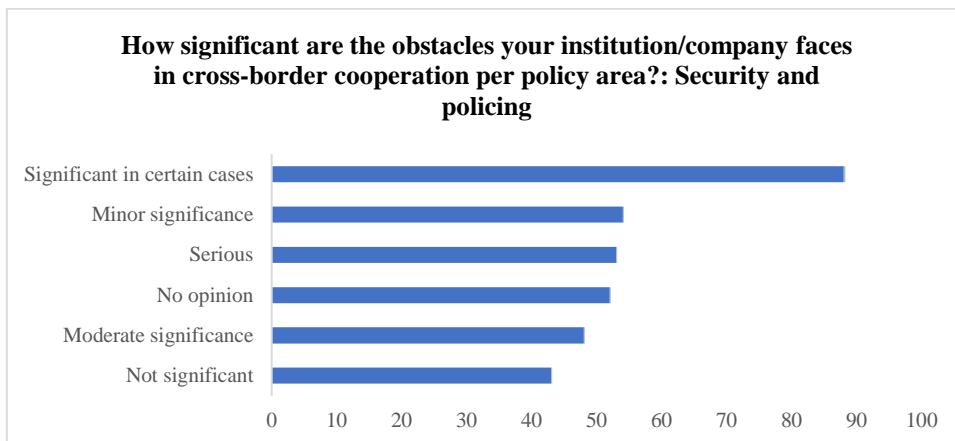
ICT and communication

In the area of information and communications technology and communication, too, a high percentage of respondents stated that the obstacles were significant in certain cases, followed by moderate and minor obstacles. Thus, in this case serious obstacles are less common (13%).



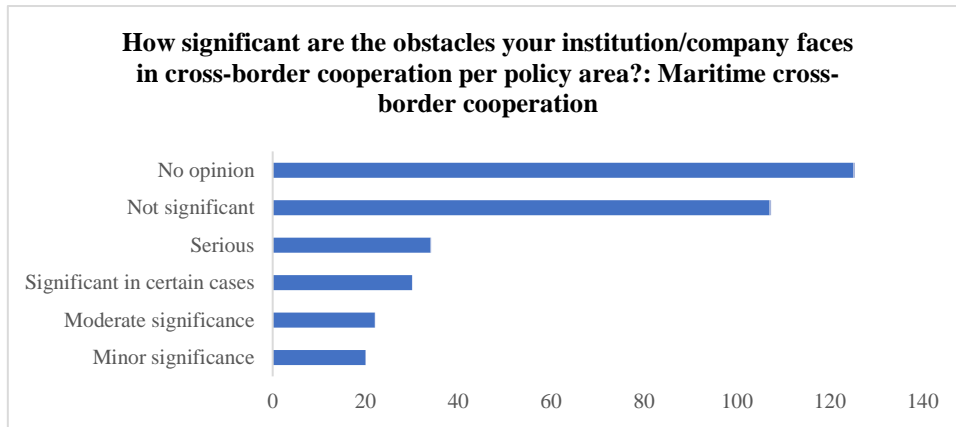
Security and policing

A plurality (26%) of entities described **obstacles in security and policing as significant in certain cases**. In contrast, almost equal numbers of entities believe these obstacles are minor (16%) and serious (15.7%).



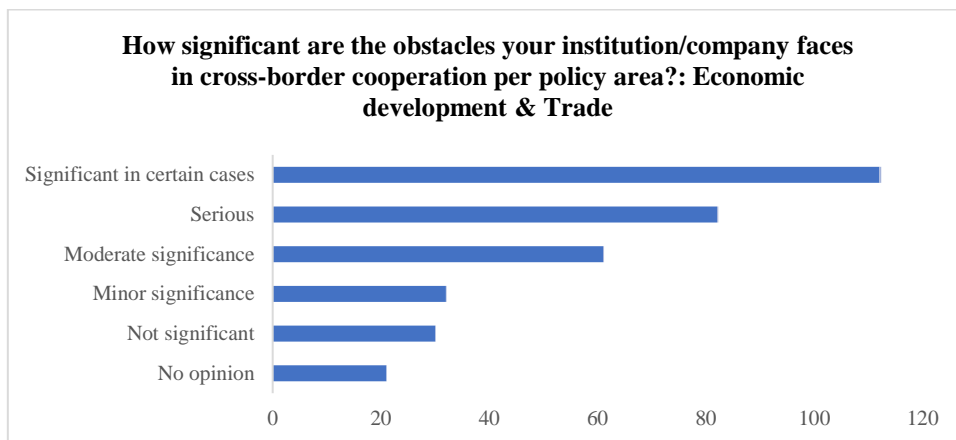
Maritime cross-border cooperation

In the area of maritime cross-border cooperation, a plurality of entities did not have an opinion, possibly due to the lack of maritime borders in most of the entities' regions. The second most common response from the cross-border structures was that the obstacles are not significant. Fewer (10.1%) stated that maritime cross-border cooperation presented serious challenges.



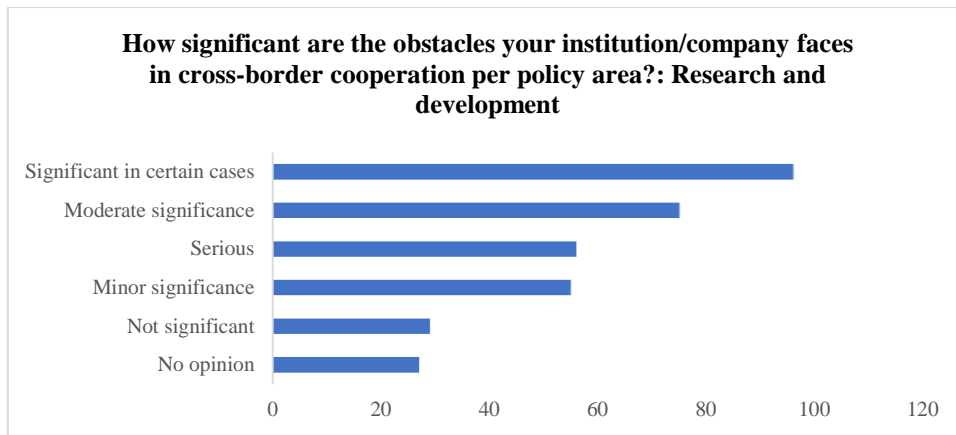
Economic development and trade

In the view of 112 of the entities participating in the survey, **obstacles in economic development and trade policies are significant in certain cases**, while 82 entities consider the challenges to be serious and 61 think they are moderate.



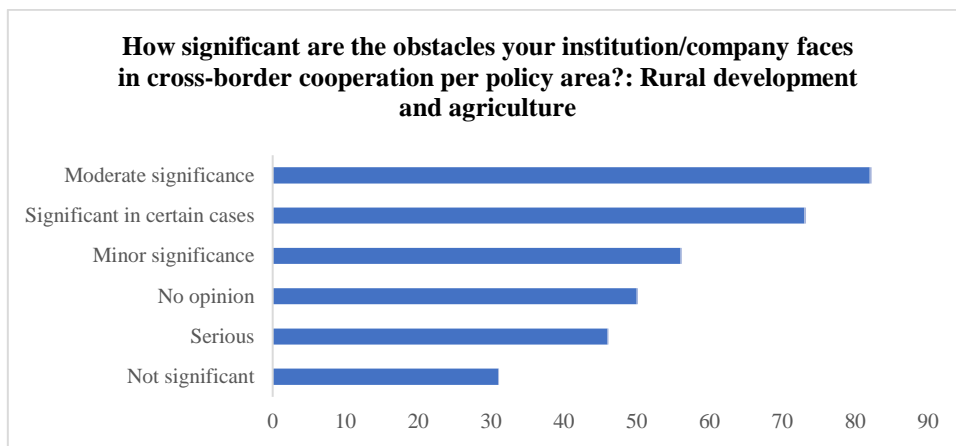
Research and development

In the EU's cross-border regions, **obstacles in the area of research and development are significant in certain cases**, according to 28.4% of votes. The second-largest group of respondents (22.2%) believe the obstacles to be moderate, followed by 16.6% of entities who think that the obstacles in this policy area are serious in their border regions.



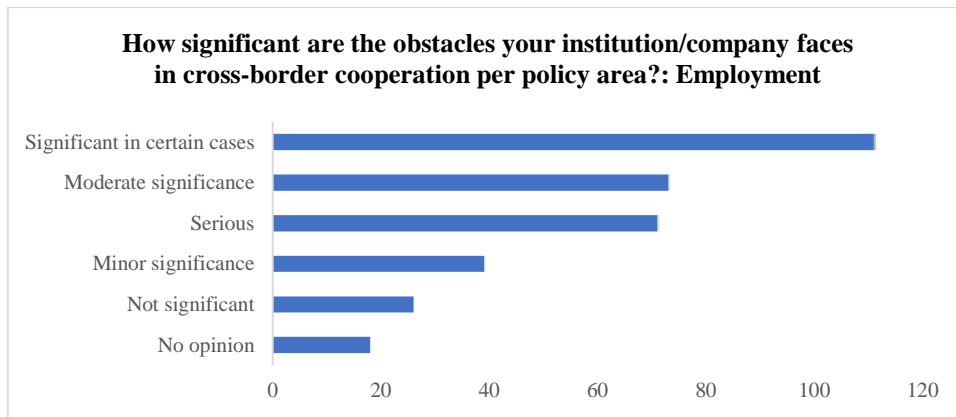
Rural development and agriculture

According to 24.3% of the survey responses, **cross-border cooperation in the area of agriculture and rural development faces moderate obstacles**. At the same time, a similar percentage (21.6%) believe that the obstacles are significant in certain cases. However, according to 16.6% of respondents, the obstacles in this policy area are of only minor significance.



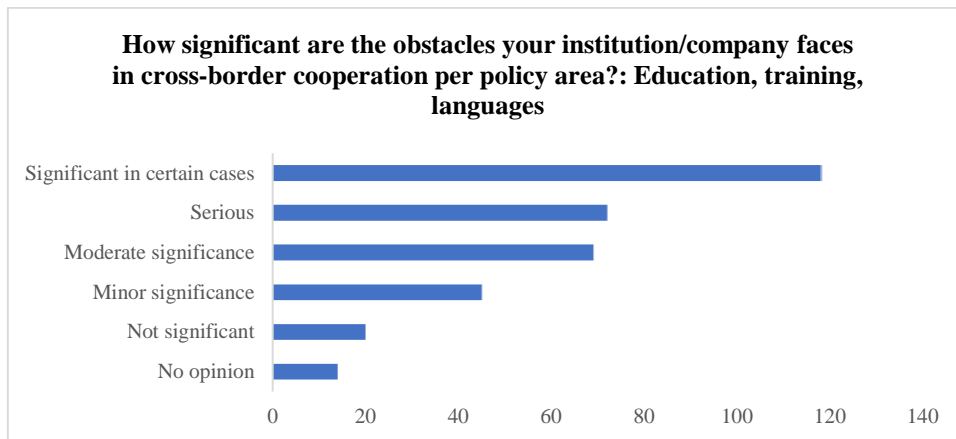
Employment

The majority of entities voted that **employment has significant obstacles in certain cases**. The second-largest group of cross-border structures described the challenges as moderate, and a similar percentage think the problems are serious. Accordingly, most of the respondents experience obstacles in cross-border employment, albeit to different degrees.



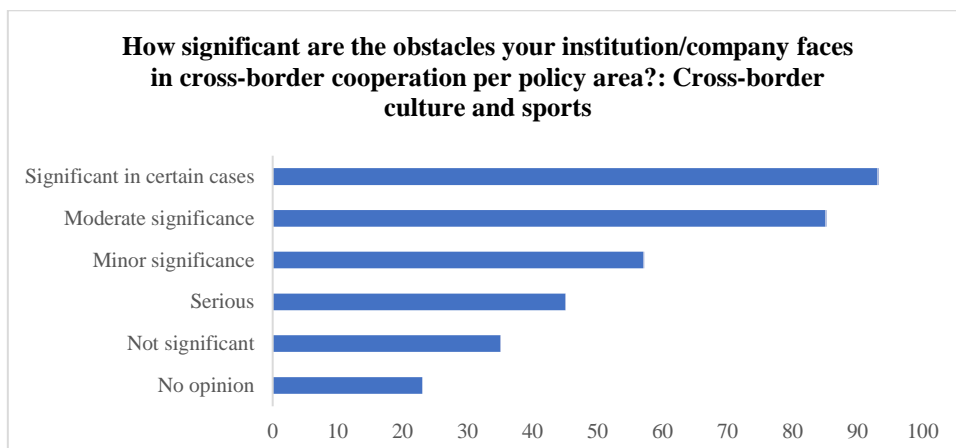
Education, training and languages

In line with the tendency seen in other policy areas, **obstacles in cross-border education, training and languages are significant in certain cases** according to the plurality of entities (34.9%). Next, 21.3% of the respondents think the obstacles are serious in their border regions. Similarly, 20.4% of them said that the challenges were moderately significant.



Cross-border culture and sports

In the field of culture and sports there are significant obstacles in cross-border areas, according to 93 entities, while 85 of the respondents view the challenges as moderate. In third place, 57 entities consider obstacles in these policy areas to minor, while 45 of them believe they face serious obstacles when cooperating on culture and sports.



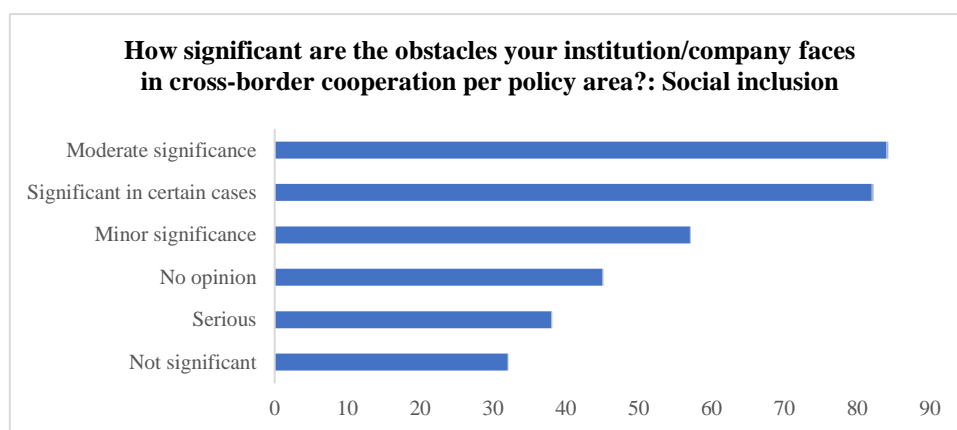
Recognition of documents and qualifications (Diplomas, citizenship certificates, driving licences)

The recognition of documents and qualification remains a significant barrier to cross-border cooperation. 27.8% of the entities surveyed face significant obstacles in certain cases. The obstacles to cross-border cooperation in this area are serious, according to 19.8% of the respondents, while another 18% believe the challenges are moderate; only 12.1% think there are no significant obstacles to the recognition of diplomas, citizenship certificates or driving licences.



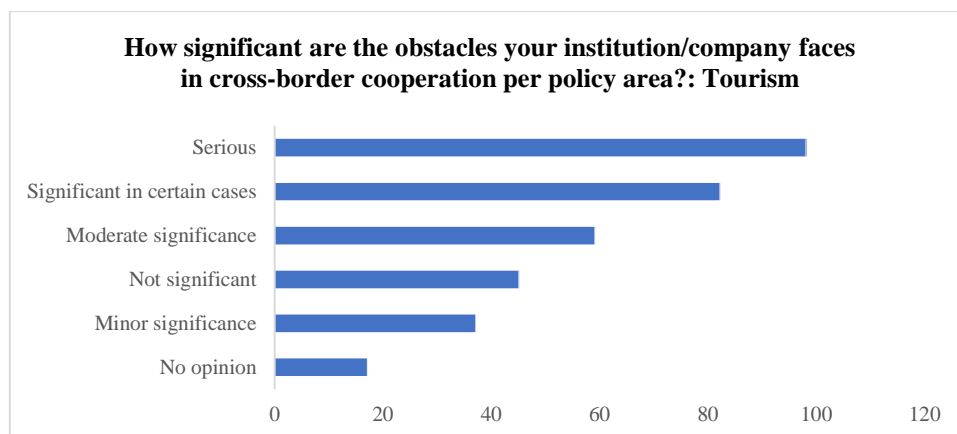
Social inclusion

Cross-border cooperation in the area of social inclusion faces obstacles that are moderate or significant in certain cases according to a large number of entities – 84 and 82 respectively. On the other hand, 57 entities described the obstacles to cooperation on social inclusion in their border areas as minor.



Tourism

In the field of cross-border tourism, a plurality of entities (29%) face serious obstacles, while the problems are significant in certain cases according to 24.3% of entities and moderate for 17.5%. This demonstrates that this policy area is characterised by serious obstacles in cross-border areas.



Cross-border obstacles: Conclusions

Overall, the majority of entities located in the various border regions across Europe stated in the public consultation that cross-border cooperation significantly affected their daily work/lives or that it was important for certain services and aspects of their daily lives. For this reason, entities were asked to assess to what extent this cooperation is affected by obstacles in each policy area.

It is worth noting that, in 12 of the 19 policy areas, the most common answer was that the obstacles are significant in certain cases. This is the case for a wide variety of policies, including employment and economic development and trade, spatial planning, cross-border governance, and recognition of documents and qualifications.

In other cases, cross-border structures largely consider the obstacles to be moderate: this is the case for access to public services, rural development and agriculture, and social inclusion.

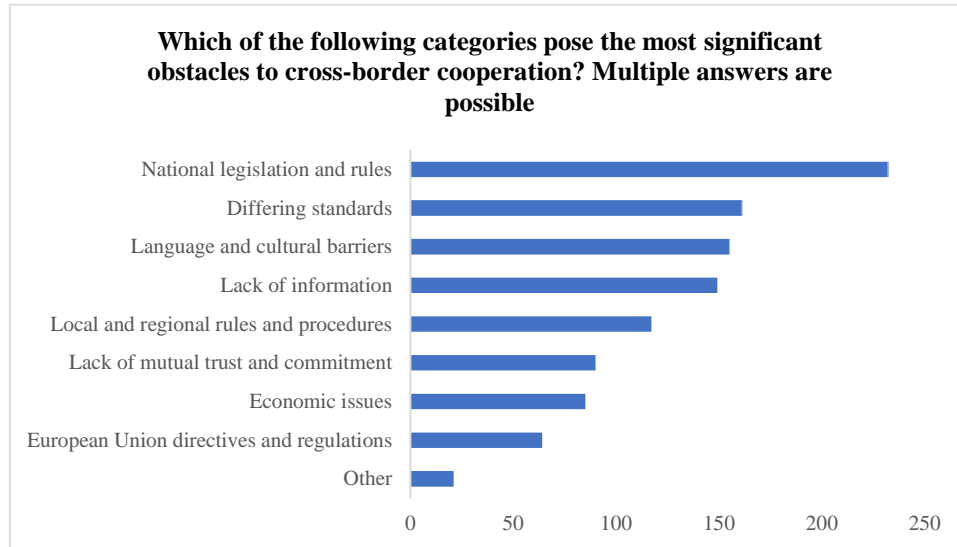
In two policy areas entities face serious challenges when dealing with cross-border cooperation. Transport and connectivity and tourism are, according to the plurality of responses, the policies where citizens suffer the biggest disadvantages of living in border regions.

On the other hand, access to healthcare and rural development and agriculture do not create significant obstacles to cross-border cooperation, according to the largest number of votes. However, the entities that believe the obstacles are significant in certain cases came a close second.

Last but not least, many entities did not have an opinion on maritime cross-border cooperation, or on the option of other policy areas. In the first case, it is likely that those entities that did not have an opinion do not have maritime borders, and the second most common answer should therefore be taken into account, namely that the obstacles are not significant. In regard to other policy areas, the second most common answer, after not giving an opinion, is that the obstacles are significant in certain cases.

4. Obstacles per category

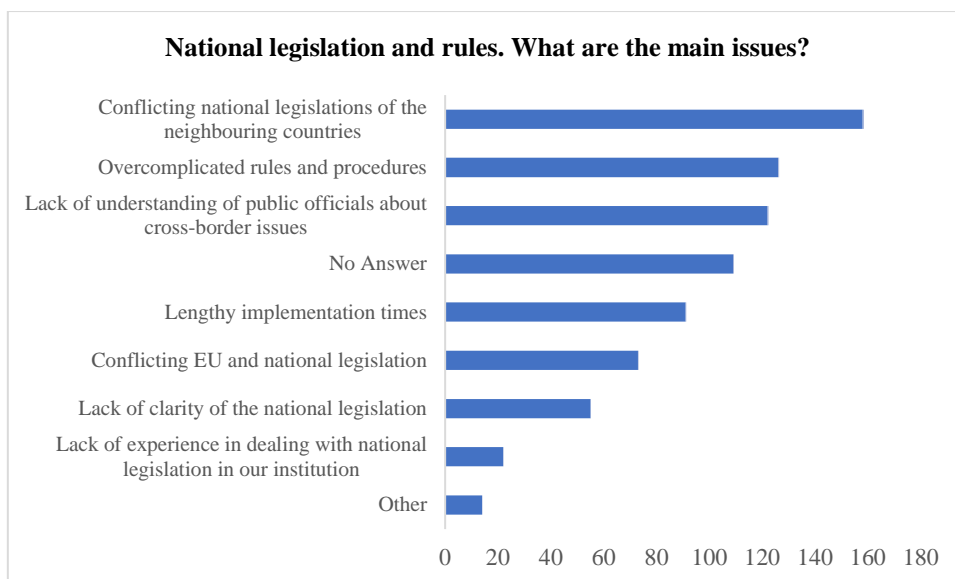
Presented with a list of options, the participating entities identified which categories posed the most significant obstacles to cross-border cooperation:



National legislation and rules

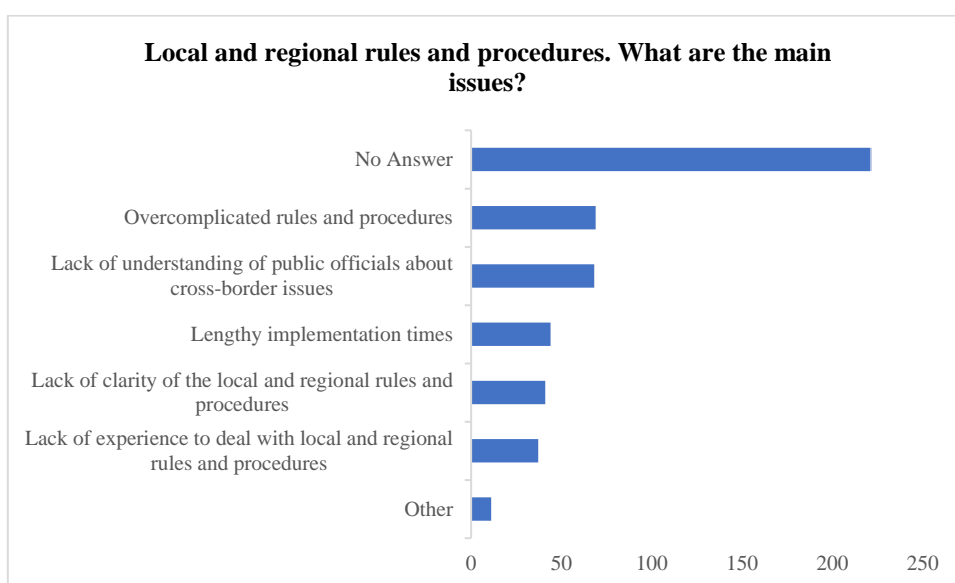
According to the survey responses, national rules are the biggest obstacle to cross-border cooperation. Within this category, **46.8% think that the main issue is conflicts between the national legislations of neighbouring countries**. Other significant problems are related to overcomplicated rules and procedures, lack of understanding on the part of public officials about cross-border issues, lengthy implementation times, conflicts between European and national legislation, unclear national legislation, and a lack of experience in dealing with national legislation on the part of the participating entity.

In addition, participating entities specified other significant problems with cross-border cooperation. **Not having the same competences in the same positions on both sides of the border makes it difficult to cooperate** due to diverging rules and regulations. Some entities believe that greater consideration should be given to the effects of national regulations on cross-border cooperation. Moreover, some respondents also complained of a lack of interest in cross-border issues and a lack of mutual understanding between national and regional or local levels.



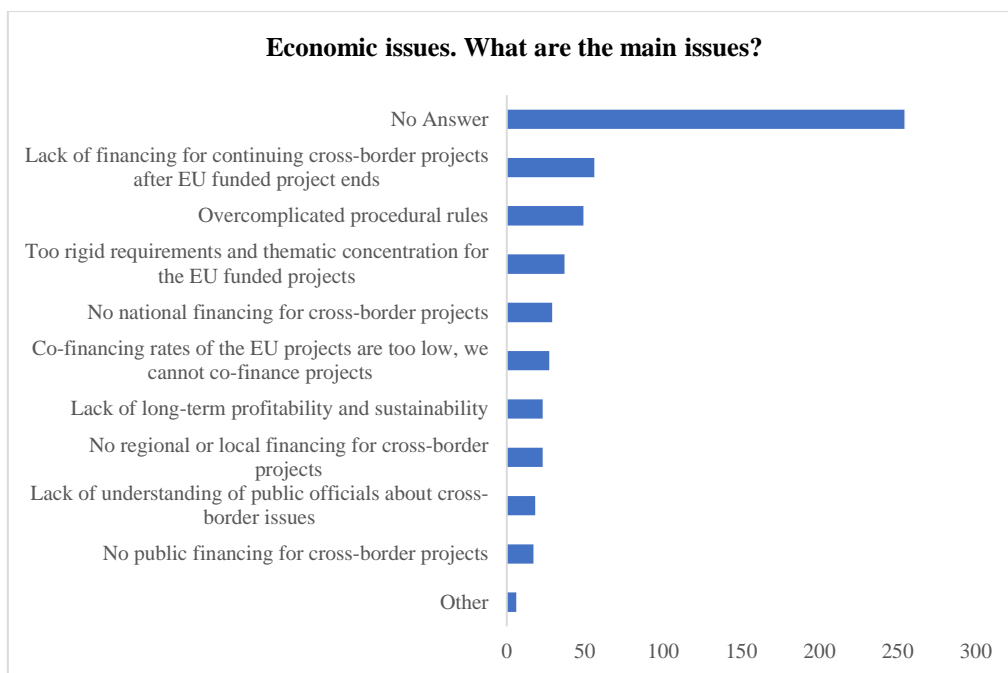
Local and regional rules and procedures

In this area, **overcomplicated rules and procedures are once again a relevant obstacle for border regions**, followed by lack of understanding on the part of public officials about cross-border issues and lengthy implementation times. Respondents also mentioned obstacles relating to differences in competences, procedures and budgets between cross-border entities and to a lack of innovation in cross-border initiatives.



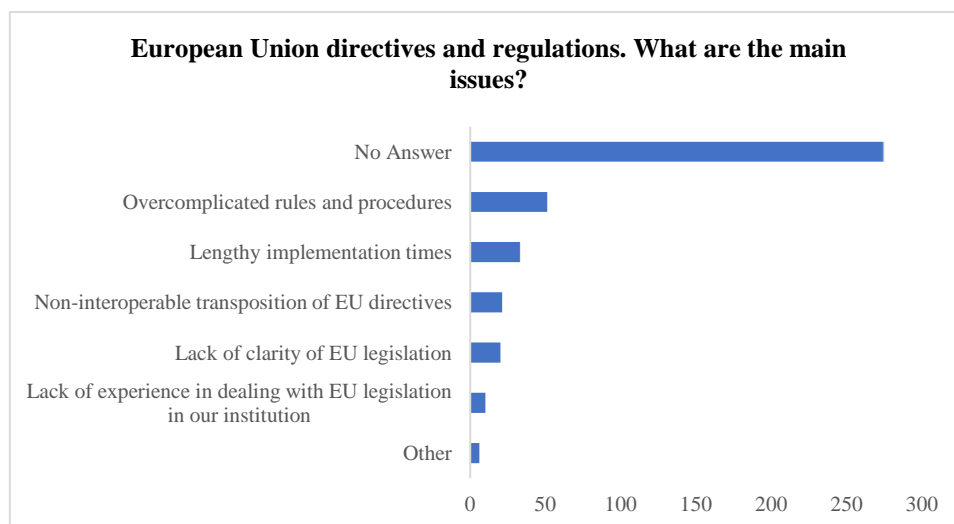
Economic issues

The **most significant economic obstacle, according to the participating entities, is the lack of financing for continuing cross-border projects when EU-funded projects end**. Not surprisingly, there are also challenges due to overcomplicated procedural rules. Cross-border entities believe that requirements and thematic concentration for EU-funded projects are too rigid and that there is no national, regional or local financing for cross-border projects. Other economic issues mentioned are excessively low co-financing rates for EU projects and a lack of long-term profitability and sustainability.



European Union directives and regulations

At European level, there are significant challenges due to **overcomplicated rules and procedures and lengthy implementation times**, although some entities also believe that **non-interoperable transpositions of EU directives and unclear EU legislation create significant obstacles to cross-border cooperation**. Finally, some entities have problems dealing with EU legislation because of a lack of experience.

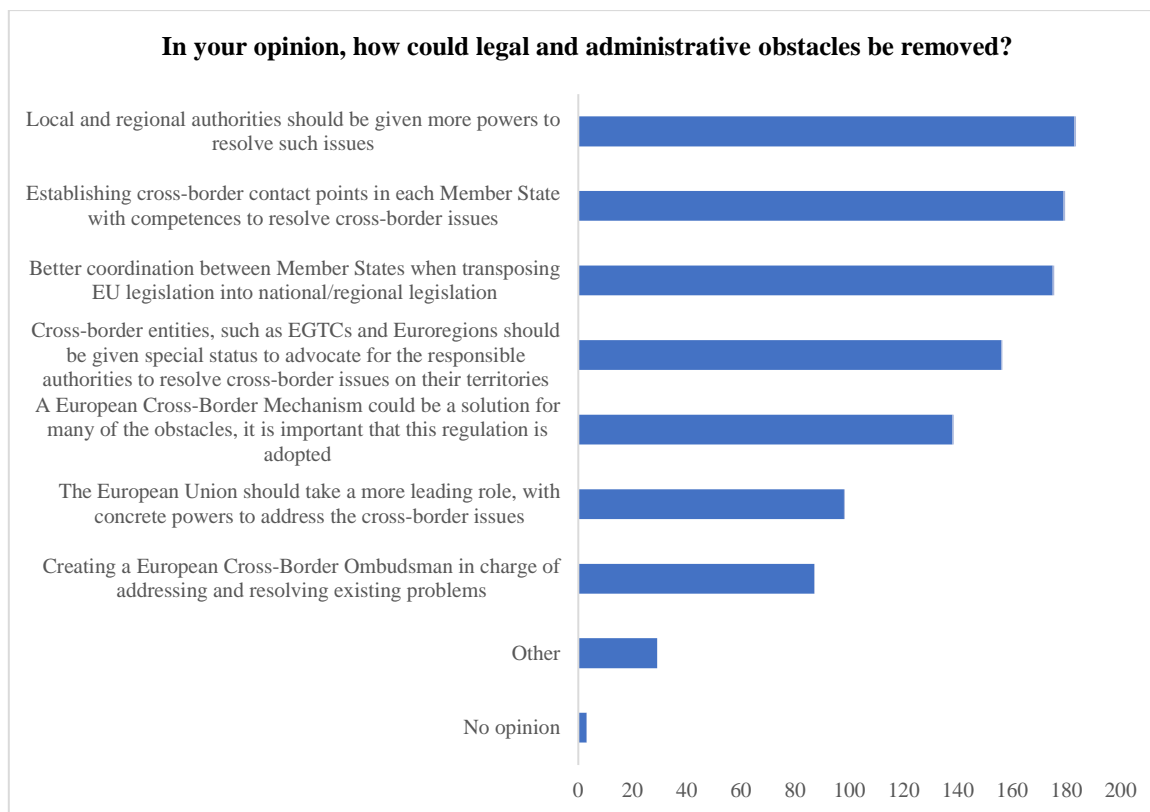


Other issues

With regard to other categories that create significant obstacles to cross-border cooperation, answers volunteered by the participating entities include project **administration costs that are too high in relation to project outputs**, a lack of capacity to participate in and implement cross-border cooperation activities, a lack of political understanding on the part of local politicians of the benefits of cross-border cooperation, and EU external border formalities such as customs, import restrictions, border crossings or visa practices.

5. Recommendations to remove legal and administrative obstacles

The participating entities were invited to choose from a set of proposals that could help remove legal and administrative obstacles in their border regions.



Above all, the survey respondents think that **local and regional authorities should be given more powers** to resolve such issues. The recommendation of establishing **cross-border contact points in each Member State** with competences to resolve cross-border issues would be valuable for a large number of respondents. Respondents also are in favour of **better coordination between Member States when transposing EU legislation** into national or regional legislation.

Additionally, the respondents support the idea of **giving cross-border entities, such as EGTCs and Euroregions, a special status** to advocate for the responsible authorities to resolve cross-border issues on their territories.

It is worth noting that 41% of entities believe that a **European Cross-Border Mechanism** could be a solution for many of the obstacles. For this reason, it is important for this regulation to be adopted.

Finally, the participating entities believe that the **European Union should take more of a leading role**, with concrete powers to address cross-border issues.

The respondents also proposed other solutions, such as identifying and analysing barriers at an early stage or putting cross-border cooperation higher on the national and EU agenda. Moreover, the entities suggest giving more power and more of a voice to the European Committee of the Regions and to regions and their networks. They also call for simplification of structures and for better communication and trust between local and regional representatives inside the CoR.

6. COVID-19 pandemic and cross-border Cooperation

One of the objectives of the public consultation was to analyse the impact of COVID-19 in border regions and to evaluate the additional obstacles that were encountered during two different periods of the pandemic: March-May and September-December 2020.

Concretely, more than half of the entities (67%) agree that, in the period from March to May 2020, the pandemic had a significant negative effect on cross-border cooperation in their region. For the second period, the percentage was slightly lower – though still high – at 61%, showing that the pandemic had a slightly less negative impact in fewer border regions during that period.

On the other hand, very few entities experienced no significant negative effects on cross-border cooperation: only nine entities reported this for the period March-May, and 13 for September to December.

Thus, according to the survey respondents most of the border regions suffered negative effects on cross-border cooperation due to the pandemic. These effects, however, had a different impact on the daily lives and work of citizens depending on the policy area.

Regarding **cross-border transport**, 33% of the participating entities consider that transport links did not function well during the first period of the pandemic. A smaller percentage of them believe it also affected transport in the second period. On average, only 11% of the survey respondents think that cross-border transport links functioned properly in their region during the two periods of COVID-19.

According to 44% of the respondents, citizens could not **access cross-border public services** on a normal basis in the months of March to May 2020. For the second period, this opinion is shared by 33% of respondents. In contrast, only between 3 and 6% of the entities believe citizens had normal access to cross-border public services in their region.

In the area of **cross-border healthcare**, 24% of entities do not think citizens' access to cross-border healthcare was maintained in the first months of the pandemic, in comparison to 15% who think the same about the second period. Not surprisingly, less than 12% consider that cross-border healthcare functioned well.

Numbers are similar with regard to **cross-border educational facilities**. Specifically, 27% of entities do not think that citizens' access to these services was maintained during the first period. That figure decreases to 20% for the second period. On the other hand, a small percentage of entities – less than 10% – say that cross-border educational facilities were maintained during those months of the pandemic.

The **right to commute to work across the border** was impeded in the period March-May according to 17% of respondents. That number falls when assessing the second period of the pandemic, in line with the trend shown for the other services mentioned above: 9% of entities say that workers could not cross the border during the second period. In addition, while 24% of entities consider that citizens continued to have that right during the first period, the percentage increases to 36% for the last four months of 2020.

Cooperation between emergency services from both sides of the border worked well between March and May, according to 13% of the participating entities. A similar percentage (11%) believe such services did not cooperate well in that same period. Thus, opinions in this area are more evenly distributed. For the period September-December, 7% of entities do not think there was a good cooperation, while 14% think the opposite.

When asked about the **government's actions towards the COVID-19 outbreak**, 26% of entities said that the government did not take appropriate action at their border in order to deal with the challenges of COVID-19. However, this opinion falls to 18% of respondents for the second period of the year. Furthermore, 35% of

respondents declared that they were not consulted at all on the national plans at the borders during the first months of the pandemic. This percentage falls to 26% for the second period, meaning that governments paid more attention to cross-border regions and their opinions after the experiences during the first period.

The public consultation asked entities whether **citizens were allowed to see their families and relatives across the border**. For the period March-May, 37% of the entities stated that this was not possible for their citizens, versus 6% of entities who said citizens were allowed to do so. The situation changed in the second period of the pandemic, with 13% of respondents saying that citizens could visit families and relatives across the border.

Similarly, 32% of respondents said that **citizens were not allowed to visit their property on the other side of the border** during the period of March-May, compared with a smaller number of respondents, 16%, who stated that the same thing had happened during the second period of the pandemic.

Finally, cross-border structures evaluated whether **businesses continued operating normally across borders**, with 30% saying it had not been the case in their region during the first few months of COVID-19. The negative impact suffered by businesses did not improve considerably in the months September-December: 25% of entities, only 5 percentage points fewer, said companies were still not working as normal.

Additional comments on COVID-19 and its effects in border regions

For border regions, it is essential to get public life, companies and schools restarted. The pandemic slowed down the professional and economic activity of people living in these areas. In some cases, according to some of the respondents, holding a weekly update on the crisis with the Euroregions worked very well. However, this was not the general case across the EU. Certain entities complain of an ongoing lack of reliable information to support cross-border workers. Furthermore, the impact on the tourism industry has affected a large number of regions, but one entity also remarked that domestic tourism had increased significantly and that this had reduced the negative effects on the regional economy. Regarding the situation at the EU's external borders, one entity commented that there were no common services like those in the internal border regions. In addition, the disruption of cross-border cooperation is more difficult to solve because the pandemic affects regions unequally and there has therefore been a disparity in the measures adopted.

One very relevant issue mentioned by multiple entities was the closing of **borders** during the pandemic. Indeed, a large number of respondents maintain that borders should remain open and that, before closing borders unilaterally, neighbouring countries should have better dialogue on the issue. For instance, the reasons behind closing the borders unilaterally could be attributed to the lack of communication and cooperation concerning the pandemic rules and infection figures.

Therefore, entities ask for **stronger collaboration** to enhance cooperation across borders and limit the occurrence of restrictive measures on only one side of the border. In this regard, a uniform approach within the EU cannot be expected with any certainty and the situation in other, similar crises may require different rapid-response measures, respecting the subsidiarity principle. However, a common EU framework should be established and measures should be communicated more effectively. Specific measures could be approved in border areas to respond to specific needs. To this end, EGTCs could play a crucial role in the coordination of such efforts where local authorities, respecting national laws, could work with the authorities on the other side of the border. Moreover, some entities consider that regional authorities should have more power in areas where free movement is important for citizens, businesses and structures.

To address obstacles created due to COVID-19, some entities agree that it would be appropriate to focus on **digitalisation** and to eliminate excessive complexity and bureaucracy. In practice, a platform could be created to promote cooperation between cross-border entities to help cope with this pandemic situation.

COVID-19 pandemic and cross-border cooperation: Conclusions

The second period of the pandemic, from September to December, had a less negative impact on cross-border cooperation than the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak (March-May). Thus, citizens' lives were in general less affected, public services worked better and authorities cooperated more across borders. However, the improvement was not that significant in the case of businesses. According to the participating entities, businesses activity did not significantly change from the first to the second period.

Secondly, the area most heavily affected due to the pandemic was cross-border public services, with up to 44% of entities sharing this opinion. The next most commonly mentioned issue was citizens not being allowed to cross the border to visit family members (up to 37%). In addition, a large percentage of entities (up to 35%) consider that the government did not consult the local and regional authorities on their plans at the borders.

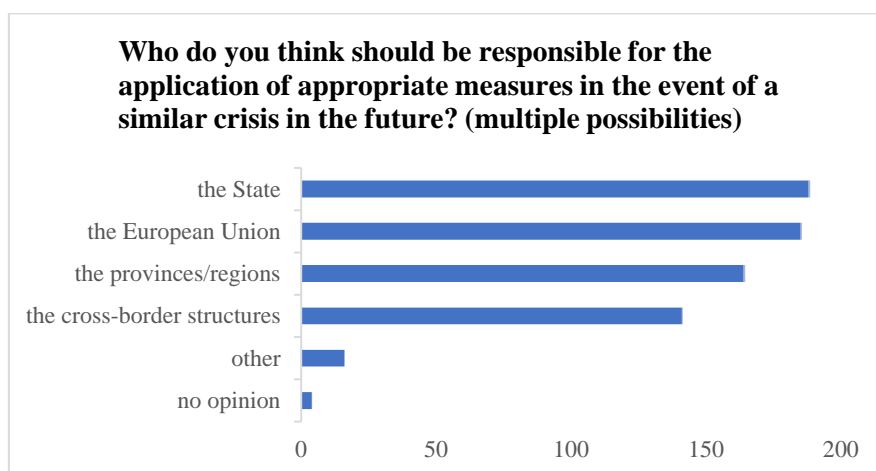
Overall, according to the participating entities, the normal functioning of cross-border cooperation was significantly affected during the pandemic, except for the right to commute to work across the border. In this specific case, more entities consider that workers commuting across the border did not see their rights being disrupted, although it still created problems according to 17% of entities.

Application of measures in the future and minimum level of cross-border cooperation in a similar crisis

The negative consequences of the pandemic are undeniably apparent in cross-border regions. For this reason, the consultation addressed a series of questions to the participating entities regarding the application of appropriate measures in the event of similar crises in the future.

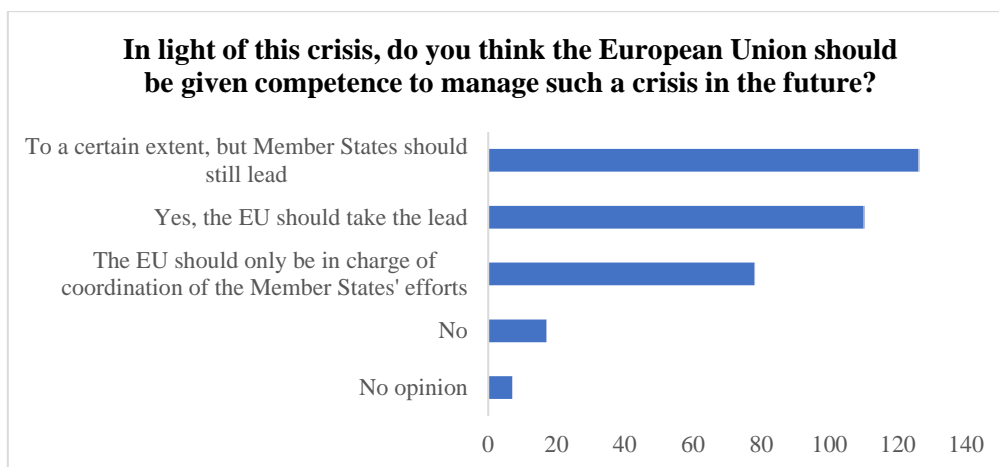
On the question of **who should be responsible** for the application of these measures in the future (with multiple answers possible):

- 55.6% of entities would give the **State** responsibility,
- 54.7% think it should be the **European Union**,
- 48.5% believe **provinces/regions** should be responsible,
- 41.7% consider that **cross-border structures** should be in charge,
- and 4.7% proposed other ideas: a framework decided on at European level and implemented by Member States; cross-border structures taking measures in line with State policies or dialogue between States and regions involving cross-border structures to ensure measures do not create more obstacles.

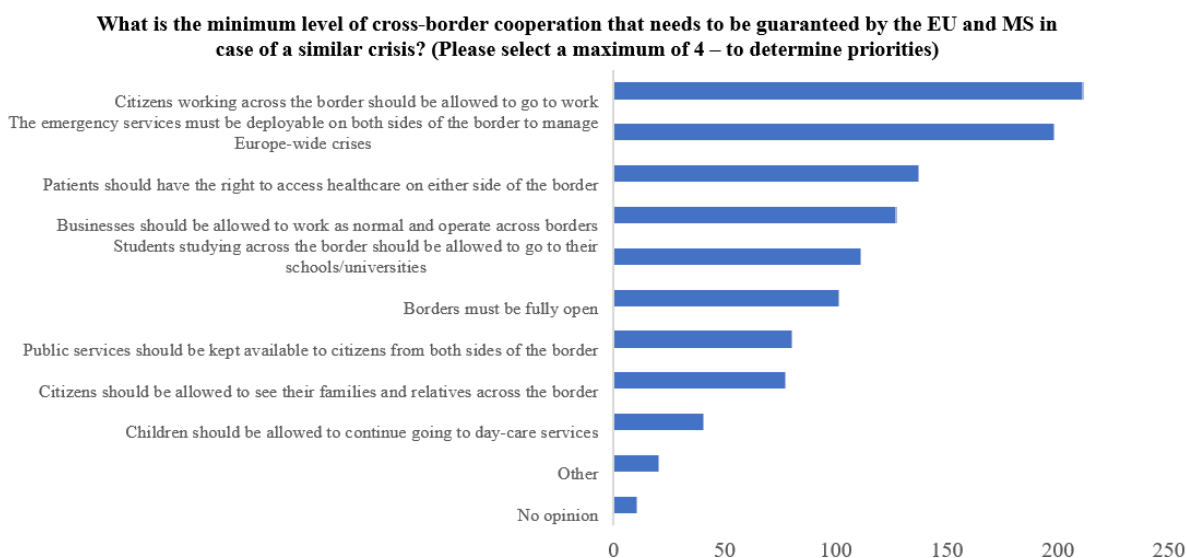


Accordingly, the **State** and the **European Union** are the preferred bodies to take responsibility in the event of future crises. Concretely, 32.5% of the respondents think that the EU should take the lead. 37.3% of respondents believe that the EU should be given a certain degree of competence to manage such crises but that Member States

should still take the lead. The opinion that the EU should only be in charge of coordinating the Member States' efforts accounts for 23% of the respondents. Finally, only 5% consider that the EU should have no competence on the matter.



When asked about the **minimum level of cross-border cooperation that needs to be guaranteed by the EU and the Member States** in case of a similar crisis, the majority (62.4%) consider that citizens working across the border should be allowed to **go to work** and that the **emergency services** must be deployable on both sides of the border to manage Europe-wide crises (58.6%). Entities also give priority to patients having the right to **access healthcare** on either side of the border (40.5%) and a similar number of cross-border structures, 37.6%, consider that **businesses** should be allowed to work as normal and operate across borders. Next, 32.8% believe that students **studying across the border** should be allowed to go to their schools/universities and 29.9% of the participating entities think **borders must be fully open**. Minimum cross-border cooperation should be guaranteed with **public services available** to citizens from both sides of the border according to 23.7% of the participating entities, closely followed by 22.7% who consider that citizens should be allowed to see their **families and relatives across the border**. Finally, a smaller percentage (11.8%) thinks children should be allowed to continue going to **day-care services** and 5.9% of the entities suggested other areas that should be guaranteed: cross-border transport, cross-border information and common prevention instructions.



7. Future of Europe, European democracy and the future of cross-border cooperation

Based on the analysis of the effects of the pandemic in border regions, this section of the report suggests an initial approach to the measures that could be implemented in the future. To this end, the survey asked about what measures cross-border structures would like to see implemented in their territories by 2050. The measures are organised in four thematic areas: cross-border governance, cross-border economy, living in border regions and citizenship services.

Cross-border governance

More than half of the respondents agree (29.9%) or slightly agree (29.6%) that highly integrated cross-border areas should be allowed to elect a **cross-border mayor and/or a cross-border council** for their cross-border region, with concrete powers. However, 18% of the entities answering the survey disagree with this measure.

Similarly, a large percentage of entities believe that highly integrated cross-border areas should be allowed to have a **joint budget** that would serve for development of the cross-border territory: 42% agree and 32.5% somewhat agree with the statement, On the other hand, 33 cross-border structures (9.8%) do not think this measure should be implemented.

It is interesting to note that, while 29.9% of entities slightly agree that **EGTCs** should be given powers equivalent to the regional governments, 20.7% of them disagree with this measure. Additionally, another 15.7% would like to see this implemented by 2050.

With regard to the European Union, a large number of respondents (133 entities) believe that the EU should create a "**Cross-border citizens' initiative**" defining the rules under which a certain percentage of citizens living in a cross-border region could put a subject on the agenda of the European Committee of the Regions and/or other EU institutions. This measure would be supported to some extent by another 115 entities. In comparison to these numbers, only 18 cross-border structures would disagree with the EU's initiative.

Furthermore, the EU Treaties should provide for a mechanism ensuring that a certain percentage of the membership of the European Parliament and the CoR is elected/nominated as **transnational or cross-border members**. The measure would be fully supported by 26.9% of the respondents; 35.5% (120 entities) somewhat agree and 10% of them totally reject it.

Concerning the Member States, there is a widespread belief that they should allow **tax sharing across borders** in order to develop the cross-border territories in a cohesive manner. Specifically, 31% of respondents somewhat agree and 25.4% completely agree with this proposal. Fewer entities think the contrary about this topic (11.5%).

A similar trend can be seen in the fact that 36.4% of the entities agree and 30.2% slightly agree that the European Union should propose **concrete tax provisions** to be provided for by Member States to foster the development of border regions and the development of cross-border cooperation in Europe. Only 24 cross-border structures (7.1%) disagree with the measure.

A large number of entities, 165, would like to see the implementation of **fully integrated spatial planning** in cross-border regions. It would be supported to some extent by another 109 cross-border structures. In contrast, 33 entities slightly disagree and 10 completely disagree with the application of this measure in the future.

According to 55.6% of respondents that agree and 32.5% that somewhat agree, the cross-border region should have a **fully integrated infrastructure development strategy** looking at the cross-border region as a whole.

Interestingly, this is a very strongly supported measure, with less than 6% of the participating entities that completely disagree with its implementation.

Finally, there is common support for giving the **European Committee of the Regions** more powers, especially when it comes to cross-border-related issues, such that it can be the lead advocate for cross-border-related issues at EU level with concrete powers to resolve such issues. Specifically, 149 entities agree and 118 slightly agree with the proposal. A smaller percentage of entities would not like to see this implemented (7.4% somewhat disagree and 3.5% completely disagree).

Cross-border economy

The first broadly accepted economic measure, where 65.1% of entities agreed that it should be implemented, is the creation of a **cross-border strategy on economic development**. It would also be supported to some extent by another 26.3%, while less than 4% of the respondents do not agree with the specific proposal.

By 2050, a large percentage of entities would like all business-related documents (permits, etc.) to be issued in **common EU standardised forms** and be automatically recognised in all EU Member States. Specifically, 185 entities agree and 95 slightly agree with the measure. In contrast, 18 respondents somewhat disagree and 7 totally disagree.

Additionally, 47.3% of the respondents would be in favour of having **joint cross-border marketing and placement of products** on the EU and world markets. This measure would be supported to some extent by 28.7% of the participating entities, while only 2.7% disagree with this economic plan.

Last but not least, entities were asked to suggest what **other economic measures** would they like to see implemented by 2050 in their border regions:

In relation to the proposal mentioned above regarding **common standards**, entities propose harmonising standards and certification procedures or providing derogations from national standards for border areas (e.g. development of cross-border short supply chains, permission for cross-border local trade).

Regarding **employment, trade and labour markets**, entities suggest developing a common employment strategy, consistent business rules, a common cross-border labour market and trade integration. Equal wages could be applied in both sides of the border and workers' insurance should be valid in both countries too, according to the survey respondents.

Additionally, entities would like to have a common strategy for structural **funds**, for example, a common economic and innovation promotion programme and funds.

In the field of **taxation**, some entities suggest that there should be homogeneous cross-border taxation and uniform business requirements or procedures at tax offices.

Being aware of the importance of **technology and research** for the development of cross-border regions, some entities asked for attention to be paid to cross-border IT connections to support economic cooperation. Furthermore, they would like to promote joint work on new technologies, and exchanges of experience including in the case of crisis events. In general, cooperation in RD&I should be stepped up, with some entities suggesting the creation of IT and transfer parks.

With regard to **climate change and the environment**, some entities propose undertaking all possible measures related to climate change and cross-border planning in relation to environment and biodiversity that would have an economic benefit/impact.

In the area of **transport**, the cross-border economy could, according to some entities, be improved by a joint development strategy for cross-border rail infrastructure and green mobility and better rail connectivity.

Finally, another relevant suggestion would entail having **representation offices in Brussels** for cross-border associations.

Living in border regions

Interestingly, all the suggested measures concerning life in border regions were broadly agreed on by the participating entities.

All citizens should have **access to public services across the border**. A large number of entities, 212, would like to see this implemented in their cross-border region and 94 somewhat agree with this proposal.

Schools in border regions should systematically offer **courses in the languages spoken in the border region** to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn them. Again, 234 entities agree with this measure and 67 somewhat agree. Only 6 entities disagree with this statement.

All citizens living in border regions should have **at least a basic understanding of the neighbour's language**. In this case, 182 entities totally agree with this proposal whereas 114 slightly agree. Very few entities, namely 10, would not like to see this implemented.

The curricula of schools in border regions should include **joint history programmes** highlighting the common history of the border regions from different perspectives. This educational proposal would have the support of 296 entities, of which 182 agree and 114 somewhat agree. In contrast, only 10 entities disagree with the measure.

Public educational and cultural services should be available to citizens from both sides of the borders (schools, childcare, recreational facilities, etc.), according to 231 entities that agree and 70 that somewhat agree. Overall, the measure would be highly appreciated, as only four entities disagree.

European healthcare should be fully interoperable, and guaranteed to every citizen of the European Union. The general opinion is in support of the proposal: 227 entities agree and 66 slightly agree. On the other hand, only four entities would not support it.

Emergency services should be allowed to provide service across borders indiscriminately (medical, fire protection, policing). This measure received the broadest support from the participating entities: a total of 259 agree, 56 somewhat agree and only two disagree.

Local plans for climate change adaptation measures should be made across the borders, as 238 entities agree and 72 somewhat agree. Two entities disagree with the proposal, clearly showing that most cross-border structures would like to see this implemented by 2050.

Interoperability of IT systems is seen as a favourable measure according to 212 entities that agree and 86 that somewhat agree. Only two entities disagree with the proposal.

All providers should be required to provide **EU-wide insurance coverage** for any possible use, not limited by national borders. 195 entities agree and 81 slightly agree with the proposal, compared to five that disagree.

An **EU-wide social security** system should be established, according to 161 that agree and 81 that somewhat agree. However, 24 entities would not support the implementation of this measure.

Mental borders should be eliminated and **cross-border identities** should be developed. This is the general view of 206 entities that agree and 84 that slightly agree. On the other hand, 10 entities expressed their disagreement with the proposal.

Citizenship services

With regard to citizenship services, the proposals that could be implemented in border regions in the future are generally agreed on by the entities. Nevertheless, opinions are more evenly distributed.

Citizenship services should be provided from either side of the border in one's **own language**, according to 152 entities that agree and 108 that somewhat agree.

All **citizenship documents** should be issued in a common digital EU standardised form and automatically recognised in all EU Member States (birth, marriage, death, etc.). This proposal is supported by 233 entities; 62 slightly agree and only five disagree. **Diplomas and certificates** related to education and employment should be fully standardised and issued in a common digital form standardised across the EU. Again, a large number of entities agree with the measure, with 240 entities that agree and 64 that somewhat agree. In contrast, only seven entities disagree.

European citizenship should be fully implemented with an EU passport and personal identification document replacing the current national system. Opinions differ on this proposal, although the most common answer is to agree, with 161 votes. In second place, 73 entities somewhat agree, while 29 disagree with the suggestion.

Other measures entities would like to see implemented

The public consultation concludes with an open question to cross-border structures, asking them to suggest additional measures they would like to see implemented in their border regions.

In relation to **education and languages**, there is a suggestion that the European Commission should give language minorities direct access to mother-tongue media libraries in neighbouring countries, abolishing geo-blocking. Another interesting proposal is to make it possible to learn the neighbouring language even before school age, in childcare centres, and to enable cross-border educational institutions that focus on common (formal) learning for children from an early age. An exchange programme for civil servants in cross-border regions is another proposal.

A suggestion was made to create "**border area citizenship**", which would initially be important in creating an identity. Such a citizenship could, for example, make it easier to cross the border in the event of increased controls due to a future crisis.

In the area of **tourism**, bilateral, innovative approaches are needed in order to use the opportunity of the leisure industry and tourism and at the same time to protect nature through new guidance systems.

Recommendations related to **healthcare** are addressed to public authorities and the European Union. The first is that operational framework agreements could be set up between countries and border regions, protecting access to health services in exceptional border closure cases. At the same time, new hospital planning could include a cross-border approach. In addition, public authorities could make cross-border solidarity in health a priority, particularly in the event of a shortage of essential or strategic equipment and products. The EU could encourage the establishment of cross-border health observatories responsible for analysing the population from a socio-health, demographic and epidemiological point of view. Similarly, the EU could encourage and finance pilot projects in the cross-border framework of border areas in order to gather and exchange best practices.

Other proposals include, for instance: allowing **cross-border citizens to vote** on relevant issues that concern them; **circular economy** approaches through cross-border cooperation using consultations as provided for in the

Strategic Environmental Assessment, as well as through cross-border clustering for value chains; and, finally, analysing obstacles to cross-border **financing** in the form, initially, of a call for projects to train officials in the basics of cross-border cooperation.

8. Conclusions

This public consultation will be a basis for a CoR resolution presenting concrete proposals for the future of cross-border cooperation. For this reason, both public and private entities working in border areas were asked to answer the consultation and share their views on the current legal and administrative obstacles, the additional challenges created during the pandemic and the ideal measures to be implemented in the future. Entities answering the survey come from almost all Member States and are mostly located in urban-rural and natural areas.

Based on all the answers received, this report has analysed the principal obstacles that affect the ideal cooperation between cross-border regions. At the same time, the consultation obtained from the participating entities the most appropriate recommendations for removing these barriers.

In this regard, and assuming that cross-border cooperation plays an important role in the majority of entities' regions, certain conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, obstacles are significant in certain cases in more than half of the policy areas (12 out of 19). Secondly, this is the case for a wide variety of policies, meaning that problems with cross-border cooperation are not focused in only one area, like transport, but extend across economic areas such employment and trade, and social policies such as culture, languages and social inclusion. There is, however, one exception: access to healthcare, where the majority of entities believe that there are no significant obstacles to cooperation. Thirdly, national legislation is the main barrier to cooperation between cross-border regions. Conflicts between the national legislations of the neighbouring countries and overcomplicated rules are the most relevant issues within this category. In addition, differing standards and language and cultural barriers also impede local and regional entities in cooperating with their counterparts across the border. Thus, obstacles are created firstly because national governments do not pass laws that take into account border regions and their neighbouring countries, and secondly because standards do not match and the language and culture also create conflicts between cross-border structures.

Consequently, the variety of obstacles and of categories that create them suggests that different measures need to be enforced as well. To remove legal and administrative obstacles, the participating entities consider that three main actions would be beneficial for cross-border regions: firstly, giving more powers to local and regional authorities to resolve such issues; secondly, establishing cross-border contact points in each Member State with competences to resolve cross-border problems; and thirdly, improving coordination between Member States when transposing EU legislation into national/regional legislation. This action could also reduce conflicts between the national legislations of neighbouring countries and eliminate the problem with differing standards.

The unexpected and disturbing situation created due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected border regions in a way that had never been experienced since the establishment of the Single Market in 1992. To illustrate this, the public consultation asked entities to evaluate the pandemic's impact on cross-border cooperation. In order to ensure that border regions do not face further setbacks, long-term measures were also proposed. The most relevant conclusions from this section can be listed as follows: in the period from March to May 2020, the negative effects on cross-border cooperation were significant, and worse than in the second period from September to December of that year. It is understandable that cross-border regions were able to adapt somewhat to the situation after the first few months of the crisis. Furthermore, cross-border public services were significantly altered. In relation to this, the second biggest issue was the closure of borders, such that citizens were not allowed to cross the border to visit family members. Accordingly, a large number of entities consider that borders should remain open and that authorities should have better communication with their neighbouring counterparts before taking any unilateral decisions. Only the right to commute to work across the border was not significantly altered, according to the majority of entities.

Regarding the application of future measures in the event of a similar crisis, the participating entities believe the State should be responsible for applying them, followed by the European Union and the regions. Specifically, the majority of entities consider that the EU should be given a certain degree of competence to manage such crises in

the future but that Member States should still take the lead. Therefore, despite the obstacles created due to national legislation, entities still think Member States should apply the appropriate measures to face similar problems in the future. However, a similar but lower percentage of entities think that the EU should indeed take the lead.

Apart from the above-mentioned players taking responsibility, the minimum level of cross-border cooperation that should be guaranteed in the event of a similar crisis prioritises citizens' right to work across the border and emergency services' ability to work on both sides of the border to manage Europe-wide crises. Access to healthcare on either side of the border and businesses' ability to operate across borders are also important activities that should be guaranteed by the EU and the Member States, according to the entities surveyed.

Not surprisingly, with the long-term future of cross-border cooperation in the EU being the main reason for launching the public consultation and therefore drafting this report, the measures that can be implemented in the future are of major significance. For this reason, in the area of cross-border governance, the majority of entities want cross-border regions to have a fully integrated infrastructure development strategy looking at the cross-border region as a whole. Moreover, they believe that cross-border regions should have fully integrated spatial planning and that highly integrated cross-border areas should be allowed to have a joint budget that would serve for development of the cross-border territory. Regarding the cross-border economy, having a cross-border strategy on economic development would be highly beneficial. In addition, all business-related documents could be issued in common forms standardised across the EU and automatically recognised in all EU Member States. Thirdly, joint cross-border marketing and placement of products could be established on the EU and world markets. With regard to life in border regions, the most important measure for entities would be allowing emergency services to provide services across borders indiscriminately. Secondly, local plans for climate change adaptation measures should be made across the borders. Thirdly, public educational and cultural services should be available to citizens from both sides of the borders. Finally, in the area of citizenship services, all citizenship documents and diplomas and certificates related to education and employment should be fully standardised and issued in a common digital form standardised across the EU.

Last but not least, additional measures were proposed by the participating entities. It is worth noting that entities suggest teaching the neighbouring language from an early age, as this could be a long-term solution to the obstacles created due to language and cultural barriers. Moreover, in the area of tourism, some entities highlight the need for bilateral, innovative approaches to promote the leisure industry across borders. These measures could definitely help to solve the serious obstacles to cross-border cooperation in tourism and the negative impact of the pandemic in the industry, which has affected a large number of regions. As expected, the pandemic has also shown the need to have better cross-border healthcare, although a large number of entities believe it is not a very significant obstacle to cross-border cooperation. However, in the event of a similar crisis border regions should be more prepared. To this end, entities propose establishing agreements between States and border regions, protecting access to health services in exceptional border closure cases.



**European Committee
of the Regions**

Created in 1994, the European Committee of the Regions
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