Border Orientation Paper

Italy – Switzerland
1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out key characteristics of the cross-border region between Italy and Switzerland and outlines options and orientations for the programming of the next Interreg programme along that border. It is part of a series of similar papers prepared by DG REGIO for all EU land borders (and borders with Norway and Switzerland).

The objective of this paper is to serve as a basis for a constructive dialogue both within each cross-border region and with the European Commission for the 2021-2017 Interreg cross-border programme Italy – Switzerland.

The paper is based for a large part on objective information stemming from three studies commissioned by DG REGIO:

- “Border needs study” (“Collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes”) conducted in 2016;
- “Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions” conducted in 2015-16 and;
- “Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders” conducted in 2017-18.

In addition, many data sources available at European level were also used to describe certain aspects socio-economic and territorial development. A full list of information sources is provided in annex.

Cross-border cooperation is much broader than Interreg programmes. The objective is to facilitate cross-border cooperation by reducing remaining persisting obstacles to cross-border activities and linkages as outlined in the 2017 Communication on Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions. The instruments available are not only the funds (in particular Interreg and other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programmes which may invest in cooperation), but also European and national legal instruments (European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), regional agreements (e.g. in the Benelux and the Nordic countries), bi-lateral agreements, etc.) as well as a number of policies e.g. on labour mobility, transport, health, etc. The Interreg programmes should therefore not only aim to fund projects but should also seek to reduce cross-border obstacles. To do so, the legislative proposal on Interreg foresees that part of the budget is dedicated to cross-border governance (including capacity building and contribution to the macro-regional/sea-basin strategies).

That is why this paper goes beyond the traditional activities of Interreg programmes (funding projects) and also covers governance issues (reducing cross-border obstacles). On this, the roles of the programmes are: (a) to initiate the work on the obstacles (e.g. the members of the Monitoring Committee could contact the relevant public authorities and stakeholders); (b) to facilitate the work (by funding working groups as well as possible studies and pilot projects); and (c) to contribute to this work (providing input from the wide knowledge gained in past programming periods). Whilst the budget is limited, the impact can be important as the actions concerned will have a limited cost (meetings, studies, pilot projects, etc.) but structural effects.
2. ANALYSIS OF THE BORDER AREA

Top characteristics

- Italy and Switzerland share a long land border of 740 km right in the middle of the Alpine chain which represents a major physical obstacle to mobility in the area as well as a common asset of inestimable value. The border is also characterized by socio-economic, linguistic and cultural differences existing from the eastern to the western extreme of the border.

- The Italy-Switzerland (IT-CH) border is also an external EU border which adds a supplementary layer of complexity. In the 2015 Eurobarometer dedicated survey, legal and administrative obstacles are seen by 63% of the population as being substantial and providing important barriers to cross-border engagement, mobility and cooperation. This is the highest percentage on this indicator of all 54 borders surveyed.

- Overall, 4.43 million people live in the areas (3 Cantons and 9 Provinces) along the border, but they are quite unevenly distributed as 3.54 million live on the Italian side of the border and 0.89 on the Swiss side.

- As regard the general economic situation, the area is amongst the most developed in Europe with GDP per capita above the EU average. Swiss border regions perform better than the Italian ones (based on NUT2 level available data) where relevant differences exist (GDP per capita compared to the EU average ranges from 50% more in Bolzano to 4% more in Piemonte).

- However, looking at data on unemployment rates, population at risk of poverty and physical access to public services (notably health and education), it should be noted that inner peripheries exist in particular at the two ends of the border (Canton Valais/Piemonte/Valle d’Aosta and Bolzano/ Canton Graubünden-Grigioni).

- Cross-border commuting for work (essentially from Italy to Switzerland) is a relatively old phenomenon in the area. Nevertheless, in the last 15 years the number of registered commuters has increased to about 70,000 (the second highest number compared to other Swiss borders). This phenomenon is particularly relevant for Canton Ticino, where commuters represent around 28% of the total number of employees in the area, which raises concern. Indeed, the labour mobility seems to be a particularly sensitive issue on this border as reflected in the strong support (68%) to the Popular Initiative “Against mass immigration” recorded in Canton Ticino in 2014.
3. TERRITORIAL DIMENSION

• Typology of region

1. The IT-CH border region is essentially a mountain area whose development is strongly linked to the morphology and the environmental characteristics of the Alps. Population density varies greatly in the border region, with several areas with high population density (mainly on the Italian side) whilst others are well below the EU average. Both predominantly urban and predominantly rural areas exist, confirming the non-homogeneous profile of the cross-border region.

2. Population in the border area has been increasing since 2001 with more positive trends compared to national ones (see graph, below). This is mainly due to positive net migration, the natural change being stable or slightly negative on both sides of the border where ageing population is a common concern.

3. It is important to highlight that the immediate proximity to the metropolitan area of Milan (about 7.5 million inhabitants) and to a lesser extent of Turin (about 2.2 million), leads to a remarkably unbalanced situation as regard population density (well described in the picture below1 which provides information on population density and recent variations).

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1 “La frontiera e le mappe”, Evidenze demografiche e socioeconomiche tra Svizzera e Italia, 2010-14, Quaderno 1 - 2017
4. Inevitably, this has a strong impact on the economic and social dynamics of the border area characterised by this huge centripetal node surrounded by more sparsely populated areas on the Swiss and the two extremes sides of the border. Indeed, the largest share of the border region economy is held at 50% by Lombardia and 18% by Piemonte while Ticino represents 4%.

5. The map below which presents population density and road accessibility, clearly identifies the cross-border areas of development and mobility between Italy and Switzerland around the existing border crossings. It also shows the level of discontinuity existing from the French to the Austrian extremes of the border.
6. At the same time, the alpine environment represents a huge asset for the border area thanks to the rich biodiversity, the number of forests (one of the widest surface in Europe), the many surface and ground water sources (which feed some of the biggest rivers in Europe), the existing renewable energies (biomass and hydroelectric) and also the very specific ecosystems of glaciers. All these natural assets provide essential ecosystems services well beyond the border area.

7. Besides the existing many protected areas (Natura 2000, Ramsar, National Parks), the region presents an important cultural and historical heritage, including 8 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and famous traditional gastronomy and products. Combined with the good quality of services and accommodation capacities, these assets make of the border area a unique tourism destination. Overall, the Alps are the second most favoured holiday destination in Europe, after the Mediterranean Coast, and tourism provides 10-12% of jobs.

8. However, such an environment is also very fragile and particularly affected by pollution and climate change, but also by the unsustainable use of resources (as for mass tourism or industrial agriculture).

- **Functional areas**

9. The cross-border region is not strictly limited to the administrative borders of the programme but may have a flexible geography depending on the topic concerned and the required competence. For some topics, the solution can only be found if partners outside the current programme area are involved (e.g. to reduce the risks of floods, wetlands or dams upstream of a river but outside the programme area may be necessary; to test a new cross-border health service neighbouring regions or national authorities involvement may be required).
10. For some other topics, the solution is purely local, corresponding to an area much smaller than the programme (e.g. to increase forests connectivity). This is the general idea of a functional area and this is relevant to this border area that is surrounded by important metropolitan areas (as Milan, Zurich, Turin).

11. Problem-solving should be based on the functional areas rather than on the administrative scale defining the programme area (which is only used to define ERDF allocations). This requires the development of a strategic approach to think solutions in a wider context of multilevel governance and having always in mind the expected cross-border impact and benefit. This is a new approach in the post-2020 regulations and has three main benefits: (1) It enables the projects to be more effective as they can build on the experience of a wider range of relevant partners and as they can be located where the impact is bigger; (2) It clearly shows that Interreg is a policy tool supporting projects to improve the situation and not a mere funding tool for the benefit of local authorities sharing a budget; and (3) It avoids that programmes re-create new borders outside the programme geography.

12. On the IT-CH border, different functional areas could be identified either along the existing cross-border natural areas (i.e. forests, mountain belts, lakes or walking trails) or by topics of common relevance (i.e. ageing population, service accessibility in sparsely populated areas, innovation in agri-food sector, risks prevention and management, sustainable transports, etc.).

13. Natural sites and environmental concerns are better addressed with a holistic approach covering different needs and potentials. For instance, the creation in 2018 of a common consortium between relevant IT and CH authorities for the navigation of lakes Maggiore and Lugano opens up the opportunity to build a cross-border strategy to develop a common set of services for tourism but also commuters, enterprises, schools or for environment protection.

14. Another example could be the supply chain forest/wood which is a cross-border asset and concern. With a strategic approach, programme authorities could better connect the relevant stakeholders who manage and exploit the forests with high level R&D expertise which exists in and nearby the programme area with the aim to promote ecosystem based services, technology transfer and clustering activities. This could provide a lot more opportunities for innovation and development in sectors like renewable energy, construction, new materials, tourism, agri-food.

15. The programme strategy for the 2014-2020 programme already identified different areas where deficiencies and potentials could be better addressed with a systemic approach aimed at developing a “corporate” identity of the cross-border economy and facilitates the networking and integration of stakeholders across sectors. The future programme should build on that to identify main border obstacles, formulate clear priorities and propose a set of actions.
16. **Macro-regional Strategy**

Macro-regional strategies are supported by the highest political levels of the EU, the Member States and the regions concerned and have become an integral part of EU regional policy. The two levels of cooperation, macro-regional and cross-border, are very much interlinked by nature, hence, the 2021-2027 Interreg programmes should support those actions arising from the macro-regional strategies, under any relevant policy objective, provided they also contribute to the specific objectives of the cross-border region.

17. The IT-CH border area is covered by the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (Alpine Strategy) which focuses on objectives and concerns relevant also for cross-border cooperation. Coordination and mutual support should therefore be strengthened following the priorities identified for future investments. Competitiveness, labour market, mobility, preservation of the alpine landscapes and biodiversity, adaptation to climate change, promotion and use of renewable energies are all possible topics for potential synergies. Synergies with specific on-going projects could also be considered, (i.e. ARPAF project identifying solutions and models for cross-border mobility with a focus on daily commuting or Re-Search Alps gathering and providing data on laboratories and research and innovation centers in the alpine space to better support research and development processes).

18. The alignment of cross-border programmes to macro-regional strategies is a ‘win-win’ approach. Clearly, macro-regional strategies will benefit from the experience, the partners and the funds of cross-border programmes. But, cross-border programmes will also benefit from such an alignment as: (a) their impact will be bigger, when they participate in a structured development policy as set by a macro-regional strategy framework across a wider territory which they are part of; (b) the project pipeline will be better as project ideas will have political support); (c) they will increase visibility by political leaders, decision-makers and citizens, as well as the various Commission services and other EU institutions and of course (d) they will improve the social and economic development in the macro-region they are located in, and the actions of the relevant strategy will also have a positive impact on the cross-border area.

19. In particular, the contribution to macro-regional strategies does not mean a reduction of the budget available for the programme as it is clear that every project should also benefit to the cross-border functional area.

20. **Spatial planning and territorial tools**

Regulations of structural funds support innovative tools to improve the efficiency of territorial development like the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) for piloting integrated sets of measures, or the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) for strong bottom-up approach and others. In a nutshell, those instruments provide local authorities with a framework that help the adoption of a more strategic approach to investments in a context of multi-level stakeholder governance. The future cooperation programme may consider promoting these instruments in order to bring stability and long term perspective to identified functional areas or strategies.
21. Based on available information, two Working Communities (Communità di lavoro), ARGE-ALP and Regio Insubrica, support cross-border cooperation in the concerned IT-CH border area. Together with any other existing cross-border stakeholder (i.e. chambers of commerce), they could be relevant stakeholders to involve in the development of targeted strategies and actions.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

- Identify existing and potential functional areas and define priorities for further development in relevant sectors (as sustainable tourism, innovation, transports, etc.) and for relevant targets (as ageing population, SMES, workers commuters, etc.)

- Build targeted strategies involving relevant stakeholders to overcome specific obstacles and to develop relevant cooperation activities

- Explore the possibility of establishing joint territorial instruments to build and consolidate those strategies

- Coordinate with the existing macro-regional Alpine Strategy
4. GROWTH, COMPETITIVENESS AND CONNECTIVITY

• Innovation

22. In the "Regional Competitiveness Index" (RCI), the picture for the IT-CH border is incomplete as there is no data for Switzerland and the data for Italy is principally at NUT2 level. Similar data from the World Economic Forum’s "Global Competitiveness Index” (GCI) for Switzerland exist but only at national level. Considering the already mentioned strong differences between urban and rural areas, a more targeted data collection and analysis at regional and sub-regional level would be necessary to identify actual gaps and potentials together with possible complementarities and synergies.

23. Overall, subject to the caveat that comparative data on competitiveness was not available, there is a clear cross-border difference in terms of the levels of competitiveness. Switzerland has been ranked as the most competitive economy globally, whereas the Italian border regions overall are ranked as being slightly less competitive than the EU average. This being said, important differences exist in the area depending on specific indicators.

24. There are mixed conditions in the Italian border regions for supporting effective growth in competitiveness. Several of the regions perform very well on certain indicators, with health being rated very positively in all regions, good regional infrastructure levels in Lombardia and Piemonte (but below the EU average in Bolzano and Valle d’Aosta), relatively efficient labour markets in Bolzano, Valle d’Aosta and Lombardia and large regional markets in Lombardia, Piemonte and Bolzano. However, some issues and weaknesses have been identified such as poor institutional capacities, relatively unstable macroeconomic conditions and less than average educational performance.

25. Although perhaps less competitive than their neighbouring regions in Switzerland, all Italian border regions are assessed, based on the ESPON territorial Review, as either already having a Knowledge Economy or as having potential for the development of the Knowledge Economy. In terms of trends it should be noted that RCI changes between 2010 and 2016 show that the situation has deteriorated in Lombardia and Piemonte and improved in Valle d’Aosta and Bolzano.

26. In terms of human resources it is worth mentioning the existing data on education and employment. The Regional Competitiveness Index (RCI) ratings on "higher education and lifelong learning" show that all Italian border regions score below the EU average of 63. Lombardia and Bolzano have the highest scores at 52, followed by Piemonte at 49 and Valle d’Aosta at 44. On the indicator of "higher education and training" Switzerland was rated 4th globally and 3rd in Europe in the GCI, whilst Italy was rated 43rd globally and 20th in the EU.

27. With regard to the levels of R&D researchers in the total number of persons employed, general data (at NUTS 2 level in Italy and at the national level in Switzerland) show again a clear cross-border difference with the Italian regions all being below the EU average level, whilst Switzerland is above the EU average.
28. The 2014-2020 IT-CH programme strategy also observe the presence in the concerned Swiss Cantons of high rates of knowledge-intensive workforce and sectors (districts of Lugano and Bellinzona in Ticino, district of Visp and Mothey in Canton Valais, district of Prättigau/Davos in Canton Grigioni).

29. In terms of levels of patent applications as an indicator of innovation capacity, data is available at NUTS 3 level for both Italy and Switzerland and confirm the general trend: the highest two performing regions in terms of patent applications are both Swiss regions with Graubünden-Grigioni, at almost three-times the level of the EU average and Ticino at around 2.7 times the EU average level. Only three of the ten Italian border NUTS3 regions are above the EU average and only slightly: Varese (24% above the EU average), Bolzano (18% above the EU average) and Lecco (4% above the EU average). All other Italian border regions are below the EU average, and five at less than 50% of the EU average.

30. As regard the R&D capacity, the cross-border area counts a high number of universities, research centres and professional schools of high quality, with an already existing tradition of cooperation for research, education and training between Switzerland and Italy.

31. Nevertheless, that potential seems still underexploited by local enterprises. The RCI in fact shows that "business sophistication" ratings (measuring the degree to which SMEs are involved in innovation co-operations with other firms and/or research bodies) are above the EU average of 37 in two Italian border regions (Lombardia at 47 and Piemonte at 43) and below the EU average in two other regions (Valle d’Aosta at 31 and Bolzano at 27). On this indicator Switzerland was rated number one globally in the GCI, with Italy rated 25th globally and 12th in the EU.

32. There are Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies at NUTS2 level in the Italian border regions. Besides, the action group on "Economic competitiveness and Innovation" of the Alpine Strategy works on the implementation of smart specialisation strategies on-going in the concerned regions and cooperates with the S3Platform to support Regional Innovation ecosystems.

33. Common areas of interest, in principle relevant for Swiss regions as well, are visible in sectors linked to the mountain economy like tourism, cultural and creative industry, renewable energy, agriculture and food production, ICT and services digitisation. The future cooperation programme could identify specialisation areas for the development of cross-border synergies or clustering, having in mind that innovation is not limited to high technology and research activities but could also touch production processes or organisational patterns in relevant supply chains.

- Enterprises/entrepreneurship

34. As regard the sectoral focus and employment structure, the available sources provide a rather incomplete picture with no data on the Swiss side and incomplete data for the NUTS2 Italian regions.
35. Overall, the border area is characterized by a predominance of SMEs and microbusinesses, notably on the Italian side. Overall, the current programme area is characterised by the predominant relevance of the services sector which provides about 70% of the total GVA (Gross Value Added) for the area.

36. For the sectoral breakdown of employment in Piemonte, Valle d’Aosta and Lombardia, it can be noted that the highest share of employment is in manufacturing (24% of the total), followed by retail trade and accommodation-food services (both above 11%), then construction and services (both around 10% of the total). Professional, scientific and technical activities have a smaller share with less than 9% of the total employment on average.

37. Based on the strategy of the current cooperation programme 2014-2020, it is clear that the sector of tourism is particularly relevant in all areas. The number of employees in hotels and restaurants is particularly high for Bolzano (almost 20% of total employees) and Valle d’Aosta (16%) but also for Graubünden (15%).

- **Digitisation**

38. In terms of digitisation in government and in business, information used for drafting this paper is only available at national level or absent (for Switzerland). Therefore, it is not possible to make any informed observations with regard to the situation at regional level in the cross-border region. However, some national trends can be noted to sketch the most likely situation in border regions and the potential area for investments.

39. In terms of digitisation in both government and in businesses, the picture in Italy is generally negative with digitisation performance at or below the EU average in almost all areas. The only exception to this is the relatively positive performance on the delivery of eHealth services.

40. In terms of user characteristics, Italy is rated as low on both "IT Usage" and "Digital Skills” and data at NUTS2 on the levels of interaction via internet with public authorities show that all the Italian regions are well below the EU average. Similarly, as regards "e-commerce" related indicators and the share of GDP spent on ICT, Italy is one of the worst performers in the EU.

41. Regarding Switzerland, a recent study\(^2\) suggests that although Switzerland is recognized as one of the world’s most competitive economies, the country is less advanced for its information technology sector and e-Government is relatively underdeveloped and represents an untapped opportunity for the administration and the economy. The report notes also that digital literacy and readiness should be promoted through dedicated programmes.

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• Connectivity

42. While in terms of physical obstacles, the Border Needs Study classifies the Italy – Switzerland border as having "more physical obstacles than average", the transport connectivity is assessed as being very good in terms of road connectivity and above average in terms of rail connections, compared to other border. This apparent contradiction reflect the already mentioned (in chapter 3) high level of geographical discontinuity as well as the uneven population density along the border area.

43. Actually, parts of the areas immediately at, or close to, the eastern and western ends of IT-CH border are assessed as having relatively poor road accessibility. Accordingly, several of these areas have been identified in ESPON Territorial Review as "inner peripheries" with significantly poorer access to regional centres than neighbouring regions in Switzerland and Italy.

44. With regard to the percentage of the population having access to cross-border rail services assessed by the Border Needs Study, a significant divergence exists between Italy (at10-25%) and Switzerland (above 75%).

45. In terms of perceptions of accessibility (linked to both geographical barriers and transport infrastructure), this is seen as an obstacle to cross-border cooperation by 49% of respondents in the Italy – Switzerland border region. This figure is the highest percentage of all 54 EU border regions surveyed by Eurobarometer, and could be explained by the increasing concerns for congestion problems and bottlenecks in the existing corridors of European relevance and in areas of daily commuting.

46. The current cooperation programme strategy identified sustainable transport, increased inter-modality and improved services for public transport, as priorities for investments while cooperation on infrastructure for rail notably is covered by existing bilateral agreement (i.e. “Dichiarazione di Intenti” signed between Italy and Switzerland in 2012, including Piattaforma Luino e Piattaforma Sempione).

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<td>- Identify common priority areas and existing innovation drivers to promote cross-border strategy (in line with cross-border functional areas identified and with smart specialisation strategies)</td>
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<td>- Focus on targeted services to SME, including digital-based ones, to promote enterprise networking, cross-border clustering, upgrading skills, technology transfer, internationalisation</td>
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<td>- Invest in eGovernment solutions that facilitate the daily life of citizens and focus on the priority for investments identified (i.e. silver economy, labour market, tourism, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Support alternative and sustainable mobility solutions to improve inter-modality and to address cross-border accessibility concerns notably, in peripheral areas</td>
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5. GREENER, LOW CARBON ECONOMY

• **Energy transition**

47. In terms of renewable energy, available information for the area shows that there is potential in solar and hydro power on both sides of the border. In addition, there is good potential for biomass (from straw and, to a lesser extent wood) in the Italian border regions.

48. However, the relatively high investments costs rates in Italy (WACC, weighted average cost of capital, is at 7-9%) could be a disincentive for investments. Therefore, cross-border cooperation to support renewable energies does not seem to be a priority.

• **Circular economy**

49. In terms of waste generation and management, data is only available at the national level (for Italy). Overall, Italy performs better or in line with EU averages as regard waste generation (except for hazardous waste in Italy), recycling and disposal, but 2030 Circular Economy targets are still far and would need to be promoted.

50. On the assumption that the border regions are in line with national levels of performance, the needs of investments to improve the situation could be substantial. Nevertheless, considering the high investments costs required for waste management infrastructures and the different governance systems in place, the possibility as well as the opportunity to address this issue at cross-border level seems rather limited.

51. However, specific needs of cross-border relevance may exist in relation to waste generated by tourism which could be particularly harmful to regional ecosystems. Common approaches to promote waste prevention and the use of recycled products as well as to raise awareness could be therefore considered.

• **Climate adaptation and risk management**

52. Based on current available estimations (for Italy only), the Italian border regions show *medium to high environmental sensitivity to climate change*. Global warming and expected estimations of drought conditions would have a very high impact on public water supply and quality, on snowfalls and melting of glaciers. The overall consequences for the ecosystem services delivered in the Alpine environment can therefore be quite disruptive.

53. The figure below (from the 2018 *ISPRA*³ report) shows the existing high level risk of floods (dark blue) and landslides (red-brown) in some border areas. The report provides also estimation of population, industries, services and cultural assets at risk of being damaged.

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³ Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e Ricerca Ambientale)
Considering that the environmental landscape and the natural protected areas are a unique asset, developing synergies in risks prevention capacities and preparedness to disaster management across the border should be a shared concern due to the cross-border relevance.

In this respect, the Commission adopted an EU strategy on GI in 2013 to enhance economic benefits by attracting greater investment in Europe’s natural capital. GIs are strategically planned networks of natural and semi-natural areas with environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services. They incorporate green spaces and other physical features in terrestrial and marine areas. In certain sectors, in particular climate change mitigation and adaptation, GI approaches can offer complementary or more sustainable alternatives than those provided through conventional civil engineering. As GIs do not know borders and as they require a good planning with many stakeholders, they can be supported through Interreg programmes where appropriate (e.g. cross-border flood plains to prevent flood risks).
• **Natural areas and biodiversity protection**

56. The index of natural and protected areas in the Italy – Switzerland border region is very high. There is a number of Natura 2000 sites, both Habitats Directive sites and Bird Directive sites, in the Italian border regions, as well as several "ramsar" sites (internationally important wetland sites), on both sides of the border. Forest connectivity is also very high, although landscape fragmentation is significant in some areas.

57. The European Environment Agency has identified several important cross-border habitats for the bear, the lynx and the wolf in the border region and in general it has been assessed that the border region has many areas of high wilderness quality and even some areas (in the Italian border regions) that are within the top 10% of wild areas in Europe on the Wilderness Quality Index.

58. There are many rivers and water bodies, including substantial cross-border water bodies, in the Italy – Switzerland border region. In terms of water quality, although data was only available for Italy, the percentage of classified water bodies that are affected by points and/or diffuse pollution pressures, as well as the percentage of classified water bodies having less than good ecological status or potential (i.e. not having "good chemical status") are at a mid-level.

59. Overall, evidence in relation to natural environments and habitats in the IT-CH border is a call to cross-border approaches for shared management, protection and stewardship of the high level of natural resources, including a number of water bodies. Future cooperation activities should in particular consider the high potential for landscape connectivity, green infrastructure networks and cross-border ecosystem services delivery.

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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Map the actual level of vulnerability of the cross-border areas (including the Swiss side), as well as the existing disaster management capacities, to identify priorities and define cross-border strategies for climate change adaptation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Promote shared approaches to the management of protected areas along the border to increase water quality and forest interconnectivity</strong></td>
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<td>- <strong>Support the development and coordinated management of Green Infrastructures and improved ecosystem services</strong></td>
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<td>- <strong>Explore the possibility of using territorial tools (cf. previous chapter 3) to promote and consolidate cross-border strategies for environment protection and management</strong></td>
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6. EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND INCLUSION

• Employment

60. Unemployment rates are higher in the Italian border regions, particularly in Piemonte, Valle d’Aosta (both above the EU average of 7.6%) but also Lombardia, than in the Swiss border regions (where the highest rate is in Canton Valais at 3.8%). Similar trends and discrepancies between Italy and Switzerland are reported for long-term unemployment rates as well as for employment rates (above 82% in CH and between 60 to 75% depending on the IT region concerned). As regard youth unemployment rates, defined as the share of unemployed people aged 15-24 years, performance at NUT2 level shows a less important gap can be observed between IT and CH, notably in Canton Valais and Ticino that have similar scores to Italian regions.

61. Labour productivity (measured by Gross Value Added per person employed), is generally higher than the EU average, with Swiss border regions performing better than the Italian ones.

62. Cross-border labour mobility is a relevant phenomenon (about 70 000 cross-border commuters), that has increased over the past 15/20 years, especially towards Canton Ticino. Whereas in principle cross-border mobility has many benefits (reduce unemployment, increase activity in enterprises, keep people in the region, etc.), it raises concerns and negative opinion on this border and it is clearly a source of tensions between the concerned stakeholders and local authorities.

63. Such mobility touches many dimensions from the recognition of skills/ qualifications/diplomas, social security, pensions, taxations, transport, etc. that can only be tackled through reinforced cooperation. Accompanying measures to labour mobility (as communication and information exchanges, trainings, dedicated services to citizens and organisations, administrative agreements), without removing all existing legal obstacles, could mitigate their negative effects.

• Education

64. On educational indicators, there is limited areas comparative data available at regional level. However, where data exists it indicates that educational performance is better in the Swiss border regions than in the Italian border regions (which are also ranked relatively low in comparison with EU averages). This gap between the two countries is also shown by ratings for educational indicators on the Regional Competitiveness Indicators (for IT) and Global Competitiveness Indicators (for CH).

65. On the rate of working-age people with tertiary educational attainment (levels 5-8), the three Swiss regions of Région Lémanique (at 41%), Ticino (at 36%) and Ostschweiz (at 35%) are all above the EU average of 31%. The Italian border regions are all well below the EU average, in a range from 16% to 19%.
66. In terms of physical access (by car) to education (i.e. travel to primary and secondary schooling) there are large parts of the border region, particularly in the areas at the western and eastern ends, that have been identified as having relatively poor access to both primary and secondary schooling.

67. Several universities offer opportunities to access higher education. Cooperation activities could therefore more strategically support the coordination between enterprise and these universities located within the cross-border region to match the cross-border labour market’s current needs and also the potential of future developments in relevant sectors for innovation strategies (i.e. like biodiversity, agri-food, ICTs, tourism). Similarly, vocational training could also be better targeted to these needs and potentials.

68. Investments in education and training with cross-border relevance should in principle promote the objective of bi/multiilinguism. Whereas language is often seen as a barrier, the ability to speak foreign languages is a strong asset to boost employability and mobility of workers and to increase competitiveness of labour markets. Cross-border areas, where bilingual population already exists, have great potential to capitalise on. This is particularly evident in the IT-CH border where at least 3 main languages are spoken (French, Italian and German) but language differences, based on the Eurobarometer survey, are seen as problematic, particularly in the Italian side.

69. In a long term perspective, cross-border initiatives promoting bilingualism should invest in new generations and target children at early stage of their education.

• Health

70. There are some differences in the age profile of the populations in the border regions, with the Italian border regions generally having an older population (less aged under 65, more aged over 65) than their neighbouring regions in Switzerland and also in comparison with EU averages.

71. The 2014-2020 IT-CH programme strategy also observe the existence of a general growing trend (with identified differences between concerned territories) of the ageing population rate coupled by a growing trend of the dependency ratio (measuring the proportion between inactive and active age-populations).

72. In terms of health outcomes, life expectancy at birth is higher than the EU average of 81 years in all of the border regions on both sides of the border (in a range from 83 to 84 years).

73. In terms of physical access (by car) to health services, there are large parts of the border region, particularly in the areas at the western and eastern ends, that have been identified as having relatively poor access to medical services (doctors and hospitals). Cooperation initiatives may target potential synergies of care facilities, e-Health measures, exchange of knowledge on targeted categories of population (aged) or diseases, but could also consider measures for patient mobility and support to the development of potential for "silver economy".
• **Inclusion**

74. In respect of social factors such as poverty, social exclusion, severe material deprivation, low work intensity in households, the available NUTS 2 level data provide a picture of border regions at similar level or slightly better than the EU average, with the already noticed non homogeneous areas.

75. On "people at risk of poverty or social exclusion" the levels are below the EU average of 24% in all but one of the regions. The highest rate, and the only region which is above the EU average, is Ticino (CH) at 33%, followed by Piemonte (IT) at 23%, Lombardia (IT), Valle d’Aosta (IT) and Région Lémanique (CH) all at 20%, Ostschweiz (CH) at 16% and Bolzano (IT) with the lowest rate at 10%.

76. There is a significant cross-border difference in the numbers of people living in severe material deprivation. In Switzerland all regions are substantially below the EU average of 10%: Région Lémanique is at 1.9%, Ticino at 1.1% and Ostschweiz at 1.9%. The rates are much higher in Italy, although still mainly below the EU average. Piemonte has the highest rate at 10.2%, followed by Valle d’Aosta at 7.3%, Lombardia at 6.1% and Bolzano at 2.4%.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

- Map existing labour shortage in identified sectors of priority for cross-border development and promote synergies between universities and vocational schools to propose new professional opportunities

- Develop a strategic approach to support cross-border healthcare (starting with the identification of potential functional areas and synergies, major obstacles to cooperation between service providers and to patient mobility);

- Create the basis to promote bilingualism in a structured manner, targeting labour market potential needs but also including basic education.

- Promote information services to raise awareness and facilitate cross-border mobility and access to public services in sectors close to citizens’ needs (like labour market, education, patient mobility for care) to increase attractiveness of the area
7. GOVERNANCE

Section 1: Cross-Border Governance in a wider context (and use of the new "Interreg Governance" specific objective)

77. Cross-border cooperation is not limited to Interreg programmes. It also builds on policies (e.g. cross-border mobility), on legal instruments (e.g. bi-lateral agreements, treaties, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation) and on funding (including but not limited to Interreg). Actions and orientations set out in this section may be supported by using part of the programme’s budget as proposed in the ETC (Interreg) Regulation for improving governance issues.

78. The 2014-2020 IT-CH programme already identified the need to strengthen the administrative capacity of involved authorities and to harmonise the legal and administrative framework in order to consolidate cooperation in a long-term term perspective. A substantial part of the funding was therefore earmarked under a specific priority axes (i.e. competitiveness and internationalisation of SMEs, management of natural resources, services accessibility, sustainable transports) to promote capacity building and cross-border integration between relevant institutions.

79. Nevertheless, while there seems to be a good bottom-up dynamics of cooperation at local level between Swiss and Italian partners, the institutional dialogue within the programme bodies seems to increasingly suffer from tensions and lack of shared understanding and approaches. This undermines the capacity of the programme bodies to implement top-down governance strategies. For instance, under the 2014-2020 programme, it was decided to provide support only to standard projects (with a more limited scope and budget) and to exclude any support to strategic ones.

80. As a result, despite the decided strategy to invest in systemic interventions and cross-border governance in priority sectors for the programme, the authorities involved were finally not able to agree on a project pipeline and the allocation for this axis has been drastically decreased. To avoid similar situation in the future, and considering time and efforts required to work on capacity building and cross-border governance, the programme authorities should establish dedicated working tables to identify beforehand a set of actions to be included in the future programme so that implementation can start soon after programme approval.

• Working on border obstacles and potential

81. As illustrated in the Commission Communication "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions", there are many different types of obstacles to cross-border cooperation. There is also scope for greater sharing of services and resources in cross-border regions and to intensify the cooperation between citizens and institutions. Among the obstacles, legal, administrative and differences in institutional capacity are a major source of bottlenecks. Other issues include the use of different languages or lack of public transport for instance. When it comes to unused potential, the shared use of health care or educational facilities could contribute greatly to improving the quality of life in border regions. As the Interreg programmes are instrumental to effective cross-border cooperation, they should seek to address these particular obstacles and tap the common potential to facilitate cooperation in this wider context.
82. Although based on estimations, the study "Quantification of the effect of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions" assessed the percentages of GDP loss at NUTS 3 level due to sub-optimal or insufficient use of regional growth assets (like agglomeration economies, productive capacity, accessibility or trust). The estimated loss ranges from 7.6 to 18% of NUTS3 GDP of the concerned areas between Italy and Switzerland (see map below). The potential for economic growth is therefore very significant and certainly deserves further analysis of the specific causes to shape targeted solutions for the next programming period.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

- **Identify the key obstacles to a more effective use of the existing regional growth assets as well as the untapped potentials for cross-border cooperation**
- **Encourage the development of strategic approaches to tackle identified border obstacles and involving relevant stakeholder based on the idea of functional areas**
- **Organise and support institutional dialogue bringing the relevant actors together (e.g. authorities at national/ regional/ local levels, enterprises, users, cross-borders bodies, etc.) to work on the development of capacity building and cross-border governance projects**
- **Create framework conditions and processes facilitating the identification of solutions and of leverage factors (e.g. by funding meetings, independent experts' evaluations, pilot projects for small scale testing, etc.).**
• **Links with existing strategies**

83. Cross-border cooperation cannot be done in isolation. It has to be **framed in existing strategies** (e.g. macro-regional, national, regional or sectoral). Ideally, there should be a dedicated cross-border strategy which is based on reliable data for cross-border regions, which is politically supported and which has undergone a wide consultation with relevant stakeholders. It can be a useful exchange forum and a necessary step for sustainable and structural cooperation (i.e. a Monitoring Committee is not sufficient as its focus is on funding and not on designing a development strategy with strong political support).

84. IT-CH border seem to be covered by different and only partially overlapping strategic frameworks, from the Italy-Swiss bilateral diplomatic relations (including dialogue on cross-border cooperation), the ARGE-ALP Working Community on the eastern German-speaking side of the border, to the recently signed Roadmap between Canton Ticino and Lombardia. They all aim at improving policy coordination and develop common approaches in economic, cultural, environmental domains.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

*Explore the possibility to develop an overall cross-border strategy in coordination with existing macro-regional, national, regional or sectoral strategies. This requires a coherent overview and mapping of all existing strategies affecting the border area and the identification of the most appropriate territorial scope for building such strategy (i.e. such cross-border strategy may cover the IT-CH border area in its full length or sub-areas attached to France on the one side and to Austria on the other side may also be considered)*

• **Role of existing cross-border organisations**

85. Several regions have cross-border entities which can be established under EU law (e.g. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation – EGTC), national law (e.g. private law associations or public law bodies) or international law (e.g. under bilateral agreements). Euroregions, Associations or Working Communities (such as Regio Insubrica) are possible examples.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

*Build on legitimacy, experience and expertise of relevant existing cross-border organisations. Where they are a legal body, they could play a role e.g. by managing a Small Projects Fund or by managing strategic projects (as sole beneficiary, in particular for the EGTCs).*

• **Links with other Cohesion policy programmes**

86. The proposed Common Provisions Regulation stipulates that “each programme shall set out, for each specific objective the interregional and transnational actions with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State”. Whilst a similar provision is already present in the current Regulation, it is now proposed to become **compulsory for the mainstream programmes** to describe the possibilities for cooperation for each specific objective.
87. It means that if mainstream programmes do not plan such cooperation actions, they will have to justify the reason. Cooperation may have many benefits for cross-border areas: more ambitious projects (e.g. joint infrastructures), involvement of new players (e.g. the national authorities such as Ministries) and overall more ambitious policies (e.g. spatial planning with associated funds).

88. Similarly, coordination with existing national and regional strategic policy frameworks on Swiss side should also be tackled when designing cross-border cooperation strategy for post 2020. Looking at the New Regional Policy of the Confederation (covering also border areas) for the period 2016-2023, there is a strong potential for synergies. Cross-border cooperation is clearly supported, in particular to promote innovation (i.e. the Technopole Ticino and ALPlastic cluster project) and tourism.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

Establish (or participate to) a strong coordination mechanism with the authorities managing mainstream programmes. This coordination implies exchange of information and cooperation and should happen at all stages: planning (e.g. designing complementarities), implementation (e.g. building on synergies and avoiding double or inefficient investments) and communication (showing the benefits for the citizens and the region).

• **Cross-border data**

89. Decision-making to make infrastructural investments and to design effective public policies for their optimised use (e.g. spatial planning) should be based on evidence (i.e. data, studies, mapping). Whilst this is generally available at national level, it is not always the case at regional/local level and even less at cross-border local level. Some of this evidence is particularly important to identify actual needs and potential cross-border synergies/complementarities: economic flows, types of cross-border mobility and trends, mapping of existing competences, infrastructures and services by relevant sector (such as education, energy, healthcare, support to SMEs, etc.), mapping of vulnerable areas by type of risk (floods, fires, etc.), and/or vulnerable categories (marginalised communities, elderly etc.).

**ORIENTATIONS:**

- Identify the areas where important cross-border data on the IT-CH border is missing in relation with identified border obstacles and needs and with strategic priorities for cross-border investments.

- Support projects that would fill that gap at the latest by 2027 (e.g. in cooperation with national statistical offices, by supporting regional data portals etc.) and projects that pave the way to proper cross—border monitoring of data, trends and impacts.
Section 2: Governance of programme

90. The implementation of the 2014-2020 programme showed some dysfunctionalities in the governance of the programme, notably as regard the actual operation of programme management bodies and projects selection. Those aspects (further described below) revealed some unsolved tensions and conflicting approaches to cooperation between the involved authorities. They clearly should be analysed and tackled to avoid similar problems in the future programme settings.

• Financial performance

91. The implementation of 2014-2020 IT-CH programme had a quite slow take-off: first selection of projects was delayed by long and difficult discussions on the admissibility of few proposals, reflecting a weakness in the definition of admissibility/selection criteria but more generally also a lack of common vision between the Italian and Swiss representatives on the use of bottom-up and top-down approaches to investments.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

*Undertake a systematic analysis of the key factors having a potential negative impact on programme kick-off and implementation pace and take targeted mitigating measures to accelerate the programme implementation for this new programming period. Where appropriate, technical assistance can be used for developing a roadmap for administrative capacity building with defined activities.*

• Partnership principle

92. The principle of partnership is a key feature covering the whole programme cycle (including preparation, implementation and participation in monitoring committees), building on the multi-level governance approach and ensuring the involvement of economic, social and environmental partners. Examples of good practice include involving representatives of different interests in the programming process; involving them in programme evaluation or other strategic long-term tasks for instance by setting up temporary working groups; consulting all members on key documents also between meetings. An active involvement of economic, social and environmental partners should be ensured by their participation in key steps. Technical Assistance can also be made available to facilitate their full involvement in the process.

• Role of the monitoring committee

93. The monitoring committee is the strategic decision-making body of the programme. In 2021-2027 the monitoring committee of IT-CH programme should be given a more prominent role in supervising programme performance.

94. **The composition of the monitoring committee** must be representative for the respective cross-border area. It must also include partners relevant to programme objectives, e.g. institutions or organisations representing environment, research, SMEs,
civil society, etc. When the programme is relevant for the development of a macro-regional strategy, macro-regional key stakeholders should also be regular members of the monitoring committee of the programme.

95. Currently, in absence of an enlarged partnership including thematic and professional organisations and also other possible territorial organisations (like association of municipalities of mountain communities, or cross-border organisations) as active and voting members in the monitoring committee, there is a clear overlapping between the memberships of monitoring committee (MC), steering committee (SC) and joint secretariat (JS). This clearly dilute the added value of the different programme bodies which are basically made up of the same institutions and sometimes the same individuals. As a result, the strategic scope and function of the MC seems quite limited to the endorsement of decisions already taken under the SC.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

- Boost strategic guidance of monitoring committee besides project selection. The future IT-CH programme monitoring committee is invited to widen its scope of action and take on a more strategic role (i.e. including dedicated strategic points in the agenda point, inviting contact points of institutions playing a key role in the border area, organising project visit)

- Promote strategic thematic discussions to cover relevant horizontal issues and deficiency to be tackled (i.e. identified border obstacles, cross-border data needs, participation of specific target groups/beneficiaries of the programme)

- Encourage an enlarged participation of civil society representatives to programme monitoring as well as relevant organisations in relation to programme objectives and priority (support to capacity building through TA support may be considered)

- Establish a clear distinction of membership rules and functions between relevant programme bodies (MC, SC, JS)

96. **Project selection** shall in principle take place in the monitoring committee or in steering committee(s) established under the monitoring committee in full respect of the partnership principle. It is crucial that key stakeholders are involved in the project selection process. **Selection criteria** and their application must be non-discriminatory and transparent. They should also be clear and they must enable the assessment of whether projects correspond to the objectives and the strategy of the programme. They are to be consulted with the Commission and communicated to applicants in a clear and systematic way. The cross-border dimension should be compulsory in every selected project.

97. The programme might consider the use of independent expert panels for preparation of project selection. In case of "in house" assessment, **mechanisms that ensure independence of the assessors and a clear separation of duties between programme bodies must be implemented** (see below on JS). For instance, the Joint secretariat could be charged of projects assessment while the Monitoring Committee is charged of the approval of the project selection, provided that the members in JS are functionally independent from the authorities sitting in Monitoring and Steering Committees.
98. Larger strategic projects / flagship projects (i.e. designed and implemented by public authorities without a call) may be pre-defined in the programme document or selected via a transparent and agreed procedure. It is up to each programme partnership to decide on the optimal balance between different types of projects required to achieve the overall programme objectives, such as flagship projects, projects embedded in the relevant macro-regional strategy, regular projects, projects selected through bottom-up or top-down procedures, small projects, etc.

99. Under 2014-2020 programme, the IT-CH programme authorities decided not to support strategic projects and cross-border integrated plans as for 2007-2013 programme. The experience was not considered encouraging but it is not clear why it was not possible to revise and mitigate any the negative elements without abandoning the possibility to support some strategic investments.

100. It should also be noticed that first open call for proposals covered about 80% of the available allocations. While the advantage to speed up funds absorption is clear, such “concentrated” approach has also some disadvantages. First, having for some priority axis only one call during a 7 years programming period is not a strong incentive for mobilizing potentially interested beneficiaries, especially the smaller ones. Secondly, this limit the resources available for any needed adjustment to the programme objectives and targets by the programme authorities, again reducing the strategic role of the Monitoring Committee. A more balanced approach may be considered in the future programme.

101. Decision-making must also be non-discriminatory and transparent. The procedure should also be inclusive. Each monitoring (or steering) committee member shall have a vote. Voting by delegation should not be encouraged unless it is transparent and puts weaker partners at equal footing with "institutional" partners.

<table>
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<th>ORIENTATIONS:</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Explore the possibility to implement strategic investments through dedicated project pipeline and selection process</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ensure the effectiveness and transparency of the project selection, reporting and monitoring systems. The use of Interact's Harmonised Implementation Tools and electronic monitoring system (eMs) is recommended, if relevant</td>
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• Role of the managing authority

102. The managing authority shall ensure effective implementation of the programme. The managing authority is also at the service of the programme and its monitoring committee. It acts as the programme authority representing all countries participating in the programme.

103. Therefore, it is recommended that the Member State hosting the programme authorities is represented in the monitoring committee separately from the managing authority (i.e. a different person). The managing authority shall ensure the effectiveness and transparency of the project selection, reporting and monitoring systems.
• **Role of the Joint Secretariat**

104. The Joint Secretariat (JS) should ideally be the cross-border executive body of the programme at the service of the managing authority. It should consist of professional and independent staff from the participating countries. The JS should possess representative linguistic competence and relevant border country knowledge. Its procedures should be efficient and transparent. Communication with beneficiaries, potential applicants and the general public should be ensured mainly by the JS. **Regional contact points/antennas** operating directly under the JS’ responsibility may be useful in border areas characterised by large distances and/or difficult accessibility.

105. Based on available information, under the current IT-CH 2014-2020 programme settings, part of the staff in the JS is functionally and directly linked to the programme authorities sitting in SC and MC and was precisely nominated to represent its belonging authority in the JS. This is not in line with the principle of clear separation of duties.

• **Trust-building measures**

106. Effective cross-border cooperation requires a good level of trust between partners. Overall, the IT-CH programme in its current governance settings, has shown inadequate level of trust between the stakeholders involved in the programme bodies reflecting several levels of tensions which undermine the effectiveness of programme bodies (i.e. different regulations and administrative cultures; top-down vs bottom-up approaches to programme management; unclear separation of duties in projects selection).

107. Trust-building is also a long-term investment which aims at fostering cooperation-minded future generations. The Interreg programmes can make a substantial contribution by providing financial support for trust-building activities such as linking up schools, sports clubs, cultural organisations, etc. The beneficiaries of such activities are often not equipped to manage full-blown Interreg projects.

**ORIENTATIONS:**

Promote trust building putting in place mechanisms to finance small or people-to-people projects that make a strong contribution to the social and civil cohesion of the cross-border region. This can be done using the new tool proposed by the Commission (the Small Projects Fund) or via specific calls managed by the Managing Authority itself.

• **Conflict of interest**

108. Conflict of interest between decision-making bodies and applicants and beneficiaries is to be avoided at any moment, including project generation, project preparation, project selection and project implementation. One way to avoid this is to ensure a proper segregation of duties between institutions and persons.
• **Communication and publicity**

109. Appropriate actions and measures in line with the Communication Guidelines need to be taken by all involved authorities and beneficiaries, such as the identification of a communication officer per programme, the establishment of a website per programme and use of the term "Interreg" next to the emblem of the EU. Responsible authorities are encouraged to explore the possibilities to receive targeted funding under the Interreg Volunteers Youth Initiative, by which budget has been made available for citizens engagement activities. In case the programme is financing the implementation of a macro-regional project, the logo of the respective macro-region should be added. Thereby, opportunities will be created for further promotion of the project through the macro-regional platforms and networks, where relevant.
Existing sources of information

- Border needs study (Commission, 2016) – Collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes - Regional Policy - European Commission


- Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions (Commission, 2016) – quantification of the effects of legal and administrative obstacles in land border regions - Bing

- Easing legal and administrative obstacles (Commission, 2017) – Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions - Regional Policy - European Commission


- DG SANTE's study on cross-border health care Building Cooperation in Cross-border Healthcare: new study published! | FUTURIUM | European Commission

- ESPON's Targeted Analysis on Cross-Border Public Services CPS - Cross-border Public Services | ESPON

- Territorial Cooperation for the future of Europe – ESPON contribution to the debate on Cohesion Policy post 2020, 2017

- Smart Specialisation Strategies – http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/

- Strategy of the 2014-2020 programme Italy-Switzerland Cooperation Programme