



Cross Border Information Services in Europe and in Ireland/Northern Ireland: *Border People Information Service*

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Freedom of movement

More than one third of EU citizens live in cross-border regions.¹ For many individuals crossing the border for work, to visit family, to shop, for leisure, to study or to retire is a natural occurrence.

Since its inception the EU has facilitated cross-border mobility. For workers, this freedom has existed since the foundation of the European Community in 1957. Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union² enshrines:

- the right to accept offers of employment in another Member State
- the right to move freely within the territory of Member States for this purpose;
- the right to stay in a Member State for the purpose of employment ;
- the right, subject to conditions, to remain in a Member State after having been employed there;
- the right to equal treatment in respect of access to employment, working conditions and all other advantages which could help to facilitate the worker's integration in the host Member State.

Alongside implementing legislation that secures free movement of workers, the EU also protects workers by providing legislation on for example social security co-ordination and safeguards for the rights of posted workers.³ Despite these efforts there remain many well documented obstacles to mobility encountered by citizens and frontier workers.

*A frontier worker is someone who is employed in a Member State but resides in another, where he/she returns at least once a week.*⁴ EU Commission

¹ Opinion of the Committee of the Regions *Frontier workers: assessment of the situation after twenty years of the internal market: problems and perspectives* 2013, July

² Free movement of workers is a fundamental principle of the Treaty enshrined in Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

³ www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/freemovementofworkers.htm

⁴ www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/frontierworkers.htm

On 16 April 2014 the European Commission confirmed the adoption of Directive 2014/54/EU which aims to remove existing obstacles to the free movement of workers, such as the lack of awareness of EU rules among public and private employers and the difficulties faced by mobile citizens to get information and assistance in the host Member States.

The Directive will ensure the better application at national level of EU Citizens' right to work in another Member State. The new rules aim to remove existing barriers to the free movement of workers, by providing **access to information, providing advice and support, and legal assistance where necessary**. Member States have until April 2016 to implement the Directive at national level.⁵

Cross-border obstacles to free movement

The 2012 AEBR report⁶ on *information services for cross-border workers* highlights some key obstacles to mobility found in numerous EU border regions. They include:

- Absence of information or insufficient information
- Differences between social care and tax systems
- Cultural differences
- Lack of mutual recognition of qualifications

These are comparable to cross-border obstacles identified in Ireland / Northern Ireland by the Border People project⁷, managed by the Centre for Cross Border Studies. They include:

- Lack of awareness
- Lack of clear information
- Differences in social welfare
- Complex tax systems
- Retirement and pension entitlement
- Access to healthcare
- Recognition of qualifications
- Access to trained cross-border advisors

Furthermore limited statistical data and analysis on cross-border mobility is hindering high level strategic planning.

In response to these and other issues many European countries have established citizens' information services that provide tailored cross-border information and advice and guidance.

The next section briefly explains the BordInfo project which outlines what is needed in such a service. This is followed brief examples of services found in four EU border regions.

⁵ Directive 2014/54/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on measures facilitating the exercise of rights conferred on workers in the context of freedom of movement for workers- <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014L0054>

⁶ www.aebr.eu/files/publications/121030_Final_Report_EN_clean.pdf

⁷ Cross border information service - www.borderpeople.info

BordInfo project - Nemunas Euroregion, Lithuania

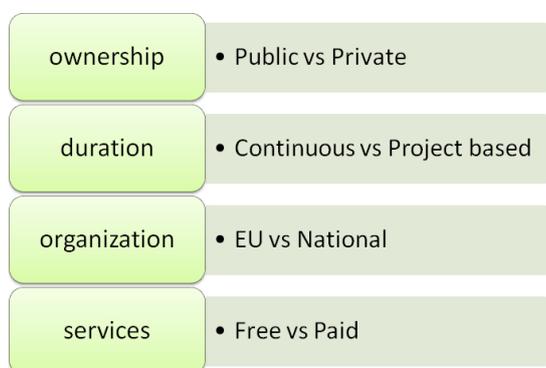
BordInfo is the acronym for “Border Information Centre”. It constitutes a subproject of the INTERREG IVC project “Brain flow” in which six partners exchange experiences about existing Border Information Centres. The project involves partners from Lithuania, Sweden, Norway, Germany and the Netherlands.⁸

The project examined good and bad practices in existing Border Information Centres (BIC) and considered how they could be improved. The project also developed guidelines on “how to install a new Border Information Centre”. These guidelines will be used to establish a Border Information Centre in the Lithuanian Nemunas Euroregion.

BordInfo recognises that obstacles to mobility exist and usually stem from the issues mentioned above; differences in social welfare, complex cross-border taxation, access to healthcare, etc. As a result BordInfo sees the role of Border Information Centres as informing individuals and relevant stakeholders in the region.

The BordInfo guidelines provide a list of considerations for improving an existing BIC or creating a new centre. They include:

- Identifying the target groups in the region
- Focusing services and activities to best suit target group needs and available resources
- Ensuring that the core task is informing citizens and organisations
- Creating awareness of the service among target groups, authorities, advice sector etc.
- Analysing emerging legal and policy issues, gathering statistics and informing stakeholders and authorities
- Deciding how the centre should be funded – public vs private, free vs paid, national or EU
- Ensuring the service is structured to create strong cross-border cooperation and collaboration between partners



Source: Common Guidelines - Subproject Border Information Centre (BIC) - June 2013

⁸ <http://www.bordinfo-subproject.eu/>

Cross-border Citizens' Information Services in Europe

Example 1 - Grensetjänsten - Norway-Sweden

Grensetjänsten is a transnational cooperation between Sweden and Norway. It facilitates economic activity and growth in the region by providing cross-border information to individuals and businesses with cross-border employment issues or activities. In addition the service also works (within the Nordic Council of Ministers' structure) to identify and solve border obstacles.

The service prides itself on providing complete information to clients due to the collaboration of a wide range of organisations affiliated to the service.⁹

Grensetjänsten services

- Online Information
www.grensetjansten.no
- Email advice
- Telephone advice
- Face to face advice
- Research and analysis
- Co-ordination of stakeholders

Grensetjänsten was initially funded by the INTERREG programme but since 2006 it has been funded by the regional and national ministries.¹⁰

The screenshot shows the website for Grensetjänsten Norway-Sweden. The header includes the logo and navigation links: HOME, WORKING IN NORWAY, JOBBE IN SWEDEN, MOVE, BUSINESS / FEAT, STUDIES, and FORMS / INFO SHEET. The main content area has the title 'Grensetjänsten Norway-Sweden' and a sub-header 'Cross-border cooperation in order to facilitate economic activity and growth in Norway and Sweden'. Below this is a paragraph describing the service. A search bar with the text 'Google' Anpassad sökning and a red 'Search' button is present. The 'News' section features a date '2014-09-19' and a headline 'Job Opportunities in Norway when IKEA opens new store'. A sidebar on the right contains a section 'Grensetjänstens activity' with links to News, We work for you, Partners, Contact and opening hours, Swedish-Norwegian dictionary for employee / employer, Nordic Council of Ministers - Information Services, Freedom of Movement, and Newsletter. At the bottom right, a yellow box displays 'Hours' as 'Monday-Friday 8:00 to 15:30'.

⁹ <http://www.grensetjansten.no/samarbetspartners/>

¹⁰ http://www.bordinfo-subproject.eu/export/sites/bordinfo/downloads/public/State_of_the_art_Vaermland-Hedmark1.pdf

Example 2 - Öresund Direkt - Southern Sweden and Eastern Denmark

Öresund Direkt provides information from public authorities to citizens and businesses. The initiative's goal is to promote cooperation between authorities and administrators in the region and to identify and eliminate barriers to integration in the region, and communication between citizens, businesses and public administration.

Öresund Direkt consists of an editorial staff in Copenhagen and an information centre in the town square in Malmö. The information centre assists the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, County Administration and the Swedish Tax Agency with staff who are on hand to provide government information from an Öresund perspective.¹¹

Öresund Direct services

- Online Information
www.oresunddirekt.com
- Email advice
- Telephone advice
- Face to face advice
- Research and analysis
- Co-ordination of stakeholders

The initiative was funded by the EU INTERREG programme initiated by the Öresund Committee. It is now financed by regional and government funds from Sweden and Denmark.

The screenshot shows the homepage of Öresund Direkt. At the top, there is a logo and navigation links for 'Contact', 'About Us', and 'News'. Below this is a dark navigation bar with categories: 'Jobs & Education', 'Economy', 'Family & Children', 'Health', 'Car & Home', 'Society', and 'Guides'. The main content area features a large banner image of a bridge over water with the text 'Find your new job on the other side of the bridge!'. To the right of the banner is a search bar with the text 'Hvad søger du?' and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar is a section titled 'JOBS IN SWEDEN - RIGHT NOW' with three job listings: 'Operating Area Sales Manager Habia Cable, Scania', 'Utvecklare / architect-operation Data Warehouse Sigma, Malmö', and 'Operationssjuksköterskor till Orthopaedics Region Skåne universitetssjukvård, Malmö'. Below the job listings are five colored buttons: 'Search Jobs In Sweden', 'Won Jobs In Sweden', 'Living In Sweden and work In Denmark', 'Studying In Sweden', and 'Moving to Sweden'. The main content area is divided into sections for 'JOBS & EDUCATION', 'ECONOMY', 'FAMILY & CHILDREN', and 'HEALTH'. A search bar is visible in the top right corner.

¹¹ <http://www.movingtosouthernsweden.com/about/sweden/oresund-region>

Example 3 - INFOBEST – France / Germany / Switzerland

INFOBEST is a network of four information and advice centres based in the Upper Rhine region. The centres are a contact point for: citizens, clubs/associations, businesses, administrations and politicians. It functions as a link between the administrations of the three jurisdictions to support the communication and the co-operation between the different administrations.

INFOBEST was originally funded by the EU INTERREG programme.¹² All four offices are funded by public funds from France, Germany & Switzerland (applies only for the INFOBEST in the South at the FR-DE-CH Border).¹³

INFOBEST services

- Online Information
www.infobest.eu
- Email advice
- Telephone advice
- Face to face advice
- Research and analysis
- Co-ordination of stakeholders

¹² INTERREG report - *Transcending border with every project: INTERREG in the Upper Rhine area.*

¹³ <http://www.infobest.eu/fr/les-partenaires-cofinanceurs1/>

Example 4 - Border People – Ireland / Northern Ireland

The Centre for Cross Border Studies, in partnership with the North South Ministerial Council (Joint Secretariat), manages the Border People project which provides *cross-border* citizens' information and advice in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The key elements of the project include provision of online information and direct (telephone and email) support to the public and advice sector. The project also provides cross-border training for advice sectors in each jurisdiction. Furthermore it fosters collaboration between government departments, agencies and the advice sector who have been committed members of the advisory group since 2007.

The project has received EU funding since 2007 and is currently part-financed by the European Union's INTERREG IVA programme until January 2015.

Border People services

- Online Information
www.borderpeople.info
- Advice sector training
- Research and analysis
- Co-ordination of stakeholders
- Email advice
- Telephone advice

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Border People website. At the top, there is a logo for 'borderpeople' with the tagline 'crossing the border to live, work or study' and a navigation arrow with 'Live, Study, Work, Retire'. Social media icons for LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook are present, along with a 'Select Language' dropdown and 'Powered by Google Translate'. A search bar is located below the navigation. The main navigation menu includes 'Home', 'A-Z', 'Themes', 'Categories', 'Life Events', 'Information for', 'FAQs', 'Links', and 'Policy'. The main content area is titled 'Welcome to Border People' and includes a sub-header 'Crossing the border regularly? We're here to help. Your one-stop guide to everything from taxation, social security and job seeking, to health, education and banking.' Below this are four large icons representing 'LIVE', 'STUDY', 'WORK', and 'RETIRE'. The 'Categories' section lists various topics such as Banking, Education, Health, Social welfare, Travel, Business, Employment, Motoring, Tax, Consumer issues, Housing, Retirement, and Telecommunications. The 'Life Events' section lists events like Adoption, Buying a car, Getting divorced, Going to third level education, Moving, Running a business, Shopping, Working, Becoming unemployed, Buying a house, Getting ill, Studying, Older people Health Care, Schools, Starting a new job, Bereavement, Commuting, Going back to education, Having a baby, Retiring, Setting up a bank account, and Travelling. The 'Information For' section is partially visible. On the right side, there are sections for 'Popular Articles' and 'Features'. The 'Popular Articles' section lists articles like 'Child Benefit in Ireland', 'National Insurance Number - Northern Ireland', 'Pensions in Ireland', 'Tax credits in Northern Ireland', and 'FAQs: Taxation'. The 'Features' section lists features like 'Free movement of people: Commission to tackle tax discrimination against mobile EU citizens', 'Seminar on Cross Border Social Security', 'Training for Information Advisors', 'Habitual Residence - EU Practical Guide', 'EU Press Release 20 Jan 2014', 'Cross-Border Prescriptions and Pharmacies', 'IntertradeIreland offers 100% funding to develop cross border business', and 'User Survey - Help us improve the information on the Border People website'. There are 'View all articles' buttons at the end of both the 'Popular Articles' and 'Features' sections.

Conclusion

The existence of dedicated Cross-border Information Centres undoubtedly fosters cross-border mobility. Informed citizens are much more likely to consider options for employment, education, and retirement on the other side of the border. Guided by these services they are more likely to engage with social welfare, health and tax authorities in the relevant jurisdiction.

The importance of Directive 2014/54/EU should not be underestimated. Cross-border Information Centres should play a key role in ensuring that member states meet the requirements of the directive - by providing **access to information, providing advice and support, and legal assistance where necessary**.

The previous four examples highlight the need for Cross Border Information Services in EU border regions. Given that the obstacles to mobility are so similar it is important to learn from the experiences of established services.

The Border People services listed indicate that the project is quite comparable to other Cross Border Information Services found in mainland Europe. However it is important to recognise that beneath those over-arching issues found across Europe, the solutions and services available locally are tailored to fit the needs of each region.

Unlike the first three examples, the Border People service does not have a physical space. Citizens cannot find all the answers under one roof. Instead the service puts importance on upskilling the long established advice sector in each jurisdiction. With the support of the mainstream advice sector it is envisaged that, with continued cross-border training for advisors, citizens will receive reliable, practical cross-border information in their local citizens' advice office.

Since 2007 the Centre for Cross Border Studies has built up considerable expertise in the provision of cross-border information for citizens but the success of the Border People project owes much to the commitment and engagement of the project Advisory Group members: North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat, Department of Social Protection, Citizens Information Board, Citizens Advice NI, Social Security Agency NI, EURES Cross-border Partnership.

Over the years strong cross-border relationships have been built up between the organisations. Providing a platform for this level of cross-border collaboration is essential and will be a key aspect of any future service.

The project has developed into a high impact, low cost information service. However, funding of the service is another key difference. The Border People project is entirely dependent on EU funding which will expire in January 2015. The reliance on short-term funding affects the impact of the project, reduces long-term strategies to short-term planning and trained resources are lost due to staff resource instability.

The other three examples which were established with the support of EU programmes are now fully sustained by public funds. Securing this level of commitment from regional and national governments strengthens cross-border partnerships and ensures that strategies can be put in place to meet the long-term needs of the region. **The ongoing issue of securing long-term funding for the Border People information service is the key obstacle to the development of a significant cross-border information service for citizens in the Ireland/ Northern Ireland region.**

Applicable legislation¹⁴

Free movement of workers

- [Directive 2014/54/EU](#) on measures facilitating the exercise of rights conferred on workers in the context of freedom of movement for workers
- [Directive 2014/50/EU](#) on the acquisition and preservation of supplementary pension rights
- [Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union \(TFEU\)](#)
- [Regulation \(EU\) 492/2011](#) of 5 April 2011 on freedom of movement for workers within the Union, codifying [Regulation \(EEC\) 1612/68](#) and its successive modifications (Council Regulations 312/76 and 2434/92, and Article 38(1) of Directive 2004/38/EC).
- [Directive 2004/38/EC](#) of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States (OJ No L 158, 30 April 2004)
- [Directive 98/49/EC](#) of 29 June 1998 on safeguarding the supplementary pension rights of employed and self-employed persons moving within the Community (OJ No L 209, 25 July 1998)

¹⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=474>

About the Border People project

In 2001 the North South Ministerial Council published a *Study of Obstacles to Mobility*, which explored the wide range of obstacles which hindered people moving across the Irish border to live and work. The report presented 50 recommendations / solutions and of relevance is the second recommendation which was:

A one-stop cross-border mobility information website should be established which would provide comprehensive and easily accessible information on key aspects of jobs, learning opportunities and living conditions on both sides of the border. This would be linked with European Commission proposals for development of such a site on a pan-European basis. This site should also provide linkages to websites for government departments as well as representative agencies and voluntary groups.

In response to this recommendation a partnership between the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat and the Centre for Cross Border Studies **launched a prototype Border People website in October 2007** which was initially funded by the EU PEACE Programme and then developed as part of the Centre's 2009-2012 INICCO-1 programme with EU INTERREG funding.

The Border People website provides **practical information** for people crossing the border to *live, work, study or retire* and is recognised as an important portal for cross-border *citizens' information and advice* on the island of Ireland. It provides a signposting service to a wide range of information sources, the most popular of which are in the areas of social security, taxation, welfare benefits, healthcare, pensions, and motoring. As well as providing information to citizens the Border People project, supports the advice sector in both jurisdictions and is actively engaged with policy and decision makers.

This phase of Border People (2013-2015) is an integral part of the INICCO-2 programme, also funded by the EU INTERREG IVA Programme. Behind the scenes four organisations are committed partners:

- **Centre for Cross Border Studies**
- **North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat**
- **Citizens Information Board (Ireland)**
- **Citizens Advice Bureaux (Northern Ireland)**

The partners are advised and guided by representatives from the **NI Social Security Agency**, the **EU International Section of the Department of Social Protection** and **EURES Cross Border Partnership**.

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