

DISEASE CONTROL AND BORDER LOCKDOWN AT THE EU'S INTERNAL BORDERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF FINLAND

J. Virkkunen

University of Eastern Finland
2 Yliopistokatu St., Joensuu, FI-80101, Finland

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The article discusses the lockdown of the EU's internal borders during the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland. Special attention is paid to bordering as a means for disease control and the governments' aim to "protect the population and secure functions of society" during the pandemic. Not only did the government restrict flights and 'non-essential' travel from non-Schengen countries such as Russia, China and Thailand but, with some exceptions, it also restricted everyday cross-border encounters and commuting between Finland and its Schengen neighbours of Sweden, Norway and Estonia. The restrictions hampered tourism and migrant-dependent industries; they also complicated the lives of migrants' families. While lockdown of the Estonian and Russian border does not cause any debates in Finnish society, the closure of the Finnish-Swedish border area that had been completely open since the 1950s led to a debate on citizens' constitutional rights and civil disobedience in the form of semi-legal border crossings.

Keywords:

bordering, COVID-19, pandemic, EU's internal borders, Estonia, Finland, Sweden.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the geopolitical map of the world in a matter of months. Travel restrictions have become a global phenomenon and countries around the world have closed their borders for foreign citizens, ordered flight and rail operators to discontinue their operations and put travellers entering the state into quarantine. Quarantine and health control measures are nothing new in the management of communicable diseases but in the context of the globalised world with open borders, extremely high social, economic and political interdependence, the new practices of bordering shook our perception of the state and global integration and, in particular, transformed our everyday habits of domestic

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and cross-border travel. Viewed as one of the most critical parts of disease control and national security during the pandemic they have been also criticised for limiting our engagement and ability to perform in the globalised world.

The article discusses the lockdown of the EU's internal borders during the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland when the Finnish government not only restricted flights and 'non-essential' travel from non-Schengen countries such as Russia, China and Thailand but, with some exceptions, also limited everyday cross-border encounters and commuting between Finland and its Schengen neighbours of Sweden, Norway and Estonia. The article aims to explore the pandemic-bordering nexus and some of the social and economic impacts that bordering creates at the integrated internal border areas of the European Union. The paper focuses on Finland's borders to Sweden and Estonia representing two unlike border areas with different histories and levels of cross-border integration. Due to cooperation between five Nordic countries, the border to Sweden had been basically non-existent since the 1950s. The introduction of the pandemic lockdown led to the demands to observe citizens' constitutional rights for free movement and to actions of civil disobedience in the form of semi-legal border crossings. As many Estonian families and businesses rely on tourism and work across the border in Finland, the country's decision to restrict border traffic had severe impacts on Estonia's economy and families of Estonian commuting migrants.

The geopolitics of infectious disease control is not a new phenomenon. The topics of public and world health, as well as the spatial management of microbes and viruses, have been central in the political, legal and commercial history of nationalism, colonialism and internationalism. In her analysis of the history of disease control, Bashford [1] describes how infectious disease control takes place not only within the jurisdiction of sovereign states but also in formal and informal intervention beyond states. She connects the rise of global public health and disease regulation to the context of the colonisation and de-colonisation on one hand, and to the evolving 'national' and 'international' spheres on the other hand. For colonial powers 'international health', i. e. colonial and tropical medicine there in the colonies, was a question of national defence. The geopolitics of disease prevention was, Bashford argues [1, p. 6], closely linked nationalism and the policing of sovereign territory. With the increase in travel, harbours and land borders became places of inspection where incoming goods, vessels and animals, as well as peoples' documents, identities and bodies, were examined. In fact, health documents and health checks including screening immigrants' bodies for any signs of disease appeared before the current-day ID system, a passport or visa, and made borders necessary points of travel.

Communicable diseases and disease control are studied primarily within the disciplines of medicine and public health, but they are also important topics of history, public management, sociology, social policy and others. Health geog-

raphy¹ that is closely related to medical geography and the geography of health care, by definition, engages itself with geography and human health, while the topics such as mobility, border control, and isolation remain on the margins [2, P. 316]. In the relatively small fields of political geography and geopolitics, which this article contributes to, a nexus between disease, space and power is often scrutinized through globalisation and the workings of global political economy. They are also concerned with the possible impacts of disease on state sovereignty and with health as a contributor to or a destructive force of geopolitical stability. Thus, health issues became topics in critical analysis in environmental security and the new security agenda in the 1990s. [4, P. 38].

Globalisation, the rapidly increased international movements of people and goods and the recognition of the global character of communicable diseases transformed the colonial and the international health into global ‘post-Westphalian’ governance. A whole range of non-state actors and global health initiatives such as public-private partnerships, foundations, international organisations, G8, and civil society groups became central in setting the global health agenda, mobilising resources and providing services. [5, p. 3; 6; 7, P. 240, P. 256; 8, p. 161 – 164]. At the same time, borders became constitutive components of the new security discourse, technologies of governance and points of public health policy protecting domestic populations from outside threats [6; 8; 9; 4]. The conception of public health policy is still grounded in geopolitical ideas and national interests. Even though one nation’s health security depends on that of all the others, national (or sectional) interests still prevail in public health [10]. In the European Union, the joint public health policy and infectious disease control became conceptualised through ‘health security’ and the generic notion of ‘serious cross-border threats to health’ [11, p. 347, 361 – 363]. Bengtsson and Rhinard [11, p. 363] conclude that joint EU-level coordination and support to the resilience in member states give an additional value to the states’ ‘generic’ health risk management. They suggest that the fact that ‘serious cross-border health threats’ are increasingly considered as elements of societal security and subjects of crisis management reveals and consolidates a qualitative change in the vocabulary and priorities of health security at EU level. More attention is paid to European level threats to health and to threats crossing borders than to the plain prevalence of an infectious disease in individual member states.

In contemporary societies, the practices of border screening for disease prevention and management relate to acute outbursts of diseases caused by rapidly dispersing microorganisms such as bacteria and viruses or by chronic infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. In the context of new ‘re-emerging

¹ According to Elliot [3], health geography “is the study of the distribution, diffusion, determinants, and delivery associated with health and health systems in human populations”. It also examines health and health systems with spatial lenses that open different perspectives to the study from the local (e. g., neighbourhood) to the global.

diseases and economic globalisation', way before the appearance of the pandemic, Bashford [1, p. 10–13] notices the change from 'international' health to 'global' health. The threats of bioterrorism, avian flu, SARS, and other microbial diseases are global in nature and, thus, impact the rich 'first world' societies as well. In the context of the internet, information and communications technologies, global social networks, transnationality and intensive cross-border mobility of people as well as financial capitalism are 'placeless' and, thus, undermine the foundations of national sovereignty and capacities of the state. However, the management of the global coronavirus pandemics in 2003 (SARS) and 2020 (COVID-19) clearly illustrates the dominance of nation states in disease control. Thus, global and European governance seem extremely weak.

In today's context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Radil, Pinos and Ptak [12] write about state bordering and illustrate the sudden reintroduction of border enforcement as the states' most salient political strategies to contain the virus and, thus, to manage the crisis. This reflects a rapid revival of nation states and territorial borders manifested in the expansion and the reintroduction of border management, including checkpoints and security forces limiting the international, and in some cases domestic, movement of people. The new practices of bordering materialise themselves in extremely severe travel and mobility restrictions. They serve as the primary instruments of control, health risk containment and national security and, thus, securitize not only everyday mobility and public spaces such as shops and public transport but also seriously restrict travel and transnational practices. Paasi [13] reminds that even though many states introduce borders as the primary solution for 'the problem', interruption of global networks or value chains is seldom the best solution. As an optimist, he also proposes another option: the pandemic can stimulate cross-border and future-looking cooperation in forecasting and preparing for future pandemics and drug development.

Borders of Finland during pandemic

On March 11th 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. A few days later, on March 16th, the plenary session of the Government of Finland announced a three-month state of emergency first time during peace. The Emergency Powers Act and the Communicable Diseases Act allowed the authorities to issue and implement a whole range of regulations limiting people's basic rights set in the constitution. To 'prevent a serious danger to life and health', the Government regulated visits to housing services for and free movement of the elderly and other at-risk groups, access to public establishments such as schools, universities and cultural venues such as libraries, mobile libraries, hobby and leisure centres, museums, and sports facilities. Private and third-sector actors and religious communities were encouraged to do the same.

According to section 9 of the Constitution of Finland, Finnish citizens must not be prevented from entering Finland, and everyone has the right to leave Finland. However, limitations on the right to leave the country may be provided by law if they are necessary for the purpose of safeguarding legal proceedings or for the enforcement of penalties or for the fulfilment of the duty of national defence².

This quotation from the Finnish Border Guard instructions for passengers (2020a) points to several key principles and practices of bordering that the Emergency Powers Act introduced during 2020 pandemic, its ability to restrict people's constitutional right for free movement within Finland and across borders. Based on the Government order, the Border Guard Act, and the EU's Schengen Borders Code, on March 19th 2020, the government introduced new entry requirements and border traffic restrictions. The passenger traffic was restricted at the 'eastern' border and at the 'internal' borders of Finland³. The government recommended the shipping companies operating from Sweden, Estonia and Germany to discontinue ticket sales for passenger traffic until mid-May, with the exception of cargo traffic and the return of Finnish citizens and persons residing in Finland. Finnish citizens and residents were advised to return to Finland immediately and not to travel 'abroad'. 'Essential travels' for work and to access 'necessary services' were permitted across the northern and western borders. People returning to Finland from abroad by land, sea and air were advised to remain in conditions equivalent to quarantine for 14 days.

Finland shares its borders with four states: Estonia, Sweden, Norway and the Russian Federation. As the Finnish history and the changes in the region's geopolitical settings well indicate, relations to each of the bordering states, as well as different segments of the border, are different. The term 'internal' refers to Finland's Schengen borders to Sweden, Norway and Estonia, with traditions of free movement of people, while the 'eastern' and 'external' refer to the well-guarded border to Russia where also a valid passport and, usually, a visa is needed. The 'essential travel' and 'necessary services' refer to some of the exemptions in bordering under the Emergency Powers Act. These politically complex exceptions, and their implementation by the Finnish Border Guard, enabled some passenger traffic across Finland's borders. However, the vague definition of 'essential' and the understanding of constitutional rights lead to a discussion of de facto legality of the government's border policy on the one hand and to civil disobedience and semi-legal border crossings on the other hand. The impact and experiences of the situation clearly depended on the context.

² The instructions of the Finnish Border Guard to passengers regarding entry to Finland, 2020, *Finnish Border Guard*. URL: https://www.raja.fi/current_issues/guidelines_for_border_traffic (accessed 8 December 2020).

³ Finnish border traffic to be restricted as of 19 March 2020, 2020, *Finnish Border Guard*. URL: https://www.raja.fi/current_issues/facts/news_from_the_border_guard/1/0/finnish_border_traffic_to_be_restricted_as_of_19_march_2020_79144 (accessed 8 December 2020); Traveller, Return to Finland, 2020, *Ministry for Foreign Affairs*. URL: https://um.fi/ajankohtaista/-/asset_publisher/gc654PySnjTX/content/ulkoministeri-c3-b6-c3-a41-c3-a4-matkusta-ulkomaille- (accessed 8 December 2020) (in Finnish).

Table 1

**COVID-19 cases, COVID-19 related deaths and the number
of new cases per 100,000 for the last 14 days of the month
in Finland, Sweden and Estonia in 2020* (ECDC 2020)**

Month	Cases			Deaths			New cases / 100.000, avg.		
	Finland	Sweden	Estonia	Finland	Sweden	Estonia	Finland	Sweden	Estonia
January	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
February	3	11	1	0	0	0	0,01	0,01	0,005
March	1315	4360	716	13	289	3	6,3	10,15	14,45
April	4908	20968	1667	206	2803	50	28,76	63,83	40,48
May	6828	38390	1866	316	4593	63	19,64	77,63	8,38
June	7211	67060	1988	328	5482	0	4,94	118,49	5,74
July	7425	76681	2052	329	5760	0	1,75	67,33	1,64
August	8079	84234	2374	335	5839	64	4,49	34,42	8,45
September	9894	93160	3316	343	5895	0	11,38	33,52	26,03
October**	11051	96685	3716	346	5904	67	31,91	61,41	51,48

* Cumulative, at the end of the month. ** Average The situation on 8 October.

Sources: ECDC 2020, Daily update of new reported cases of COVID-19 by country worldwide, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. URL: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/download-todays-data-geographic-distribution-covid-19-cases-worldwide> (accessed 8 December 2020).

The dynamics of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Finland, Sweden and Estonia were different (see table 1). With its more liberal policy, the overall number of cases, COVID-19 related deaths and the number of new cases per 100,000 in Sweden were clearly higher than those in the other two countries. This difference in the epidemiological situation had a direct impact on the way Finnish and Estonian policymakers, as well as health border authorities, viewed the free movement with Sweden, it was perceived as a risk. While Estonia created the ‘Baltic bubble’ allowing free movement between it, Latvia and Lithuania, Finland tightened the ‘non-essential’ mobility with all its neighbours in the North (Sweden, Norway), in the South (Estonia) and in the East (Russia).

Finland’s ‘eastern’ border to Russia is an external border of the European Union and, thus, follows the joint Schengen regulations for border control. It also complies with the EU-level guidelines, best practices and recommendations for border guards as well as with the joint standards of information exchange. When the border traffic restrictions entered into force on March 19th, the passenger traffic was severely restricted and, apart from cargo, only some dual citizens, students coming to Finland and family members of Finnish citizens were able to cross the border. Consequently, the number of daily border crossings in Southeast Finland Border Guard District dropped from about 8,000–15,000 passengers to

1,000–1,500 with about 80% of them being professional freight drivers [14]. The new regulations allowed goods to move across borders but prohibited passenger travel such as tourism, they banned Russian cottage owners from visiting their properties in Finland and Finnish borderlanders from visiting Russia for ‘cheap’ gasoline. Cross-border cooperation projects transferred to online platforms but empty shops, malls and outlet villages had a serious impact on economic development in areas such as South-East Finland that relied heavily on cross-border business and tourism.

Unlike the ‘eastern’ border to Russia, Finland’s western and northern borders to Sweden and Norway have been open for local border traffic for a long time. No passports have been required from the citizens of the five Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland) since the 1950s. Since Finland’s entered the Schengen area in 2001, the border can be crossed anywhere [15] and the borders neither to Sweden nor Norway had any significance. Therefore, the government’s March 19th decision to restore border checks⁴ and to ban all movement other than cargo traffic and ‘essential’ travel-to-work commuting was controversial. Due to the high number of COVID-19 cases in Sweden, it was both welcomed and confusing. In the areas with hundreds of years’ joint history, shared business and social infrastructure, e. g. in the joint city centre of Haparanda-Tornio twin city, the restrictions created some distress and ‘semi-legal’ traffic across the border to/from Sweden. In the South, the maritime border to Estonia had lost its significance upon Estonia’s joining the EU in 2004 and entering the Schengen territory in 2007.

Like the land border to Sweden, the border at the Gulf of Finland developed into an area with the strong and active cross-border agglomeration of business, tourism and labour. During the pandemic, Finland’s border control transformed both the travels and encounters between the two countries and the lives of Estonian immigrants in Finland.

In the following part, I will discuss the above territorial lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic in Finland. Special attention will be paid to the governments’ aim to “*protect the population and secure functions of society*” by restricting migration and mobility at Finland’s internal borders to Sweden and Estonia. The paper is based on academic and media reports, seminar discussions and in-

⁴ According to the Schengen Border Code (Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control, Migration and Home Affairs, 2020, *European Commission*. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/reintroduction-border-control_en (accessed 8 December 2020)), member states can reintroduce border checks at internal borders temporarily in the event that is a serious threat to public policy or internal security. The control must remain an exception, must respect the principle of proportionality and be limited in time. Previous time any control took place at Finland’s border to Sweden was during the 2015–2016 ‘migration crisis’ when the Finnish Border Guard in cooperation with the Swedish Police exercised ‘intensified immigration control’ (‘tehostettu ulkomaalaisvalvonta’ in Finnish). (see e. g. [17;18]). Formally, that was not border control but, rather, surveillance of foreign citizens including identity checks both in areas close to the border and Finland as a whole.

formation received from publications (news, statistics, etc.) of and meetings with the Finnish Border Guard. These will be analysed by using qualitative content analysis approach.

Medical personnel, snus and civil disobedience at the Swedish border

The history of the Finnish-Swedish border goes back to the Treaty of Fredrikshamn in 1809 when Sweden ceded Finland over to the Russian Empire. The border is the Sea of Åland and the Gulf of Bothnia in the South and the rivers Tornionjoki and Muonionjoki in the North. As members of the Nordic cooperation both Finland and Sweden have been committed to free movement of passengers and labour since the 1950s. The passport control was abolished already in 1952. In the 1960s and 1970s, the free movement culminated to mass migration to the rapidly developing industrial cities of Sweden. According to Korkisaari [16] up to 545,000 Finnish citizens moved to Sweden and about 295,000 moved back to Finland during 1945–2000. That was about 70% of all Finnish emigrants during the period and, including descendants, an increase of about half a million inhabitants in Sweden. These, combined with the traditionally intensive cross-border encounters in Torne River Valley, once a single cultural entity without border, and the Schengen cooperation in 2001 created a joint space for cultural heritage and intensive social, economic and political encounters.

Within the above context of cross-border integration, the government's decision to restrict border traffic at the Finland-Sweden border on March 19th was exceptional. The border was open only at Karesuvanto, Kolari, Muonio, Pello, Tornio and Ylitornio border-crossing points for goods and return traffic as well as for 'essential' commuting and other traffic. Crossing the border elsewhere was not permitted. Everyone, including Nordic citizens, was also obligated to carry a passport or an official ID. In practice, the new restrictions paralyzed many of the daily activities in the area where people used to work, visit friends or family members, go for shopping, movies or undertake other leisure activities and, importantly, do business across the border on a daily basis. The countries' different epidemiological development and approaches to virus control set the basis both for the state and civic discourses of the COVID-19 and cooperation.

According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control⁵, the first cases in Sweden occurred in late February. Their number increased to 20,000 cases at the end of April and 93,000 at the end of September. With the first cases registered in Finland about a week later, their number in Finland rose to 5,000 at

⁵ Daily update of new reported cases of COVID-19 by country worldwide, 2020, *European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control*. URL: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/download-todays-data-geographic-distribution-covid-19-cases-worldwide> (accessed 8 December 2020).

the end of April and to 9,900 at the end of September. Similarly to the number of new reported COVID-19 cases, the number of COVID-19 related deaths in Sweden (5,895 on September 31st) was about ten times higher than in Finland (343 on September 31st). The numbers reflecting the different medical approach to the pandemic — Sweden’s being more liberal— as well as the fear for Finland’s medical capacity set the basis for Finland’s approach to and the discourses on the Swedish border during the pandemic. As the Minister of the Interior Maria Ohisalo stated at the government’s COVID-19 briefing: “*The intensive care capacity of the North is rather small, and we cannot risk that. So now during the next weeks we need to limit even commuter traffic*”.

Following the countries’ commitment for free movement, the border between Finland and Sweden opened on September 19th, six months after the unprecedented introduction of border control. Thus, the reasoning behind and the social, economic and political consequences of virus control in the two countries rise a number of interesting questions regarding the politics of bordering. First, the new border regulations restricted ‘non-essential’ crossings to/from Sweden. The ferry connection between Helsinki and Stockholm halted but, as its part of Finland’s critical infrastructure, the connection between Turku and Stockholm continued its operations for cargo and returning passengers but not for cruises and other personal traffic. In the North where the border area makes a joint travel-to-work area, the narrow interpretation of the ‘non-essential’ travel, as well as the restrictions’ impact on daily commuting, caused some concern. However, the Deputy Commander of the Lapland Border Guard District Janne Kurvinen explained the necessity of the restrictions during the pandemic:

The border checks have been reintroduced for a reason. They have been introduced not to annoy but to protect people. Many things at the border areas are different, at least momentarily, when regular business across the border has been restricted. You cannot go across the border for regular shopping, banking or second home visits if it is not essential for the lives of people [19].

The final decision on the ‘essential’ character of a border crossing was made by the Border Guard checking the purpose of travel. Commander Kurvinen’s above statement clearly demonstrates that the Border Guards in charge occasionally disagree with the citizens’ conception of trips’ essentiality, and this may lead to further clarification or, even, to a fine. As the epidemiological situation in Sweden was considerably worse than in Finland, the new restrictions and the efforts of the Border Guard to limit the spread of the virus were strongly supported both in the region and in the country in general. The recommendation for self-quar-

⁶ Hallitus aloittaa pikaisesti valmistelut pohjois- ja länsirajaliikenteen tiukentamiseksi — Joudumme jopa työmatkaliikennettä rajoittamaan, sisäministeri sanoo, 2020, I. URL: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3—11283443> (accessed 8 December 2020) (in Finnish).

antine remained valid until the reopening of the border on September 19th, six months after the introduction of the control. After a week, on September 24th, the government reintroduced the border control due to the rapidly deteriorating epidemiological situation in Sweden, this time with an exemption for the residents of ‘border communities’⁷. The acknowledgement of special needs among the communities at the border was a great success for the Lapland Chamber of Commerce that, among others, demanded a regionally sensitive approach to health policy that previously ignored all regional specificities and differences⁸.

The second fascinating aspect of disease control relates to the above-mentioned constitutional rights of the Finnish citizens to exit and enter the territory of Finland at any times. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemics in March, the government sent a clear message to its citizens: “The borders are closed, this is not the time to travel for summer cottages, only ‘essential’ trips abroad are allowed, and both the Police and the Border Guard guarantee that the law is being complied”. However, in early May, a couple of months after the new measures were implemented, local media along with people who used to cross the Swedish border on daily basis suddenly realised that the ban was not legal and it violated citizens’ constitutional rights to exit and enter Finland. Having consulted lawyers, they concluded that the Border Guard had exceeded its authority by restricting the cross-border traffic with Sweden. As restrictions to the border traffic were not used for medical reasons only, and people attempting to cross the border were requested information and certificates of the ‘essentiality’ of their travel, the measures were assessed as disproportional and, even, as an excess of power by the Border Guard [20]. Interestingly, the Border Guard recognizes the questionable character of the restrictions but justifies the actions by their ‘essentiality’ for safeguarding citizens’ fundamental rights to life and health protection. In its public response to the critique and complaints submitted to the Chancellor of Justice and the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the Finnish Border Guard clarifies:

The decision to restore the internal border control has not violated the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of movement, according to which a Finnish citizen must never be prevented from entering the country. Moreover, everyone has the right to leave the country unless this right is legally restricted. Consequently, the decisions taken by the Government regarding travel restriction are partly of a recommendatory

⁷ To ease the situation in the North, the government introduced a border community regime with no requirements for quarantine. At the Swedish border, the regime applies to the municipalities of Haparanda, Övertorneå, Pajala and Kiruna in Sweden, and Tornio, Ylitornio, Pello, Kolari, Muonio and Enontekiö in Finland. At the Norwegian border, the regime applies to the municipalities of Storfjord, Kåfjord, Nordreisa, Kautokeino, Kaarasjok, Tana, Nesseby, and Sør-Varanger in Norway, and Enontekiö, Inari, and Utsjoki in Finland.

⁸ Lapland Chamber of Commerce 2020, 2020, *Border Crossing Statement of Lapland Chamber of Commerce*. URL: <https://www.lapland.chamber.fi/lapin-kauppakamarin-rajanylityskannanotto-23-9/> (accessed 8 December 2020) (in Finnish).

nature and their purpose was to slow down the spread of the pandemic. In these respects, the border officers have with instructions and advice supported the realization of the Government's goals⁹.

The Border Guard's decision to restrict border crossings was a good example of two significantly important constitutional rights competing, to an extent, during the state of emergency: Right to life and health vs. the right to freedom of movement. The Border Guard is and represents itself as a body implementing the government's decisions. At the Swedish land border, the opening, however, led to an immediate increase in the number of border crossings particularly at Ylitornio and Haparanda-Tornio twin city¹⁰. Besides travel-to-work commuting and other daily affairs, many of the newspapers drew attention to snus¹¹ issue and civic disobedience at the border. The below example of snus shopping in Sweden reveals how some people, despite strong recommendations not to travel, took the initiative to cross the border as personal reserves of snus were getting low and its price on the Finnish black market was increasing. A man from Kemi, about 30km from the border, told about his trips across the border. Having become aware of his constitutional right to visit Sweden through the grapevine, despite border checks and quarantine, he decided to go for shopping.

I have done it, the thing that you should not do. So, you must accept the two-week quarantine but the following week I did it again. I am a bit of a rebel... Sometimes the inspectors grumble what my personal motives are [to cross the border], I tell them that I do not have to tell them [21].

Majority of border crossings in the territory of Lapland Border Guard District was still travel-to-work and other 'essential' border crossings such as family visits¹². As a concession, the Minister of the Interior Ms Maria Ohisalo recognized Finnish citizens' constitutional rights to travel abroad and supported the new governmental decision to award 'border communities' of Finland, Sweden and Nor-

⁹ The Basics of the Border Guard in Internal Border Control, 2020, *Finnish Border Guard*. URL: https://www.raja.fi/ajankohtaista/tietoa/tiedotteet/1/0/rajavartiolaitoksen_toimin_nan_perusteista_sisarajavalvonnassa_79675 (accessed 8 December 2020) (in Finnish).

¹⁰ Haparanda-Tornio twin city is an urban agglomeration of about 32,000 inhabitants that consists of the city of Haparanda in Sweden and the city of Tornio in Finland. According to Mainio (2020), 13.5 million crossed the border at Tornio in 2019. In Haparanda and the surrounding Swedish side of the valley, most of the medical doctors and care personnel, teachers, elderly care workers etc. are Finnish. The cities have over 40 cooperation agreements, including a joint school, travel centre, water treatment and heating plants, provincial museum and, of course, Ikea.

¹¹ Snus is moist smokeless tobacco that originates in Sweden. It is commonly used also in Finland, but it cannot be purchased in any EU country except for Sweden.

¹² Liikenne kasvaa Lapin sisärajoilla — Ylitornio ja Kilpisjärvi ovat vilkkaimmat Lapin rajavartioston valvomat rajanylityspaikat länsi- ja pohjoisrajoilla, 2020, *RAYA 100*. URL: https://www.raja.fi/lr/tiedotteet/1/0/liikenne_kasvaa_lapin_sisarajoilla_-_ylitornio_ja_kilpisjarvi_ovat_vilkkaimmat_lapin_rajavartioston_valvomat_rajanylityspaikat_lansi-ja_pohjoisrajoilla_79783 (accessed 8 December 2020).

way a special status¹⁵. The new arrangement that came into effect on September 29th allowed the residents of border municipalities to cross the border even if the border crossings were otherwise restricted due to worsening epidemiological situation in Sweden. Thus, Ohisalo did appeal to Finns' morale and responsibility to refrain from any travels across [21]:

Finnish citizens are always allowed to exit the country and come back. I appeal to the morale of Finnish citizens and to the fact that Border Guards work risking their health. Nurses, medical doctors fighting this disease risk their health every day.

Tourism and the family decisions at the Estonian border

The second case study of this paper, Finland's border to Estonia during COVID-19 pandemic, is very different from the one with Sweden. The cultural relations and mobility between Finland and Estonia have changed since the mid-19th century [24]. The foundation for relations and cross-border encounters was laid by cultural enthusiasts in the late 19th century Russian Empire and early 20th century independent Estonia. Yet, much of the contemporary relations encounters between the two countries developed during and, particularly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Opening of the regular boat connection in 1965 between Helsinki and Soviet Tallinn, unfolded new possibilities for travel. While Estonians were able to get acquainted with Finland through the Finnish TV and radio, only a few Estonians could travel to Finland due to tight exit regulations of the Soviet state. The number of Finnish tourists in Estonia, however, grew. The border opening upon the restoration of Estonia's independence in 1991, as well as Estonia's accession to the EU in 2004 and its joining Schengen Area in December 2007, transformed the cross-border travel and migration across the Gulf of Finland. As components of Finnish critical infrastructure, a basic ferry connection between the two countries continued during the pandemic, although only for cargo. The restrictions hit first and foremost tourism, Estonian migrant workers in Finland and their families in Estonia.

The area that is playfully also referred to as Talsinki or Hellinn¹⁴, has during the years become a transnational space where the movement of people, goods and services is constant and an everyday practice both among Finns and for Es-

¹⁵ The instructions of the Finnish Border Guard to passengers regarding entry to Finland, 2020, *RAYA 100*. URL: https://www.raja.fi/current_issues/guidelines_for_border_traffic (accessed 8 December 2020).

¹⁴ The notion of Talsinki or Hellinn comes from an idea of a twin city consisting of Finland's capital Helsinki and Estonia's capital Tallinn. It is closely related to cities' strategic cooperation and an idea of twin city with concrete development goals through mobility of people and goods, services for non-residents, competitiveness and marketing of the region and well-being of the Baltic Sea. The notion has been extended to concrete projects aiming to develop cooperation and infrastructure (e. g. tunnel) of the region.

tonians. According to the Bank of Estonia¹⁵, over 6.1 million non-resident trips were made to Estonia in 2019, out of which one third, about two million, was made by Finns. It is estimated that tourism and its EUR 2 billion receipts made up about 8% of Estonia's GDP in 2018¹⁶, thus, the share of Finnish tourists is central for the country's economy. During the pandemic, the total number of overnights in Estonia decreased by 45% from about 4.9 million in 2019 (January-August) to 2.67 million in 2020. Estonians' domestic travel during the summer holidays compensated some of the 62 per cent decrease in foreign tourists. During the first eight months of 2020, Finnish tourists made about 21% of all overnights in Estonia (34% in Tallinn), including overnights by domestic tourists, but Finnish citizens accounted for the largest share (41%) of foreigners' overnights in the country¹⁷.

The number of Finnish tourists started to decrease in mid-March and early April (see table 2), in the aftermath of the 'travel ban recommendation' and the restricted sales of tickets for passenger traffic issued by the Finnish government. Upon some improvement of the epidemiological situation in Estonia, Tallinn and Pärnu remained the most popular destinations among Finns. For many of them, Estonia is familiar, easy-access and safe and, therefore, it can serve as a substitute for the 'usual' summer vacation destinations of Greece and Spain during the pandemic.

Table 2

Overnights by Finns in Estonia, January-August 2020

Month	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August
Estonia, total	71 950	101 165	30 978	262	1 873	37 248	156 166	78 126
Tallinn	51 456	74 609	20 652	125	1 407	22 243	89 958	46 442
Pärnu	11 908	15 724	6 363	37	147	8 848	38 822	16 476
Tartu	2 696	3 018	956	63	148	1 640	8 103	3 888
Other	5 890	7 814	3 007	37	171	4 517	19 283	11 320

Sources: Turismi arengu ülevaated, 2020, Puhka Eestis. URL: <https://www.puhkaeestis.ee/et/uuringud-ja-ulevaated/turismi-arengu-ulevaated> (accessed 8 December 2020).

Alho and Kumer-Haukanõmm [25, p. 17] portray the extent and the reciprocal character of mobility and migration between Finland and Estonia. According to them, these "*challenge the classification of identity binarily and roughly*

¹⁵ Inbound travel, 2020, *Eesti Pank* 2020. URL: <https://statistika.eestipank.ee/#/en/p/1410/r/2831/2620> (accessed 8 December 2020).

¹⁶ Tourism Trends and Policies, 2020, OECD. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1787/6b47b985-en>.

¹⁷ Turismi arengu ülevaated, 2020, *Puhka Eestis*. URL: <https://www.puhkaeestis.ee/et/uuringud-ja-ulevaated/turismi-arengu-ulevaated> (accessed 8 December 2020).

as 'Finnish' or 'Estonian' and give new meanings to the concepts of 'home', 'foreign', 'presence' and 'absence'". Besides tourism, long-term migration and transnational life have become a fact of life in the region. The number of Estonian immigrants in Finland has increased from 710 in 1990 to about 29,000 in 2010 and, notably, to about 51,000 in 2019¹⁸. Actually, Alho and Kumer-Haukanõmm [25, p. 18] argue that 'Estonians' is a heterogeneous group that consists not only of Estonians but also of Ingrian Finns and Russian speakers of several nationalities. Besides tourists and labour migrants, there are also students and entrepreneurs as well as spouses, children and retired individuals many of whom have immigrated along with the family. As many of the Estonians do not register their stay in Finland but commute between their 'home' in Estonia and Finland, the figures can be much higher. Between 1992 and 2019, over 8,500 Estonians have also received Finnish citizenship¹⁹.

In 2011, up to 80–90% of the Estonians in Finland were men. Many of them travelled between home and work (in Finland) weekly, monthly, or slightly less often. The distance between the capitals of Finland and Estonia is only 80 kilometres and the inexpensive ferry connection across the Gulf of Finland takes only two hours. Employment in Finland where salaries are considerably higher than in Estonia gives commuters a sense of financial security and general well-being. Strong family and friendships relations in Estonia mean that most of the migrants have no desire to change their country of residence. [26, p. 141; 27, p. 158, 164–166]. That transnational life of commuting migrants materialises itself in constant travel, distance relationship and experience of being separated from one's wife and children. These often result in the feeling of loneliness, alienation between the father and his children, parallel relationships, or divorce. Yet, frequent communication combined with the economic security, well-valued quality time with the family during days off, including domestic and international travel, and better prospects of being able to support children's education may have a positive impact on the relationship [27; 28]. Even though children may get material benefits from family members' work abroad, they may have difficulties comprehending the 'necessity' of the situation [29, p. 94].

In this context, an article on Estonian construction workers being 'corona prisoners' in Finland [30] clearly illustrates the trouble that the sudden restrictions of border traffic created for Estonian labour migrants and their families. As Estonians' commuting across the Gulf of Finland was usually not considered as 'essential', the government's decision to terminate ticket sales for passenger traffic put Estonian migrants' lives on hold. They had to choose between going 'home' to Estonia or continuing earning in Finland, without knowing if they would be

¹⁸ Immigrants and integration, 2020, *Statistics Finland Web databases*, available at http://pxnet2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/en/Maahanmuuttajat_ja_kotoutuminen/ (accessed 8 December 2020).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

able to go home before the end of the pandemic. In the article published in early-May [Ibid.], an Estonian construction worker voices his perspective that, I argue, represents a broader sentiment among commuting Estonians in Finland.

I have not seen my family since then... Of course, I miss my close ones. Here, no one has been at home. Men walk around with depressed faces. But we have no choice since if you go to Estonia, you cannot come back. Everyone stays here, scared to lose the job!

The man had briefly visited Estonia for his son's birthday one and a half months before writing that, shortly, as the borders to Finland would be closed and travel-to-work commuting was not possible. Living apart from families, often in collective flats with several other male migrants, was challenging. While some decided to return home and find alternative employment in Estonia, others decided to stay in Finland due to Finland's more regulated and secure labour market. In Mõttus-Lepik's report [30], two men tell about the use of new telecommunication technologies for migrants' practices of home making in a transnational or translocal contexts. That is an important tool not only for Estonian migrants in Finland but for migrants around the world (see e. g. [27; 31]).

I talk to them every evening through a video call. It is a kind of adventure, isn't it? They wait for me, and I wait for them. I am here for my family's sake to earn some money.

Every morning, lunchtime and evening we communicate through video call but the absence of the physical contact is immense... And it has not been so easy for my wife either in Spain [where she stays] where the restrictions were particularly harsh. She could go out of the flat only to take out the trash and to go to a store.

Overall, these relate to the notion of transnational relationships and care among migrant families that suddenly revolutionised after the government decided to restrict mobility between the two countries. Working with Bryceson's and Vuorela's [32] and Pöllänen's [33] conceptions, Siim [26, p. 142] explains how transnational families have specific — often conscious — ways of expressing love, affection and care when everyday presence and family routines are absent. In the above example, video calls are significant daily practices that reduce emotional stress among migrants. However, both the physical longing and the worry about family members 'at home' remain. While some of the migrants had no other options but to 'wait and hope' for the changes in border traffic regulations in Finland, others left Finland for good or tried to find 'alternative' ways to cross the border back and forth. A migrant in Mõttus-Lepik's [30] report explains:

You get a commercial vehicle and drive. As freight traffic is allowed, with a small van you will get across [the border]. If you tell them that you are bringing goods and you are a transport worker, the Finnish customs will let you through smoothly... In

theory, you could even visit your family in Estonia this way, but people have not done that yet. Now we just wait and hope that the Finnish government will ease the border restrictions on Sunday.

Since it was an important issue for Estonian labour and Finnish companies alike, and the idea was strongly promoted by the Estonian government, the commuting migrants were exempted from the 14-day quarantine when the Finnish government on September 12th tightened its travel restrictions with Estonia. While the Finnish government introduced the concept of ‘border communities’ at the Swedish border, Estonian travel-to-work migrants also got a special status for border crossings.

Conclusion

The history of borders as the primary solution for disease control is not a new phenomenon. In the context of the globalised economy, transnational networks and lives, as well as global value chains, states’ decision to restrict travel and transnational practices is not, necessarily, the best solution. Being central components of nation states and popular in nationalist and populist discourses while, at the same time, functioning as instruments of control and health risk containment, borders and cross-border mobility are clearly securitized during the pandemic. Allowing cargo and ‘essential’ travel at the ‘internal’ borders, the Finnish government acknowledged the importance of well-functioning border-crossings for Finland’s economy, performance and security. As the recent special arrangements of ‘border communities’ and commuting clearly indicate, the government, after all, responded to the critique and diplomatic pressure for alleviating social costs of its bordering.

The Finnish government protects its population and secures functions of society during the pandemic by restricting mobility and migration from its neighbouring states and beyond. The ‘external’ border of Finland to Russia was closed and effected particularly cross-border shopping and local economies in border communities. The ‘internal’ borders to Sweden and Estonia, that this paper concentrates on, represent two different historical, social and economic bordering contexts within the European Union. In the North, the cultures and the practices of border-crossing have been developing for centuries. Up to ten times higher infection rates in Sweden ‘forced’ Finland to restrict border traffic for over half a year and separated an integrated border area where people used to cross the border daily for work, leisure, shopping and family affairs. A special ‘border community’ concept and free cross-border movement for locals were introduced only in autumn 2020 when the government reinstated border control due to the deteriorating epidemiological situation in Sweden. In the South, the encounters across the Gulf of Finland between Finland and Estonia became extremely intensive only during the last decades. Besides interrupting the exceptionally lively tourism

exchange, the new lockdown disrupted personal encounters and networks among commuters, migrant families and others. It also hampered the transnational family making and the development of personal networks, as well as caused severe economic losses for businesses and regions alike. Besides preventing the spread of the virus during the pandemic, the lockdown shook the areas that had been economically and socially integrating for years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed our understanding of globalising and Europeanising world. The illusion of a global world and borderless Europe has turned into a hey-day of nation states where international cooperation is scarce and different types of bordering practices are more rigorous than ever. Besides states' territorial borders, the practices of bordering have extended to public spaces and spaces outside border areas. In a way, bodies — particularly foreign bodies aiming to cross the border — have become spaces of suspicion and sites of bordering. In the context of very strong political pressure and methodological nationalism, the new practices often remain unnoticed. We can, thus, ask: Do bordering and restrictions to migration and mobility provide a solution to the 'problem'? And at what cost do they come for citizens, local communities and businesses?

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The author

Dr Joni Virkkunen, Research Manager, Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland, Finland.

E-mail: joni.virkkunen@uef.fi

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8845-1396>
