

RESILIENT BORDERS

CROSS-BORDER SPATIAL PLANNING
& CRISIS MANAGEMENT

POLICY PUBLICATION & COMPENDIUM OF PILOT ACTIONS



Photo: DG of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic, Crisis Management pilot CM9

Pilot actions under the Resilient Borders initiative on Cross-Border Spatial Planning and Crisis Management

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Preface by DG REGIO, European Commission

In early 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across Europe, countries closed borders, disrupting one of the fundamental pillars of the European Union: the four freedoms – free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. This unprecedented situation highlighted the critical importance of cooperation at the borders and reminded us that crises do not stop at national boundaries. The pandemic offered a clear lesson: coordinated action is essential in crisis situations, and this coordination can only be achieved through effective cross-border governance.

The initiative “Resilient Borders – Cross-Border Spatial Planning and Crisis Management Pilot Actions” sought to translate this lesson into practice. Through 19 pilot actions, it aimed to strengthen resilience, interoperability and efficiency in border regions by fostering joint cross-border planning and crisis management. The experiences gained and results achieved offer valuable guidance for shaping future Interreg programmes. The purpose of this publication is to share the main conclusions of the pilot actions and to provide policy and practical recommendations.

We live in a period of increasing uncertainty, marked by extreme weather events, public health crises and the resurgence of conflict on the European continent. These challenges make resilience and preparedness essential components of effective policy at both the regional and European levels. The different pilot actions demonstrate that borders need not to be obstacles: through cooperation, they can become opportunities for innovation and shared solutions. Spatial planning and

crisis management are reinforcing tools that directly contribute to the resilience of European regions.

The conclusions of these projects provide a strong foundation for further cross-border cooperation. Strengthening the resilience of European regions requires collaboration across a wide range of issues: from cross-border mobility and infrastructure to climate adaptation, digitalisation and the responsible use of artificial intelligence. By working together, Europe can better respond to the challenges of the 21st century and protect its citizens in a future-proof manner.

I would like to express a special thank you to the teams at the Association of European Border Regions and the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière for driving the pilot actions forward and preparing this publication. I also extend my gratitude to all the stakeholders at the borders, whose active participation in the projects has greatly enhanced cooperation and contributed to building a more resilient Europe.

This initiative marks a concrete step toward addressing the unique challenges faced by border regions during crises. I strongly believe that the insights gleaned from our 19 pilot projects will serve as a powerful inspiration for future work on the resilience and preparedness of cross-border regions.

With best regards,

Hugo Sobral



Preface by AEBR and MOT

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020, states responded within domestic frameworks without cross-border coordination, leading to disproportionate, unfair, and sometimes violent border closures. As a result, people who lived there were hit harder than others, as economic actors (who could no longer cross the border to work), as citizens (their national identity card no longer allowing them to cross the border), as users of public services (cross-border services were the first to close), as informed beings (suddenly deprived of any cross-border information), as individuals engaged in a cross-border community (suddenly injured by the loss of trust of their neighbours), and as persons linked by family ties (which were suddenly cut between countries). This crisis raised awareness that border management needed to be reinvented, recognising borders not only as lines separating states, but also as cross-border living areas for multi-dimensional persons.

To meet this challenge, the European Commission supported diverse actions, initially driven by the Parliament, among them the Resilient Borders project developed by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT). The 19 pilots have demonstrated how cross-border living areas can be sustained through cross-border spatial planning in ordinary times and cross-border crisis management in times of turmoil. This requires an integrated 360-degree

vision; horizontal, vertical and diagonal coordination; personal commitment combined with cross-border institutionalisation; and shared responsibility by local, national and European institutions towards cross-border regions and their inhabitants, moving from voluntary co-operation to compulsory collaboration, with cross-border mandates given to institutions.

For their cross-border living areas, the pilots have developed spatial planning and crisis management actions, addressing cross-border interdependencies through different sectoral policy fields (housing, mobility, nature protection, civil security, public services...), and cross cutting dimensions such as governance, information and trust, combined through a holistic approach in different contexts (urban or rural), and at different scales (from Eurocities to Euroregions): this is what the present publication intends to showcase.

Combined with Cohesion policy's Interreg programmes, which support investment projects, a territorial approach and governance, and enable pan European knowledge transfer, the pilot projects show the way: the toolbox is now ready to foster cross-border spatial planning and crisis management all over Europe.

With best regards,

Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Secretary General of the AEBR



Jean Peyrony, Director General of the MOT



INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Resilient Borders Initiative

Five years after the COVID-19 pandemic and in the midst of the effects of climate change and geopolitical instability, building resilience for cross-border territories is no longer an option but a necessity. It requires coordinated policy approaches in the European Union, especially in border regions. Achievement of the Single market, climate adaptation efforts, crisis management, social and territorial cohesion, and integrated territorial development also point to the importance of joint actions within cross-border regions. With this in mind, Resilient Borders is an initiative aimed at supporting border regions to become more resilient together with their neighbouring regions in the fields of crisis management and spatial planning.

As resilience has gradually become in recent years a topic of interest among policy makers and stakeholders, some reference studies on cross-border regions on this issue have been drawn up. Two specific studies initiated by the European Commission lay the groundwork of the Resilient Borders project.

For the crisis management lot, the study *Strengthening the resilience of EU border regions. Mapping risks & crisis management tools and identifying gaps*¹ provides tools to help stakeholders manage cross-border risks, both natural and man-made. For spatial planning, the reference study is *Building More Resilient Cross-border Regions*². Two studies on the effects and impact of 'COVID-19'³ complement this bibliography.

These theoretical frameworks provide valuable knowledge and insights into these two fields. To go further, the European Commission's DG REGIO wanted to support the concrete application of the developed knowledge and tools through the implementation of pilot actions in both fields. The pilot actions were selected through a call for proposals that addressed both fields as two distinct lots.

1. Cross-border Crisis management

Crises are characterised by threat, surprise and a short time to make decisions, but especially by the need for change. If risk management is the assessment of potential threats and the search for the best way to avoid them, crisis management addresses threats before, during and after their occurrence. This means building the skills and techniques to better detect, evaluate, grasp and handle serious situations. Crises may be sudden or gradual, and their basic phases are detection, preparedness and prevention, containment and damage control, recovery and learning. There are various related models and theories, and the role of the media (including social media) is crucial as it may help or worsen a given crisis if it is not appropriately involved when planning. The preparation of a crisis management plan is a complex exercise that requires consideration of many elements and circumstances and involves a high number of stakeholders.

The Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) followed in particular the cross-border crisis management pilot cases and the preparation of the corresponding plans: through the developed plans, border regions should now be better equipped to react swiftly to different types of crises (pandemic, environmental, security, natural disasters, migration, terrorist attacks...) impacting borders and requiring the coordinated action of national, regional and local authorities across borders. In fact, the list of risks includes extreme weather, flooding, drought, wildfires, geophysical risk, epidemics/pandemics, animal and plant diseases, nuclear and radiological accidents, disruption of critical infrastructure, industrial accidents (including marine pollution) but also terrorism, cyber threats (general, institutional, industrial, nuclear), etc. Each of these risks requires a specific sectoral approach (generally organised around domestic policies, with varying levels of EU coordination) but also a systemic,

¹ European Commission, Technopolis Group, CMCC, and Nordregio (2024) Strengthening the resilience of EU border regions. Mapping risks & crisis management tools and identifying gaps.

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/studies/KN-02-24-586-2A-N.pdf

² OECD & DG REGIO, Building More Resilient Cross-border Regions (January 2025).

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/building-more-resilient-cross-border-regions_d5fd3e59-en.html

³ MOT "The effects of COVID-19 induced border closures on cross-border regions" (2020).

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/46250564-669a-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> / MOT "Analysis of the impact of border-related measures taken by Member States in the fight against COVID-19" (2022).

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2022/analysis-of-the-impact-of-border-related-measures-taken-by-member-states-in-the-fight-against-covid-19

bottom-up approach inherent to the cross-border context.

2. Cross-border Spatial planning

Spatial planning is understood here in a holistic way, as territorial development aiming at territorial cohesion, coordination of sectoral and territorial policies addressing a specific area, and a synthesis of different traditions, such as the Anglo-Saxon “town and country planning”, the German “Raumordnung”, or the French “aménagement du territoire”. In a cross-border context, cross-border spatial planning should consist of an integrated approach embedded in multi-level governance, helping to develop cross-border public services, addressing in a coherent way the cross-border area concerned, cross-border governance able to coordinate such public policies for citizens living there, under cross-border democratic control, cross-border markets, to assure a win-win economic development of the cross-border region, including fair cross-border public funding of necessary investments, cross-border shared information (including the critical data issue), cross-border identity, trust, sense of belonging, and common vision for the future, and cross-border networks of persons, which are proven essential in a crisis context.

European borders are diverse, and the Resilient Borders project has enabled the development of various approaches, mixing some of the above components, though not necessarily all of them, ranging from integrated to more sectoral-based approaches.

The Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) has coordinated the cross-border spatial planning pilot actions and the elaboration of the corresponding plans. Previous crises have shown that cross-border socio-economic interdependence is often not addressed through systematic, coherent cooperation among public authorities across the border. Thus, managing cross-border areas requires cross-border spatial planning and multilevel governance, as these regions are deeply interlinked and often depend on decisions taken at the national or European level.

B. Purpose of Resilient Borders initiative

Resilient Borders explores the complementary dimensions of crisis management and spatial planning

to structurally and institutionally adapt cross-border territories to crisis. On the one hand, by developing cross-border crisis management, a border region builds joint capacities and reinforces preparedness for crises. On the other hand, cross-border spatial planning, by fostering cross-border governance and joint strategies, addresses structural and territorial aspects of risk management. Both dimensions contribute to reinforcing the resilience of cross-border regions.

Cross-border regions should often be considered as cross-border living areas⁴. Cross-border living areas are characterised by strong interdependencies across the border in the economic, social, cultural and ecological sectors (French concept of “bassins de vie”), which are often not addressed by appropriate cross-border public policies. Borders are permeable to climate-related hazards and, more broadly, to all types of risks. When a crisis occurs, the lack of joint management or preparedness is exposed, as the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent border closures, acting as a stress test, have shown (see references to COVID-19 studies above). More recent events have underlined the need for joint preparation in cross-border areas such as the rockfall in the Maurienne Valley in August 2023, which interrupted the Paris-Milan railway line for nineteen months. This event highlighted both the vulnerability of border regions located in risk-exposed areas and the vulnerability of critical cross-border infrastructure, and the need for anticipatory spatial planning, especially to secure cross-border transport corridors and ensure the availability of effective alternative routes. The high vulnerability of this cross-border region, further illustrated by a flooding event in July 2025 that affected both sides of the border and along the same corridor, which again halted traffic for a week, demonstrates that these hazards reinforce the need for cross-border coordinated preparedness strategies and cross-border spatial planning.

Cross-border spatial planning and crisis management are complementary approaches that contribute to the objectives of the Cross-Border Crisis Response Integrated Initiative (CB-CRII, initiated by the European Parliament and implemented by the Commission) and should boost similar actions in other border regions

⁴ Cross-border living areas are territorial spaces located on both sides of a national border, where populations maintain daily and functional interactions (work, housing, mobility, access to services, education, healthcare, commerce, culture), forming an integrated living area despite the presence of a state border.

- They are characterised by:
- strong socio-economic interdependencies;
- regular cross-border flows of people, goods and services;
- shared daily life practices across the border;
- a need for tailored cross-border governance and cooperation mechanisms.

across Europe. Recent crises and the weakness of border regions towards closure decisions during the COVID-19 crisis or due to the reinforcement of border controls have made it necessary to adopt a high level of coordination and preparedness for joint action through efficient cross-border planning and governance, and to develop joint crisis management plans.

The objectives of Resilient Borders were to support the implementation of 19 action plans for spatial planning and crisis management through pilot actions. Resilient Borders aimed to:

- Involve local and regional authorities and representatives from both sides of the selected cross-border territories in the design and implementation of spatial planning and crisis management action plans.

- Select and complete a series of joint cross-border plans for spatial planning and crisis management to facilitate the resilience of cross-border territories.
- Raise knowledge and awareness on the methodologies used in designing and implementing cross-border plans.

The plans were not expected to be officially adopted by the participating authorities, nor were agreements to be signed by the end of the implementation period, given the relatively short timeframe. However, as strategies, protocols, manuals for action or agreements, they constitute an important framework for further cooperation beyond the pilot action.

C. Methodology and approach

The AEBR and the MOT organised a call for proposals between October and November 2024 to select twenty pilot actions. Its objective was to initiate the implementation of up to twenty pilot actions, ten for each lot, to identify and promote sustainable methods for developing resilient border regions by elaborating plans for cross-border crisis management on the one hand and cross-border spatial planning on the other.

The call addressed public bodies (national, regional, and local) in border regions, as well as cross-border structures such as European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), Euroregions, Eurodistricts and Eurocities.

The European Commission, AEBR and MOT selected the applications to be awarded and implemented based on appraisals carried out by two pools of cross-border experts. A total of 20 pilot actions were selected, including one that later had to withdraw for internal reasons, bringing the total number of pilots to nineteen.

The support during the initiative was provided to nineteen selected cases divided into two lots:

- **Lot 1 on Cross-border Crisis Management with nine pilot actions, coordinated by the AEBR**
- **Lot 2 on Cross-border Spatial Planning with ten pilot actions, coordinated by the MOT**

For each lot, the initiative referred interested stakeholders to relevant literature and studies published by the European Commission (see references above) to support the implementation of these findings. The Resilient Borders pilot actions were strongly encouraged to make use of the findings of the studies.

The initiative offered financial and technical support to actors in cross-border regions to develop pilot actions, aiming to set up joint cross-border spatial planning or crisis management plans over an eight-month implementation period from February 2025 to September 2025.

Kick-off webinar on 27 January 2025: The selected pilot actions met for the first time during an online kick-off webinar on January 27th 2025 in the presence of the European Commission's DG REGIO and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), where the AEBR and the MOT explained the Resilient Borders initiative. Each pilot also had the opportunity to present its project within its respective lot.

Onboarding interview - March 2025: The MOT and the AEBR organised onboarding interviews at the beginning of the implementation period. This allowed for a first overall understanding of the stakes in each pilot border region, enabling a better understanding of the goals and needs to be addressed during implementation and of the expected outputs.

The beneficiaries received financial support to implement their pilot action, with the aim of making their cross-border territories more integrated, achieving better cross-border governance and cohesive territorial development, and thereby building resilience in cross-border regions. The stakeholders explored possibilities for joint planning with competent authorities across the whole cross-border territory and conducted activities to build resilience and enhance cross-border cooperation.

Action plans: Each of the nineteen beneficiaries prepared, together with their partners, a joint cross-border crisis management action plan under lot 1, and a

cross-border spatial planning action plan under lot 2. Through joint plans spanning national borders, cross-border regions were to increase their preparedness to face potential crises and to develop more efficient infrastructure and services in their territories. To achieve the overall goal of the pilot action, the elaboration of a joint cross-border plan, the beneficiaries organised a wide range of activities. They prepared studies, roadmaps, draft agreements, protocols, mappings, data collection, testing phases, experiments, etc.; organised consultations, study visits, meetings, workshops, and conferences; and promoted the results through communication campaigns. After the implementation period, pilot actions handed in their final action plans.

Final conference of Resilient Borders - 12 and 13 November 2025 in Gorizia: These results were presented at the final event of the Resilient Borders initiative. It took place on November 12th and 13th 2025 in Gorizia and Nova Gorica, European Capital of Borderless Culture 2025, at the Italian-Slovenian border, the site of one of the pilot actions supported by the initiative. The final event was organised around a main internal workshop session. It allowed participants to meet in person with other pilot action representatives and stakeholders, share their experiences and lessons learned in both crisis management and spatial planning, and present the results to the European Commission.

The results focused on how Resilient Borders has established resilience and will continue beyond the initiative to inspire the future Interreg programming period post-2027. During three poster sessions, the pilot actions had the opportunity to present their results to a wider audience. The posters were prepared in advance of the final event.

The internal exchange was linked to two further sessions: one within the Cross-Border School organised by AEER at the *Università degli Studi di Trieste – Sede di Gorizia*, which allowed discussion of the results with other European cross-border stakeholders; and a second within the European Cross-border Platform (ECBP) annual event that took place on the second day. These sessions allowed the results of the exchanges and the key lessons from the Resilient Borders initiative's pilot actions to be presented.

Overall results of Resilient Borders: The overall results of the Resilient Borders initiative are presented in two final documents: the present “Policy Publication on Resilient Borders” and a “Compendium of the Resilient Borders pilot actions”, which summarises the nineteen pilot actions and their action plans.

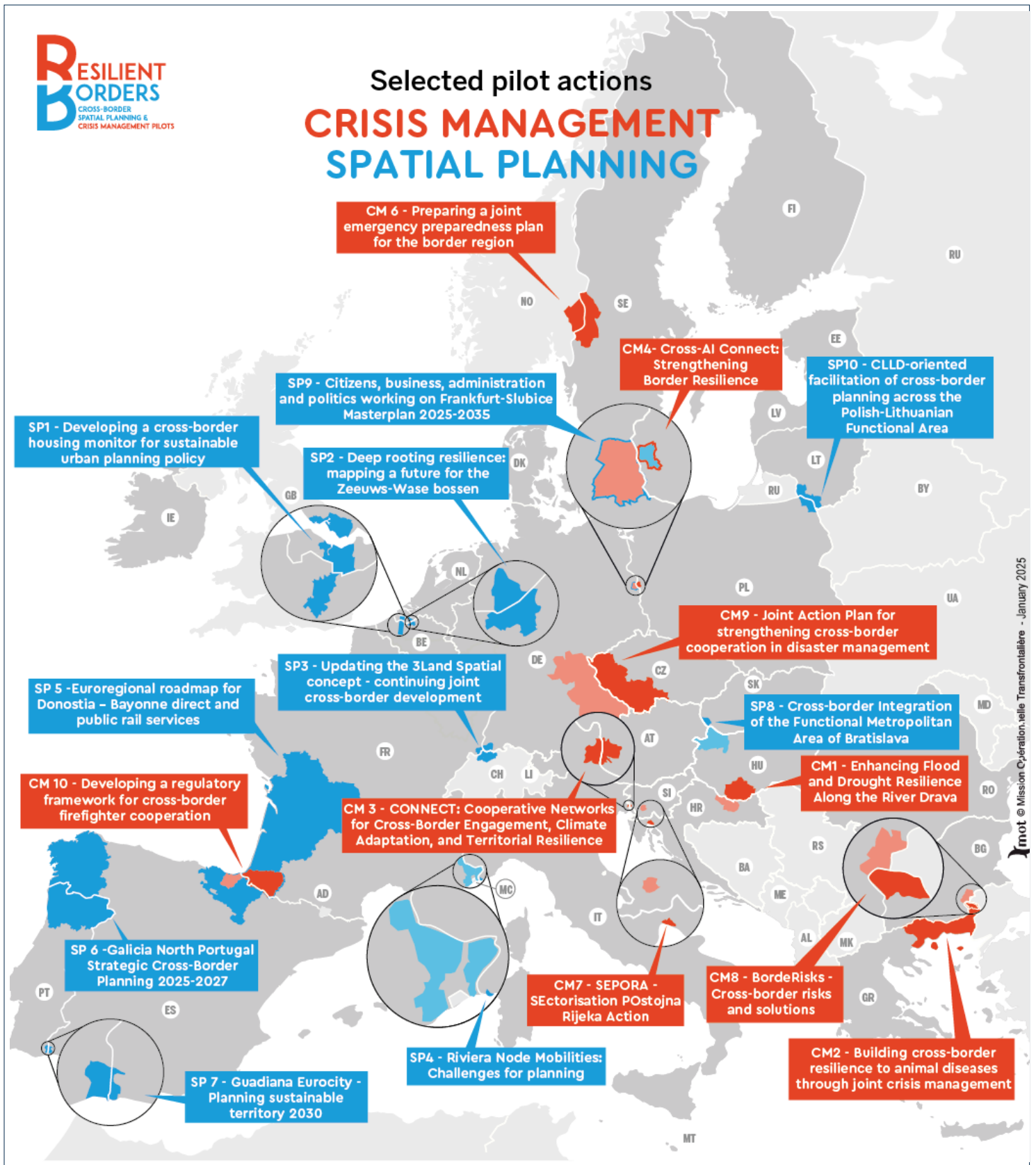
Policy Publication on Resilient Borders: This publication presents the evidence and analysis-based outcomes of the Resilient Borders initiative. It raises knowledge and awareness of viable methodologies for preparing and implementing a cross-border plan to develop governance and resilience in a border region. It analyses both the intermediate and final reports of each pilot action, and in particular the action plans, completed by the exchanges and findings of the final event held in mid-November 2025.

Compendium on the pilot actions: The “Policy publication” is complemented by a compendium summarising the pilot actions. The findings of each project beneficiary are showcased in the compendium which builds on the analysis, outcomes, action plans and their capitalisation potential.



THE NINETEEN PILOT ACTIONS

Resilient Borders pilot actions



Resilient Borders - Crisis Management - Pilot actions

Recipient organisations

CM1 - HU/HR - Local government of Baranya county in partnership with Virovitica-Podravina county

CM2 - EL/BG - Region of Eastern Macedonia & Thrace in partnership with Regional administration of Smolyan

CM3 - IT/SI - EGTC GO

CM4 - PL/DE - City of Stubice in partnership with City of Frankfurt (Oder)

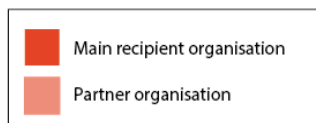
CM6 - NO/SE - Border region ARKO

CM7 - HR/SI - City of Rijeka in partnership with Municipality of Postojna

CM8 - EL/BG - Municipality of Orestiada in partnership with Svilengrad Municipality

CM9 - CZ/DE - Ministry of the Interior - Directorate General of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic in partnership with Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Sport and Integration

CM10 - FR/ES - Pyrénées-Atlantiques Departmental Fire and Rescue Service (SDIS64) in partnership with f



Resilient Borders - Spatial Planning - Pilot actions

Recipient organisations

SP1 - BE/NL - North Sea Port District BGTC

SP2 - BE/NL - EGTC Linieland van Waas en Hulst

SP3 - FR/DE/CH - Trinational Eurodistrict Basel

SP4 - FR/IT - Ventimiglia Municipality in partnership with Nice Côte d'Azur Metropolis and Community of Agglomeration of the French Riviera (CARF)

SP5 - FR/ES - EGTC Euroregion Nouvelle-Aquitaine Euskadi Navarre

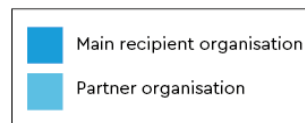
SP6 - PT/ES - Galicia Norte Portugal EGTC

SP7 - PT/ES - EGTC Eurociudad Del Guadiana

SP8 - HU/SK - Bratislava Municipality in partnership with General Assembly of the Local Government of Győr-Ménfőcsanak-Sopron County

SP9 - DE/PL - City of Frankfurt (Oder) in partnership with Municipality of Slubice

SP10 - LT/PL - Polish-Lithuanian Cross-Border Functional Area EGTC



The nineteen pilot actions of the Resilient Borders initiative were distributed into two themes: nine addressed cross-border crisis management, and ten addressed cross-border spatial planning. They spanned seventeen internal EU borders, providing a diversity of contexts in which to explore how resilience is built in cross-border regions. The pilots tackled multiple dimensions of risk and resilience:

Within the crisis management lot, pilots addressed risks such as floods, droughts and forest fires; climate-related hazards; animal diseases; industrial and technological accidents; disruptions to critical infrastructure and challenges linked to crisis communication, information exchange and coordination between emergency services across borders. They explored how joint preparedness, joint procedures and the alignment of operational and legal frameworks can facilitate cross-border resource access and joint action during a crisis, thereby reducing vulnerability to shocks.

Within the spatial planning lot, the pilots focused on reinforcing structural frameworks to enhance resilience through the development of cross-border housing analyses, joint land-use strategies, metropolitan and functional area integration, the integration of transport corridors and mobility, and the strengthening of multilevel cross-border governance frameworks to support cross-border cooperation. They explored how joint governance, long-term operational strategies, and the alignment of operational and legal frameworks can facilitate cooperation and planning across borders, as well as the implementation of structural changes within the territory to develop its adaptation capacities.

More information on each pilot action can be found on the Resilient Borders website or in the compendium.

Link to the compendium: https://resilientborders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Resilient_Borders_Pilot_Actions_Compendium.pdf

Link to each pilot action webpage where their public action plan are available: <https://resilientborders.eu/pilot-actions/>

Furthermore, each pilot presented the results of their pilots and the action plans during a poster session at the final event in Gorizia on 12 November 2025: <https://resilientborders.eu/resilient-borders-final-event/>

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PILOT ACTIONS AND THEIR ACTION PLANS

The findings drawn from Resilient Borders are based on the reference studies and the initiative's outputs. Through the pilot actions, the Resilient Borders initiative provided valuable insights into the realities, challenges and opportunities of cross-border crisis management and spatial planning across Europe. It proposes a methodological approach outlining the steps needed to develop a joint action plan: gathering knowledge about the topic, engaging the relevant stakeholders and creating a common foundation for future resilience across the border.

I. Building knowledge

The implementation of the pilot actions demonstrated the importance of cultivating shared knowledge across borders and of using evidence-based approaches when coordinating preparedness and response measures. A key finding is that effective collaboration in crisis situations and during planning relies on a shared understanding of territorial vulnerabilities, available resources, responsibilities and operational capacities on both sides of the border.

1. Assessment of the initial situation

When developing an action plan, the beneficiaries followed a sound methodological approach that began with an **assessment of the current situation**. Although most of them had already identified general patterns and trends - based on observations, existing studies, and a shared intention to improve cross-border cooperation in spatial planning and crisis management - they still needed a better understanding of:

- The current situation,
- The stakeholders' and local communities' needs on each side of the border,
- The existing and potential risks,
- The barriers and gaps limiting cross-border collaboration,
- The key stakeholders and their roles, responsibilities and competences required to address the challenges,
- The existing frameworks in the territories at different levels (for instance, the EU Civil

Protection Mechanism, bilateral agreements, cross-border committees, regional strategies),

- The state of awareness, concern and preparedness of the population.

All nineteen pilot actions conducted different types of mapping covering one or several of the elements listed above to better understand the territorial organisation concerned and/or the state of play of the cooperation.

The methodology applied varied and relied on analytical tools such as risk assessment, modelling, impact forecasting, and data interpretation, involving relevant actors to share their viewpoints and expertise.

EXAMPLES FROM SPATIAL PLANNING PILOT ACTIONS

SP4:⁵ The city of Ventimiglia produced a **comprehensive document with key figures and detailed information** on cross-border mobility and spatial planning responsibilities regarding transports corridors between Nice and Ventimiglia to enable stakeholders to develop an action plan for the Riviera node (France/Italy).

SP3:⁶ To prepare the updating of the 3Land Spatial concept, the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel conducted a **cross-border project mapping of past, ongoing and planned development** in the cross-border area. This led to an **analytical report of the documents drawn up in the last 15 years** of cooperation, providing contextual knowledge and methodological and strategic references of the cross-border urban transformation before the future actualisation.

SP10:⁷ For the EGTC Functional Area of Poland-Lithuania mapping became a direct tool beyond the understanding of the state of play, in the form of a **"manual on governance and communication"**, linking both topics who and how to address issues.

⁵ Pilot action SP4 Riviera Node Mobilities: Challenges for planning managed by Ventimiglia Municipality (IT), the Community of Agglomeration of the French Riviera (CARF) and Nice Côte d'Azur Metropolis (FR). More information on the SP4 pilot case in the compendium: [Compendium](#)

⁶ Pilot action SP3 Updating the 3Land Spatial concept - continuing joint cross-border development managed by Trinational Eurodistrict Basel. More information on the SP3 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

⁷ Pilot action SP10 CLLD-oriented facilitation of cross-border planning across the Polish-Lithuanian Functional Area managed by the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation "Polish-Lithuanian Cross-border Functional Area". More information on the SP10 pilot case in the compendium: [Compendium](#)

EXAMPLES FROM CRISIS MANAGEMENT PILOT ACTIONS

CM1⁸: Collecting available data and identifying missing information made it possible to **map climate risks** along the Drava River between Croatia and Hungary.

CM2⁹: The **mapping of existing structures and crisis-response workflows** on both sides of the Bulgarian-Greek border enabled the identification of institutional and operational coordination gaps between veterinary, civil protection, and local authorities, affecting the capacity of the region of Eastern Macedonia & Thrace in Greece and the Region of Smolyan in Bulgaria to respond jointly to animal disease outbreaks. Data was gathered through document reviews and structured interviews with regional officials.

CM3¹⁰: **A comprehensive analysis of the border area's context**, covering economic, environmental, social, and governance dimensions - **combined with a detailed mapping of relevant stakeholders**, their strengths, and areas for improvement, revealed vulnerabilities in crisis management systems and identified opportunities for synergy between Italian and Slovenian institutions.

CM9¹¹: The integration of analytical tools as **a risk map and a competency map** was a key process in the preparation of the joint action plan for strengthening cross-border cooperation in disaster management along the Czech-German border region.

Conducting a diagnostic phase enabled beneficiaries to develop a shared vision, a common understanding and a sense of common ownership. To start, they focused on reviewing and comparing existing frameworks, mapping cross-border interactions, and identifying barriers to cross-border cooperation.



SP2¹²: Building a shared vision for the Zeeuws-Wase bossen, the pilot action developed a **joint development strategic vision** for the Dutch and Belgium sides of the area that will guide governance and projects in and around the forests, addressing themes such as biodiversity, water management, fire safety, recreational use, and impact of infrastructural developments.

Recognising common goals, challenges and vulnerabilities can serve as a catalyst for encouraging communities and political actors to take action. It enables stakeholders to move from fragmented cooperation into a structured, evidence-based approach and replicable model. A body of evidence on existing needs and obstacles can shape common priorities, serve as a basis for tackling them, and is beneficial to developing a joint strategy.

Typical gaps and challenges observed by the pilots include:

- Differences in legal competences and mandates among stakeholders and competent authorities,
- Asymmetric settings on both sides of the border,
- Unequal resources or socio-economic conditions, and
- Communication barriers, such as differing terminology or the lack of tools for multilingual communication.

SP3: The Trinational Eurodistrict Basel had to harmonise administrative procedures with three national systems, and thus take into account the governance procedures and delays that can result from working with different national systems.

These issues often highlight the need for stronger institutional cooperation, based on a mutual understanding of the administrative, logistical, and legal realities on both sides of the border. Knowledge-sharing fostered a sense of shared purpose and demonstrated that local and regional actors have a role to play in spatial planning and crisis preparedness.

⁸ Pilot action CM1 Enhancing flood and drought resilience along the river Drava managed by the Local Government of Baranya County (HU) and Virovitica – Podravina county (HR). More information on the CM1 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

⁹ Pilot action CM2 Building cross-border resilience to animal diseases through joint crisis management managed by the Region of Eastern Macedonia & Thrace (EL) and the Regional Administration of Smolyan (BG). More information on the CM2 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

¹⁰ Pilot action CM3 CONNECT: Cooperative networks for cross-border engagement, climate adaptation, and territorial resilience managed by EGTC GO (IT-SI). More information on the CM3 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

¹¹ Pilot action CM9 Joint Action plan for strengthening cross-border cooperation in disaster management managed by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic – Directorate General of the Fire Rescue Service (CZ) and the Bavarian State Ministry of the Inter, for Sport and Integration (DE). More information on the CM9 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

¹² Pilot action SP2 Deep rooting resilience: mapping a future for the Zeeuws-Wase bossen managed by EGTS Linieland van Waas en Hulst (NL-BE). More information on the SP2 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

Main takeaways

- Looking at the initial situation is a first necessary step. It includes **analysing previous experiences, good practices, existing tools and regulatory frameworks**, such as bilateral agreements, national rules and other regulations.
- It is important that this **mapping and assessment is done early on in the process**. In this regard, taking into consideration cross-border public services appears particularly relevant to ensure coherent and coordinated planning and crisis response.
- Having a **shared situational picture** provides a concise overview of each partner's status, needs, and challenges, and helps **understand which obstacles or challenges should be prioritised**. It sets the foundation for a strong collaboration to identify opportunities for cooperation.
- **Knowing who** is involved, who has decision-making authority, and who can take action enables more efficient and realistic joint spatial planning and crisis management.



2. Evidence-driven methodology

Throughout the pilot actions, especially during the initial phase, the priority was to establish a clear understanding of the existing cross-border dynamics. In addition to the above-mentioned assessment of the initial situation, the pilot actions worked strategically on how to achieve a diagnosis. Pilots developed and applied various tools and methods, ensuring that all **knowledge was based on verifiable, evidence-based data**. This approach was essential to guarantee empirical knowledge of the territory, to lay the groundwork or reinforce trust, and encourage cooperation.

Collecting reliable, comparable data and sharing it across borders is challenging and complex due to differences in methods and indicators, as well as the lack of data on cross-border interactions. The Resilient Border pilot actions addressed this by enabling knowledge sharing of key data and information through joint protocols, which formed the basis for aligning priorities and criteria across administrative and national boundaries.

Technical and concrete shared data and mapping are fundamental. It is even more important for approaches to resilience building in both crisis management and spatial planning, as they require high technology and up-to-date knowledge. Planning for resilience in the medium to long-term requires **spatial and impact foresight** for border regions, to acknowledge different adaptation scenarios. When planning joint infrastructure or land-use or responding to crises, technical understanding and data-driven decision-making are then indispensable.

To collect and analyse this data, pilots used **diverse methods**, including:

- Desk research of spatial and operational data (e.g. seismic activity records, flows, thematic maps).
- Interviews and surveys (e.g. of local communities, local, regional or national authorities, experts in specific fields).
- Workshops and working groups for direct exchanges.
- Expert involvement, both external and from local and regional authorities, to support diagnostics and draft protocols, agreements, and initial action plans.

An innovative methodology was the use of **simulation and testing tools**, such as tabletop crisis management exercises. These tests occurred at different stages, sometimes during diagnostics to gather data, but more often after developing joint ideas and tools, to validate and refine them. It provided flexibility, allowing the tool to be adapted before defining mid-term goals and helped shape protocols and agreements for joint action plans. The testing was conducted collaboratively with administrative and/or operational teams from both sides of the border. Through such an experimental approach, testing not only strengthened knowledge sharing but also enhanced capacity-building and legitimacy of the solutions and processes that were co-created and jointly verified.

SP1¹³: The BGTC North Sea Port at the Dutch-Belgium border **collected heuristic data and harmonised it** to build a housing monitor and to **provide a data set to urban planners on both sides**. They analysed data on both sides of the border regarding key aspects of housing policies: land use, housing capacity, demography, workers, and cross-border flows. They also involved external experts to draw the housing monitor framework.

An extensive data collection and cross-border mapping of the forest area was done by the EGTC Linieland van Waas en Hulst (SP2)¹⁴: They mapped forest areas, biodiversity flows, management policies... with the main goal of **exchanging information with the other side of the border to design coordinated land use** and environmental strategic planning.

SP7¹⁵: The Eurocity of Guadiana organised exchanges between urbanists and planners from both sides of the border to **exchange practices and jointly coordinate urban planning**.

¹³Pilot action SP1 Developing a cross-border housing monitor for sustainable urban planning policy managed by the Benelux Grouping for Territorial Cooperation North Sea Port District (BE-NL). More information on the SP1 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

¹⁴ Pilot action SP2 Pilot action SP2 Deep rooting resilience: mapping a future for the Zeeuws-Wase bossen. More information on the SP2 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

¹⁵ Pilot action SP7 Guadiana Eurocity - Planning sustainable territory 2030 managed by EGTC Eurocity of Guadiana (ES-PT). More information on the SP7 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

CM7¹⁶: In collaboration with Slovenian and Croatian experts, the Faculty of Civil Engineering at the University of Rijeka produced high-resolution geographical and population maps by **comparing data and aligning spatial and operational criteria related to geography, infrastructure, accessibility, and population density**. The resulting maps were validated in a joint review session.

CM4¹⁷: **Practical exercises simulating crisis scenarios** such as multilingual alert generation, misinformation attacks, and technical failures tested both human workflows and AI tools. The results demonstrated that AI tools, such as automated translation (DeepL, Google Translate), content generation (ChatGPT), and voice synthesis (ElevenLabs) can significantly enhance existing human workflows. However, these tools are designed to assist German and Polish emergency responders, not replace them.

CM8¹⁸: **Two Tabletop Exercises (TTX)** were conducted. The first TTX served as **a diagnostic tool at the beginning of the pilot action**, testing the identified coordination gaps, operational challenges, and weaknesses in communication protocols. Findings were then integrated into the subsequent training workshops in Bulgaria and Greece. The second TTX, taking place towards the end of the pilot action, validated the progress made, tested new coordination mechanisms, and provided feedback for the finalisation of the Joint Plan.

Main takeaways

- The **involvement of experts** on both sides of the border is highly relevant for cross-border resilience building as it relies on linking practical and theoretical approaches, ensuring a high level of precision and continuously updating knowledge to evolving realities.
- **Cross-border data sharing fosters transparency** and, therefore, trust, a key factor at the origin of stakeholder engagement in regional policy, whereby comparable data collection remains the challenge
- **Experimenting within the pilot actions**, through testing tools for instance, creates a better understanding of needs and obstacles, validates possible solutions and processes from the joint action plans to strengthen resilience and readiness, and also lays the basis for later transferability.

With knowledge backed by shared data and simulation tools, regional and local actors are better equipped to act swiftly and effectively in coordinating during crises or planning joint projects for territorial cohesion. However, for cooperation to be successful, the mobilisation of actors and the engagement of local communities are essential. In the Resilient Borders initiative, competent authorities and stakeholders met regularly, exchanged ideas, and had the opportunity to give new impetus to their resilience cooperation.

¹⁶ Pilot action CM7 SEPORA - Sectorisation Postojna Rijeka action managed by the City of Rijeka (HR) and the Municipality of Postojna (SI). More information on the CM7 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#).

¹⁷ Pilot action CM4 Cross-AI Connect: Strengthening border resilience action managed by the City of Stubice (PL) and City of Frankfurt (Oder) (DE). More information on the CM4 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#).

¹⁸ Pilot action CM8 BordeRisks - Cross-border risks and solutions managed by the Municipality of Orestiada (EL) and Svilengrad Municipality (BG). More information on the CM8 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#).

A. Building engagement

As cooperation is above all a matter of persons, their **engagement** is fundamental. This engagement needs to be addressed through a cross-sector, multilevel approach to fully take into account the human side of resilience building. Furthermore, trust between stakeholders plays a crucial role in the process, both for a common understanding and for a shared ownership of the stakes and the joint action plans. Finally, there is a need to raise awareness of the inhabitants and local communities in the concerned cross-border regions, to guarantee the long-term effects of these cooperation and adaptation strategies.

1. Cross-sector and multi-level approach

Most resilience topics, such as emergency responses, environmental protection or transport planning, require a multilevel, cross-sector approach to effectively engage relevant stakeholders and trigger actions at the competent level. Throughout their implementation, pilots intended to involve these actors, which can be considered within the quadruple helix framework: political representatives at different levels of governance, administrative bodies, economic stakeholders - including insurance companies, civil society organisations, academics and experts. This multi-stakeholder approach helped guarantee the legitimacy of the proposed action plans and fostered the **sense of ownership** among all actors.

First and foremost, **involving political representatives and administrative bodies at the local, regional, and national levels** was a key objective for the pilots, as they have knowledge, interest and mandate to support or directly implement measures from the joint action plans. However, given the limited eight-month implementation period, the pilots sometimes struggled to put their cooperation objectives at the top of political representatives' agendas and secure their involvement. The tight timeline, along with external factors such as elections, made it difficult to align agendas and obtain participants' availability for interviews, workshops or conferences. Even after commitments were secured, validation processes took time, as they had to follow official institutional calendars. Notably, pilots that invested **early effort in briefing decision-makers** were more successful in laying the foundation for elaborating a joint action plan and in raising awareness among stakeholders at levels of governance beyond the local level (e.g. national or EU). Furthermore, **para-diplomacy**, such as region-to-region and municipality-to-municipality relations, proved to be powerful social and

political tools for better coordination in cross-border areas.

Secondly, almost all of the pilot actions involved **academics, universities, research centres or specialised experts**, as the topic of resilience requires high technicality, specialised knowledge and continuous updates. Differences between countries highlighted the need to involve experts who are familiar with both country systems in resilience-related topics. Expert work(shops) and studies contributed to enhancing stakeholders' **knowledge of the technical content**. Some pilots even organised professional exchanges between experts from both sides of the border, emphasising the relevance of peer learning.



SP5¹⁹: Due to the high-technicality of mobility planning for high speed lanes and regional trains, the Euroregion Nouvelle-Aquitaine Euskadi Navarre involved decision makers as well as all relevant transportation stakeholders, including the transporters, in its meetings.

SP8²⁰: The city of Bratislava with the Győr Moson County involved an Hungarian cross-border cooperation association to draft their final action plan, as they could deliver insights and the best practices, and were able to best coordinate the cooperation for the new cross-border partnership.

Thirdly, civil society, including citizens, economic actors, and associations, needed to be gathered to prepare their response in the event of a crisis, as developed in part II-C Awareness-raising of the inhabitants in cross-border regions. Private sector actors may be associated with and financially contribute to a cross-border resilience project.

¹⁹ Pilot action SP5 Euroregional roadmap for Donostia – Bayonne direct and public rail services managed by the EGTC Euroregion Nouvelle-Aquitaine Euskadi Navarre (ES-FR). For more information on the SP5 pilot case, consult the compendium: [Compendium](#)

²⁰ Pilot action SP8 Cross-border Integration of the Functional Metropolitan Area of Bratislava managed by Bratislava, the Capital City of the Slovak republic (SK) and the General Assembly of the Local Government of Győr-Moson-Sopron County (HU). For more information on the SP8 pilot case, consult the compendium: [Compendium](#).

CM6²¹: ARKO Border Committee focused on **political anchoring** with targeting briefings to municipalities in order to involve political and administrative leadership, secure commitment and align expectations at the cross-border local level.

SP6²²: The Eurocity of Guadiana develop a citizen participation online platform to collect citizen feedback on the region spatial planning policies. They also organised workshop and conference with civil society, and a dedicated workshop with youth.

On the topic of spatial planning, without getting the different types and levels of stakeholders on board, it is impossible to develop joint proposals for a cross-border resilience.

On the specific, often technical, topics of crisis management, the network of stakeholders also included crisis management teams or citizens associations. Youth actors seemed to be particularly sensitive to crisis management topics and willing to engage.

The pilots helped develop **new partnerships**. One pilot managed to bring entirely new stakeholders (from a third country) on board, adding to the existing framework of cooperation:

SP8: The city of Bratislava, which has a long-standing cooperation with the Austrian part of the metropolis, through the *baum city region* framework, focused during the pilot phase to develop their cooperation with the Győr-Ménfőcsanak county in Hungary, as a third country involved for the first time. Though the county can be considered as functionally a part of the metropolis, since thousands of residents work or regularly go to the city, it was the first time the mayors of Bratislava and of the county met. To facilitate the cooperation, the partners relied on the existing initiatives and networks. This mirrored the *baum strategy* on the Slovak-Hungarian border, and benefited from the support of a Hungarian cross-border cooperation network to accompany them in formalising the cooperation.

Main takeaways

- Resilience building processes need to gather stakeholders in both a **cross-sector** and **multilevel** cross-border approach. Involving all these actors around the table helps to **create new partnerships**. The most efficient approach involves relying **on existing initiatives and networks**.
- **Early political anchoring** requires not only bringing political actors on board from the beginning but also maintaining contact with political stakeholders at all times, including when there is no crisis, keeping them informed and involving them in press conferences or any event with experts and relevant actors. This is a means to mitigate challenges coming from stakeholder engagement.
- **Political will is key** of the success of short- and long-term implementation of resilience strategies. Once engaged, **coordinated efforts** between political actors from both sides can help to **accelerate** ongoing processes or convey messages to other relevant levels, such as the national or EU level.
- Clear traceable **processes** may help overcome **changes in stakeholders** and systematically build on previous actors' cooperation and exchanges.

Involving the right stakeholders is only the first step. Fostering constructive dialogue and building trust are additional and essential challenges. While the Resilient Borders project has initiated or strengthened trust-building and fostering

²¹ Pilot action CM6 Preparing a joint emergency preparedness plan for the border region managed by the ARKO Border Committee (NO-SE). For more information consult the pilot case CM6 of the compendium: [Compendium](#).

²² Pilot action SP6 Guadiana Eurocity - Planning sustainable territory 2030 managed by the Eurocity of Guadiana (Spain/Portugal). For more information consult the pilot case SP6 of the compendium: [Compendium](#).

constructive dialogue, this effort must continue beyond the project's timeframe, as trust-building requires time and sustained engagement.

2. Trust-building through a shared understanding

Trust develops through exchanges and a shared understanding; that's why the pilots invested heavily in relationship-building throughout their stakeholder engagement and communication activities. They used a broad range of tools - such as co-designed workshops, joint working groups, participatory conferences, and strategic steering committees - to facilitate dialogue and **formalise** a shared understanding that serves as a basis for future planning and readiness to respond to crises.

Regular meetings with all actors proved particularly valuable for building a common vision of the challenges, collecting direct feedback, and advancing in the elaboration of the joint action plans. There was also broad consensus that **personal interactions** played a decisive role: one-to-one conversations and in-person exchanges were the most effective for building trust and securing engagement. A notable outcome of the initiative was the emphasis on **open partnerships**, which enabled new actors to join the process across the border and contribute to the discussions.

To support effective dialogue, **cross-border structures** often **played a role as facilitators and mediators** in bringing stakeholders together. This can be explained because EGTCs are often composed of regions and stakeholders from both sides of the border and already have a mandate to enhance cross-border cooperation, sometimes including the specific fields of crisis management or spatial planning. They provided neutral spaces for technical exchanges, mediated between regional, national, and local administrations, and operated across both institutional/political and technical/operational spheres. In pilots of spatial planning specifically, EGTCs were often able to act as facilitators.

Trust is particularly important in crisis management projects, as complete trust is necessary in case of emergencies as each team must be able to completely rely on their partner from the other side of the border.

The pilot actions also highlighted that fostering trust requires more than a strong institutional cooperation. It also depends on languages and a shared awareness of cultural differences.

The **language issue** was central for most of the pilots. Language barriers, especially on highly technical topics that require precision in translation, became true obstacles. Pilots either recognized the importance of a systematic bilingual approach from the beginning, or

they analysed the possibilities (and limits) of real-time translation using artificial intelligence tools. The results of the analysis of real-time translation in technical urgency situations validated that AI-based translation tools can reduce language barriers as long as they are deployed securely under human supervision and without relying on sensitive data processing..

CM10 ²³: When it comes to coordinating during crisis, it is necessary to develop absolute trust among French and Spanish partners at all levels: political, technical-administrative, and field workers in order to ensure swift and effective responses on the ground.

The uniqueness of cross-border interactions also stems from the fact that they occur within two **distinct cultural frameworks**, that may differ due to historical developments and personal experience. These cultural differences are part of Europe's richness, yet navigating them can be challenging, especially when resilience-building based on a common understanding is crucial. Addressing them required mutual efforts to foster dialogue, understanding of the other, and trust, all with the shared objective of developing joint action plans for resilient territories and future readiness.

Therefore, it was important to agree not only on the terminology and language used, but also on the underlying meaning, **cultural understanding** and common importance of cross-border cooperation. This requires continuous efforts that must extend beyond the project's duration. Regularly taking the stakeholders' feedback into account helped to move towards a common understanding.

Engagement and trust can also be fostered by real crisis training: **Real crises help raise awareness, build common understanding** and foster actors' willingness to cooperate. This laid the basis for engagement, as it is easier to achieve when people feel concerned, especially in the field of resilience building. A real crisis also allowed the **training of actors** in crisis management, enabling them to test and develop preparedness for further resilience in their own cross-border territory.

Nevertheless, the range of actors and levels involved showed **asymmetric engagement**, capacity, understanding, and/or awareness of building resilience, a topic that especially needs common understanding

²³ Pilot action CM10 Developing a regulatory framework for cross-border firefighter cooperation managed by the Pyrénées-Atlantiques Departmental Fire and Rescue Service (SDIS64) (FR) and Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (ES). More information on the CM10 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#).

and ownership. This was sometimes exacerbated by the physical distance among the actors. The balanced representation of both sides of the border was at stake.

When technical topics were addressed, trust could be more easily established when the content was based on confirmed and shared expert knowledge.



Main takeaways

- To sum up, “**trust comes before procedure**” and learning to know each other and **building trust takes time**. **Changing of stakeholders** had an impact on the launched projects, and this is where setting up of processes become important.
- The pilot actions contributed to building capacities for stakeholders and organisations by strengthening cooperation and trust. This contributes to enable them to act effectively and appropriately when planning jointly or in the event of a crisis affecting the border region. In short, resilience is not built solely by hard infrastructures, institutions and processes, but by networks of people who trust each other and are empowered to cooperate toward a fair, joint resilience model.
- Best results were achieved with a **high level of flexibility** and a person-driven approach in organising meetings and workshops, including the possibility to join online, adapting at maximum to agenda constraints as needed, keeping the meetings small, adjusting meeting schedules or using selective online sessions
- This flexible approach was completed by **one-to-one communication**, which proved very efficient in building trust.
- A balance has to be found between bottom-up (as a starting point of trust-building among the primarily concerned stakeholders) and top-down approaches (to involve and convince decision makers e.g. at the national level) to achieve resilience in cross-border territories.
- **Specific (technical) working groups** may be set up for each issue involving specific and experienced stakeholders and experts.
- **Language** barriers need to be actively addressed through increased **training** and education to improve the language capacities of stakeholders. Training in policy-specific and technical vocabularies through dedicated programs are needed (especially in the field of crisis management, but also in spatial planning regarding conceptual meaning). Systematic translation of all relevant documents should be the goal.
- **Training** might also be organized to reach a common understanding: this might include training on the stakes to raise **awareness** on the importance of resilience building, and more generally of the understanding of **systems** or **intercultural** differences.

While the relevant stakeholders build trust and mutual understanding, the inhabitants and communities also need to be involved in the resilience building of their border regions.

3. Awareness-raising of the inhabitants in cross-border regions

Beyond the project itself, one of the major challenges of the initiative and its pilot actions was **raising awareness among the inhabitants** of the cross-border territory. A central question emerged: how can citizens' awareness and preparedness be fostered on specific topics such as crisis management and spatial planning?

Since the **welfare of citizens** is at the core of all (political) action, engaging the local population has become essential for the success of resilience-building initiatives - especially as cross-border residents are increasingly exposed to the impacts of crises. Throughout the pilots, it proved essential to **raise inhabitants' awareness** on the value of resilience-building, both for managing future emergencies and for shaping a shared secured vision of the territory. Such efforts are more effective when people **feel personally exposed** to risk, for example, to floods or wildfires.

To reach citizens, pilots used a variety of communication channels. **Social media tools** such as Instagram, Facebook, X, and LinkedIn complement more institutional channels and **traditional media** like newspapers, television, and press releases. These channels target different audiences. Traditional media tend to operate separately on both sides of the border and in one language only. Digital tools, however, enable faster dissemination in multiple languages and broader outreach, including among young people, through, for instance, alert systems that can be particularly useful in times of crisis. The **language factor** is important in cross-border territories, where inhabitants expect to be addressed in their native language, especially on **sensitive topics** and when a crisis emerges.

Communication efforts also needed to be adapted to a wider public. Experience showed that communication with **simple, accessible messages** were the most effective. **Regular and coordinated communication** across the border was highlighted as essential to ensure that all residents receive the same information and that no one is left behind.

An effective strategy adopted by several pilots was to **build on already existing local or national (awareness) campaigns**. This approach helped reach a larger number of citizens and provided additional visibility to the pilot initiatives. These campaigns took various forms, such as joint cultural events or participation in larger **national, European or even international events**. Some pilots also developed specific awareness actions tailored to local communities.

While the objective was to reach the **widest possible audience**, some pilots paid particular attention to **young people and the elderly**, the latter often representing a

significant share of the population in rural border regions, as well as a socially vulnerable group. Targeting these segments of the population proved essential to ensure an inclusive approach to the resilience-building process and to strengthen preparedness across the entire community.



Engagement of **local population via participative processes** proved to be useful, in both spatial planning and crisis management pilot actions. It enabled the projects to **take their opinion and concerns into account**, which was especially important for sensitive topics such as crisis management resilience. Among the spatial planning pilots, one of the pilot actions especially focused on a Community-Led for Local Development approach (CLLD) involving citizens and local actors throughout the whole implementation.²⁴

Engagement is easier to reach when citizens feel concerned by an issue or are directly impacted by it. **Real crises** helped **trigger the awareness** of the population on the importance of common approaches, resulting in shared stories and memories. The gained experiences help foster a shared identity of the territory. When drafting the spatial planning plans, pilots had to face evolving challenges, either linked to the global geopolitical context impacting their border region, e.g. US tariff increase for exporting agricultural regions or EU defence policy changes due to the Ukraine-Russia war²⁵, or a local impact, e.g. local elections which made the cooperation more difficult (retreat of former engagements, questioning of cross-border policies). In these cases, it was even more difficult to bring the population on board but showed at the same time the importance of building resilience of the border region.

Building resilience is not limited to technical and political aspects, it also depends on ensuring that awareness is embedded in the society to strengthen the capacity of the entire community ecosystem to adapt to disruptions, support informed decision-making, and contribute to spatial planning and crisis management. It has to be taken into account to set up strategies and action plans with more efficiency, acceptance and chances of success.

²⁴ SP10 CLLD-oriented facilitation of cross-border planning across the Polish-Lithuanian Functional Area by the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation "Polish-Lithuanian Cross-border Functional Area". More information on the SP10 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

²⁵ The pilot actions prepared their project in 2024 before Donald Trump re-election in the US. The implementation period started in February 2025, after Donald Trump became president.

Main takeaways

- Building resilience requires that people of all ages and social groups become familiar with the challenges and opportunities related to crisis preparedness and resilient spatial planning. **It is essential to actively involve citizens**, so they understand their risk exposure and the adaptation strategies needed on their cross-border territory, as well as to take genuinely into account their concerns and experiences.
- This can be encouraged through continuous education and communication campaigns, which focus on shared and relatable narratives, possibly inspired by real crisis events and reflecting the cultural resilience of people who experienced crisis.
- In this way, communities are better equipped to understand, support and participate in collective resilience strategies and coordinated responses to future crises.
- The awareness building strategies and tools can be even more efficient when **linked to existing national or large-scale campaigns to reach the broadest audience possible**.



B. Building resilience

The overall aim of the Resilient Border initiative was to build resilience. The pilot actions therefore elaborated operational strategies for preparedness and managed to institutionalise cooperation and procedures across the cross-border territories.

1. Elaborate operational strategies for preparedness

The OECD study²⁶ highlighted a common limitation: when cross-border governance bodies adopt strategic planning documents, these often lack clear guidance on implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Based on this observation, the 19 pilots of the Resilience Borders initiative were required to develop an actionable plan for their cross-border region serving as a roadmap for the implementation of their strategy by local stakeholders and political authorities. During the development of this **action plan**, the pilots highlighted several key lessons to ensure implementation.

Elaborating adaptable strategies

- **Integrate strategies in a clear vision for the region.**

A clear vision provides not only a short-term action plan but also a long-term framework, ensuring that the strategies and objectives are time-relevant and supported by both sides of the border. The goals of the vision need to be shared, but do not have to be identical on both sides of the border, as some elements of the national and local context may influence them differently.

- **Articulate short, medium and long-term solutions within the shared cross-border strategy**

Setting milestones secures the action plan beyond the pilot phase and ensures its implementation by local authorities. Short-term milestones encourage the adoption of solutions to immediate or easily solved issues, while mid-term milestones lead to the fulfilment of long-term solutions. Time-based planning enables consideration of integrating short- and medium-term solutions into long-term objectives. It allows cross-border regions to implement strategies independent of stakeholder turnover uncertainties. Cross-border regions are indeed twice as affected by election-created turnover.

SP8²⁷: The **municipality of Bratislava** incorporated in its mid-term strategy with the Gyor-Moson County in Hungary the phased integration of a new Austrian partner, first as an observer to gain knowledge on the established cooperation, later as an institutionalised partner.

- **Action plans need to be drawn as adaptable strategies to address evolving situations and unforeseen crises**

Flexibility needs to be designed in the strategies to address upcoming, evolving or new, unforeseen challenges, such as geopolitical tensions and socio-economic shocks without disrupting the territory's long-term objectives. Plans also have to allow for the integration of evolving projects, partnerships and new policies that were not foreseen during the drafting phase. This flexibility will also be the basis for resilience in the long run.

SP6²⁸: The **EGTC Galicia Norte-Portugal** (Spain/Portugal) drafted during its pilot action the new Galicia Norte Portugal Strategic Cross Border Planning 2025-2027. The previous planning strategies had been drawn shortly after the COVID-19 crisis. As health had suddenly become one of the most concerning issues at the local level and largely supported at the European level, the EGTC strategy had incorporated a large set of objectives regarding health. But the rapidly evolving policy scene and global context made the strategy slightly misaligned with the current local, European and global context. The strategies drawn during the Resilient Border pilot phase have been realigned to the current national, European and global context but also considered strategies more flexible to address the evolving situation.

CM8²⁹: Orestiada and Sviligrad municipalities established a governance committee with the power to adapt the strategy to evolving contexts. **A Joint Cross-Border Crisis Coordination Committee** - comprising representatives from municipal and civil protection services - will oversee execution, monitor performance, update the plan as necessary, and ensure the plan's effective implementation and continuous improvement.

²⁶ OECD & DG REGIO, Building More Resilient Cross-border Regions (January 2025).

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/building-more-resilient-cross-border-regions_d5fd3e59-en.html.

²⁷ Pilot action SP8 Cross-border Integration of the Functional Metropolitan Area of Bratislava. More information on the SP8 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [hyperlink](#).

²⁸ Pilot action SP6 Galicia North Portugal Strategic Cross-Border Planning 2025-2027. More information on the SP6 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

²⁹ Pilot action CM8 BordaRisks - Cross-border risks and solutions managed by the Municipality of Orestiada (EL) and Sviligrad Municipality (BG). More information on the CM8 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

- Emerging from the setting of adaptable strategies is the need to **anticipate and codify alternative trajectories within the action plan**

Directly integrating different operational scenarios enables the plan to be modulated to the ongoing implemented solutions and to be more adaptable to contingencies and crises. Anticipation is integrated into the decision-making process. Flexibility becomes institutional rather than discretionary, reducing decision-making time and at the same time potential political friction in the event of a change in circumstances or the individuals involved.

Involving relevant policies and policymakers

The findings regarding stakeholder engagement in implementing the action plan for resilience have been developed before. Nonetheless, the following complementary points are to be highlighted in terms of overall resilience building:

- **Involving national and European authorities facilitates effectiveness**

Cross-border resilience often depends on national levels (legal adjustments, emergency powers, taxation, social protection, civil protection intervention authorisations) that local and regional actors cannot provide on their own, lacking competency. Where **national administrations have been involved**, pilot projects have reported the **removal of regulatory barriers, as well as better investment planning and greater legitimacy for cross-border decisions**. National participation can be formalised through dedicated mandates or interministerial coordination. It also facilitates an alignment with state strategies, ensuring that cross-border measures are integrated during the policymaking phase of national and regional planning. Impact assessment of national measures on cross-border cooperation may also be helpful. On specific issues, such as civil protection and crisis responses, involving the **European administration** in top-down policies directly in the drafting phase of a local cross-border strategy benefits the project.

- **Integrate cross-border public services**

There is also the need to **integrate cross-border public services** early on when building resilience actions plan for spatial planning and crisis management, including public services regarding mobility and health, to design a knowledge-based and operational plan.

Peer-learning and transferability

- **Foster peer-learning between border regions and prepare transferability**

Finally, **peer learning between border regions** is a useful process, whether during the drafting phase or

implementation phase. **Peer learning from other projects facilitates knowledge exchange and the transferability of methods** to similar issues faced by other border regions. The most effective peer learning is through study visits and in-person exchanges. The aspect of transferability also goes beyond the initiative and sets the basis for future initiatives.

SP6³⁰: The **Eurocity of Guadiana** organised study visits to two other spatial planning pilot sites in Spanish border regions. The cross-border cooperation on spatial planning was relatively new for this pilot and exchange with more established and more experienced EGTCs located in approximately the same legislative framework helped them assess what cross-border spatial planning entails and adjust their approach based on lessons and best practices of the pilots' sites visited.

CM2³¹: The Regions of Eastern Macedonia & Thrace in Greece and Smolyan in Bulgaria have integrated the transferability aspect directly into their action plan. A particular attention has been given to **designing methods and tools that could be transferred** to other EU border regions facing similar challenges. In addition to its local benefits, the Joint Action Plan provides a concrete model for replication in other cross-border areas, to be used beyond the project.

Facilitating the integration and adaptability

- **Methodologies** for cross-border spatial planning and crisis management should be **drawn so as to be easily transferable to other sectorial issues and integrated to local and regional plans**

Developing a method that is transferable and adaptable to other policy fields facilitates the implementation of the pilots' operational results in the event of changes. Cross-border spatial planning and crisis management engage several policy fields such as water management, health services, transport networks, economic planning, or tourism planning, civil protection or governance. The methodology developed during the pilot actions can be transferred and adapted across these fields when needed. **Facilitating this transferability of the methodology for resilience into other policies enhances integrated and operational planning and accelerates appropriation** by other policy's stakeholders.

In the same sense, mechanisms and tools, including those focused on data collection, should be adapted or created with an approach that makes them easily adaptable and **integrated into local and regional plans**.

³⁰ Pilot action SP7 Guadiana Eurocity - Planning sustainable territory 2030. More information on the SP7 pilot case in the Resilient Borders compendium: [Compendium](#)

³¹ Pilot action CM2 Building cross-border resilience to animal diseases through joint crisis management managed by the Region of Eastern Macedonia & Thrace and the Regional administration of Smolyan. For more information, consult the pilot case CM2 in the compendium: [Compendium](#)

2. Institutionalise the cooperation and the procedure

The pilots underlined that building resilience cannot rely solely on actors willing to cooperate. To ensure the work is aligned with a short-, a mid- and a long-term vision, **strategies need to be anchored and permanent governance structures need to be involved or established.** This helps overcome turnover among actors, including changes due to elections. In that sense, the Resilient Borders initiative clearly acted as a catalyst by drafting an action plan as a framework for future cooperation, based on institutionalisation and procedures.

The first step to institutionalising cooperation is **establishing (or revising) frameworks such as political agreements, protocols, manuals, strategies** and action plans, and ensuring their **adoption by political stakeholders with a mandate to act.**

The designed framework should integrate the (technical) **outcomes developed and tools created** during the pilot action phase by the relevant stakeholders of the cross-border region: technicians, experts and academics, policy stakeholders from the local, regional, national and European levels, stakeholders from the economic sector when concerned, and citizens.

Furthermore, **strategies and methodologies gain in operability when framed within or linked to local, national, EU** or even existing cross-border **strategies**, ensuring their long-term implementation. Integrating operational results into wider local, national or EU strategies ensures that stakeholders adopt outputs and that they will benefit from regular impact assessment. In this context, the pilots highlighted the importance of mobilising synergies with EGTCs, LEADER and CLLD, national recovery instruments, cohesion funds, climate and mobility funds, regional innovation schemes, regional spatial planning strategies: in short, to **use the entire toolbox to involve relevant stakeholders, reach a comprehensive and integrative view of the cross-border territory, including an access to diverse fundings to secure strategies implementation.**

CM2³²: The pilot action **“Building Cross-Border Resilience to Animal Diseases Through Joint Crisis Management”** (Bulgaria/Greece) between the Region of Eastern Macedonia & Thrace and the Regional

Administration of Smolyan integrated a policy dimension in their methodology by linking operational results to wider EU strategies on “One Health”, resilience, and territorial cooperation. This ensured that the pilot’s outputs would not remain isolated but could be linked to regional contingency planning and future DG REGIO and/or DG SANTE initiatives.

The institutionalisation of the cooperation also works through the **consolidation of a joint governance** by involving relevant local and regional stakeholders, as well as the national and EU levels. Joint governance can be based on existing regional or national structures, or involve European tools created to facilitate cross-border cooperation and dialogue, such as EGTCs. In some pilot actions, EGTCs acted as mediators, providing a neutral space for all stakeholders concerned in the border regions. As some EGTCs are directly composed of public authorities, they represent at the same time an institutionalisation tool for cooperation. **To ensure operational strategies**, it is necessary to involve **joint stakeholders’ governance**, with a **mandate to act** on crisis management or cross-border spatial planning within the cross-border region.

SP10³³: As a newly created EGTC, the **Polish–Lithuanian Functional Area EGTC** pilot action focused its activities on strengthening the EGTC structure. The EGTC represents the main tool of institutionalisation of the cooperation between local authorities of the Polish municipalities and Lithuanian municipalities of the border regions. The EGTC developed during the implementation several strategies to strengthen its governance, such as a Manual on Internal Governance and Communication for the EGTC, and organized several workshops to train local authorities on its application.

A joint, institutionalised cross-border cooperation supported by procedures, also **fosters trust** among the stakeholders involved in the cross-border region and lays the basis for preparedness and, in short, community resilience.

Finally, it helps **raise awareness** among inhabitants and local communities, peers and upper levels regarding the vulnerability of their cross-border territory. The institutionalised cooperation hereby maximises the effect of the established procedure and enhances preparedness for a crisis.

³² Pilot action CM2 Building cross-border resilience to animal diseases through joint crisis management. For more information, consult the pilot case CM2 in the compendium: [Compendium](#)

³³ Pilot action SP10 CLLD-oriented facilitation of cross-border planning across the Polish-Lithuanian Functional Area. For more information, consult the pilot case SP10 in the compendium: [Compendium](#)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO BUILD CROSS-BORDER RESILIENCE

The lessons learnt provided valuable insights into the knowledge-, engagement- and resilience-building of the pilot actions. Building on them and on the takeaways from the pilot actions, the Resilient Borders initiative can formulate a set of policy recommendations, applicable beyond the initiative, to enhance resilience in cross-border regions and strengthen their preparedness for crises. The recommendations address how to improve the resilience of cross-border regions through a consolidated governance, strengthened capacity-building, and solid funding. They furthermore address the need to integrate actions into a multilevel policy support framework with a focus on the national and European levels, to strengthen the effectiveness of local cross-border action and increase the resilience of cross-border territories.

A. Consolidate governance

Recommendation A.1. Focus on the shared dimension within a cross-border functional living area

Cross-border regions extend beyond national borders. Therefore, the shared cross-border dimension of the living areas in border regions needs to be recognised in order to allow joint planning. Spatial planning and crisis management require that the cross-border dimension of territories be integrated at the institutional and operational levels on each side of the border. **Approaching these territories as cross-border functional living area³⁴** when drafting shared strategies, whether in spatial planning or crisis management, helps identify the scope of stakeholders to design integrated, resilient, cross-border action. Policymakers and administrations need to **act across administrative borders to prepare or facilitate shared integrated responses to crises and adapt to common needs on their territories**. They shall **provide border regions with tools, institutions, processes and, where possible, agreements that ensure a joint planning or an adaptable, rapid response** to potential crisis situations in a cross-border context. Participatory cross-border governance in building resilience in border regions can lead to innovation-laboratories for testing modern technologies and shared cooperation models that strengthen European resilience.

Recommendation A.2. Consolidate the joint governance of the border regions by involving all relevant stakeholders

Consolidating joint governance needs to be done both **cross-sectorally and at multiple political levels**, first of all at the local and regional levels, with support from the national and the EU ones. The involvement **of all relevant stakeholders in joint governance, with a mandate to act** on crisis management and (cross-border) spatial planning on the border-region territory, is key. Hereby the continuous commitment of political stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels in the cross-border regions must be ensured. Mandates can be given to existing joint governance structures, e.g. institutional cooperation as Euroregions or legal entities such as European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation.

Spaces for dialogue should be available in each cross-border region to **enable continuous dialogue among stakeholders at different levels**, and to facilitate learning exchanges with peers on the other side of the border, including political actors, experts and academics in the relevant policy fields. Continuous dialogue fosters trust, readiness and flexibility in policy actions. This dialogue may be **organised in an informal or institutionalised way**, through regular follow-up or informational meetings to provide updates on resilience issues or through existing platforms at local and/or European level.

The joint governance may also focus on **an improved coordination of all stakeholders** within cross-border regions to prepare for and respond to crises, as cross-border unified resources maximise efficiency for faster, targeted responses.

Recommendation A.3. Set up strategies and procedures as a framework to planning and preparedness

Based on a shared vision and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, **shared strategies and common procedures help improve coordinated action**. These should also be **adaptable to evolving situations and legislation on both sides of the border**, as well as to the global geopolitical context. They should **provide a flexible framework and tools and guidelines** for planning and action to prepare and enhance response facilities, rather than a rigid one. As part of the framework and tools, they should **clearly identify the relevant policies** to

³⁴³⁴ As clearly defined by Denis de Rougemont in 1979, https://www.unige.ch/rougemont/articles/1978-1981/ddr19790000ge_p0007

be addressed and the possible scope of action. Hereby, both planning and preparedness should be fostered.

B. Strengthen capacity-building

Recommendation B.1. Foster expertise and knowledge building, and exchanges as condition to be and remain resilient

To be resilient, cross-border regions need a high degree of technicality and understanding. Therefore, they need to **create or further develop, make accessible and share knowledge, through a pool of cross-border experts on resilience, which may include academics, universities, research centres.** This work may **also build on existing European initiatives and networks** (Joint Research Centre - JRC, European cross-border platform, CESC, MOT, AEBR - b-solutions, TEIN). Independent expertise is important to provide comparable data, knowledge and precise content. Hereby the pool of experts should ideally **include cross-border experts** and connect experts from both sides of the border. A continuous **knowledge building and shared data** collection is the condition for resilient action, which may allow a content and trust driven reactive political action in times of need.



Recommendation B.2. Engage in a continuous process to keep up a cross-border readiness

Being resilient is a continuous process. To foster on regular evaluations, updates on content (see also knowledge building B.1.), joint trainings and exercises, is necessary to maintain readiness. **Action plans need continuously to be adapted to evolving risks and settings** and/or be flexible. One needs to get regular feedback from all of the stakeholders involved, keep them involved, informed and trained, in order to maintain awareness, ownership and readiness.

Recommendation B.3. Go beyond one's own resilience and exchange good practices with others

European resilience can be improved by sharing and promoting good practices (along with the challenges and difficulties to overcome) so that other cross-border territories can learn from it. Create or **promote exchange platforms or develop spaces for dialogue** at the local, national or European level can facilitate this knowledge sharing. This might be supported, enabled and encouraged **at different levels** (EU level: e.g. in the case of the Resilient Borders final conference; national level: e.g. linked to the BRIDGEforEU application and setting in each member states to overcome obstacles in cross-border cooperation (see also Recommendation D5 for EU supported capitalisation).

Recommendation B.4. Facilitate synergies between policy programs and mechanisms

It is essential to search for **synergies between policy programs and mechanisms** as they widen the policy areas addressed by a specific program and involve each program' specific target group. Expertise and awareness gain a wider audience. Spatial planning and crisis management need to be **integrated into broader frameworks, to be operational and most effective in practice**, in other words, actors in cross-border regions need to use all the tools in the toolbox. Stakeholders in cross-border regions should not only focus on cross-border funded program (such as Interreg) but also **mobilize European, regional and national programs, that are not primarily dedicated to cross-border cooperation**, as those are also operational at a local level in cross-border regions and relevant to build resilience, such as LEADER and the CLLD approach, LIFE and JTF, Horizon Europe, REACT-UE, Union Civil Protection Mechanism(rescEU), EU4Health.

Recommendation B.5. Maintain bilingual (technical) language communication and common intercultural understanding

Maintaining bilingual communication proved essential for stakeholders' understanding, engagement and awareness campaigns including those for the wider public. Additionally, one of the biggest challenges proved to be the cultural differences. Therefore, both **activities and training to overcome language or cultural barriers should be considered as part of resilience strategies.** Readiness to communicate in a shared language and to understand cultural differences is indeed key to ensuring a rapid and effective response to a crisis. Specific training programs on the technical use of language are needed and a clear and detailed understanding of the other side of the border and the common territory is essential in technical topics related to resilience.

A. Support through funding

Recommendation C.1. Generate and foster funding initiatives based on pilot actions as innovative approaches and catalysts

Pilot actions as supported by the Resilient Borders initiative **should be encouraged by European, national and regional institutions** as they act as catalysts to strengthen institutional cooperation and provide initial analyses to obtain short-, mid- and long-term solutions. Pilots under Resilient Borders confirmed that **EU-supported pilot actions can act as powerful catalysts for institutional change**. When grounded in real needs and practical cooperation, even small-scale activities with limited funding can have a structural impact by fostering new habits of collaboration, strengthening mutual trust, and setting the groundwork for more formalised, long-term partnerships under programmes such as Interreg. They may create innovative inputs and approaches within a short implementation time.

Recommendation C.2. Encourage small scale project funding

European-funded pilot actions should be encouraged and further developed. Even with limited funding, they can serve as **an engagement starting point for political stakeholders** in a border region **and encourage them to fund the next steps** of the pilot, increasing its impact beyond the pilot phase. Pilot actions, even with limited funding, are also more accessible to stakeholders who are less familiar with the “heavy” administrative and financial obligations of other cross-border programs. In that sense, initiatives such as Resilient Borders are highly effective as a funding mechanism, as administrative reporting requirements are kept relatively low for stakeholders, pre-financing payments are available and payment delays are limited, while at the same time, tangible outcomes are achieved in the short term. They should be encouraged on other border issues.

Recommendation C.3. Confirm and promote the use of Interreg programs to continue resilience building

Interreg programs provide a relevant framework for continuing to implement the results of pilot actions. Pilot actions are invited to use them for follow-up projects. They can also be useful for capitalising outcomes. Pilot initiatives can continue to grow and build the groundwork for more formalised, long-term partnerships under programmes such as Interreg.

Recommendation C.4. Include the cross-border resilience specificity in the future programming period

The future 2028-2034 National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP) should anticipate the possibility of cross-border investments and strategies that respond to the specific needs of cross-border regions, particularly regarding resilience. The aim is to develop cross-border preparedness in crisis management and cross-border spatial planning, beyond having the cross-border component solely addressed in the Interreg Plan. Civil Protection, Health emergencies and climate adaptation are indeed policies addressed in the NRPP.

Recommendation C.5: Involve the private sector in resilience dialogue and funding

Building resilience is a shared responsibility, which means the private sector also has a crucial role to play in ensuring the preparedness and strategic planning of the territories in which they operate. Their strategic and financial involvement helps align economic activities with local resilience objectives and strengthens collective capacity to anticipate and manage risks. For example, insurance companies should be included in resilience dialogues, as their expertise in risk analysis and financial protection can inform adaptation strategies and support funding mechanisms.



B. Support through multi-level policies

Recommendation D.1. Adapt legislation, impact assessment and mechanisms to remove obstacles

National, regional, and local legislation must better take into account the cross-border situation and perspective, and plan accordingly. Furthermore, impact assessments should be conducted systematically for future laws and regulations. Bilateral agreements can facilitate the coordination between countries (e.g. the French-German cross-border cooperation committee which worked on the impact assessment of future laws)³⁵. Additionally, national, regional and local policymakers should facilitate cross-border planning/ cooperation by removing legal and administrative obstacles (see recent development following the BRIDGEforEU regulation).

Recommendation D.2. Set resilience building in cross-border regions as a national priority

Joint crisis management and cross-border spatial planning should be prioritised as national priorities in each Member State, given their multisectorial impact. Cross-border territories should not be considered peripheral, rather laboratories of European integration to develop cross-border joint preparedness and crisis response. Recent developments to better coordinate cross-border politics should be incorporated into national-level settings.

Recommendation D.3. Link the topic of the cross-border resilience and the pilot actions to sectoral policies

Within a multilevel governance approach, projects need to be linked above all to sectoral policies, and this at the EU level (EU civil protection mechanism, sectoral EU policies, link with sectoral DGs), and the national level (sectoral ministries), which might also include the local level (sectoral departments of local administration).

Recommendation D.4. Position the EU as a facilitator of capitalisation and integration of cross-border resilience approaches into policies/ strategies at different levels

Future initiatives should clearly allocate resources for capitalisation and policy alignment, ensuring that project outcomes feed into local, regional, national, and EU strategies. When European priorities address resilience planning, whether in spatial planning or on crisis management, they should be better coordinated or integrated with local and regional planning schemes.

The EU should furthermore support local actors in spatial planning and crisis management to give impetus to the involvement of local, regional and national government and challenge them to act in and for cross-border regions.

Recommendation D.5. Promote experience exchange, transfer and linking of tools at the EU level

Peer-learning should be facilitated at the European level, promoting the exchange of experiences between cross-border territories, facing similar issues, through study visits, webinars etc.

The EU level should furthermore help involve and coordinate with complementary tools to foster resilience building, such as the EU civil protection mechanism or EU4Health. In the long-term, the different tools should be organised into an overall coherent toolbox for resilient cross-border territories to use, as they serve as a laboratory of an integrated Europe able to face challenges.

Finally, the EU should also further focus on the transferability and replicability of successful approaches and systematically use and/or refer to them. The outcomes of the present Resilient Border initiative give many valuable examples, lessons learned, and recommendations for preparing future resilient cross-border territories.

³⁵ Comité de coopération transfrontalière - Deutsch-französischer Ausschuss für Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit, <https://agz-cct.diplo.de/agz-cct-de>

CONCLUSION

At a time when the European Union is mobilising to shape the future cohesion policy, it is crucial to advocate for a cohesion policy addressing not only institutional regions, but also functional cross-border regions - in line with the article 174 of the Treaty of Lisbon which recognizes, beyond border region, the existence of "cross-border regions" as priorities. Since 2020, **two highly innovative EU regulations** have put flesh on the bone: the revised Schengen Code which demands that States better respect free movement within cross-border regions and the BridgeforEU regulation, which offers a new tool to address obstacles to cross-border integration, particularly in the field of public services.

Since 1950, European nations have engaged into a process of integration, nourished by both their similarities and their differences. Their assumed interdependencies contribute to build a European sense of belonging - provided that citizens are involved within their living areas, which is the fundamental goal set by Jacques Delors for cohesion policy. It is not only a question of socio-economic and environmental, legal or technical issues, but of narratives and visions of the world, which may collide or converge on each border. Today, Europe is confronted to multiple destabilizing factors. Nationalism threatens to undo Europe. At the same time, Europe unity and cohesion is strained by climate change, implementation of sustainable adaptation and the resurgence of conflict. How can we live up to Jacques Delors' vision?

In the face of today's immense challenges we propose to relaunch a forward-looking vision of European territories.

The present initiative has shown clearly the necessity of cross-border territories to be ready to respond to

upcoming challenges. Beyond the borders of the States, by combining efforts of regions, States and the European Union with those of local cross-border stakeholders, we can collectively foster the integration of labour markets and cross-border public services, as well as cross-border investment in ecological transition, education, transport, housing and planning. Under the Polish presidency of the 1st half of 2025, the ministers responsible for cohesion policy, territorial cohesion and urban issues, have committed to initiate the renewal of the Territorial Agenda for 2030 in the context of the European vision of territorial development, in close cooperation with the European Commission, between Member States, partner States, regions and relevant intergovernmental groups".

Starting from **cross-border functional living areas**, we propose to relaunch, step by step, European spatial planning through a bottom-up approach, that was already discussed in the 1990s and 2000s to contribute to the Union's resilience. Alongside institutional Europe: the European Union, States, regions, municipalities, a Europe of territories can be built, also across borders: cross-border regions, Euroregions, macro-regions. The Resilient Borders initiative is one of the applicable tools to contribute to building resilience capacity across European cross-border living areas to better prepare them. Rather than clinging to exclusive sovereignty within their borders, States shall exercise their sovereignty jointly at each border and at EU level. Europeans, on each border, can build common narratives, based on their histories - both different and common - and a shared vision of their future. Only then will they be able to achieve the single market and cohesion, develop cross-border common goods, build resilience and manage the many transitions we have to face, for the benefit of European citizens, their security and wealth.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

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OECD and European Commission (2024), *Cross-border Governance Framework and Tool*³⁷.

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European Commission, Technopolis Group, CMCC, and Nordregio (2024), *Strengthening the resilience of EU border regions. Mapping risks & crisis management tools and identifying gaps*³⁹.

European Commission and Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (2021), *The effects of COVID-19 induced border closures on cross-border regions, an empirical report covering the period March to June 2020*⁴⁰.

European Commission and Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (2022), *Analysis of the impact of border-related measures taken by Member States in the fight against COVID-19*⁴¹.

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' Governance Committee, Council of Europe (2019), *Resolution calling for a fair distribution of fiscal wealth in cross-border territories*⁴², following a report drafted by KH Lambertz⁴³.

ESPON and DG REGIO (2022), *Cross-border public services: CPS inventory analysis and policy recommendations*⁴⁴.

DG REGIO, Spatial Foresight, TCP International, TRT and EureConsult SA (2022), *Study on Providing public transport in cross-border regions – Mapping of existing services and legal obstacles*⁴⁵.

AEBR and European Commission (2020, 2022, 2024) Compendiums of cases analysed by the *b-solutions* initiative. Some of them directly or indirectly deal with these issues. All *b-solutions* publications are available in the project's online library⁴⁶:

- ▶ *b-solutions: Solving Border Obstacles. A compendium 2023-2024 (2024)*.
- ▶ *b-solutions: Solving Border Obstacles. A compendium 2022-2023 (2024)*.
- ▶ *b-solutions: Solving Border Obstacles. A compendium 2020-2021 (2021)*.
- ▶ *Border regions for the European Green Deal – Obstacles and solutions to cross-border cooperation in the EU (2021)*.
- ▶ *More and better cross-border public services – Obstacles and solutions to cross-border cooperation in the EU (2021)*
- ▶ *Vibrant cross-border labour markets – Obstacles and solutions to cross-border cooperation in the EU (2021)*.
- ▶ *b-solutions: Solving Border Obstacles. A compendium of 43 Cases (2020)*.

³⁶ Available on https://resilientborders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Resilient_Borders_Pilot_Actions_Compndium.pdf

³⁷ Available on https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/building-more-resilient-cross-border-regions_d5fd3e59-en.html.

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³⁹ Available on <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/border-focal-point-network/news/big-news-border-focal-point-has-just-published-new-study-cross-border-disaster-risk-and-crisis>.

⁴⁰ Available on <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/46250564-669a-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

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⁴⁴ Available at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/cross-border-public-services_en.

⁴⁵ Available on https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/studies/public-transport-cross-border/transport-cross-border-study.pdf

⁴⁶ <https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/library>.

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