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Transboundary cooperation: ***A “b-solution”* to face and solve obstacles**

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Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)

Founded in 1971 by the first border regions to embark on cross-border cooperation in Europe after the Second World War, strengthening the integration of citizens across national borders.

Today: over 100 members from EU member states and neighbouring

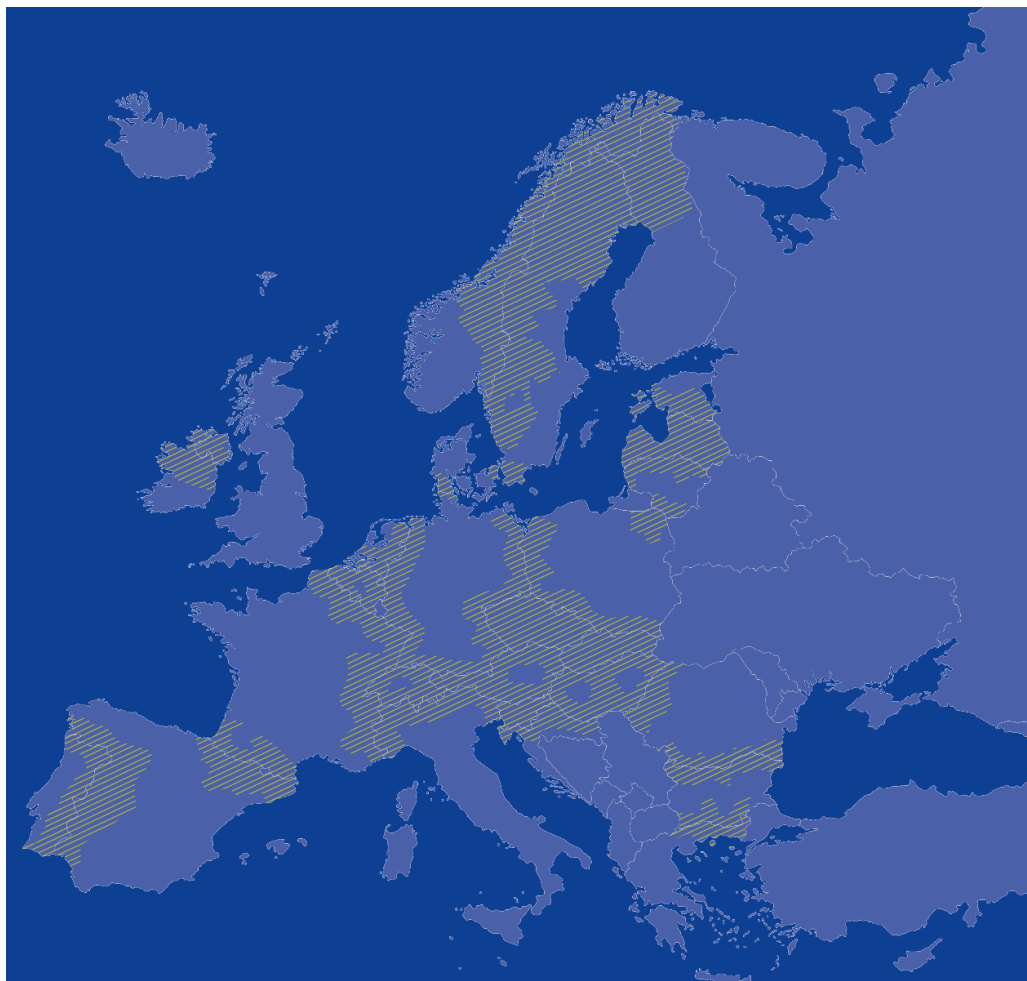
Missions:

- highlight the role of border regions in the political landscape;
- represent their common interests;
- enhance cooperation between border regions throughout Europe;
- promote exchanges of experiences, information and solutions to common obstacles



Discover: what is *b-solutions*

What is *b-solutions*?



Map by AEBR

- *b-solutions* is an initiative to address legal and administrative obstacles hindering cross-border cooperation in the EU
- Promoted by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional & Urban Policy (DG REGIO)
- Managed by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
- Within the framework of the Communication Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions adopted by the European Commission on 20 September 2017 and the report EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration published on 14 July 2021



What is *b-solutions*' objective?

Support local actors in border regions

to **solve obstacles**

of a legal and/or administrative nature

along EU borders, inclusive along borders with EFTA and IPA countries

Because:

- 40 land borders between the 27 EU Member States, the EFTA countries and the UK
- 448 regions (NUTS 3 level) located alongside at least one border;
- 30% of Europeans live in these regions

Despite the financial (ERDF and Interreg) and the legal (EGTC) tools already at disposal of border regions

Why *b-solutions*?

- Border obstacle persist: legal and administrative obstacles exist and arise because of:
 - lack of coherence of legislation applicable on the different sides of the border
 - inconsistencies, non-existence, or overlapping of different administrative procedures
 - applicable European, national or regional legislation or administrative procedures do not take into account the specificity of cross-border interaction

- These obstacles can affect many aspects of life in border regions such as
 - access to public services: offer of public transport, reimbursement of healthcare costs;
 - access to the labour market: administrative burdens, slow recognition, limitation to working remotely.
 - quality management of the territory (parks, rivers, mountains, etc.)

b-solutions 2.0

Goal : identify and promote further 120 cases and sustainable methods of resolving border obstacles of a legal and/or administrative nature

Target : Public bodies in border regions (including public equivalent bodies); and
Cross-border structures with legal personality, established under public or private law

Scope: border regions along EU internal **land and maritime borders** and along EU borders with EFTA and IPA countries

Themes: institutional cooperation, public services, labour markets and education and European Green Deal

Which kind of support is provided?

b-solutions provides technical support

> Participants receive advice by legal experts who cooperate with them to:

- define the obstacle;
- identify a possible solution to it.

Output:

Report by the expert with clear explanation of the obstacle and suggestions for concrete solutions

How does it work?

Through field visits, experts carry out the analysis. Experts are assigned to participants for 9 days within a period of a maximum of 3 months.

Costs and administration are managed by AEBR.

The experts are selected with an open [call for expression of interest](#) and are “matched” with the selected cases on the basis of their expertise, their language proficiency and their understanding of specific territories. The expert is hired and paid directly by AEBR.

Participants **do not need to file** a report about their participation and only fill in a one-page document to evaluate their experience and endorse the report by the expert.

b-solutions: a tool to solve your cross-border obstacles

Selected cases will obtain:

- a full report with a detailed analysis of the specific obstacle faced in the region, and proposals for concrete solutions
- participation in a compendium illustrating a variety of obstacles and possible solutions to enhance cross-border cooperation

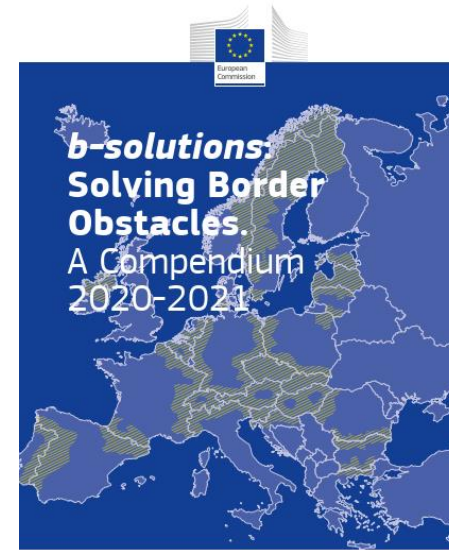
This publication along with the takeaway from the expert report can be used by actors in border regions to:

- Demonstrate more accurately what are the cross-border obstacles they face to relevant authorities
- Move towards the implementation of the solutions identified through a concerted approach
- Raise awareness of cross-border cooperation and facilitate mutual learning with other border actors
- Be part of a European project demonstrating the weight and potential of border regions as living labs of European integration

- Outputs: 4 calls for proposals (2018-2021) leading to 90 cases showcased in:

- 2 compendiums of reports
- 3 thematic booklets
- 1 illustrated storytelling booklet

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



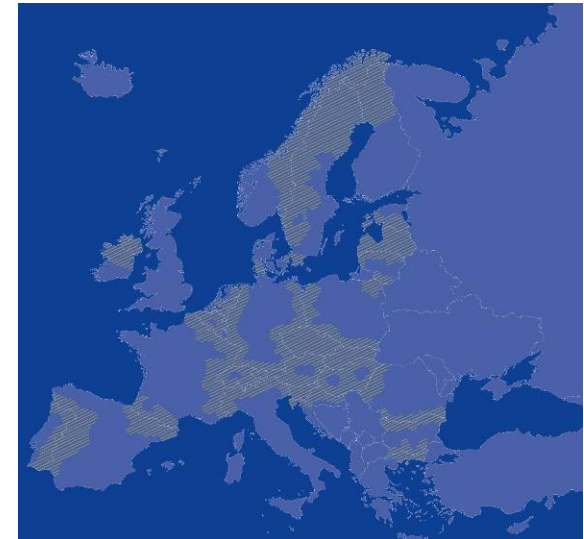
Images by AEBR

What have we learned so far?

- Legal and administrative obstacles are many and different, as are their root causes
- There are no off-the-shelf solutions! Solutions must be tailored to the specificities of the territories involved – every region, every country is different

- Solutions can involve several options:
 - Change in legal frameworks
 - Harmonise administrative practices
 - Use of complementary tools such as INTERREG, EGTC

- It is important to have:
 - Deep analysis
 - Political commitment
 - Information sharing
 - Multi-level engagement
 - Capacity building





Focus: Border Regions for the European Green Deal

Difficulties in coping with the challenges linked to climate change and the environment in a cross-border dimension



Border Regions for the European Green Deal

| OBSTACLES | |
|---|--|
| LEGAL | ADMINISTRATIVE |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The joint establishment and management of infrastructure • Diverging national rules on permits to design and build infrastructure • Inconsistent legal competence on spatial planning • Different regulations on necessary technical requirements • The lack of revision of the law • The lack of specific provisions considering the cross-border dimension • The lack of EU-wide standardised norms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different spatial dataset references for mapping and collecting data • Different technical standards for environmental management criteria • The absence of an ad-hoc cross-border structure or entity in charge for the coordination of the natural site • The absence of a joint mechanism to regulate the exchange of data |



Border Regions for the European Green Deal

| SOLUTIONS | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| LEGAL | EUROPEAN CROSS-BORDER MECHANISM (ECBM) | ENHANCED ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY AND COORDINATION | CROSS-CUTTING SOLUTIONS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendments or improvement of existing legislation at the European level • Fostering harmonisation at the supranational level • Revision or update of current provisions on one or both sides of the border • Creation of ad-hoc legal frameworks | <p>Voluntary participation in a mechanism to overcome legal obstacles</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up of a joint management structure • Creation of a single or unified command • Harmonisation of datasets, methods and technical environmental management standards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of specific consortium of relevant actors from both sides of the border • Awareness-raising actions • Trainings local actors engaged in a specific project |



Example: Improvement of conditions for cross-border aerial forest fire control

The border area between the **Spanish region of Extremadura and Portugal is affected by recurrent forest fires.**

Several important barriers remain to achieve an agile response in the context of emergency fire control operations.

OBSTACLES:

- **a lack of mutual recognition of the Special Operator Certificate** from one country in the neighbouring country. For example, if Portugal does not recognise the Spanish certificate, **Spanish aviation crews cannot enter Portuguese territory to assist them;**
- **language skill requirements for civil aviation crew:** the crew must either speak English or the respective national language (Spanish or Portuguese), which is a real obstacle since most crew members do not speak English sufficiently in order for this to be a common language for aerial communications.



Take part: *b-solutions'* call for proposals

How to apply?

Proposals should be submitted via an online form, accessible here:

<https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/call-for-proposals>

Guidelines to the application and FAQs can be found in the link above.

Timeline

Deadline: 10 November 2023

Applications are reviewed on a **rolling basis** with immediate implementation.

Eligibility criteria

- The application form must be submitted electronically via <https://www.b-solutionsproject.com/call-for-proposals> before 10 November 2023
- The application form should be completed preferably in English – all 24 official EU languages will be accepted
- The applicants must be:
 - Public bodies, “bodies governed by public law” or “public equivalent bodies” at the national, regional or local level with a national boundary limiting their territory
 - Cross-border entities such as European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), Euroregions, Eurodistricts, Eurocities and similar cross-border structures
 - Located in an EU Member State or neighbouring EFTA or IPA country and share at least one land or maritime border with another EU Member State or with an EFTA country or an IPA country

Awarding criteria

Each application should address a specific obstacle that the applicant has encountered in its border region.

In the application form, applicants should demonstrate:

- That the proposed action addresses a real and documented obstacle of an administrative and/or legal nature hampering cross-border cooperation in one of the thematic areas mentioned
- The potential increase in cross-border cooperation if the obstacle is solved
- Its mandate to devise solutions
- The replicability potential of the action

Applicants may submit more than one case, but each application should address a different obstacle.

Quality assessment

AEBR scores each award criterion on a scale from 1 to 5. **A minimum of 12 points** is needed to be selected.

All applicants will be notified at the end of this process of the decision taken on their proposals.

Non-selected applicants (receiving less than 12 points) can still reapply after improving their proposal based on AEBR's feedback.



Thank you!

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

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***b-solutions 2.0* - call for proposals**

Guiding questions for criteria number 1: **description of the obstacle**

- What is the general context in which the obstacle arises?
- By which legal or administrative provisions do you think the obstacle is caused?
- How is the cooperation with your neighbour(s) affected by the obstacle?
- Which kind of actions or services is prevented or limited by the obstacle? (i.e. it obstructs cross-border mobility of citizens and/or workers, it poses limits to the accessibility to healthcare services to citizens residing on the other side of the border, etc)

> share what obstacle you face in your region!

b-solutions 2.0 - call for proposals

Guiding questions for criteria number 2: **potential increase in cross-border cooperation**

- Is the theme relevant for cross-border interactions in your region?
- Is the specific obstacle causing an impactful reduction of these interactions?
- If the obstacle is solved, would cross-border cooperation increase?
- How so? (more frequent exchanges, more willingness to cross the border, easier to make business, etc)

> share what obstacle you face in your region!

b-solutions 2.0 - call for proposals

Guiding questions for criteria number 3: **mandate of the applicant and co-applicants if any**

- Do you have legal mandate to promote cross-border cooperation and to intervene on the theme of the obstacle?
- If you don't have legal mandate to promote cross-border cooperation and on the theme of the obstacle, who would you involve in the implementation of the solutions?
- How can you involve the competent body identified?

> share what obstacle you face in your region!

b-solutions 2.0 - call for proposals

Guiding questions for criteria number 4: **replicability**

- Where else do you think a potential solution could be successfully implemented?
- Along other borders in different areas of the EU?
- Or in some other borders in the EU with very specific characteristics? Or on other borders of the same countries, in very specific conditions?

> share what obstacle you face in your region!