



b-solutions 2.0: Solving Cross-Border Obstacles

Info session on the call for proposals
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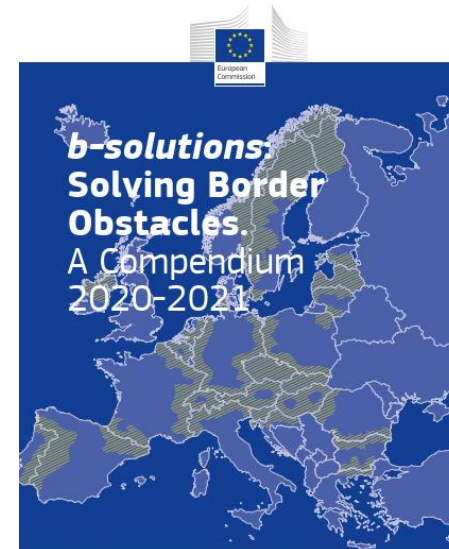
What is *b-solutions*?

- *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

- 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>



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

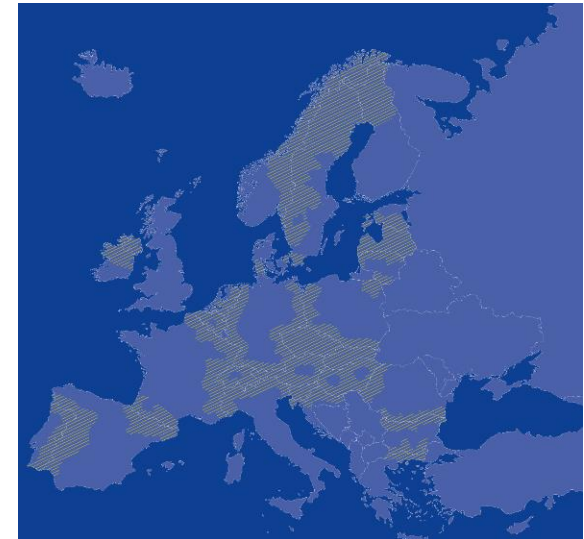
- These obstacles can affect many aspects of life in border regions
 - such as access to public services: offer of public transport, reimbursement of healthcare costs;
 - access to the labour market: administrative burdens, slow recognition, limitation to working remotely.

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



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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

b-solutions 2.0 also supports the implementation of 30 cases of cross-border obstacles of a legal and/or administrative nature through workshops

Which kind of support is provided?

b-solutions provides technical support

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

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

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.

Successful cases **do not need to file** a report about their participation.

In conclusion of the analysis by the expert, successful cases are requested to fill in a one-page document to evaluate their experience and endorse the report by the expert.

How does it work?

Experts visit successful candidates and stakeholders to carry out the analysis for a maximum of 9 days within a period of a maximum of 3 months.

The three-month period starts on the day on which the successful applicant is informed which expert has been assigned to the case.

During the visit, the expert writes a case report, including:

- a description of the obstacle with indication of the legal/administrative provisions causing the obstacle
- a description of possible solutions
- a full list of all legal provisions relevant to the case with the correct citation both in the original language and in English
- an executive summary

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

Strengthening institutional cooperation

Difficulties in cooperation between different entities at the border

Most common issues:

- lack of legislation to allow for common projects in the field of data and information sharing
- different legal applications,
- limited existence of mutually recognised documents, diverging administrative procedures,
- lengthy and costly procedures.



The advertisement features a light blue background. In the top left corner is the AEBR-AGEG-ARFE logo, and in the top right corner is the B SOLUTIONS logo. The central focus is a yellow rectangular box containing an icon of three interlocking puzzle pieces above three stylized human figures. Below this icon, the text 'Institutional Cooperation' is written in a dark font. Underneath the yellow box, the text 'Do you face an obstacle to cross-border cooperation?' is displayed. At the bottom of the advertisement, the text 'Apply to b-solutions 2.0!' is written in a bold, italicized font.



Setting up of a Special Economic Zone on the cross-border area Nova Gorica – Gorizia

The Regional Development Agency of Northern Primorska, together with the municipalities of the region, as well as with the neighbouring municipality of Gorizia and the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia in Italy, have proposed the idea of a cross-border Special Economic Zone. On the Italian-Slovenian border, the participating municipalities established a local EGTC, which could take on the role of managing a special economic zone. In this sense, this zone would not be located within national borders but would instead stretch across the border, not only fostering cross-border cooperation but also regional economic development.

OBSTACLES:

- different national laws on taxation, combined with the European legal framework on State aid
- doubts concerning the status to favour: could the border free zone be configured as a customs free zone in which companies can benefit from customs exemptions, or as a Special Economic Zone, which additionally provides for tax benefits? Is a customs free zone would be compatible with European law?
- practical barriers: defining the location, joint management of the area, customs control and operations

Creating cross-border public services

Difficulties in promoting or implementing the development of cross-border public services (health, education, culture, transport, leisure, etc.)

Most common issues:

- service accessibility issues in remote areas,
- sharing scarce resources, developing innovative synergies, managing common resources,
- different systems and costs of services.



The graphic is a square with an orange background. In the top-left corner is the AEBR-AGEG-ARFE logo, and in the top-right corner is the B SOLUTIONS logo. In the center is a yellow triangle containing a white icon of a computer monitor with a document on it. Below the triangle, the text "Cross-border Public Services" is written in white. Below that, the text "Do you face an obstacle to cross-border cooperation?" is written in white. At the bottom, the text "Apply to b-solutions 2.0!" is written in white.

AEBR-AGEG-ARFE

B SOLUTIONS

Cross-border
Public Services

Do you face an obstacle to
cross-border cooperation?

Apply to b-solutions 2.0!



Introducing cross-border healthcare into regular operation

Citizens in the border regions of Lower Austria and South Bohemia, in Czechia, often rely on care on the other side of the border if such services are not available where they live. However, they are faced with reimbursement rates that vary dramatically between the two countries for the same services provided.

OBSTACLES:

- difference in framework conditions to enjoy healthcare services in both countries. Regulatory structures in the two countries are considerably different
- administrative burden on patients and making reimbursement processes difficult to navigate.

Promoting labour markets and education

Difficulties in fostering labour and education mobility and creating a cross-border labour market

Most common issues:

- complicated procedures to obtain professional certificates and information provision
- completing an apprenticeship,
- having one's skills and competences fully recognised,
- accessing job vacancies,
- recruiting staff,
- obtaining legal certainty on fiscal issues,
- securing full social security coverage,
- obtaining professional insurance for medical staff.



The advertisement features a blue background with a central yellow hexagon. Inside the hexagon is an icon of a person at a desk with a computer, representing employment and education. The text 'Employment and Education' is written below the icon. At the top left and right corners of the blue area are the AEBR-AGEG-ARFE and B SOLUTIONS logos, respectively. Below the hexagon, the text asks 'Do you face an obstacle to cross-border cooperation?' and encourages applying to 'b-solutions 2.0!'.

Do you face an obstacle to cross-border cooperation?
Apply to b-solutions 2.0!



Financing cross-border pupils' education

In the Pyrenees territory along the Franco-Spanish border, the need for cross-border education is important.

The Community of Communes of the Haut Garonne's Pyrenees presented the problem of the lack of a framework agreement on funding for students from across the border. The funding of Spanish students in these French schools is currently handled informally via donations and this is not sustainable to keep up with the growing rate of enrolment.

OBSTACLES:

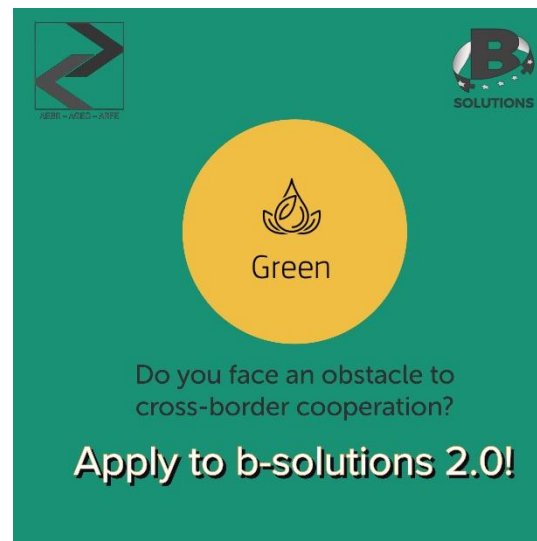
- absence of a framework agreement between the competent authorities in charge of primary and secondary education (local municipalities and “départements” on the French side)
- the lack of funding in general at the local level

Implementing the European Green Deal

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

Most common issues:

- uncertainties on how to establish a green public transport system (bike sharing),
- different national standards for resource management (water, wind turbine),
- lack of coordination and information exchange between the border authorities managing a nature reserve/park/protected area





Cross-border renewable energy exchange

The national grid plans of Netherlands and Germany are not aligned, which hinders the exchange of renewable energy between the countries.

OBSTACLES:

- under the Dutch 1998 Electricity Act, the decentralised and cross-border exchange of electricity through the distribution system is not permitted;
- subsidy schemes for a direct connection between German energy sources and the Dutch electricity grid cannot be applied due to the lack of a relevant formal agreement between the countries.
- limited capacity of the power grids in each country and congestions occurring when the supply of electricity from renewable energy sources on the grid exceeds customer demand.

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.

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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!

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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!

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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!

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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!

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.



Thank you!

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

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