

Regio-Silience

Final report

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Office of the Marshal of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship



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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Why Regio-Silience? | 2 |
| What is the policy challenge addressed by Regio-Silience? | 3 |
| The methodology of Regio-Silience | 5 |
| By the regions for the regions | 7 |
| Synergies with other European initiatives | 9 |
| The policy recommendations | 13 |
| Working Group 1: Local, Regional, National programmes | 14 |
| Working Group 2: Cooperation programmes | 23 |
| Conclusions | 32 |
| Interreg Europe's reflection on the Regio-Silience process | 32 |
| Media coverage | 34 |
| Participants | 37 |



Why Regio-Silence?

Russia's war aggression on Ukraine in 2022 and the subsequent closure of Europe's eastern borders are profoundly reshaping the economic and social context of the EU regions neighbouring Russia, notably in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. The current set of European policy instruments, particularly the mainstream and Interreg programmes under the EU's cohesion policy, had not been designed to address the negative impact of this "new iron curtain" on regional development.

To address the challenges caused by the war, the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship reached out to the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform for an interregional policy learning process bringing together the local and regional border territories directly affected by the war. The process was driven by the aims to share experiences from all Eastern border regions facing the impact of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, to identify new potentials for investments and cooperation among Europe's Northeastern rim, and to elaborate targeted policy recommendations for adapted policy interventions strengthening the regions' resilience.

The event was organised under the patronage of the Polish presidency of the Council of the European Union.



What is the policy challenge addressed by Regio-Silence?

Russia's attack led to the interruption of long-established cooperation ties, cutting vital supply chains, trade relations and people-to-people contacts. Financially, the war forced the suspension of all cross-border cooperation programmes between the EU and Russia, affecting EUR 300m of allocated EU support.

All countries and regions bordering Russia are affected by similar challenges. In Poland, for instance, the territories along the Russian border are some of the least developed. They are affected by depopulation and economic decline. Since the start of the war, the situation worsened, as cooperation with Russia was an important factor in the development of the border territories. Especially for the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region, as they share more than 200 km of land border with Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast).

In Finland, the new geopolitical situation causes heavy consequences for the security of supply chains (for example biofuel production), logistics, workforce, labour market, R&D cooperation, as well as the suitability of transport infrastructures in the light of new security requirements.

All across the border regions, tourism as well as 'trade tourism' is one of the economic sectors suffering the most from the current geopolitical situation. The sudden stop of Russian tourism traffic has heavy consequences on many businesses, leading to economic crises, bankruptcies, and overall development decline.

In parallel, the external cross-border cooperation programmes have been suspended. The cooperation programmes within the EU reacted to this new geopolitical context, notably by extending their geographical areas to the territories along Europe's Eastern border. Yet, these measures must be qualified as ad-hoc responses, insufficient to compensate for the consequences of the nearby war. As a result, the cities and regions affected are facing the strategic challenge of reorienting their respective policy instruments to better support the affected areas.



Altogether, the joint work in Regio-Silience led to the following list of joint regional development challenges, shared by the participating local and regional territories from Poland up to Norway:

Common challenges as common ground for collaboration

| | |
|--|--|
| Economic challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decline in investments, industry, tourism and trade; supply chains interrupted; limited access to private funding. |
| Employment and demographic challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased attractiveness for families and skilled labour force; layoffs; skills development. |
| Security challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall feeling of insecurity; priority shift towards security and civil protection. |
| Energy challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complex energy challenges; energy costs; limited capacity of grids and storage; constraints for windmill construction. |
| Transport and logistics challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transport corridors cut; costly reorientation from East-West to North-South axes; costs of investments. |
| Cooperation challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long-established relations cut at all levels; new relations; networks and relations to be built. |
| Programme challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (Attractive) external CBC programmes suspended; lack of funding for investments; new partnership required. |
| Resource and capacity challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permanent "survival and firefighter mode"; lack of resources for new cooperation priorities. |

Against this challenging background, the reorientation of local and regional development policies involves identifying new priorities and sectors for territorial development. Equally, the unprecedented situation caused by the war creates opportunities to redefine cooperation priorities with new partners along the North-South Axis.

The situation calls for exploring wider geographical outreach beyond direct neighbours, aligning strategies with broader national or transnational objectives.

Consequently, policy reorientation is required at all levels, building on the experiences of the local and regional territories directly affected.

The methodology of Regio-Silience

Following an informal discussion at Interreg Europe's 2024 annual event in Antwerp, initiated by the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, the local and regional territories bordering Russia, from Norway to Poland, decided to join forces. Altogether, 19 local and regional authorities representing 16 regions signed up for the collective policy learning journey of Regio-Silience, coordinated and facilitated by the team of the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform.

As part of the preparatory works in 2024, numerous bilateral online exchange sessions were held with the affected regions.

To gain a clearer understanding of the key policy areas affected along the "new iron curtain", an online survey was shared with the affected territories as part of the preparatory works, notably. The feedback given by the regions clearly outlined four policy priorities of particular concern:

Economic development including tourism

End of cross-border trade, tourism, decreased attractiveness for foreign investments, low-wage jobs

Security and civil protection

Unsafety for local population
End of cooperation programmes

Social policies

Brain-drain
Depopulation
Unemployment

Energy & transport

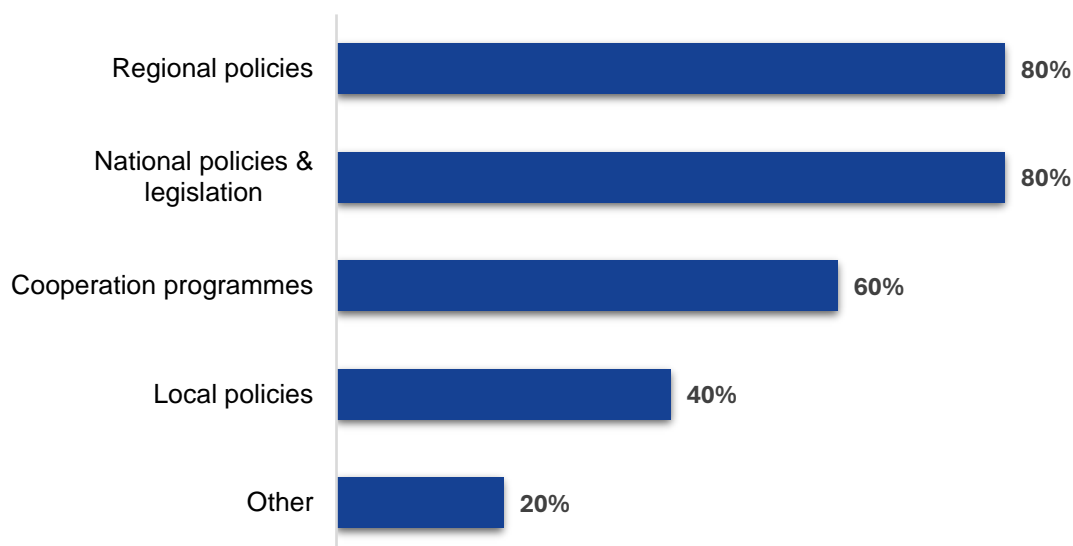
Defense priorities vs wind energy power production
Trade on logistics routes

Source: Survey study

Additionally, the respondents identified the most relevant policy instruments for regulating measures in response to these challenges through the survey.

Which policy instruments have the highest relevance for regulating measures and approaches to react to the challenges made worse by the war?

Respondents could choose more than one answer



The results clearly outlined the need for an integrated approach across policy levels, adapting and aligning national, regional, local and cooperation policies.

Following the results of the survey, the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform proposed the possibility for the concerned territories to meet, to exchange and co-create. An online briefing on 2 October 2024 served as an opportunity to discuss the policy learning methodology with all participants, and to reflect on the first survey results presented above. The online gathering prepared the ground for the preparation of an onsite policy learning event over two days, that took place on 15 and 16 January 2025, in Olsztyn, the capital of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship.

All levels of administration from all concerned countries were invited: 26 public administrations at local, regional and national levels from all 6 countries bordering Russia attended the event, broadly covering the local and regional territories along Europe's border with the Russian Federation. Altogether, Regio-Silience brought together more than 60 participants to exchange their common challenges, discuss them with European and international institutions, and eventually elaborate joint policy recommendations.

By the regions for the regions

On the spot, the event agenda was built on Interreg Europe's [peer review methodology](#), allowing the participants to team up in two informal working group settings for the co-creation of policy recommendations for future short- and long-term policy measures:

- Working group 1: National, regional, and local programmes.
- Working group 2: Cooperation programmes.

To receive hands-on feedback from the local business community, an onsite study visit to Olsztyn's Science and Technology preceded the work in groups.

The Tech Park session was attended by five local companies from different business sectors that have been significantly affected by the war in Ukraine: Elbląg Sea Port Authority (transport and logistics), Greenmiles (industrial machinery manufacturing), Priobos (probiotic bacteria research), AlterLogic (industrial automation and electrical engineering) and Hotel Ventus Natural & Medical Spa (tourist and wellness facility located 2.5 km from the Russian border).

A short presentation by each company was followed by a panel discussion on current challenges and their expectations from policymakers. The biggest challenges and obstacles for business development caused by war included:



- lack of opportunities for investment and trade expansion into the Russian market due to sanctions, thus increasing the challenge of diversifying sales markets
- lack of access to preferential investment loans for business development (banks are not willing to grant such loans due to the high investment risk resulting from the geopolitical situation and potentially from the business location close to the border)
- lack of commissioning of new technologies in the region (innovation backwardness - lack of demand), companies perform their services in more technologically and economically developed regions
- decrease in tourist traffic (decrease in the number of bookings of tourist facilities, cancellation of bookings) due to fear and perception of the border with Russia

Despite the current disadvantages, regional businesses are searching for positive future scenarios, notably by expecting and supporting:

- to tighten cooperation between academia and local businesses for more market-oriented, tailored education and research
- the creation of a marketing and information campaign by regional and local authorities to change the image of the border regions, thus helping to present them as a safe and stable place for investors and tourists
- the search for new opportunities due to changes in business flows from East-West to North-South
- new investment programmes for the regions along Europe's Eastern rim.

Altogether, the session served as an opportunity for the participants to get out of the “policymaking bubble” and receive hands-on insights into the practical challenges and business development considerations of local companies.

Equally, the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship and the Policy Learning Platform team took an outward-looking perspective towards relevant partner initiatives at the European level.



Synergies with other European initiatives

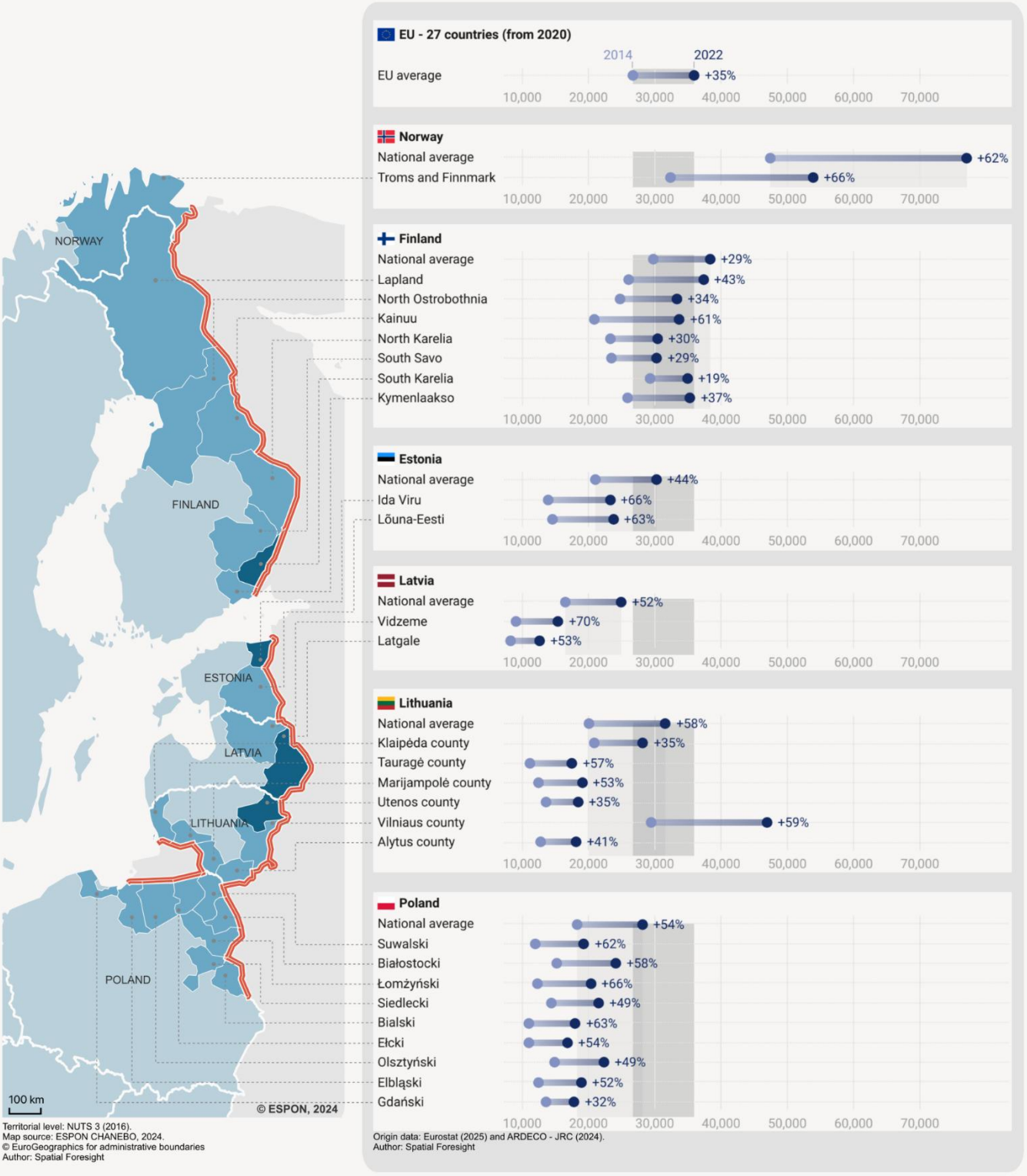
Since the outbreak of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine in February 2022, different studies, projects and initiatives have been launched at the European level to analyse and address the unprecedented situation faced by Europe's regions along the new "iron curtain". As one piece of the puzzle, Regio-Silience aims at complementing the launched works, notably by putting the most affected local and regional territories in the driving seat for the co-creation of possible policy solutions.

Consequently, the Regio-Silience team of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship and the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform pursued an active approach to involve a broad range of key stakeholders in the process, including the European Commission ([DG Regio](#)), the [World Bank](#), [ESPON](#), [Interact](#), and [TESIM-Next](#).

The ESPON programme, for instance, launched an analysis to raise awareness about the identified challenges and lost opportunities in the border regions. Called [CHANEBO](#), the study is led by the Regional Council of South Karelia involving Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian territories. The first data brought in by Sandra Spule from Spatial Foresight outlined the challenging situation for the affected border regions in quantitative terms. Systematically, the affected territories are characterised by lower levels of development, if compared to EU and national averages:

How have the 25 NUTS-3 regions having border with Russia and Belarus + 2 in the vicinity been doing so far?

GDP PPS per capita relative to national and EU averages, NUTS 3 regions (2014 vs. 2022)



Equally, the **Baltics Catching-Up Regions Initiative (Baltics CuRI)**, funded by the **European Commission** and implemented by the **World Bank**, aims to accelerate sustainable development and social investment in selected border regions of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Concretely, the initiative aims to strengthen local governance, economic resilience, and cross-border cooperation through targeted technical assistance, business retention strategies, and peer learning events. Particular emphasis will be given to the development potentials of social enterprises (Lithuania), regional planning (Latvia), and urban renewal (Estonia). Technical assistance through 2025 will support strengthening results in project pipelines for local investment opportunities under existing cohesion policy instruments and country-level programs, and a strengthened capacity of the regional and local authorities to implement the projects.

At the same time, [INTERACT](#) and [TESIM NEXT](#) have started teaming up with the management bodies of internal and external cooperation programmes (Interreg and Interreg NEXT) to consult their potential future architecture under the post-2027 policy framework. The [Executive Summary of INTERACT's consultation report](#) published on 14 January 2025 recognises the specific situation of the affected border regions, stating:

“In the 2021-2027 period, some border regions have been put under additional socio-economic and security challenges due to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. These regions also became areas with no likely cooperation partners as the cooperation with Russia and Belarus was suspended. Through transnational and interregional approaches there are ways to support regions working on shared challenges without a land border. There is an identified space here for innovation in cooperation, to seek to build a new, or adapt an existing, form of cooperation between regions facing similar challenges, without a shared border.”

On 29 October 2024, INTERACT organised an onsite panel discussion at the 2024 edition of the “Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region” (EUSBSR) in Visby. Under the title [“Building a Resilient Future for Eastern EUSBSR Border Regions”](#), the session served as an opportunity to bring together European (DG Regio), national (Estonia, Finland) and regional perspectives (Regio-Silience) on the situation. Against the background of the increasing pressures faced by the affected territories, the discussion underlined the need for an integrated and coordinated multi-level approach to policy action. Witold Kielich from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship and Thorsten Kohlisch from the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform took the



floor on behalf of the Regio-Silience initiative, presenting the first results of the launched thematic survey (see results above) and explaining the interregional pathway chosen by the regions.

Joined forces for resilient border regions

The participants of the Regio-Silience initiative at Olsztyn's Science and Technology Park on 15 January 2025



The policy recommendations

Participants worked intensively over two days to exchange their knowledge and experience on policies in place that have the potential to support further development of the concerned areas. Sharing their experience allowed them to identify several possible strategies and policy instruments that could be of interest to be implemented in other countries or regions.

Facilitated by the staff of Interreg Europe, they elaborated a list of policy recommendations, organized into two main categories: a first set of recommendations refers to the design and implementation of current and possible future **local, regional and national policy instruments** (Working Group 1). The second list is addressed to **European Territorial Cooperation programmes** (Working Group 2).



Working Group 1: Local, Regional, National programmes

Participants discussed policies governing four main policy areas, considered as a priority:

- Entrepreneurship and support to SMEs
- Youth
- Territorial attractiveness (tourists and locals)
- Energy

This section details the recommended discussions, providing an example of existing instruments in the different regions.

Entrepreneurship and support to SMEs

Economic development and SME support was the first area identified by the participants as priority for future policy actions.

Recommendations

Plan **special funding lines** to support SMEs in the regional operational programmes.

Foresee **separate funding for large infrastructure projects** (backbone for companies and industry).

In Poland: FEWiM – Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship: This ad hoc intervention provides special treatment for areas bordering Russia with an additional pool of funds.

Couple **existing national or regional funding** with ERDF.

In Finland: The AKKE funding programme is reoriented through feasibility studies on new opportunities brought by geoeconomic changes in Eastern Lapland.



Working Group 1: Local, Regional, National programmes

Consider **targeted measures** on defined geographical areas or on specific sectors.

In Latvia: The Latgale Special Economic Zone covers 5% of the total area, attracting investments and promoting regional development by offering significant tax incentives, such as reductions in profit tax and property tax.

Develop **industrial zones** in the region to facilitate the entry of large investors.

In Estonia: Võru county – where local investors' involvement is important.

Engage in analysing and proposing different state aid limits for businesses located in border areas.

Build strong relations with **academia**. Acknowledging the crucial role of **universities** in supporting the economic and social ecosystem (third mission).

In Finland: the national law states that universities are also responsible for regional development. Generally, the third mission of universities is more and more acknowledged as a crucial role in territorial development.

Consider setting up an **EDIH or equivalent structure** (*European Digital Innovation Hub*). It can be a highly effective strategy to support regional economic development and business growth through digital solutions.

Engage local businesses in **learning platforms** making use of new technologies.

In Norway: virtual reality upskilling.

Set up an **adapted monitoring system**: impact takes time – 7-10 years to see the impact of policy on SMEs. In a crisis, it could take even longer.

Working Group 1: Local, Regional, National programmes

Circular Bioeconomy holds significant potential for boosting the bioeconomy such as food and wood.

One innovative approach is the use of **ad hoc innovation lab methodologies**, which focus on addressing specific industry challenges by creating new solutions through hackathons and collaborative workshops. *In Estonia, Võru County, a well-established wood cluster brings together over 30 entrepreneurs who support one another. Additionally, the E-rural Resilience project (a 2.4 million EUR initiative under Interreg BSR) is helping rural bioeconomy companies digitalize their operations.*

The **Dual-Use** potential in production units, universities, and infrastructure could also be considered.

In Finland - Military mobility along the TEN-T corridor in Kymenlaakso and aviation and drone technology in Kymenlaakso. Where a municipality collaborates with a private entity to form a business cluster around the small local airport. The Regional University of Applied Sciences is also dedicating R&D resources on the topic.

Cybersecurity could become a new sector for border regions.

In Latvia- Drones for providing public services in local municipalities (control systems).

In Estonia - Testbed is being created for drone technology by the City of Tartu proactively engaging with local companies.

Youth

All participants have acknowledged the importance of investing in youth, both to fight depopulation and to ensure a long-term development vision for the countries.

Recommendations

Develop regional programs for youth employment, internships, and education-to-work pathways to address population decline and brain drain.

In Estonia - The Youth Entrepreneurship Programme with 3.3 million EUR is the biggest youth entrepreneurship project in Estonia and has 6 counties involved.

Include young people in the definition of regional strategies: allowing the creation of Youth panels or channels on how they can directly influence policy making – strong ownership feeling (youth councils or youth commissions).

In Norway - Youths panel on the Arctic Policy in 2021, a government paper to which is still being referenced.

Create concrete incentives.

In Poland - student loan reduction instruments are in place when youngsters start working in border regions.

Develop entrepreneurial skills.

In Latvia - entrepreneurship in kindergartens aiming to nurture entrepreneurial thinking from an early age.

Working Group 1: Local, Regional, National programmes

Create **physical and virtual spaces** for networking and more.

In Estonia - Võru HUUB is a physical space dedicated to youngsters aged 16 to 30. It serves as an innovation lab, bringing together active youth and supporting the implementation of their ideas.

Territorial attractiveness: for the locals

Territorial attractiveness is key to reinforcing the development of a territory. It is important to build awareness of its strengths in the minds of the locals, to develop a feeling of ownership and of belonging to a land that is worth living in.

Recommendations

Culture is key as it fosters social trust, strengthens community ties, and plays a vital role in promoting well-being and cohesion within society. Culture should always remain high on the political agenda.

*In Estonia: **Tartu Capital of Culture 2024**. Several projects have spurred from this initiative, more widely in the country and border regions such as Southeast Estonia (film funds, entrepreneurship programmes).*

Social connections should be reinforced by supporting inhabitants with low living standards to be active in social life and exploring participatory approaches to priority setting for municipalities.

Allow **open reflections** on the possible co-existence of military and non-military structures/projects/land use.

Territorial attractiveness: for tourists

Territorial attractiveness is also meant to raise the interest to potential tourists and investors.

Recommendations

Implement **strong marketing campaigns** to promote local attractions and events, focusing on both domestic and international audiences.

In Estonia: Creating a new region (South Estonia Region) began with cultural collaboration, which later evolved into the South Estonia Tourism Cluster to promote tourism.

Provide **increased support for tourism** and other business sectors to find new market areas replacing Russia.

Focus on **long-term investments** in infrastructure, digital tools, and partnerships to create a sustainable and year-round tourism ecosystem.

*Interreg Europe Good Practice Example: [Welcome to Lesvos \(Greece\)](#).
Creation of an [online platform](#) to promote the Island in response to a tourism crisis.*

Working Group 1: Local, Regional, National programmes

Energy

With the limited time available, participants could not extensively work on the subject of energy. Only the importance of creating Energy One Stop Shops was mentioned, to get all specialist support on refurbishing (soviet-style) housing for sustainability.

Horizontal policy proposals

Going beyond the different thematic areas, a few horizontal elements stood out from the exchanges among participants: they purely refer to governance models and management modalities of policy instruments, such as Structural Funds programmes, with special features that could be put in place.

Recommendations

Set up special **national grant programmes** for border areas small with co-financing rates and possibilities to make investments (economic, services, crisis prevention etc.).

In Poland: a government programme for the development of the north-eastern border areas for 2024-2030. With around 31 million euros per region for 6 years. However, this is still not enough for infrastructure work.

Working Group 1: Local, Regional, National programmes

Consider creating a **special status** for the regions.

In Finland: „Abrupt structural change“ - <http://www.tem.fi/> (English version available) provides targeted support for territories facing crises. Under this framework, a region declared as being in a "crisis" can obtain a special status that unlocks resources and support mechanisms.

Create dialogues across players and regions. Engage local stakeholders in a **joint reflection on the vision** for the concerned territories for their medium to long-term attractiveness.

In Finland: Technical Support Instrument – TSI: Concertation among all affected regions to plan a joint action along the Russian border. Also, a common reflection on the future of the S3 strategy focusing on new emerging sectors (e.g., dual use) could be explored.

Developing local strategies in a **participatory approach**. By involving a broad range of stakeholders—local authorities, businesses, civil society, and especially youth—the process reinforces community ownership and ensures that diverse voices are heard.

This counteracts the pervasive feeling of "loss of hope." The first step is to map detailed community needs creating a shared vision for the future.

In Finland: Arctic Data Intelligence and Supercomputing Ecosystem in Kainuu was born from an economic crisis due to the closing down of the local paper mill. A participatory approach involving the whole ecosystem ensures the smooth shifting of the value chain and workers' re-skilling.

Create **alliances across regional/national governments** for closer collaboration and shared management of projects/funds.

In Poland: Territorial Agreement between the Regional Government and the Association of Borderland Municipalities.



Working Group 1: Local, Regional, National programmes

Take inspiration from existing research, e.g. TERRA-RES, CHANEBO;

Take inspiration from other contexts (Interreg Europe): brain drain, economic shocks, and territorial attractiveness are common challenges in other EU areas – e.g. Brexit;

Consider **fast-tracking** funds in the current programming period for strategic projects in response to the current context (e.g. REACT-EU) - increase spending rates on targeted projects;

Activate cooperation possibilities within the current OP to reinforce interregional value chains with neighbouring countries to support SMEs accessing new markets – article 17 CPR “embedding cooperation”;

Continue **current initiatives** (e.g. STEP, Talent Booster Mechanism);

Consider **updates of the macroregional strategy BSR** to refer to the current trends;

Consider extending the **Baltics CuRI project** to the full range of regions/countries at the border with Russia;

Next generation of **mainstream programmes**: earmarking funds for concerned territories;

Continuation of similar exchanges under Interreg Europe by collecting good practices from the border areas and showcasing them in events.

Working Group 2: Cooperation programmes

Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine led to closed borders with Russia, the cut of long-established cross-border relations and the suspension of the EU's external cooperation programmes. Consequently, the affected European border territories are confronted with the compelling necessity to reorient their cooperation priorities. Working Group 2 addressed the EU's policy support for cooperation across national borders (cooperation programmes), with an emphasis on the North-South dimension of collaboration between the border regions.

This section details the draft recommendations discussed by the Working Group:

Strategic horizontal recommendations

As outlined by the participants, any future for cooperation support should acknowledge the regions' game-changing context for cooperation and the vital necessity for the border territories to invest in new and closer partnerships.

Guiding principles

Particular attention to the territories bordering Russia, due to the unprecedented situation resembling a "new iron curtain". These border regions have shifted from being **gateways to becoming gatekeepers** for all of Europe.

The current context demands swift action, combining both short-term and long-term action. In future policy regulations, these regions should be granted special status, comparable to Europe's outermost regions. A common statement to the EU would be essential to advocate and secure recognition.



Working Group 2: Cooperation programmes

Need for the border regions to **reorient their cooperation priorities and partnerships**. This involves considering partnerships at various levels and directions: **functional cooperation** with neighbouring regions (cross-border dimension), intensified collaboration at macroregional and transnational levels, and connections at European and global scales.

Given the changing geopolitical context, cooperation needs a clear shift from the traditional **East-West focus** towards a stronger **North-South orientation**, which was prioritised for the working group discussions in Olsztyn.

Sustainability and regional resilience as leading considerations for cooperation investments;

Substantial increase of cooperation **funding and co-financing** is also essential;

Agile and flexible management of policy instruments is welcome (with low admin burden);

Investments in the capacities of local authorities and local actors is a pre-condition for strategic cooperation and the reorientation of cooperation partnerships.

Thematic priorities

Overarching priority: **sustainability and regional resilience;**

- **Economic development**
- **Research, development and innovation**
- **Security and resilience**
- **Culture and youth.**

New opportunities of cooperation

The following non-exhaustive set of areas and potentials for cooperation emerged as the result of the exchanges and brainstorming between the participants, thus preparing the ground for the definition of concrete cooperation actions.

Recommendations

- **Reorientation of value chains** regionally and globally;
- **Infrastructure and transport investments** for economic development (e.g. ferry connection Sillamäe – Kotka);
- NATO membership / Increased military presence offering opportunities for local economies - **potential of the defence sector**;
- **Dual-use technologies**, infrastructures and investments;
- **Joining forces and cultural competencies** for supporting Ukraine's reconstruction;
- Potential of **green economy** (renewable energies, green technologies, resilience against climate change);
- **University-industry collaboration**;
- **New narrative** to increase the regions' attractiveness (external and internal perceptions);
- Strengthened **youth and cultural cooperation**.

Thematic mapping and matchmaking

Building on the successful identification of concrete areas and potentials for their future collaboration, an in-depth thematic mapping of the border regions' strengths and complementarities shall support the definition of strategic priorities and actions.

Recommendations

Systematic mapping of sectors, regional assets, and cooperation potentials is a crucial next step for identifying core strengths and strategic priorities. This process involves specifying thematic priorities and cooperation potentials, helping to determine what defines the region's core assets and competitive advantages.

Such mapping will serve as a basis for project development. To achieve this, **a combination of desk research and in-depth analysis is necessary**, supported by relevant programs, institutions, and local expertise.

In Finland: The AKKE funding programme is reoriented through feasibility studies on new opportunities brought by geoeconomic changes in Eastern Lapland.

Policy instruments for cooperation

The border regions are experienced players in the implementation of cross-border development projects and international cooperation. Moreover, they can reflect on the ad-hoc policy measures taken since 2022 to reorient cooperation priorities and resources.

Short-term solutions (programming period 2021-2027)

Building on the ad-hoc measures taken since 2022 to adapt programme geographies and reorient financial resources, the regions suggest to continue working on:

- Broadened eligible areas of **Interreg programmes**, enabling the participation of border regions;
- Allocation of funds from external NEXT programmes to internal Interreg programmes;
- **Dedicated calls**, higher funding rates and support for networking;
- **Particular attention to border regions** (reference, footnote) in directly managed EU programmes (e.g. Horizon Europe, I3, etc.).

Long-term solutions (post-2027 period)

- A dedicated **funding stream**, justified by the unprecedented situation the regions are facing;
- **Strategic and coordinated collaboration between the territories** required.

Main proposals

- Creation of a **new cooperation and investment programme** for all border regions (North-South);
- Dedicated **measures for collaboration** between border regions in **existing cooperation programmes**;
- Complementary to the two options above: embedding cooperation and investment **funding stream** for border regions in **mainstream / national programmes**.

Possible types of interventions

Different types of cooperation activities shall allow the border regions to unlock the identified cooperation potentials in practice:

Recommendations

- **Exchange of experience**, twinning and knowledge transfer between local and regional authorities. Use of existing programmes (e.g. Interreg Europe);
- **Cultural and youth exchanges**;
- **Investment and infrastructure projects** (cooperation dimension of investments to be specified);
- **Strategic projects**, clusters of projects for increased impact and visibility (cooperation dimension to be specified).

Next steps of cooperation

Concluding on their discussions in the Working Group, the participants expressed their interest to continuing working together and to deepen their joint work on the elaborated recommendations.

Recommendations

- Work on a **dedicated programme/instrument** connecting the border regions (North-South dimension). This interest was expressed by several participants;
- Create an **interregional Task Force / Working Group** for further elaboration;
- Elaborate the instrument's rationale, added value and key features;
- Coordinate the recommended thematic mapping/matchmaking;
- Consider implications for the current programme landscape.

Conclusions

In his concluding remarks **Emil Walendzik**, Deputy Director of the Regional Policy Department of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, underlined the **need for stronger regional resilience**. He shared the general opinion in the room, that a dedicated funding stream is required by the unprecedented situation the regions are facing.

Finally, all the stakeholders agreed that further steps are necessary to deepen the recommendations and implement the discussed short and long-term solutions. The idea of intensifying the exchanges in dedicated “Regio-Silience” working groups emerged as a potential follow-up activity, making active use of all available EU support mechanisms.

Equally, concrete opportunities for cooperation and joint investments emerged, for instance, around the regions’ green and bio-based economies (wood clusters), the defence sector and local military presence along the rim, as well as the economic potential of dual-use technologies and infrastructures, such as aviation, drones and cybersecurity.

Interreg Europe’s reflection on the Regio-Silience process

The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform felt honoured to support the policy learning journey of the local and regional territories most affected by the “new iron curtain”. The joint work across national and organisational borders underlined the motivation of the participants to continue and deepen the launched collaboration, and to build on the elaborated recommendations for the next steps towards tailored and adapted policy action.

In fact, the recommendations represent the first proposals “by the regions for the regions” to trigger new public stimulus for their future development. Further steps will be required to evidence, prioritise and fine-tune the suggested policy measures while taking into account the different political, administrative, economic, cultural and societal contexts of the countries and regions involved.

The team of the Policy Learning Platform is ready to continue supporting local, regional, national and European policymakers in their efforts to deliver short- and long-term policy interventions adapted to the unwanted situation. Concretely, building on the proposals made



by the Regio-Silience participants in their draft recommendations, the Policy Learning Platform could support:

- Creating a repository of local, regional, and national policy practices on the Interreg Europe website where policymakers can access information on the measures put in place in the different countries concerned.
- Accompanying local and regional authorities with tailored support in the form of peer reviews of matchmaking sessions, diving deeper into selected policy challenges and providing an interregional space for the co-creation of hands-on recommendations in partnership with experts and fellow peer policymakers.
- Presenting, sharing and disseminating the results of Regio-Silience listed in the present report in any context deemed relevant to policymakers who would ask for support.

As the team of Interreg Europe, we would like to express our gratitude to the team of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship for their initiative and excellent teamwork. Equally, we would like to thank all participants and stakeholders for their active participation and exemplary commitment during the entire Regio-Silience process.

Your motivation to work for the future of your regions and your pursuit of concrete policy solutions serve as an energizer for all of us!





“ This is an unprecedented situation that our regions are facing. And it requires a policy reorientation to adapt to it ”

Emil Walendzik, Deputy Director of the Regional Policy Department of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship

Media coverage

Poland

- TVP 3 Olsztyn - [Granica z Rosją rzuca cień. Poprawa bezpieczeństwa poprzez współpracę](#)
- Olsztyn 24 - [W Olsztynie trwają rozmowy o europejskim wsparciu regionów graniczących z Rosją](#)
- Polskie Radio - [International conference in Poland discusses EU support for border regions affected by Ukraine war - English Section](#)
- Radio Olsztyn - [Europejskim wsparciu dla regionów graniczących z Rosją na konferencji w Olsztynie : Radio Olsztyn](#)

Latvia

- [Regio-Silience: Policy solutions for the EU regions bordering Russia - Vidzemes plānošanas reģions](#)

Interreg Europe

- [From Gateways to Gatekeepers: policy solutions for EU regions bordering Russia](#)
- [Youtube Video - Regio-Silience: policy solutions for Europe's regions bordering Russia](#)





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- Mart Veliste, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform
- Vladimir Sestovic, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform
- Mario Vade pied, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

Interreg Europe Programme

Interreg Europe is an interregional cooperation programme co-financed by the European Union. With a budget of 379 million euros for 2021-2027, Interreg Europe helps local, regional and national governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policies through interregional cooperation projects and its Policy Learning Platform services. The programme promotes good practice sharing and policy learning among European regions in 36 countries – the 27 Member States, as well as Norway, Switzerland and the 7 EU candidate countries. Interreg Europe contributes to the EU cohesion policy together with the other European Territorial Cooperation programmes known as Interreg.

Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

The Policy Learning Platform is the second action of the Interreg Europe programme. It aims to boost EU-wide policy learning and builds on good practices related to regional development policies.

The Platform is a space where the European policy-making community can tap into the know-how of regional policy experts and peers. It offers information on a variety of topics via thematic publications, online and onsite events, and direct communication with a team of experts.

Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform expert services

Our team of experts provide a set of services that can help you with regional policy challenges. Get in contact with our experts to discuss the possibilities:



Via the [policy helpdesk](#), policymakers may submit their questions to receive a set of resources ranging from inspiring good practices from across Europe, policy briefs, webinar recordings, information about upcoming events, available European support and contacts of relevant people, as well as matchmaking recommendations and peer review opportunities.



A [matchmaking session](#) is a thematic discussion hosted and moderated by the Policy Learning Platform, designed around the policy needs and questions put forward by the requesting public authority or agency. It brings together peers from other European regions to present their experience and successes, to provide inspiration for overcoming regional challenges.

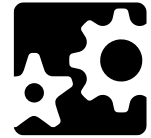


[Peer reviews](#) are the deepest and most intensive of the on-demand services, bringing together peers from a number of regions for a two-day work session, to examine the specific territorial and thematic context of the requesting region, discuss with stakeholders, and devise recommendations. Peer reviews are the deepest and most intensive of the on-demand services, bringing together peers from a number of regions for a two-day work session, to examine the specific territorial and thematic context of the requesting region, discuss with stakeholders, and devise recommendations.

**Interreg
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