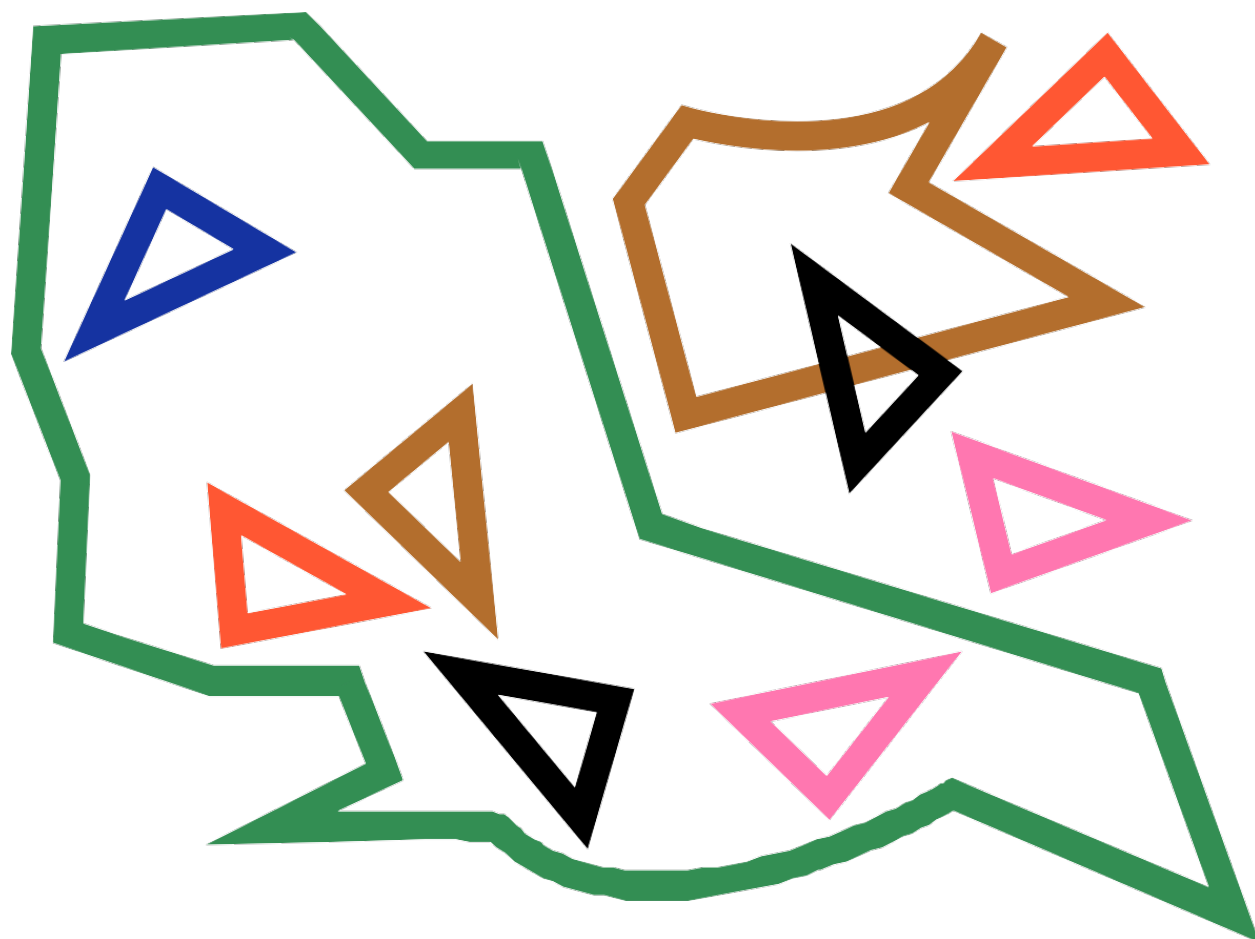




Funded by
the European Union

Co-creating Policy for Borderlands: The need for an inclusive approach



Policy Brief

b — shapes

Borders Shaping
Perceptions of European Societies

Policy implications of Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies (B-SHAPES) – a Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Action

About the project

The project B-SHAPES (Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies) was carried out between April 2023 and March 2026. The Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Action analysed and assessed how borders continue to be a key factor in shaping the ways European societies are understood. Drawing on the experiences of Europeans living in border regions, B-SHAPES examined the role of borders, especially in relation to attitudes to Europe perceptions of national minorities in border regions, with an additional focus on the role of border landscapes as a special phenomenon of heritage and a subject of cultural heritage policies.

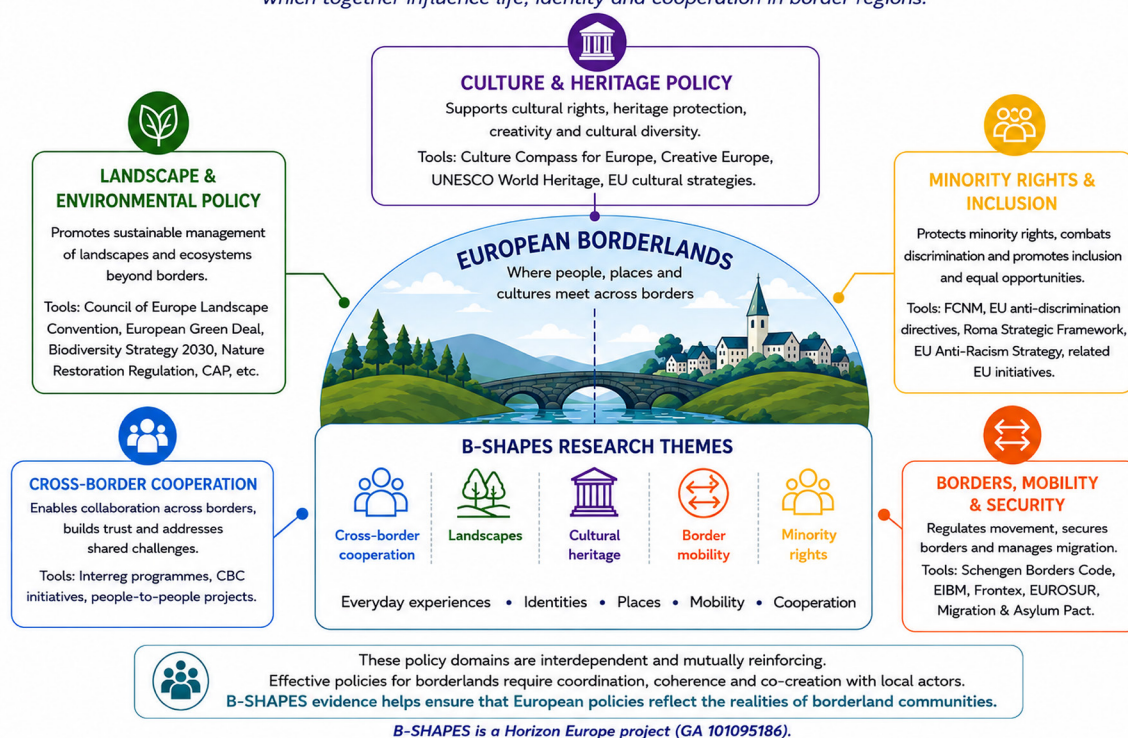
B-SHAPES has produced a wealth of analysis driven by a combination of conceptual work, empirical data and interaction with border region stakeholders. The

policy work conducted within B-SHAPES builds on the empirical research carried out within the consortium but also reflects the diversity of interests and expertise among consortium members as well as stakeholder input.

The participation in B-SHAPES of the Association of European Border Regions - the leading European interest organisation for border regions - facilitated the monitoring and harnessing of the policy relevance of B-SHAPES activities throughout the project and beyond. This was further facilitated by the consortium comprising additional cultural and creative institution partners, which enabled greater local take-up of practical recommendations already within the lifespan of the project.

European policy domains shaping cultural borderlands

B-SHAPES research is situated at the intersection of five key policy domains, which together influence life, identity and cooperation in border regions.



Created by Oriana Miraka with the support of OpenAI.

The European Policy Context

B-SHAPES was funded within a programme on Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society. Its research results and innovation activities relate to a complex policy landscape, spanning several interrelated European policy areas.

Cross-border governance and border policy

Local institutional cross-border cooperation has been supported by the European Union through the Interreg initiative since 1990. Various instruments associated with the neighbourhood and pre-accession policies have also supported cooperation along the EU's external borders.

Although the EU provides a common regulatory framework across many policy domains, implementation remains strongly influenced by national policies and agendas. This is particularly visible in the management of EU internal borders, where Member States have periodically reintroduced border controls. The Schengen Borders Code regulates the temporary reintroduction of such controls and sets conditions and limits for their use. EU border management is further shaped by the European integrated border management, the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, and the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation, which provides the legal framework for Frontex and related EU border-management systems.

Culture and cultural heritage policy

EU cultural policy is shaped by a range of policy frameworks and interacts with international conventions, including the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Transboundary heritage designations and sites provide important examples of cross-border cooperation in the protection and management of shared natural, built, archaeological and cultural heritage.

The Culture Compass for Europe, introduced in 2025, replaced the New European Agenda for Culture and provides the current strategic framework for EU cultural policy. It addresses cultural rights,

working conditions for artists and cultural professionals, digital and green transitions, and international cultural relations. Creative Europe (2021–2027) remains the EU's principal funding programme for the cultural and creative sectors, supporting cultural diversity, cooperation and competitiveness. Other relevant initiatives include the EU Artists' Charter, the AI Strategy for the Cultural and Creative Sectors, and EU digital and copyright frameworks affecting cultural production and distribution.

Landscape and planning policy

The Council of Europe Landscape Convention, adopted in 2000, recognises the importance of landscape for cultural heritage, quality of life and sustainable development and promotes its protection, management and planning. It also provides a framework for European cooperation on landscape. At EU level, landscape-related policies are increasingly linked to the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Relevant instruments include the Nature Restoration Regulation, the Common Agricultural Policy, the Deforestation Regulation, emerging policies on soil and urban greening, and the New European Bauhaus. Together, these frameworks affect land use, agriculture, forestry, environmental protection and urban development, linking landscape management to broader environmental and sustainability objectives.

National minority policy

B-SHAPES' focus on national minorities adds another important policy dimension, located predominantly within the framework of the Council of Europe and its Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. At EU level, there is no comprehensive legislative framework specifically governing national minority rights. Initiatives such as the Minority SafePack Initiative, promoted by the Federal Union of European Nationalities, have sought to strengthen EU action in this field.

Protection against discrimination is addressed through EU anti-discrimination legislation and targeted policy frameworks, including the Racial Equality Directive and Employment Equality Directive, the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020–2030, and the EU Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030. The latter was adopted in January 2026 and builds on the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025.

Together, these policy areas demonstrate the complex institutional and regulatory environment in which B-SHAPES addresses borders, European identities, national minorities, cultural heritage and border landscapes.

Evidence, Analysis and Results

Culture & Culture heritage

Evidence

European borderlands are rich in cultural heritage, but what is considered culture is often discussed and decided within the member states. Cultural heritage, as it relates to borders, was mainstreamed throughout much of B-SHAPES' work and was the focus of a policy document analysis and of recorded discussions at several policy workshops and seminars. B-SHAPES conducted an analysis of cultural and cultural heritage policy documents, spanning those produced at municipal, regional, and national levels, as well as policies crafted by cross-border governance institutions.ⁱ

The results have been integrated into an online Policy Handbook on Inclusive Borderland Heritage Managementⁱⁱ, which offers practical tips, best-practice examples, and a step-by-step guide adaptable to local circumstances.

Key findings

- EU member states generally neglect the special conditions of borderlands in culture and cultural heritage policy.
- Some European regional and local bodies involved in culture and cultural heritage “see” across the border, but many do not incorporate cross-border perspectives.

Policy documents in central and southern Europe tend to refer more to European Union frameworks than to global frameworks such as UNESCO. In contrast, policy documents in northern Europe tend to have a more global than European outlook.

Key policy recommendations

- Cultural heritage is never exclusively local. Think about your local heritage in a cross-border, European and global context.
- Create and implement cross-border heritage management plans. The B-SHAPES roadmap to setting up inclusive border heritage management plans in border regions allows for flexible frameworks that can be adapted to the specific context of each borderland, rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.
- Think about borderlands when building and implementing policy:
 - Promote initiatives such as the AI Strategy for Cultural and Creative Sectors and the Copyright Framework Modernisation in borderlands.
 - Make full use of the EU Artists' Charter, which is currently under development and will include incentives for cross-border mobility.
 - Keep Creative Europe and Interreg as key resources for cultural development across borders in borderlands.

ⁱS. Svensson (data curator), P. Balogh, A. Boháč, H. Böhm, D. Bączkiewicz, P. Bruyas, J. de Araujo, A. Engl, D. Jagetic Andersen, F. Jakola-Ylilauri, J. Kurowska-Pysz, A. Michalska, J. Mitterhofer, L. Moll, M. Nicolson, T. Nilson, E. Opilowska, E.-K. Prokkola, O. Miraka, K. Sarmiento-Mirwaldt (2026). *Cultural and cultural heritage policies in border regions*. Zenodo. <https://zenodo.org/records/19184111>

ⁱⁱB-SHAPES (Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies)/European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS). 2026. *B-SHAPES Report 2026: Inclusive Approaches to Heritage Management in Borderlands*. <https://enrs.eu/news/b-shapes-report-2026>

Border landscapes

Evidence

The B-SHAPES project involved borderwalks with young and senior citizens in the Swedish-Finnish, Swedish-Danish, Danish-German and Greek-Bulgarian borderlandsⁱⁱⁱ and a document analysis^{iv}. During the borderwalks, the researchers recorded how they talked about specific sites in the border landscape to learn how places and sites shape borderland identities. These narratives were set in perspective through an analysis of the material used by tourism agencies, schools, and environmental planners in borderlands.



The B-SHAPES project created digitized Storymaps with narratives from borderlanders about border places. Photo by Fredrika Jakola-Ylilauri.

Key findings

- Cross-border perspectives are marginalized or dependent on local initiatives in planning documents - national and state-centric perspectives dominate.
- Official narratives in border regions tend to overlook the importance of natural landscapes.
- Common natural and cultural heritage in border landscapes has a strong potential for tourism and cross-border collaboration, but competition, limited European framing, and weak integration of a contemporary European dimension into heritage narratives impede innovation and cooperation in this area.

Key recommendations

- Avoid a culture-nature divide in approaches to heritage. Such a division is artificial in many ways, but is especially evident in many borderlands, characterised by waterways or mountains, or other natural features intrinsically linked to human-made culture and crossed by boundaries. Organising shared cross-border tourism routes might reinforce local economies and the branding of these territories, as well as enhance the visitor experience.
- Acknowledge the cross-border dimension of border landscapes as heritage in policy and planning documents, at regional and local scales. Include the special cross-border lives of borderlanders and describe this as an asset to improve development: "borderlands are culturally rich places", "being in two countries, we have double opportunities", "borderlanders make a difference", etc.
- Include border landscapes as a shared heritage in education, through curriculum development, resources for local schools to develop place-based teaching and the promotion of cross-border cooperation between schools.
- Think about borderlands when building and implementing policy:
 - Integrate a shared approach to cross-border landscapes in traditionally European policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy (difficult) or LEADER (easier).
 - The implementation of the Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Nature Restoration Regulation, the EU Soil Monitoring Law and the EU Deforestation Regulation will be more successful if the national legal and operational procedures are planned jointly for cross-border areas and obstacles for cross-border cooperation are identified and removed.
- A cross-border perspective in initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus could help integrate a variety of priorities in the next policies regulating these shared living spaces (*basins de vie as it has been called by the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière*).

ⁱⁱⁱ Prokkola, E.-K., Jakola, F., Jaegtic Andersen, D., Svensson, S., Nilson, T., Miraka, O., Nedelcheva, P., Karaneshev, D. & M. Fentz Hastrup. 2025. *Border landscapes as heritage – Theoretical and practical guidelines for reading the Story Maps*. Zenodo. <https://zenodo.org/records/15729306>

^{iv}For the Nordic cases, see Prokkola, E. K., Andersen, D. J., Jakola, F., Nilson, T., & Svensson, S. M. H. (2024). *Multilayered Borders as a Method for Studying Tourism Destinations: A Case of Northern European Border Regions*. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 1–21.

^vFrench organisation of border and cross-border regions, a major partner at the European Cross-Border Platform (ECBP): <https://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/>

National Minorities in border regions

Evidence

Cross-border connections are vital to the daily lives and social fabric of national minorities - communities with common ethnic, linguistic and/or religious features distinct from the titular nation of a state, and with historical ties to a specific geographical area— present at many European borders. B-SHAPES collected minority narratives through (1) a media analysis of over 1700 border-related articles from six minority newspapers in Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, and Slovakia, focusing on the periods of increased migration in 2015-2016 and the border closures enacted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020^{vi}, and (2) semi-structured interviews, zine-making workshops and policy seminars with young people (16-30) belonging to national minorities in borderlands^{vii}.

Key findings on minorities in borderlands

- Minority youth in border regions normalise and internalise European integration through their everyday practices of cross-border living. Despite taking advantage of the freedom of mobility and open borders in their daily lives, young minority borderlanders do not display a strong emotional attachment to the EU.
- Minority youth sense a mission to develop and integrate their home borderland regions, shaping and practising inclusive visions of Europe's future.

Key recommendations

- Ensure greater consistency in (national) minority protection in European Union policy. EU binding anti-discrimination legislation should be explicitly extended to cover the protection of national minority rights.
- Include national minority issues and voices in cross-border contexts in the current review of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, an inclusive implementation of the Digital Services Act & Digital Markets Act, and particularly of the European Media Freedom Act.

- Work with media stakeholders to encourage increased diversity in media representation, including greater visibility of “minorities within minorities” (e.g. women and young people in minority newspapers) and visibility of national minorities in regional and national media.
- Include minority institutions in border regional development, for instance through consultation processes with regional bodies and cross-border cooperation organizations or through setting up think tanks including minorities.



Drawings created during B-SHAPES zine-making workshops.

Image 2 and 3 published in Opilowska, E., Mitterhofer, J., Engl, A., Nicolson, M., Klatt, M., Böhm, H., & Balogh, P. (2026). Navigating re-borderings: resilience strategies of national minorities in border regions. *European Planning Studies*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2025.2609900>

^{vi}Mitterhofer, J.; Engl, A.; Nicolson, M.; Klatt, M.; Opilowska, E.; Bączkiewicz, D.; Balogh, P.; and Böhm, H. 2026. B-SHAPES WP4 Dataset. *The role of minority media in shaping narratives on borders and Europe*. Zenodo. <https://zenodo.org/records/13935158>

^{vii}Engl, A.; Mitterhofer, J.; Nicolson, M. J.; Klatt, M.; Opilowska, E.; Balogh, P.; Böhm, H.; Gadimova-Akbulut, N.; and Nedelcheva, P. 2025. *Minority Youth and Their Perceptions of Borders and the EU*. <https://zenodo.org/records/17600967>

Attitudes to Europe

Evidence

European integration is constantly put to test by de-bordering demands and re-bordering practices. We can find both de-bordering, within cooperation contexts, and re-bordering narratives, in securitisation terms. Nationalist and Eurosceptic discourses run against the idea of open borders, and a major European strength lies in its inclusive approach to diversity and cross-border exchange. B-SHAPES conducted research on attitudes to Europe and Euroscepticism in border regions, as a cross-cutting aspect, including analysis of media^{viii} and interviews/focus groups^{ix}. A particular Euroscepticism on the management of border issues has been identified in some external borders, such as the Greek-Turkish one. For special focus policy work on challenging geopolitical borders, see the recommendations of the B-SHAPES Policy Brief on Greece-Bulgaria-Türkiye and the Policy Brief on Borderlands in Transformative Times.^x

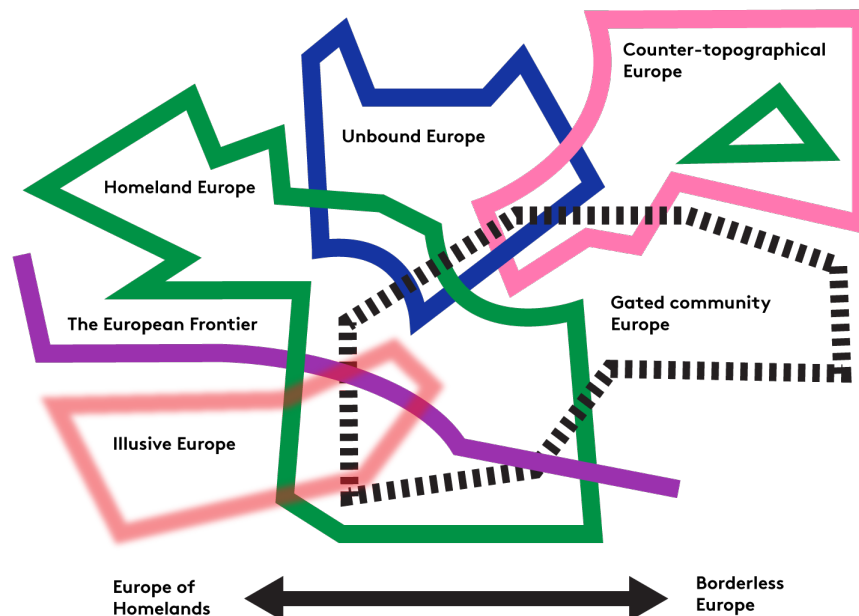
Key findings on attitudes to Europe

- Living in a border region does not automatically produce a pro-European outlook and support for open borders often coexists with distance from the European Union.

- Banal Europeanism: borderlanders practice European integration in their daily lives. They enjoy open borders (at least in the border region where they live) and acknowledge that open internal borders are a factor contributing to regional growth and development. The existence of open borders, though, is taken for granted and not credited to the EU, unless prompted to reflect.
- Even people with Eurosceptic attitudes tend to support open borders within the European Union – if the external borders are controlled systematically and drastically.

Key recommendations

- Establish and strengthen long-term cross-border cooperation between institutions at all staffing levels, while securing sustainable funding for cross-border cooperation bodies (e.g. Euroregions, EGTCs and Local Action Groups).
- Full inclusion: Make sure to give room for Eurosceptic attitudes and critical voices to European integration also in cross-border cooperation contexts.



^{viii}Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, K. (Data curator), Wassenberg, B., Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, K., Bruyas, P., Svensson, S., Moll, L., Balogh, P., Böhm, H., Miraka, O., & Boháč, A. (2025). Country summaries for B-Shapes WP3 interview and focus group analysis. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16359768>

^{ix}Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, K. (Data curator), Wassenberg, B., Bruyas, P., Svensson, S., Moll, L., Balogh, P., Böhm, H., Miraka, O., & Boháč, A. (2025). Country summaries for B-Shapes WP3 interview and focus group analysis. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16359768>

^xB SHAPES (Borders Shaping Perceptions of European Societies), B SHAPES Policy Brief 6: Borders in Transformative Times — Polycentric Explorations (2025), https://www.aebr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/B-Shapes-Policy-Brief-6_Borders-in-TransfTimes-Poly-Explorations.pdf

Cross-border Governance and Border Management

Evidence

Cross-border governance and border management were not the primary focus of B-SHAPES' empirical research activities, but the interactions with stakeholders furthered the understanding of local policy needs. In total, researchers discussed results and policy recommendations with more than 150 stakeholders participating in policy workshops: experts, practitioners from public authorities, cross-border cooperation organisations, universities, cultural institutions, and regional networks. They all have contributed insights that helped refine policy scenarios and informed policy implications for cross-border governance and border management.

Key findings

- There is widespread concern in policy communities that more work is needed to lessen the burden of borderlanders in the event of a new pandemic or similar. While the situation is better than in 2020, key stakeholders across multiple regions are not assured that they will be consulted by national governments or compensated for the loss of economic activity.

- There is widespread concern in the policy community that geopolitical insecurity will lead to recentralization, which, in combination with economic pressure, might reduce the space for bottom-up local and regional priorities to materialise through cross-border cooperation in the next EU programming period.

Key recommendations

- Require bilateral coordination and local consultations before imposing border controls. Where existing, local cross-border cooperation institutions and mechanisms should be utilized.
- Design and agree on cross-border contingency plans for periods of border control with the involvement of public authorities, civil society and other stakeholders.



B-SHAPES Policy Seminar at the Lithuanian-Polish border. Photo: Piotr Kurowski

Further B-SHAPES Materials

A collection of B-Shapes policy outputs can be found on the website of the Association of European Border Regions. They can also be found on the B-SHAPES project website at South Denmark University, which serves as the project's archival site.

- An online Policy Handbook: Inclusive Approaches to Heritage Management in Borderlands
- An online Policy Edited Volume: Seeing Europe from the Border: Research and Policy Insights on European Borderlands
- Policy Brief #1: COVID 19 border closures effects on commuters, families and students
- Policy Brief #2: Role of minority media in shaping narratives on borders and Europe
- Policy Brief #3: Recognition of border landscapes as a shared heritage
- Policy Brief #4: Cultural and cultural heritage policies affecting borderlands
- Policy Brief #5: Borders, Border Regions and Europe – Interim Policy Recommendations
- Policy Brief #6: Borderlands in transformative times: policy explorations
- Policy Brief #7: Eastern Borderlands in Transformative Times – Policy Explorations
- Policy Brief #8: Cross-border Cooperation for Border Heritage Management
- Policy Brief #9: Leaving No One Behind in Research Policy
- Policy Brief #10: European Borderlands, Borders and Minorities
- Policy Brief #11: Border landscapes as people's heritage
- Policy Brief #12: Cooperation and inclusion on troubled borders: Greece-Bulgaria-Türkiye



Scan to access B-SHAPES policy material.



**Funded by
the European Union**

This project is funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Programme, Grant Agreement No. 101095186 (B-SHAPES). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



**UK Research
and Innovation**

This work was funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee. EU grant No. 101095186. UKRI Reference No. 10065228.

Contact for more information:

Martin Klatt, klatt@ecmi.de or Martín Guillermo Ramirez, m.guillermo@aebr.eu

