

Building resilience in cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation (CBC) plays a vital role in European integration, particularly in a European Union (EU) where 40% of the territory consists of border regions, home to nearly a third of the population. These areas often struggle with economic challenges, including underdeveloped infrastructure, high unemployment, and a sense of neglect. CBC works to address these issues by fostering collaboration between neighboring regions across borders.

Despite these efforts, national borders remain barriers. Imperfect integration has cost the EU over €458 billion annually and resulted in the loss of six million jobs. Moreover, CBC faces increasing challenges due to overlapping crises—described as a "polycrisis"—that include war, pandemics, and climate change. These crises have exposed vulnerabilities in multilateral systems, with events like the migration crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine fueling anti-European rhetoric and highlighting CBC's fragility.

However, CBC offers a unique opportunity to demonstrate resilience. Resilience here means more than bouncing back from disruptions—it's about adapting, innovating, and emerging stronger. By working together, cross-border regions can withstand political tensions, economic shifts, and external shocks, all while promoting stability and integration.

What this project aims to achieve

This research focuses on three key objectives:

1. **Understanding resilience:** Investigating how CBC withstands shocks and identifying factors that sustain cooperation during multilateralism's decline.
2. **Spotting regional patterns:** Exploring differences in resilience across EU border regions and identifying macroregional trends.
3. **Informing governance:** Assessing whether lessons from CBC resilience can be applied to strengthen multilateral governance.

How we study CBC resilience

Our research centers on seven case studies, accentuating all forms of cross-border integration patterns in the EU. These case studies are chosen to reflect a wide range of geographical and institutional contexts, helping us analyze varying levels of cross-border integration and resilience.

Why this project matters

This project breaks new ground by linking resilience studies with cross-border cooperation, offering fresh insights into how subnational multilateralism can tackle global challenges. By expanding existing classifications of cross-border integration, we highlight how integration quality shapes resilience in times of crisis.

The Europe-wide scope of this research ensures that findings are not only relevant to the EU but also offer lessons for other regions globally. By bridging theory and practice, the project aims to provide practical solutions for policymakers, CBC stakeholders, and researchers. It demonstrates how resilient cross-border partnerships can navigate complex crises and inspire adaptive governance in a rapidly changing world.