

Border Orientation Paper

France – Italy



1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out key characteristics of the cross-border region between France and Italy and outlines options and orientations for the programming of the next Interreg programme along that border. It is part of a series of similar papers prepared by DG REGIO for all EU land borders (and borders with Norway and Switzerland).

The objective of this paper is to serve as a basis for a constructive dialogue both within the cross-border region and with the European Commission for the 2021-2027 ALCOTRA Interreg cross-border cooperation programme.

The paper is based for a large part on information stemming from three studies commissioned by DG REGIO:

- “Border needs study” (“Collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes”) conducted in 2016;
- “Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions” conducted in 2015-16 and;
- “Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders” conducted in 2017-18.

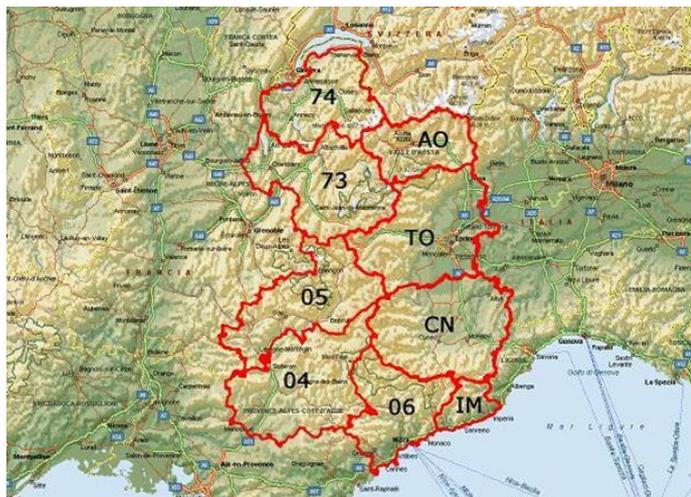
In addition, many data sources available at European level were also used to describe certain aspects socio-economic and territorial development. A full list of information sources is provided in annex.

Cross-border cooperation is much broader than Interreg programmes. The objective is to facilitate cooperation by reducing remaining persisting obstacles to cross-border activities and linkages as outlined in the 2017 Communication on Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions. The instruments available are not only the funds (in particular Interreg and other ESIF programmes which may invest in cooperation), but also European and national legal instruments (European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation – EGTC – and the proposed European Cross-Border Mechanism – ECBM – regional agreements (eg in the Benelux and the Nordic countries), bi-lateral agreements, etc) as well as a number of policies e.g. on labour mobility, transport, health, etc. The Interreg programmes should therefore not only aim to fund projects but should also seek to reduce cross-border obstacles. To do so, the legislative proposal on Interreg foresees that part of the budget is dedicated to cross-border governance (including capacity building and contribution to the macro-regional/ sea-basin strategies).

That is why this paper goes beyond the traditional activities of Interreg programmes (funding projects) and also covers governance issues (reducing cross-border obstacles). On this, the roles of the programmes are: (a) to initiate the work on the obstacles (e.g. the members of the Monitoring Committee could contact the relevant public authorities and stakeholders); (b) to facilitate the work (by funding working groups as well as possible studies and pilot projects); and (c) to contribute to this work (providing input from the wide knowledge gained in past programming periods). Whilst the budget is limited, the impact can be important as the actions concerned will have a limited cost (meetings, studies, pilot projects, etc.) but structural effects.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE BORDER AREA

- The **cross-border area** includes nine NUTS 3 regions: Four Italian « provincie » NUTS 3, i.e. Torino, Cuneo (Part of the NUTS 2 region of Piemonte), Imperia (Part of the NUTS 2 region of Liguria) and Val d'Aosta (which is also a NUTS 2 region,) and five French “départements”, i.e. Haute-Savoie, Savoie (both part of the NUTS 2 region of Rhône-Alpes) and Hautes-Alpes, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence and Alpes-Maritimes (parts of the NUTS 2 region of Provence-Alpes- Côte d’Azur (hereinafter “PACA”)).
- The **515 Km of the French- Italian border** was fixed in 1860 with the Treaty of Torino. Some adjustments occurred after WWII. This border passes through a **variety of territories and landscapes** (from Alpine to Mediterranean zones, from Mont Blanc to Imperia) covering a surface of 45.147 km² (1% of the total EU)¹. These territories, in their turn have shaped different types of socio-economic relations, activities and development. Given its location, an important part of the European history was forged there. The cultural assets in the cross-border area testify of the strong bonds between the two countries.
- The area could be characterised as ‘rural-urban’ with a mixture of types, on both sides of the border. The **population** of the cross-border area covered by the 2014-2020 ALCOTRA programme is about 5,8 million, with 2,6 million on the French and 3,2 million on the Italian side. Especially on the French side, the cross-border NUTS 3 regions' population represents a very low percentage of the total population of the respective NUTS 2 regions. Both sides face the challenge of the ageing of the population.
- French and Italian are the respective **official languages** and **local dialects** exist on both sides (Occitan in Alpes Maritimes, Francoprovençal in Valle d’Aosta etc).



¹ In a MOT/DATAR study “Reflexions sur le volet transfrontalier des contrats de plan État-Régions » (1998) this border was qualified as « frontière-glacis », i.e. a particularly unpermeable border, with a few corridors serving more the international than the local flows.

1. In terms of **population changes and flows** the relative shares of each age category are broadly similar and, as the population of 40-60 increases, ageing becomes a common pattern. The density of population varies: From the densely populated (and much above the EU average of 118 people/Km²) regions of Torino and Alpes Maritimes to the much less populated Valle d'Aosta, Hautes Alpes and Alpes de Haute Provence.
2. The percentage of residents in the area born outside the EU is more than the double of the EU average of 6%.
3. Historically, there was an important Italian immigration flow to France. Nowadays, due to the crisis, there is a certain increase of the number of Italians going to France.
4. Given the attractiveness of the cross-border area, there are significant seasonal changes due to tourist activities: In fact, in certain regions in the high season the population almost doubles. In the last years, the cross- border area receives also **migratory flows**.
5. Surveys suggest that the big majority of people living in the border area feel comfortable with the neighbours and the cross-border trust is high. Nevertheless, the mobility of people is not particularly intensive: Leaving aside a 7% crossing the border for work and business (one of the lowest in the EU- 44th out of 54), 44% of the residents of the area travel for leisure activities, including tourist visits, 18% for shopping, 14% to visit friends and 9% to visit family. This places the France-Italy cross-border area around mid-range out of the 54 EU border regions surveyed.
6. There are no major **socio-economic disparities**. The NUTS 2 regions in which the border areas belong are all qualified as "more developed". Without minimising the intra- and inter- regional disparities, divides (rural-mountainous-urban) and differences, broadly speaking, economic performance is more or less similar, with the majority of the border areas close or above the EU GDP per capita index of 100 (but in Alpes de Haute Province and Hautes Alpes is about 75). In recent years, the French side of the border has experienced growth whilst in the Italian side's GDP has fallen and French economy has proved to be more resilient to the crisis. The cross- border area has a positive overall socio-economic profile, but is experiencing 'ageing' and its economy is threatened. Actually, the decline of manufacturing (largely based on proximity relationships) raises the issue of keeping the productive activities and, eventually, the population in the area.
7. The longstanding **co-operation between the two MS** has contributed to boost relationships within the cross-border area.
8. At EU level, ALCOTRA is one of the oldest INTERREG interventions in the area. In parallel, the cross-border area is part of the "Alpine Space" transnational programme. A part of the cross-border area participates also to the CBC programmes "Italy-France" (maritime), to "Italy-Switzerland", "France- Switzerland" and to the MED programme. On the French side applies also the ERDF interregional programme "Alps" which covers the respective ALCOTRA NUTS 3 regions. This programme promotes the natural and cultural heritage, the management of risks and the promotion of the local economy, with particular focus to the wood sector.

9. In parallel, at national level there is a strong experience in cross-border cooperation: the Agreement of Rome (1993) enables not only the national authorities but also the local authorities to conclude cooperation agreements concerning a broad range of activities². The cross-border area (or parts of it) participates to the “Conférence des Alpes Franco-Italiennes”, to the “Conférence des Hautes Vallées” and to the “Conférence des trois Provinces”. In the area the intergovernmental commissions in charge of the tunnels and the rail connections operate, the “Conférence des Alpes Franco-Italiennes”, as well as unions promoting the cooperation between the Chambers of Trade and Industry. There is also a EURES service for the PACA and Liguria regions, named “Eurazur”.
10. Finally, the cross-border area participates to the broader Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée, created in 2006 and to the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSAIR).
11. Cooperation has particular relevance as regards the preservation of the natural sites. There are several cross-border management bodies in charge of natural sites: the EGTC for the French “Parc National du Mercantour” together with the Italian “Parco Naturale delle Alpi Marittime” as well as the “Espace Mont Blanc”. A scheme between Savoie, Haute Savoie, Valle d’Aosta and the Canton of Valais (CH) is considered also as a positive example of advanced cooperation, with close partnerships in the fields of climate change, protection, spatial planning, energy, sustainable transport and education.

² Urban and regional development, transports and communications, energy, environmental protection, solid and water waste treatment, education and scientific and applied research, professional training and reconversion, health, culture and sports, assistance in case of disasters, economic and social development, agriculture and tourism (Article 3)

3. TERRITORIAL DIMENSION

- *Typology of regions*

12. Heterogeneity is the main feature of the cross-border area that encompasses an extraordinary variety of landscapes: From a densely urbanised and cosmopolitan littoral and a dynamic industrial pole, to small and medium cities and, finally, to remote and scarcely populated rural communities. And all this through coastal zones, wetlands, rivers, lakes, glaciers, forests, valleys, alpine sites, each of them having its micro-climate and eco-system. In addition, the exceptional historical, cultural and architectural sites make the cross-border area one of the most attractive places in Europe.
13. The reverse of the medal is that the area is extremely vulnerable to environmental threats and risks as well as to depopulation and decline. Resilient territories and communities need important and long-term investment supported by sustainable public policies and well-planned interventions. If the aim is to maintain the attractiveness of the area, then environmental protection and risks' management interventions should go hand in hand with interventions in the local economy and employment, health, education, social cohesion, quality of life, energy, accessibility and connectivity.

- *Functional areas*

14. Structural interventions should not be strictly limited to the administrative borders of the programme. Depending on the topic, the geography can vary. For some topics, the solution can be found if partners outside the programme area are involved, while for some other topics the solution can be local. What matters is that the projects can benefit to the cross-border area. This new approach proposed in the post-2020 regulations has the benefit of enabling more efficient interventions, based on the experience of a wider range of partners. For some other topics, the solution may be very local, in an area much smaller than the programme (e.g. to have a cross-border tram line in an urban area which is expands on both sides of a border, or to promote daily commuting for work).
15. The Franco-Italian cross-border area includes some urban functional areas around the most populated cities, but so far there are no cross-border ones. One could argue that the littoral zone potentially could become a cross-border functional area.
16. However, as in certain cases already happens, cooperation can be extended beyond the administrative borders of the area. For instance, room for an "extended" cooperation can be created for the management of the natural and cultural resources, the provision of healthcare services, the management of risks. In this respect, it should be noticed also that the application of macro-regional strategies can create additional needs for a geographically broader cooperation.
17. In order to enhance cooperation within or outside the administrative borders, the use of territorial tools (ITI, CLLD and other) could also be envisaged.

- **Macro-regional strategies**

18. Macro-regional strategies are supported by the highest political levels of the EU, the Member States and the regions concerned and have become an integral part of EU regional policy. They require trust and confidence between their partners (Member States, regions, stakeholders, etc.) in order to share a common vision that will bring concrete actions and projects. It is the same for cross-border cooperation. Hence, the two levels of cooperation are very much interlinked by nature.
19. *Therefore*, the 2021-2027 Interreg programmes which are located in a macro-region should be ready where relevant to support those actions arising from the macro-regional strategies, provided they also contribute to the specific objectives of the cross-border region. This requires a good and proactive coordination with the macro-regional strategies (i.e. following the developments of the macro-regional strategies, being in contact with the National Contact Points, etc.). Different projects could be funded: group of projects (e.g., some programmes fund several projects which together form a coherent ‘group of projects’ complementing each-other and creating synergies); and single project (e.g. one programme funds one project, the impact of which is on the entire macro-region). In addition, cross-border programmes may consider one of these mechanisms: specific selection criteria (e.g. bonus points if the project contributes to a macro-regional strategy); earmarking of a budget; specific calls; or labelling (e.g. *ex-post* identification of projects that could be replicated).
20. The alignment of cross-border programmes to macro-regional strategies is a ‘win-win’ approach. Clearly, macro-regional strategies will benefit from the experience, the partners and the funds of cross-border programmes. But, cross-border programmes will also benefit from such an alignment: (a) bigger impact (on a wider territory), (b) good project pipeline (project ideas with a political support), (c) better visibility (by political leaders, decision-makers and citizens) and of course (d) an improved situation in the macro-region they are in (the actions of the strategy will also improve the cross-border area). In particular, the contribution to macro-regional strategies does not mean a reduction of the budget available for the programme as it is clear that every project should also benefit to the cross-border functional area.
21. The cross-border region is covered by the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). As it happens also in other similar cases, the ALCOTRA programme and the EUSALP (which is a “young” macro-regional strategy) need to be further synchronised. Actually, the objectives of both sides fully converge and given the long experience of the ALCOTRA in mountain projects, EUSALP could immensely benefit from the active participation of the programme in its governance structures.

- **Tourism/natural and cultural heritage**

22. Interventions in tourism can be financed by the Interreg programmes provided they are strategically framed and take into account the multi-level governance and stakeholder approach.
23. The cross-border area is very rich in natural assets (Natura 2000, national, regional parks and protected sites) and cultural heritage (including immaterial heritage), services are of good quality and hospitality well organised. Hence, unsurprisingly, there are important

flows of visitors and tourism represents a significant fraction in the local income. Nowadays, however, there are raising concerns as regards the environmental and societal impact of these activities.

24. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest and investment in the development of “all year round activities” (which, to a certain extent, can “decongest” the winter sports season) and eco-tourism. Cycling, hiking, cultural trails and other thematic trails are being developed with a high degree of respect for the environment.

ORIENTATIONS:

- *Ensure coherence of the various co-operation tools which apply to the cross-border area and, as much as possible, seek complementarities and synergies.*
- *Promote enhanced cross-border cooperation, putting emphasis on the results to be achieved in terms of sustainable socio-economic development, territorial cohesion and environmental resilience.*
- *Promote the territorial cohesion and increase ownership of the interventions by the local actors by using tools as ITI, CLLD or other tools.*
- *Ensure an active participation of the programme in the EUSALP.*
- *Ensure the visibility of the “EUSALP dimension” of those projects which fall within the scope of the scope of both the ALCOTRA programme and the EUSALP.*
- *Tourism is an important source of growth, innovation, know-how and : Eco-tourism and ”all year round” tourism could be further developed.*

4. GROWTH, COMPETITIVENESS AND CONNECTIVITY

- *Innovation*

25. The ESPON Territorial Review undertook Knowledge-Economy (KE) cluster analysis at the NUTS 2 level to provide a categorisation of the type of **competitive knowledge economies at the regional level**. The findings were that two of the NUTS 2 regions, namely Piemonte and Rhône-Alpes are at the second highest of four levels – being categorised as ‘Competitive and Knowledge-Economy related economies’. The other NUTS 2 regions (PACA, Liguria and Valle d’Aosta) are all categorised at the third highest of four levels, being categorised as ‘Less competitive economies with potential in the Knowledge-Economy’.
26. Data relating to the ‘**Regional Competitiveness Index**’ (RCI), the so-called “**pillar scores**” and **RCI of innovation potential**, suggest that overall French NUTS 2 regions perform better than the Italian ones, while Rhônes-Alpes and Piemonte are the better rated regions in terms of growth and competitiveness in the cross-border area. To a certain extent, this reflects the respective national situation: While Italy is a “moderate”, France is a “strong” innovator.
27. With regard to the **critical mass to support innovation and cooperation** in developing competitiveness, the **market size for the NUTS 2 regions is assessed** to be relatively high, with Piemonte, Rhône-Alpes and Liguria higher and PACA and Valle d’Aosta equal to the EU average. In this respect, the high population density in Torino, Alpes-Maritimes, Imperia and Haute-Savoie is a strong element.
28. The majority of the available data refer to NUTS 2 regions, so they do not fully capture the situation in the cross-border NUTS 3 regions. Having said that, the cross-border area hosts universities and technological poles, whilst certain areas (beyond Torino and Nice) have important manufacturing traditions and activities. Moreover, the need to protect the environment, to support and upgrade the local activities (agriculture, manufacturing, crafts, tourism, sports and culture) as well as the need to maintain social cohesion in particular (but not only) in the mountain areas can generate innovation. Finally, it should be noted that, overall, the cross- border area performs well in terms of patent applications.
29. In the cross-border area innovation performance varies: It is poor in rural and remote areas and more intensive in urban centres. The objective of the 2014-2020 ALCOTRA programme is to support applied innovation in the cross-border economic and productive systems with particular attention to the most vulnerable areas. For this, the programme follows a twofold approach: on the one hand, to enhance innovation and research capacity by the creation of closer links between RDI entities and intermediate bodies; on the other hand, to link the touristic zones with the new technologies.

- ***Entrepreneurship***

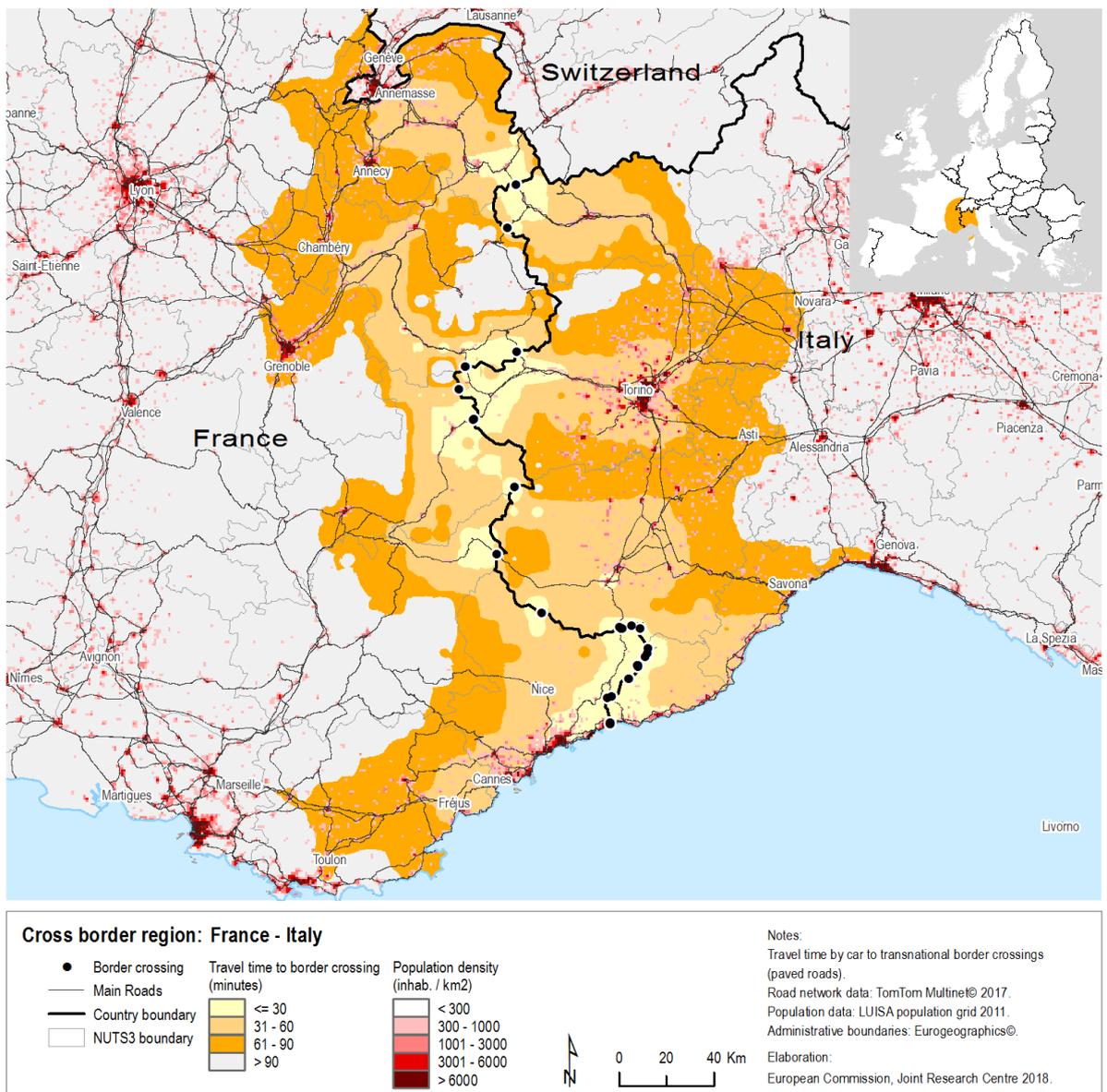
30. Overall, there are similarities between the NUTS 2 regions to which the cross-border area belongs in terms of the sectoral breakdown of employment in the sectors of manufacturing, retail, construction, professional, scientific and technical activities. There are some differences in sectors such as transport & storage as well as the administrative and supporting activities. Data at NUTS 2 level suggest that French regions perform better in respect of enterprise creation and sustainability as well as to the share of high-growth enterprises than the Italian regions, which have been more exposed to the crisis.
31. The economic structure (manufacturing, especially of metal products, machinery and food products as well construction, transport and storage services,) is more or less similar in all regions. Tourism is an important activity in almost the entire cross-border area.
32. In the cross-border area, generally speaking, there is a “gap” between the small and micro enterprises and the research centres. Local enterprises are also threatened by the internal “delocalisation” to the benefit of the urban areas. It is therefore crucial that the selected projects translate an effort to create bonds between enterprises on the two sides of the border which can “revigorate” and strengthen the local productive and entrepreneurial activities and will contribute to keeping the active population living in medium and small urban centres and remote areas. Therefore, “entrepreneurship objectives” should be defined within the specific ALCOTRA context: contribute to the resilience and sustainability of the local productive system through actions promoting the cross-border cooperation, and the attractiveness for new investment. These actions should focus on the already existing capacities in the cross-border area and on the need to promote environmentally friendly and energy efficient production processes (e.g. wood industry).

- ***Digitisation***

33. In terms of digitisation, most information is available only at national level and some for NUTS 2 regions. Therefore, it is not possible to make any informed observations for the cross-border area.
34. As national data indicate, Italy and France are broadly in line with the EU average in terms of digitisation. France performs better -and in some cases, much better- in terms of digital penetration, government digitisation quality, digitisation openness, connectivity and digital based services, availability of services online for non-nationals, on the provision of digital public services for business, digital economy and society index.
35. Data at NUTS 2 suggest a much higher than the EU average interaction via internet with public authorities in both Rhône-Alpes and PACA, whilst the Italian regions are all well below.
36. For digital services in the private sector both France and Italy are rated as “medium” and for e-commerce they are both below the EU average.
37. In any case, there is a digital divide between the metropolitan zones and the rest of the cross-border area: in the current programming period, this is tackled at “horizontal level” by the ALCOTRA programme (i.e. several selected projects have also an ICT component).

- **Connectivity**

38. With 4 rail and 19 road passages along the border **connectivity** is assessed as being generally good. The following should be noted:
39. The percentage of the population having access to **cross-border rail services** is assessed as being mid-range in comparison to other EU border regions. The average speed and frequency of cross-border rail connections is relatively high, in comparison with other EU border regions, on both sides of the border.
40. The cross-border rail transport study did not identify in the cross-border area any ‘potentially most beneficial project’.
41. The percentage of the population **accessible within 90 minutes by road** is above the EU average for the French regions and Piemonte. Valle d’Aosta and Liguria are below this average. Density of motorways in the region is above the EU average in all the border regions on both sides of the border.



42. However, when it comes to *perceptions* of whether accessibility constitutes an obstacle to cross-border cooperation, 41% of the respondents to a Eurobarometer survey carried out in 2015 see this as a problem. -This figure is relatively high and places this border as equal third highest of the 54 border regions surveyed. Far more residents in Italy see this as a problem, whereas in France the percentage of residents perceiving this as a problem is lower.
43. The Alps obviously constitute a big physical obstacle but also the absence of direct rail service between Liguria and PACA does not facilitate cross-border mobility. The high costs of setting up and organising cross-border regional transport as well as the legal and administrative obstacles do not facilitate public mobility either (e.g. different licencing systems, standards, incl. safety standards for tunnels and long approval procedures). Given the limited resources, these issues cannot be tackled in the framework of an Interreg programme, but they can affect the efficiency of the interventions of the latter. From its side however, the Interreg programme can also play a role in mobilising other financing sources.

ORIENTATIONS:

Innovation

- *Focus on a limited number of sectors which are in line with the regional RIS3 and, above all, respond to the local needs of the cross-border area (eco-innovation, agri-food, energy efficiency, environment, health).*
- *Strengthen the current approach promoting applied innovation to the local cross-border productive activities as well as to public services provided in the area.*
- *Involve the cross-border universities and business sector in the relevant for the area RDI activities.*
- *Explore the opportunities offered by the EU legal framework for: i) synergies and coordination with the regional and national programmes, and ii) the possibility to implement RDI projects outside the cross-border area.*
- *Ensure the ownership of innovation: in particular -but not only- for operations implemented outside the cross-border area this is a crucial issue: The transfer of knowledge and the dissemination of the results to the relevant cross-border actors (e.g. public entities, enterprises) should be ensured.*
- *Promote coordination and exchange of information on innovation with other programmes participating in the EUSALP and programmes implemented in other mountainous regions could be beneficial.*

Entrepreneurship

- *Enhance the resilience of the local enterprises (especially of the small and micro enterprises) through targeted actions promoting innovative solutions and cooperation with RDI entities, while supporting their visibility inside and outside the border area.*
- *Promote cross-border clusters and other forms of cooperative production, joint participation in fairs and promotional campaigns, joint initiatives of the local chambers of commerce.*

- *Consider the possibility to promote social entrepreneurship.*
- *Enhance cooperation with mainstream programmes in order to achieve better results for the enterprises located in the cross-border area.*

Digitisation

- *Support projects that mitigate the digital divide between the remote communities and the urban centres of the cross-border area.*
- *Tackle ICT as a horizontal objective in the framework of the various selected projects (e.g. those dealing with natural risk management) could also be an option.*

Connectivity

- *Develop further cross-border local strategies for a sustainable mobility (development and use of public transport, use of alternative means of transport, awareness raising campaigns, e-ticket for multimodal transports).*

5. GREENER, LOW CARBON ECONOMY

- *Energy transition*

44. The cross-border area is dependent on fossil energy sources and the consumption of energy per inhabitant in the Alps is 10% higher than the EU average. Therefore, it is important to support energy production from renewable sources and promote a more efficient use of energy by consumers.
45. There is strong hydropower potential identified on both sides of the border. There is also potential for solar energy as well as for large-scale photovoltaic systems.
46. There is some potential particularly in Piemonte and Rhône-Alpes for biomass energy from straw. There is also some, although not substantial, potential for exploiting forest biomass.
47. The cost of capital is relatively low in France and mid-range in Italy. Consequently, the economic environment for investment in renewable energy is more favourable in France than in Italy.

- *Solid waste & recycling*

48. In terms of **recycling and waste management**, data is only available at the national level. So, it is difficult to make any informed observations with regard to the situation at the cross-border area. Both countries put a slightly lower share of waste into landfill than the EU average. The generation of waste per capita is slightly lower in France and slightly above the EU average in Italy and both countries recycle below the EU average. In terms of resource productivity (i.e. the value generated from waste), both countries achieve more value than the EU average.

- *Climate adaptation*

49. The cross-border region has a **medium-high environmental sensitivity to climate change**.
50. Part is within the Mediterranean region which typically will face temperature rises larger than the EU average, decreases in annual precipitation, decrease in annual river flow, increasing risk of biodiversity loss, increasing risk of forest fire and a decrease in hydropower potential.
51. Part is within the mountain area, which typically will face temperature rise larger than the EU average, decrease in mountain permafrost areas, upward shift of plant and animal species, high risk of species extinction in the Alpine regions, increasing risk of soil erosion. The climate change adversely affects also the ski tourism in the mountains.
52. Along the coastal regions there is some risk associated with potential coastal flooding, although the trends in sea levels and tides do not suggest a high risk in comparison with other coastal areas in the EU.

53. The potential impact of drought on the water supply and water quality in the border region is assessed to be relatively high, and the forecast frequency of drought is slightly above the EU average.
54. Although there has been a slightly upward trend in forest fire dangers in parts of the border region during the period 1981-2010, the projected forest fire danger is not severe.
55. As consequence of its geological and hydrological characteristics and of the climate change process, the cross-border area is vulnerable to risks of natural and human origin: water pollution, lightning floods, landslides, avalanches, earthquakes, collapse of dams etc.
56. The assessment and mapping of risks, as well as the prevention and management of risks are tasks which, by excellence, call for cross-border cooperation. Tackling together risks also strengthens solidarity and citizenship. Cooperation is advanced in this field and should continue to be supported by the ALCOTRA programme.

- *Natural areas*

57. The cross-border area is one of the richest in the EU: there are many Natura 2000 sites (more than 300 according to the Border Needs Study), including many transboundary sites/parks/reserves as well as Ramsar wetlands (La Vanoise, les Queyras, Mercantour, Ecrins, Gran Paradiso, Alpi Maritime, La Chartreuse, Massif des Bauges, Lac du Bourget etc). There is a well-established cross-border cooperation for the shared management of natural resources (Mercantour with Parc Alpi Marittime, Parc La Vanoise with Parc Gran Paradiso, Biosphere reserve of Mount Viso, Espace Mont Blanc).
58. Biodiversity in the cross-border area is high: large parts of the border region have high levels of wilderness and parts of the border region have been classified in the Wilderness Qualify Index as being amongst the top 10% wildest areas in Europe. There is also strong forest connectivity in most areas of the border region.
59. It is an important habitat for the European Wolf and a high proportion of areas have received a favourable habitat and species assessment.
60. In general, the cross-border region has strong potential to deliver ecosystem services, to provide habitat and connectivity for large mammals and thus to have high potential for Green Infrastructure networks.
61. From its side, the Commission adopted an EU strategy on Green Infrastructure in 2013 to enhance economic benefits by attracting greater investment in Europe's natural capital. Green Infrastructures are strategically planned networks of natural and semi-natural areas with environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services. They incorporate green spaces (or blue if aquatic ecosystems are concerned) and other physical features. In certain sectors, in particular climate change mitigation and adaptation, green infrastructures approaches can offer complementary or more sustainable alternatives than those provided through conventional civil engineering. As Green Infrastructures do not know borders and as they require a good planning with many stakeholders, they could be supported through Interreg programmes where appropriate (e.g. cross-border flood plains to prevent flood risks).

62. There are relatively few rivers and no major river-basins in the cross-border area, although a number of rivers on both sides of the border have their sources in the mountains of this area. In terms of water quality, according the data that is only available at NUTS 1 level, the percentage of **water bodies** affected by point and/or diffuse pressures in rivers and lakes, as well as the percentage of bodies having less than good ecological status or potential (i.e not having ‘good chemical status’) are at a medium-level of 30-50% on the French side of the border and a medium-to-high level of 50-70% on the Italian side of the border.

ORIENTATIONS:

- *Continue support for the development of joint policies, protocols, procedures and approaches to develop the cross-border shared management of natural resources and risks. Where feasible, this should include the development of cross-border green infrastructure networks.*
- *Support cross-border actions for further development of renewable energies and the promotion of joint energy efficiency interventions.*

6. EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND INCLUSION

63. In terms of labour market there are more than average obstacles to cross-border mobility. These obstacles include differences in taxation, difficulties in recognition of foreign diplomas, differences in social insurance rights and difficulties with rights to pensions.
64. Moreover, few people travel from the one side of the border to the other in order to use public services. In this context, the relatively low awareness of cross-border health *rights*, and only an ‘average’ awareness of cross-border health services can be explained.

• *Employment*

65. For **labour market**, with the caveat that **data** is available principally at NUTS 2 level, the following should be noted:
66. In terms of the **unemployment rates**, both the highest and the lowest unemployment rates are in the French side of the border (PACA at 10,2% and Rhône-Alpes at 7,2%, respectively). Rhône-Alpes is the only region in the France-Italy border with an unemployment rate below the EU average of 7,6%; it is also below the French national average unemployment rate of 9,4%.
67. The highest rate in the Italian side is in Liguria at 9%, followed by Piemonte at 9,1% and Valle d’Aosta at 7,8%. Although these rates are all above the EU average, they are also all below the national average unemployment rate in Italy (11,2%).
68. In terms of **changes in unemployment rates**, over the period 2006-2016 all but one (Rhônes-Alpes) of the border regions experienced an increase in rates; the increase has been greatest in the Italian regions, than in the French ones.
69. With an EU average of 3,9%, **long-term unemployment rates** vary: Piemonte (5%) and Liguria (4,6%) have the highest rates, followed by PACA and Valle d’Aosta. Rhône-Alpes has the lowest rate (2,5%).
70. In terms of **labour market productivity**, all border regions are above the EU average with the highest rate in Valle d’Aosta and the lowest rate in PACA (respectively 15% and 7% over the EU average).
71. On **wage indicators**, data is only available at the national level. French wages and labour costs are higher than in Italy: In France, wages being 20% and labour costs 34% above the EU average, whilst in Italy wages are equal and labour costs are 5% above the EU average.
72. In terms of **labour market measures included in the ‘Regional Competitiveness Index’** all border regions are above the EU average. On “basic education”, they are slightly below EU average, with the French regions scoring better and above the EU average in “higher education and lifelong learning” and in “labour market efficiency”.
73. The **cross-border labour market is limited** and mainly concentrated in the coastal zone: 7% from both sides of the border travel for work or business purposes. Actually, the Alps in between and the similar level of development of the economies on both sides of the border are factors discouraging the cross-border mobility.

- **Education**

74. The **lack of knowledge of French or Italian** is perceived from both sides of the border as an important cultural barrier.
75. There are strong differences in the **share of the population aged 30-34 with high educational attainment**: The French regions are both above the EU average of 40%, while the Italian regions have a share well below the EU average.
76. In terms of **physical access to education** (i.e. travel to primary and secondary schooling), a substantial part of the border region, particularly in those areas immediately at or close to the border, have been identified as having poor access (by car) to both primary and secondary schools.
77. Border regions have some differences also in terms of the share of **'early school leavers'**. The EU average is 10.6%. Three of the regions perform worse namely Liguria, PACA and Piemonte. Rhône-Alpes is the only region with a share better than the EU average and no data was available for Valle d'Aosta.
78. The **data on educational levels of non-nationals** also shows that the cross-border differences are greatest in relation to those non-national residents born outside the EU and having lower educational attainment.

- **Health**

79. **Life expectancy** at birth in all regions in the cross-border area is at similar levels and is above the EU average of 81 years. In Rhône-Alpes and Liguria it is 84 years, and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Piemonte and Valle d'Aosta 83 years. Ageing is an issue for the entire cross-border region, therefore common solutions promoting healthy ageing and quality health care could be envisaged.
80. In terms of **access to healthcare**, in the areas immediately at, or close to, the border, there is poor access to both hospitals and to doctors, particularly in the French border regions. ESPON has identified PACA, Rhône-Alpes and Valle d'Aosta as inner peripheries in respect to access to hospitals and PACA. Rhône-Alpes is an inner periphery in respect to access to doctors. This means that these regions have relatively poor access by car to doctors and hospitals in comparison with their neighbouring regions in France and Italy.

ORIENTATIONS:

- *Consider ways to further promote labour force mobility where appropriate: The use of existing structures (EURES-Eurazur or similar, as well as the Chambers of Trade and Commerce), the development of skills in common sectors of activity (e.g. common seminars to improve skills of people working in the areas of energy, forestry, gastronomy, environment, tourism) should be supported.*
- *Consider ways to improve the legal and administrative framework of workers mobility in cooperation with the national competent authorities (taxation, pension rights, equivalence of qualifications and diplomas, social security, fight against undeclared work).*

- *Promote the systematic teaching of French and Italian in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, organise courses for professionals, trainings, events (e.g. art, sports, history).*
- *Consider ways to eliminate obstacles of physical accessibility to education (possibly in cooperation with the regional programmes).*
- *Support the non-EU born residents, especially the immigrants, to their educational and professional path for their integration in the local communities with e.g. courses (including the teaching of FR & IT) and trainings in order to improve their professional skills can be jointly organised.*
- *Support access to healthcare of the populations living in the mountain zones and, particularly, the most remote ones, while promoting “healthy ageing” initiatives, e.g. mobile units serving both sides of the border, first aid training, bilingualism of doctors and of health staff providing emergency aid, pilot projects for independent living.*

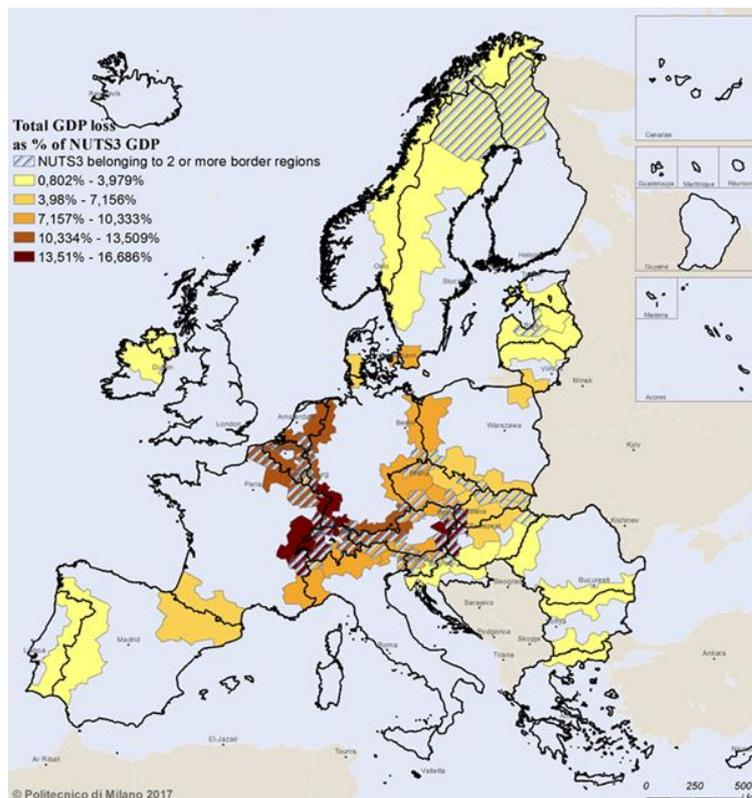
7. GOVERNANCE

Section 1: Cross-Border Governance in a wider context and use of the new "Interreg Governance" specific objective

81. Cross-border cooperation is not limited to Interreg programmes. It also builds on policies (e.g. cross-border mobility), on legal instruments (e.g. bi-lateral agreements, treaties, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation) and on funding (including but not limited to Interreg). Actions and orientations set out in this section may be supported by the programme's budget as proposed in the ETC (Interreg) Regulation for improving governance issues.

- *Working on border obstacles and potential*

82. As illustrated in the Commission Communication "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions", there are many different types of obstacles to cross-border cooperation. There is also scope for greater sharing of services and resources in cross-border regions and to intensify the cooperation between citizens and institutions. Among the obstacles, legal, administrative and differences in institutional capacity are a major source of bottlenecks. Other issues include the use of different languages or lack of public transport for instance. When it comes to unused potential, the shared use of health care or educational facilities could contribute greatly to improving the quality of life in border regions. As the Interreg programmes are instrumental to effective cross-border cooperation, they should seek to address these particular obstacles and tap the common potential to facilitate cooperation in this wider context.



83. In this context, one very important objective of the 2021-2027 programme could be:

- a) To identify precisely key obstacles and unused potential (e.g. cross-border labour market hindrances, health care, transport connections, use of languages, etc.; the Cross-Border Review should be used as a starting point);
- b) Bring the relevant actors together (e.g. authorities at national/ regional/ local levels, enterprises, users, etc.); and
- c) Facilitate the process of finding ways to reduce these obstacles or exploit the potential (e.g. by funding meetings, experts, pilot projects, etc.).
- d) In the ALCOTRA cross-border area, at first sight, there are no major legal and administrative obstacles. However, latent obstacles may exist. Therefore and before these obstacles become real problems undermining the implementation of projects, it is important for the programme authorities to take the initiative and, in cooperation with the involved public authorities and other actors identify the possible obstacles and seek for a solution. Although the solution does not always lay within the competence of the regional/local authorities it is important that central authorities become aware of these obstacles and seek for solution, using possible the available EU instruments and mechanisms.

- ***Establish links with existing strategies***

84. Cross-border cooperation cannot be done in isolation. It has to be framed in the existing strategies (e.g. macro-regional, national, regional or sectoral). Ideally, there should be a dedicated cross-border strategy which is based on reliable data for cross-border regions, which is politically supported and which has undergone a wide consultation with relevant stakeholders. It is a useful exchange forum and a necessary step for sustainable and structural cooperation (i.e. a monitoring committee is not sufficient as its focus is on funding and not on designing a development strategy with strong political support). Whilst many borders have such strategies, it is not always the case. When there are such strategies, they are often only partly implemented with the Interreg programmes.

85. In the cross-border area, there are entities either established under EU law (e.g. the Mercantour European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation – EGTC), national law (e.g. private law associations or public law bodies) or international law (e.g. under bilateral agreements). One example of is the Euroregion Alpes-Méditerranée. All these entities have created links between the two sides of the border: The better understanding of the local needs, as a result also of this bilateral exchange, is a valuable input for the implementation of the ALCOTRA programme.

- ***Links with other Cohesion policy programmes***

86. The proposed Common Provisions Regulation requires the mainstream programmes to describe the possibilities for cooperation under each specific objective. The managing authorities of the concerned mainstream programmes and of the ALCOTRA cross-border programme should explore the opportunities to create complementarities and synergies. Therefore, a mechanism is needed in order to ensure efficient coordination throughout the programme cycle.

- ***Cross-border data***

87. In order to have good public policies (e.g. spatial planning), these should be based on evidence (i.e. data, studies, mappings). Whilst this is generally available at national level, it is not always the case at regional/local level and even less at cross-border local level.
88. The 2021-2027 the programme should identify the areas where important cross-border data is missing and support actions to fill the gap (e.g. in cooperation with national statistical offices, by supporting regional data portals etc.).

Section 2: Governance of the ALCOTRA 2021-2027 programme

- ***Partnership principle***

89. The principle of partnership is a key feature covering the whole programme cycle: An active involvement of the economic, social and environmental partners should be ensured by their participation in key steps.
90. The ***monitoring committee*** is the strategic decision-making body of the programme. In 2021-2027 the monitoring committee will be given a more prominent role in supervising programme performance.
91. Its composition must be representative for the entire cross-border area. It must also include partners relevant to programme objectives e.g. institutions or organisations representing environment, SMEs, civil society or education. When the programme is relevant for the development of a macro-regional strategy, macro-regional key stakeholders should also be regular members of the monitoring committee of the programme. So, the ALCOTRA programme should consider widening the composition of its monitoring committee.
92. ***Project selection*** shall take place in the monitoring committee or in steering committee established under the monitoring committee in full respect of the partnership principle. It is crucial that key stakeholders are involved in the project selection process. Selection criteria and their application must be non-discriminatory and transparent. They should also be clear and they must enable the assessment of whether projects correspond to the objectives and the strategy of the programme. They are to be consulted with the Commission and communicated to applicants in a clear and systematic way. The cross-border dimension should be compulsory in every selected project. The programme might consider the use of independent expert panels for preparation of project selection. Larger strategic projects /flagship projects (i.e. designed and implemented by public authorities without a call) may be pre-defined in the programme document or selected via a transparent and agreed procedure. It is up to each programme partnership to decide on the optimal balance between different types of projects required to achieve the overall programme objectives, such as flagship projects, projects embedded in the relevant macro-regional strategy, regular projects, projects selected through bottom-up or top-down procedures, small projects, etc. In all hypotheses, selected projects should have a clear cross-border “added-value”.

93. **Decision-making** must also be non-discriminatory and transparent. The procedure should also be inclusive. Each monitoring (or steering) committee member shall have a vote. Voting by delegation should not be encouraged unless it is transparent and puts weaker partners at equal footing with "institutional" partners.
94. The **managing authority** shall ensure effective implementation of the programme. The managing authority is also at the service of the programme and of its monitoring committee. It acts as the programme authority representing all countries participating in the programme. The managing authority shall ensure the effectiveness and transparency of the project selection, reporting and monitoring systems. The use of Interact's Harmonised Implementation Tools and electronic monitoring system (eMs) is recommended if relevant.
95. The **Joint Secretariat (JS)** should ideally be the cross-border executive body of the programme at the service of the managing authority. It should consist of professional and independent staff from the participating countries. The JS should possess representative linguistic competence and relevant border country knowledge. Its procedures should be efficient and transparent. Communication with beneficiaries, potential applicants and the general public should be ensured mainly by the JS. **Regional contact points/antennas** operating directly under the JS' responsibility or, as is the case for ALCOTRA, "animators", can facilitate potential beneficiaries to prepare their proposals.

- **Trust-building measures**

96. Effective cross-border cooperation requires a good level of trust between partners. Trust needs to be built and maintained. This is a long-term investment which aims at fostering cooperation-minded future generations. The Interreg programmes can make a substantial contribution by providing financial support for trust-building activities such as linking up schools, sports clubs, cultural organisations, etc. The beneficiaries of such activities are often not equipped to manage full-blown Interreg projects.

- **Conflict of interest**

97. Conflict of interest between decision-making bodies and applicants and beneficiaries is to be avoided at any moment, including project generation, project preparation, project selection and project implementation. One way to avoid this is to ensure a proper segregation of duties between institutions and persons.

- **Communication and publicity**

98. Compliance with the publicity and information is a pivotal issue: Citizens should be aware how their money are used and how the EU together with the national, regional and local authorities can improve their quality of live. The EU support should be clearly indicated from the very beginning of the implementation process until the completion of projects and afterwards. Appropriate actions and measures in line with the Communication Guidelines need to be taken by all involved authorities and beneficiaries, such as the identification of a communication officer per programme, the establishment of a website per programme and use of the term 'Interreg' next to the emblem of the EU. In case the

programme is financing the implementation of a macro-regional project, the logo of the respective macro-region should be added. Thereby, opportunities will be created for further promotion of the project through the macro-regional platforms and networks, where relevant.

99. The programme should ensure it continues to contribute to the completeness and correctness of the KEEP database of Interreg projects.
100. The programme runs a clear and well-structured website that contains good and up-to-date information. This level of transparency is much welcome and should continue.
101. The programme has already made full use of the Interreg Volunteers Youth Initiative (IVY) and hosts young volunteers in the programme management bodies and projects. It is encouraged to continue on this path.

ORIENTATIONS:

- *Set thematic groups to consider the legal and administrative obstacles to cooperation and find ways to facilitate their removal.*
- *Reserve for the monitoring committee of the ALCOTRA 2021-2027 programme a strategic role, going beyond the selection of projects: Discussion on topics as e.g. cross-border obstacles, possible development of sectors of cross-border interest, coordination with other programmes and strategies, including the EUSALP etc. The composition of the monitoring committee should be widened to include also representatives of the economic and social life of the cross-border area.*
- *Ensure that in the monitoring committees the Member State hosting the programme authorities is not represented by the managing authority.*
- *Continue the approach of proceeding to the selection of territorial and thematic integrated plans (PITEM/PITER), in parallel, maintain the possibility to select “simple projects”.*
- *Consider the possibility to support small projects either through a dedicated mechanism (small projects fund) or via specific calls managed by the managing authority itself.*
- *Consider ways to simplify and accelerate the project selection procedure and, in this perspective, to assist the potential beneficiaries to prepare their proposals. In selecting projects, a link between the project and the expected results for the programme need to be clearly established.*
- *Give “flesh and bones” to publicity and information without wooden language: Emphasis should be put to the fact that ALCOTRA projects are the fruit of cooperation involving the EU, two Member States, the regional and the local authorities of the two sides of the border as well as people who worked for their construction. Events should be organised to enable citizens to understand the particular importance of the cross-border projects and that behind these projects there is a huge investment not only in money but also in common efforts.*

Existing sources of information

- Border needs study (Commission, 2016) – [Collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes - Regional Policy - European Commission](#)
- EC ex-post evaluation of ETC 2007-2013 http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/ec/2007-2013/#11
- European Territorial Cooperation - best practices and innovative measures, European Parliament, 2016 [REPORT on European Territorial Cooperation - best practices and innovative measures - A8-0202/2016](#)
- Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions (Commission, 2016) – [quantification of the effects of legal and administrative obstacles in land border regions - Bing](#)
- Easing legal and administrative obstacles (Commission, 2017) – [Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions - Regional Policy - European Commission](#)
- Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders (Commission, 2017-2018) – https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/cb_rail_connections_en.pdf
- DG SANTE's study on cross-border health care [Building Cooperation in Cross-border Healthcare: new study published! | FUTURIUM | European Commission](#)
- ESPON's Targeted Analysis on Cross-Border Public Services [CPS - Cross-border Public Services | ESPON](#)
- DATAR-MOT: Rapport « Réflexions sur le volet transfrontalier des Contrats de Plan Etat Régions » Octobre 1998, N°2892
- Smart Specialisation Strategies
 - Rhône-Alpes <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/FR71/tags/FR71>;
 - PACA: <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/FR82/tags/FR82>
 - Liguria: <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/ITC3/tags/ITC3>,
 - Piemonte: <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/ITC1/tags/ITC1>,
 - Val d'Aosta: <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regions/ITC2/tags/ITC2>
- Macro-regional strategies: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/alpine/