

CICERO

Croatia-Italy Civil protection collaboration

D.1.2.1

Recommendations

Recommendations for alleviation of obstacles in
across border cooperation



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Summary

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1. Introduction

The CICERO project answers to the need of better cooperation governance in the Programme area and in particular to the need to create a more extensive knowledge basis about legal and administrative obstacles and to implement a common collaboration in the domain of risk management. The common collaboration would also contribute to the reinforcement of institutional capacities of public authorities and stakeholders.

Two partners coming from two countries, Italy and Croatia, are collaborating: the Pratiarcati Union of Municipalities (public local authority located in Veneto region; province of Padua) in Italy and the City of Labin (a unit of local self-government; located on eastern side of Istria County) in Croatia.

The overall objective of CICERO project is to investigate, identify and contribute to solutions of cross border obstacles in risk management for natural disaster such as forest fires through cross border cooperation.

The first step was the identification of cross-border obstacles through an analysis, namely the deliverable D.1.1.1, issued on the 14th of February 2024. The analysis highlighted the presence of at least 12 different factors that make collaboration between intervention groups located in different states complex and limiting.

The project activities addressed some of these factors. Two joint cross-border exercises were carried out, one in Croatia in June 2024 and one in Italy in October 2024. The exercises allowed to work on the technical and practical aspects of sharing intervention protocols, on language barriers and also on the consolidation of mutual trust.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed in Labin on 15th June 2024 confirmed the political will for cooperation between the two partners, thus making a significant step towards overcoming the barrier related to raising awareness among local administrators.

The joint training on the use of ropes and drones led to the sharing of the specific language (overcoming the language barrier) and the creation of shared intervention protocols.

Citizen awareness campaigns conducted both in the Pratiarcati Union and in the City of Labin have led to a significant improvement in knowledge of the risks arising from natural disasters.



On the other hand, the establishment of a joint intervention mechanism that allows professional and voluntary groups to intervene mutually in Italy and Croatia in case of emergencies arising from natural disasters requires further investigation because it involves a high number of actors at different institutional levels and because it requires legislative intervention at European level, or at least at the level of neighbouring countries, which is beyond the possibilities of a territorial cooperation project.

2. Baseline: the existing situation

Referring to the 12 obstacles identified in the analysis, it is confirmed that they represent the baseline that describes the existing situation photographed at the beginning of the CICERO project.

In short, they are:

1. **Coordination and cooperation** between two countries in emergency situations.
2. **Language and communication:** lack of a common language and possible misunderstandings that risk reducing safety during interventions.
3. **Different legal regulations:** authorisation procedures for joint intervention abroad are not codified by local laws or regulations.
4. **Bureaucracy:** complex procedures can slow down cooperation.
5. **Resources and equipment:** the lack of compatibility between countries' equipment and technology can make it difficult to cooperate in the field.
6. **Geographical factors:** the diversity of terrain, climatic conditions and differences in population density may require tailored strategies and operational plans.
7. **Training and skills:** Differences in training and skills of protection and rescue personnel can affect coordination during joint interventions.
8. **Financial challenges:** The lack of financial resources and the unequal distribution of financial resources between countries can be an obstacle to joint efforts in response to disasters.
9. **Limited Access to Technology and Information:** Limited access to common information systems and technologies can make it difficult to share relevant data between the two countries.



10. **Insufficient exchange of information:** Inefficient exchange of information about fires, risk assessments and response plans can hinder rapid and coordinated action.
11. **Lack of trust and cooperation at the local level:** Local fire services and communities need to be involved in cross-border cooperation to build trust.
12. **Lack of a clear strategic framework:** difficulty in achieving fruitful and lasting cooperation.

3. Overcoming obstacles

The search for specific solutions to overcome each of the obstacles identified by the analysis was constant throughout **all** the project implementation period. There were numerous opportunities for discussion between partners, especially during the preparation, implementation and debriefing phases of the joint cross-border exercises.

The table below explains, for each obstacle, which joint response plan or joint training course was activated **in order to identify common** solutions.

In the cases **marked** in green, the solution has already been identified by the project partners and, sometimes, **it** has also been tested.

in the cases marked in yellow it is believed possible to further explore the proposed solutions by activating an external consultancy service, **namely the B-SOLUTIONS initiative promoted by the European Commission (DG REGIO) and implemented by AEBR – Associations of European Border Regions.**

The cases highlighted in red represent obstacles that cannot be overcome in the short term or with the sole intervention of the project partners because they require a joint response at Union level.

	Obstacle	Joint response plan	Joint training
1	The main challenge can be coordination and effective cooperation between two countries in emergency situations. Different administrative and organizational structures can slow down the coordination process between national, regional and local protection and rescue authorities.	An European Civil Protection Mechanism is in place: It is the national level that can request the support of rescue teams from other Member States. This activation beyond borders is not possible at local level. If a harmonized approach will be possible, it will be at Union level.	



2	<p>Different languages can be an obstacle to quick and efficient communication between protection and rescue teams from Italy and Croatia, especially in moments of urgency. Volunteers speak a different language and do not have a common language to communicate with (e.g. English). Possible misunderstandings and reduced safety during the intervention.</p>	<p>Some practical solutions were tested during the joint cross-border exercises. Two participants in the project were identified acting as linguistic mediators. They are a professional firefighter from Labin who spent a period of work in Italy and a volunteer from the Provincial Civil Protection of Padua of Croatian origin. Their personal skills were crucial in promoting understanding by all. All relevant documents have been translated in each partner's language, for example the exercise plan.</p>	<p>The common training course on the use of drones was held in English in order to teach the specific language related to the main commands.</p>
3	<p>Different legal regulations and protocols in Italy and Croatia can make coordination and interoperability in the implementation of protection and rescue measures difficult. Harmonization of the legal framework can improve cooperation between countries. Also, authorisation procedures for joint intervention abroad are not codified by local laws or regulations.</p>	<p>This issue will be talked with the help of external experts appointed by AEBR in the framework of the B-SOLUTION initiative promoted by DG REGIO. A report is expected within mid February 2025.</p>	
4	<p>Administrative barriers and complex bureaucracy can slow cooperation and make it difficult to respond quickly to emergency situations</p>	<p>This issue will be talked with the help of external experts appointed by AEBR in the framework of the B-SOLUTION initiative promoted by DG REGIO. A report is expected within mid February 2025.</p>	
5	<p>Differences in equipment, training and resources available to protection and rescue authorities in both countries can affect the speed and effectiveness of responses to natural disasters. Also, the lack of compatibility between countries' equipment and technology can make it difficult to cooperate in the field, such as the joint use of firefighting vehicles and aircraft.</p>	<p>During the joint cross-border exercises, the partners examined each other's equipment and had the opportunity to test it. In some cases, partners are considering to buy specific new equipment tested during the joint exercises. The funds for the purchase can be found by participating in the next ordinary call for tenders of the Interreg Italy-Croatia Programme or by submitting an application to the regional calls for tenders for the purchase of new civil protection equipment</p>	
6	<p>The specificities of geographical features, such as the diversity of terrain, climatic conditions and</p>	<p>This obstacle can be easily overcome by acquiring a good knowledge of the morphological and socio-cultural characteristics</p>	<p>Site inspections were conducted by a joint Italian/Croatian team before each exercise.</p>

	differences in population density, may require tailored strategies and operational plans.	of the partner. This activity has already been started during the joint exercises, each of which was preceded by specific inspections aimed at anticipating the dynamics of the operations on site	An in-depth analysis of the morphology and characteristics of the territories involved was shared within deliverable D.1.1.1.
7	Differences in training and skills of protection and rescue personnel can affect coordination during joint interventions. Likewise, differences in protocols and procedures between civil protection agencies can result in confusion during joint interventions. Also, an obstacle is the distance, because it is not easy to organise joint training.		Two common training courses were held: the first one on the use of ropes and the second one on the use of drones.
8	The lack of financial resources and the unequal distribution of financial resources between countries can be an obstacle to joint efforts in response to disasters. But also: insurance cover valid abroad for accidents and third party liability for volunteers deployed abroad; Local authorities may not have funds to cover the expenses incurred in sending volunteers abroad. The Municipal Civil Protection Groups do not have their own funds to deal with emergencies, but obtain them from the Veneto Region, which in turn obtains them from the central government if a state of emergency is declared; In Italy, the employment of civil protection volunteers in emergencies allows the reimbursement of the volunteers' employers for work services not obtained. Such reimbursements are only guaranteed if the interventions abroad are coordinated by the National Civil Protection Department.	This issue will be talked with the help of external experts appointed by AEBR in the framework of the B-SOLUTION initiative promoted by DG REGIO. A report is expected within mid February 2025.	
9	Limited access to common information systems and technologies can make it difficult to share relevant data between the two countries.	This issue will be talked with the help of external experts appointed by AEBR in the framework of the B-SOLUTION initiative promoted by DG	

		REGIO. A report is expected within mid February 2025	
10	Inefficient exchange of information about fires, risk assessments and response plans can hinder rapid and coordinated action.	This issue will be talked with the help of external experts appointed by AEBR in the framework of the B-SOLUTION initiative promoted by DG REGIO. A report is expected within mid February 2025	
11	Local fire services and communities need to be involved in cross-border cooperation to build trust and create a sense of common purpose.	The civil society was invited to attend the joint exercises, in particular schools and volunteers from the Red Cross.	
12	Without a clear strategic framework and common goals, it is difficult to achieve successful and long-term cooperation.	The signing of the memorandum of understanding represented a crucial point of the CICERO project because it involved 4 Mayors who mutually committed to foster post-CICERO project cooperation in the field of disaster prevention and management, mutual assistance and support in identifying the best solutions to counteract natural risks, encouraging collaboration and knowledge exchange among CICERO project partners and supporting the main results of the project.	

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the Cicero partnership was successful in identifying the obstacles that undermine cross-border cooperation in the field of joint interventions in the event of natural disasters and worked throughout the project implementation period in search of shared solutions.

Some solutions were found thanks to the fruitful collaboration that was established between the subjects involved. In this sense, both the two joint cross-border exercises and the joint training courses were crucial. These were concrete opportunities to bring the respective intervention protocols closer together. Furthermore, putting themselves in the position of having to explain to a stranger the dynamics of their work group led the partners to reflect deeply on their organization and to investigate the historical reasons why certain practices are in use.



Concrete steps have also been taken at a political level towards a common approach, in fact a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed through which the administrations involved commit to collaborate even after the end of the project.

The joint exercises were an opportunity to involve associations and citizens and pushed the partners to create new collaborations at local level.

Even though they are both eligible for the Interreg Italy-Croatia cross-border Programme, the regions of Veneto and Istria are not bordering each other and this aspect represents an objective limit to cooperation in the field of civil protection in case of natural disasters. In fact, it is more rational and efficient to always involve the rescue units closest to the place where the adverse event occurred. Therefore, it is difficult to justify the willingness of the groups of the Pratiarcati Union and the City of Labin to provide mutual aid.

Nevertheless, the mutual trust and the on-site experience that has been created between the two groups constitute the true heart of European cooperation and fully represent the European spirit. The construction of European citizenship passes through the breaking down of many barriers (linguistic, technical, legislative, economic), one of which is the cultural barrier. We can say that the CICERO project has shown that it is possible to break down this barrier.

