
Demographic Change and Equivalent Living Conditions - Political Strategies in EU

Member States

Joint speech by Portuguese Secretary of State for Inland Enhancement, Isabel Ferreira, and Spanish Secretary-General for the Demographic Challenge

17th of December 2020

Best Practices – Presentations by Member States

New Cross-Border Cooperation

Ladies and gentlemen, dear European colleagues,

It is with utmost pleasure that we address this audience in this particular event, in which we have the opportunity to present the Common Crossborder Development Strategy of Portugal and Spain, approved in October 10, in the city of Guarda, Portugal.

The Portugal-Spain border is the oldest in Europe and one of the longest, with 1.234 kilometers. The territories on both sides of the border have developed historic, political, economic, social and cultural dynamics with high similarity, creating the ground to develop stable cooperative relations.

However, the border has also limited the economic, social and cultural development of both territories, leading to a demographic decrease and weak economic development. The border areas are isolated and distant from the political and economic decision centers, struggling at the same time with the lack of communication and connectivity infrastructures. It is essential to congregate all efforts to encourage the convergence process and eliminate the “border effect” that has been avoiding the economic, environmental, cultural, social and territorial progress.

This Strategy represents the fulfillment of a compromise established between the Governments of Spain and Portugal during the 2018 Portuguese-Spanish Summit, and agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding for the definition of the Common Crossborder Development Strategy. The responsible entities and the Work Group

oriented their actions to achieve a main goal: to guarantee the future sustainability of the territories, making them more attractive to live, work and invest.

Moreover, and very important, the Common Crossborder Development Strategy is an instrument that complements and reinforces other instruments that are being implemented on both countries: the Strategy for Territorial Cohesion and the Program for the Valorization of the Interior, in Portugal, and the National Strategy for the Demographic Challenge, in Spain.

Therefore, the Strategy is of main importance for the Portuguese-Spanish cooperation development, representing the beginning of a long-term process that will allow the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its measures. It is clear that it launches a qualitative and innovative cooperation process between the two countries.

The Strategy is a flexible tool, which defines the main lines for an inclusive and oriented answer to territorial development, creating new opportunities and promoting the development of personal, professional and family projects, especially for women and young people. Furthermore, it ensures the quality of life of populations living in the cross-border area, both in urban and rural areas.

The Common Cross-Border Development Strategy places people at the center of its action: the objective is to guarantee equal rights and opportunities on both sides of the border, and to generate well-being, activity, employment and wealth to reverse the demographic decline, with special sensitivity towards the needs and aspirations of young people and women.

The Strategy redefines the centrality of this territory in Spain and Portugal, and provides a strategic territorial vision, which aims to become a positive and innovative example of cooperation in Europe.

For this, the Strategy defines five priority objectives for the development of the cross-border area:

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- Guarantee equal opportunities and rights,
 - Ensure adequate provision of basic services considering the characteristics of the territories,
 - Create dynamics of cross-border cooperation through the elimination of barriers and context costs,
 - Promote the development of new economic and business activities,
 - Favor the fixation of populations in cross-border areas.

Five thematic areas for cross-border cooperation have been established in the Strategy, into which the specific actions for carrying out and starting joint projects are grouped.

The thematic areas are:

1. Mobility, security and elimination of context costs.
2. Infrastructures and territorial connectivity.
3. Joint management of basic services in the areas of education, health, social services, civil protection, or other areas in which the advantages of joint provision are found.
4. Economic development and territorial innovation.
5. Environment, energy, urban centers and culture.

These areas include several positive impacts such as:

- The Strategy affects cross-border development through structural change, but also through concrete, small-scale and short-term actions.
- Barriers and context costs are eliminated for daily life: in employment, in basic services, in culture, etc.



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- The Strategy connects the territory, completing the local infrastructures that allow a permeable border throughout its entire extension.
 - It contributes to establish a cooperation framework to promote cross-border projects on environmental, cultural, innovation issues, etc.
 - Likewise, it defines numerous projects for the joint and coordinated management of basic services in the border area: health, education, welfare, culture, training, civil protection, fire-fighting ...
 - The Strategy constitutes an essential tool for creating and strengthening ties between children and youngsters on both sides of the border. This will be materialized with the promotion of bilingual sections in border education centers, as well as the creation of joint cycles of higher education. All this will favor the consolidation of social, educational and - in short - human networks sustained over time.

The Strategy working group has already started work and agreed on the following measures:

- Statute of the cross-border worker.
- Emergency services.
- Encourage the circulation of minors to oth sides of the border.

The present health and socioeconomic situation strengths the willingness of Portugal and Spain to promote cross-border cooperation, as an example of territorial cooperation in the European Union, which is strategic in the post-COVID-19 period.

As it was conceived and developed, the Strategy will allow the effective articulation of the Recovery and Resilience Plans and the Interreg Spain-Portugal (POCTEP) Program 2021-2027. It will guide investments in the cross-border area, coordinating actions

between the two countries, helping in the participation and involvement of public actors in the territory and supporting public and private sectors.

The Common Cross-Border Development Strategy is a key tool to mitigate the effects of the pandemic crisis in both countries and moving forward with the reconstruction of the European Union. It aims to make the economies and societies more resilient, sustainable, egalitarian, towards a green and digital transitions and aligned with the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of European Union 2021.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to convey to you all my best wishes for the work conducted this morning and for the valuable breakout sessions.

Thank you