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**EUROPEAN RESEARCH PROJECT //**

# Collecting and analysing data for the post-27 INTERREG (Core-IB)

Belgium-France

**Border profile**

March 2026



This European Research Project is conducted within the framework of the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme, partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

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#### **Coordination**

Andreea China, Laura Dimitriu, Martin Gauk, Nikos Lampropoulos, Nicolas Rossignol – ESPON EGTC

#### **Lead authors**

Tobias Chilla, Dominik Bertram, Elias Günther, Stefan Hippe – Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg

Irene McMaster, Heidi Vironen, Neli Georgieva, Stefan Kah, Virginia Arena – Stichting EPRC Strathclyde University

Roland Gaugitsch, Sabrina Mansutti, Helene Gorny, Michelle Wiest, Erich Dallhammer, Cristian Andronic, Manon Badouix, Chien-Hui Hsiung, Robert Badea – ÖIR GmbH

Vít Pászto, Radek Barvíř, Karel Macků, Jaroslav Burian, Zdena Dobeřová, Oldřich Bittner – Palacký University Olomouc

#### **Steering Committee**

Jean-Pierre Halkin, Gaëlle Doleans, Simona Pohlová, Maria Sioliou, Robert Spisiak – Unit D2 Interreg, Cross-Border Cooperation, Internal Borders, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission (EC-DG Regio)

Milada Hronkova – Ministry of Regional Development, Department of European Territorial Cooperation (CZ)

Josiane Meier - Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building, Division Spatial Planning, Spatial Planning Law and European Spatial Development Policy BMWWSB (DE)

Margarita Golovko – Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture (EE)

Olivier Bichel, Sébastien Keiffer– Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning, Department of Spatial Planning (LU)

#### **Acknowledgements**

We gratefully acknowledge the support and constructive feedback received during the project implementation, from the ESPON Monitoring Committee members, INTERREG programme Managing Authorities/Joint Secretariats, Ministries and DG Regio desk officers. The insightful comments and recommendations provided have been instrumental in enhancing the quality, coherence, and robustness of the analysis.

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ISBN: 978-2-919816-91-0

Layout and graphic design by BGRAPHIC, Denmark

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Contact: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)

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## **Disclaimer**

This document is a final report.

The information contained herein is subject to change and does not commit the ESPON EGTC and the countries participating in the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context and objective of the border profile

The ESPON Core-IB project (Collecting and analysing data for the post-27 INTERREG) provides evidence-based, non-binding analytical work to support the next generation of Interreg programmes post-2027. By collecting and analysing harmonised territorial data, the project highlights key socio-economic characteristics, cross-border interactions, and governance structures. Its spatial focus covers 48 cross-border cooperation areas (40 land and 8 maritime), including all EU internal border regions and those bordering Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Norway. The findings are analytical and informative; they do not create regulatory or policy obligations for Member States, the European Commission, or programme authorities. Each border profile serves as a comparable knowledge base for policymakers at EU, national, and regional levels, supporting dialogue and reflection rather than prescribing policy choices. The profiles aim to provide consistent, data-driven territorial evidence that can inform strategic discussions about future cross-border cooperation and contribute to the preparation of Interreg programmes post-2027.

The Core-IB border profiles are designed to support the upcoming steps in the Interreg programming process with analyses based on data that is available at the European scale, including ESPON, Eurostat, DG REGIO, JRC, and Interreg databases. Their main purpose is to ensure comparability of data analyses and to provide programme areas with access to recent harmonised data at high geographical resolution (NUTS3 level or finer). Member States may hold additional or more detailed data which can further enrich or contextualise the findings beyond the Core-IB project. These national sources are essential for refining and validating territorial evidence in policymaking processes, including additional regional, fine-scale information and insights from political processes related to prioritisation and objective setting. All border profiles follow a systematic and methodologically robust approach. They provide territorial evidence, structured along 6 thematic dimensions, offering insights into the geographic, economic, environmental, socio-economic, border security and governance characteristics of the border region. Quantitative data and qualitative analyses are combined to ensure meaningful insights into all 48 border areas. Due to methodological constraints and limited resources, local studies and national datasets falling outside the European data framework could not be included. Visualisations, such as maps and charts based on descriptive statistics, facilitate understanding and support evidence-based policymaking. The profiles analyse the border region as a whole at NUTS3 (2021) level (corresponding to the current Interreg VI-A programme area)<sup>1</sup> and position it within a broader European context. For comparative purposes, several reference categories are applied:

- › European averages (EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, depending on data availability)
- › National averages
- › National border region averages
- › Aggregated border region averages

To complement the quantitative evidence, the profiles also draw on strategic and qualitative sources, including:

- › Strategic documents from the Interreg Programme 2021-2027
- › Border Orientation Papers from the 2021-2027 programming period
- › Information from the keep.eu database on cross-border cooperation activities
- › Information from the Cohesion Open Data platform
- › Information from the b-solutions initiative
- › Information from recent ESPON Projects (i.e., CROSSGOV, House4All, PROFECY Update, CPS 2.0)

<sup>1</sup> As defined by Annex 1, Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/74 of 17 January 2022, as amended by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2023/1638 of 14 August 2023 (OJ L204, 17.8.2023, p. 9): [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec\\_impl/2022/75/oj/eng](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2022/75/oj/eng)

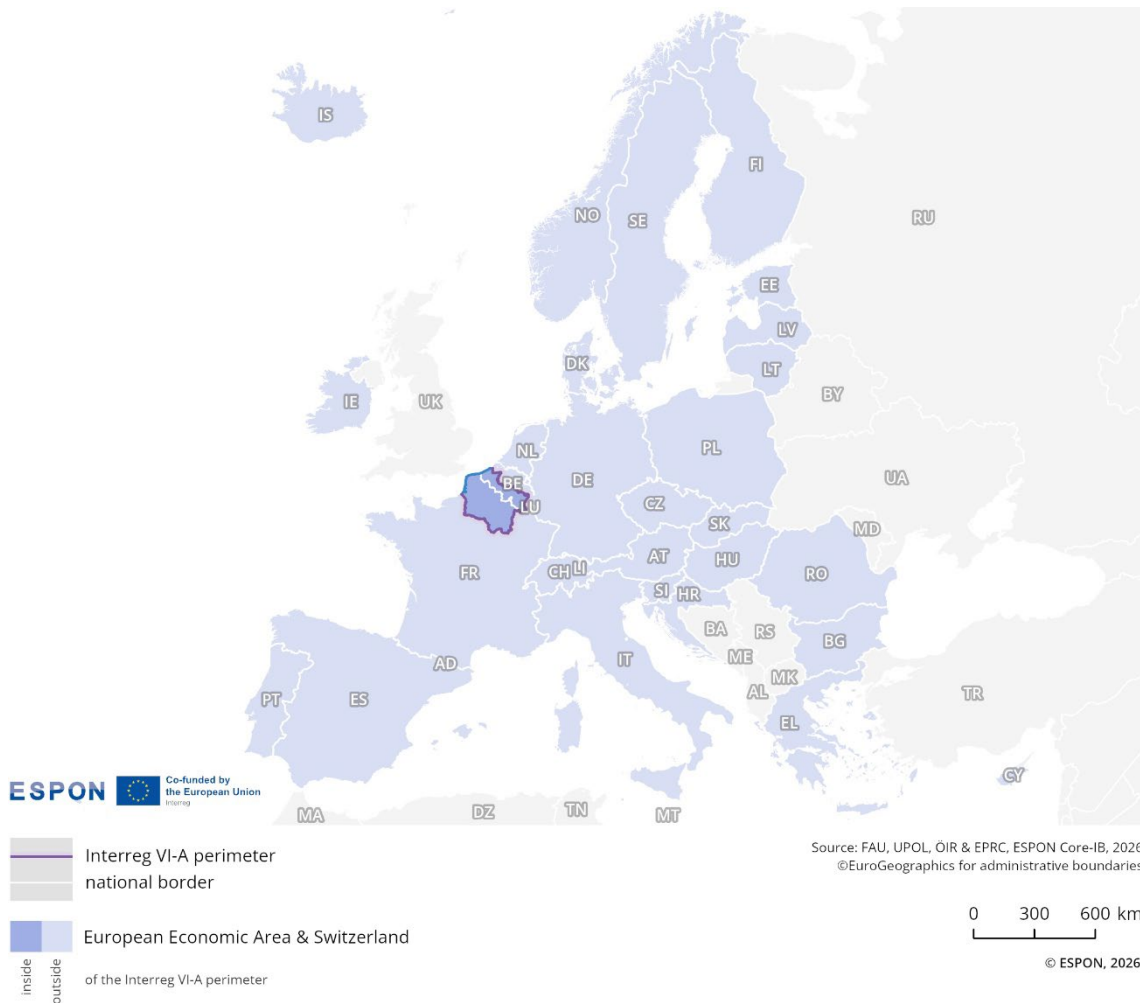
Within the ESPON framework, the CROSSGOV project (Governance mechanisms for cross-border functional areas) has been implemented in parallel to Core-IB. The CROSSGOV hub<sup>2</sup> provides a comprehensive platform for interactive data exploration, and selected data have been incorporated into this study.

Additional project-related information can be explored separately in the Core-IB **Final Report**. Further technical information on this border profile can be found in a separate **Technical Annex** providing an overview of data and methods.

## 1.2 Presentation of the border area

The Interreg VI-A border region ‘Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France’ covers the area between south-western Belgium and northern France (see Figure 1.1). In Belgium, the programme area includes most of the provinces of Luxembourg, Hainaut, West Flanders, Namur, and East Flanders, spanning both Wallonia and Flanders, and comprising a total of 25 NUTS3 regions. In France, it covers the NUTS3 regions of Aisne, Nord, Oise, Pas-de-Calais and Somme, located within Hauts-de-France region, as well as the NUTS3 regions of Ardennes and Marne within Grand Est region.

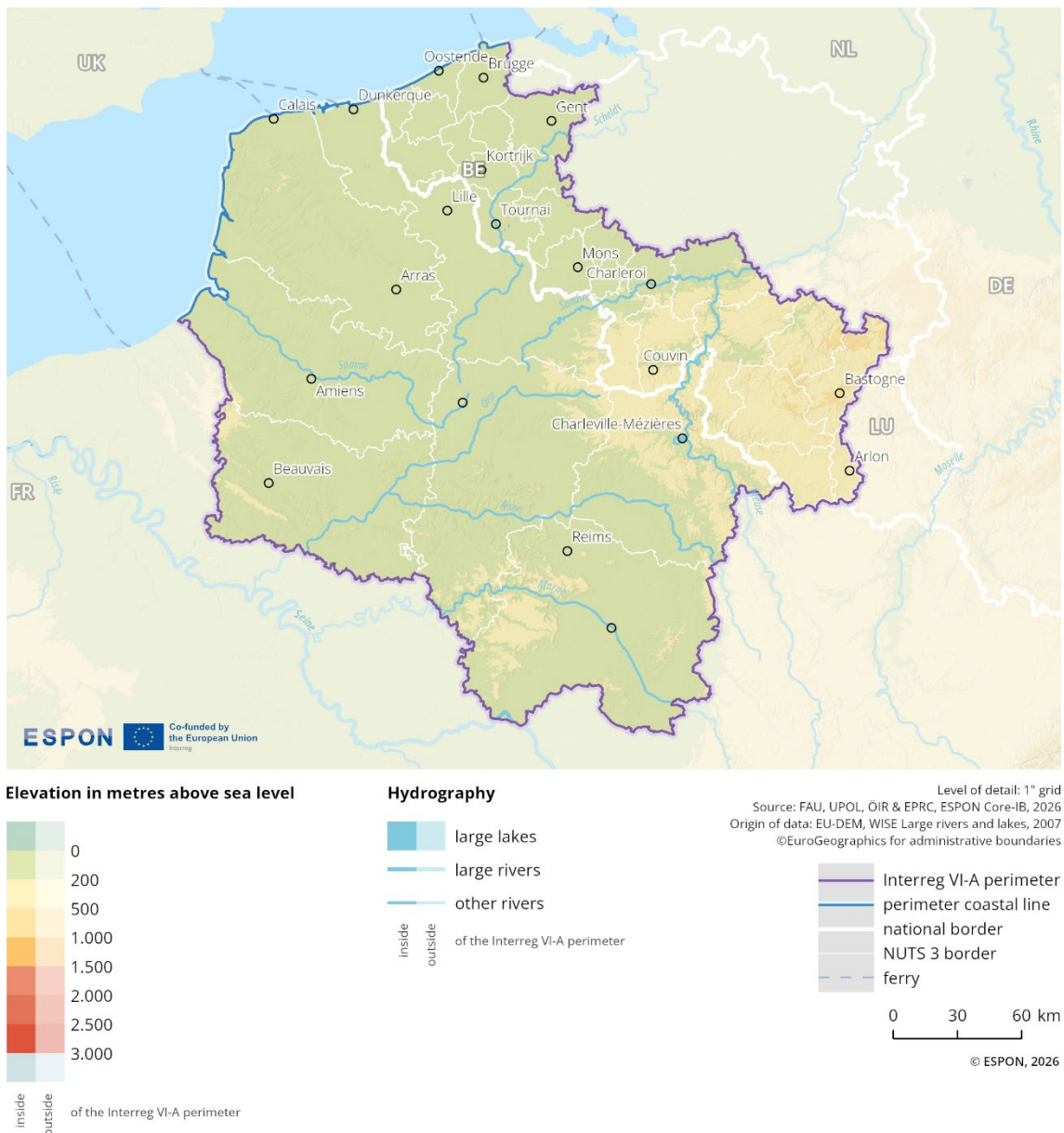
**Figure 1.1: Overview map**



<sup>2</sup> ESPON CROSSGOV Hub: <https://gis-portal.espon.eu/arcgis/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=27e3b86ef44441b08793a2239c370607>

Figure 1.2 illustrates the region's geomorphological features and the perimeter of the current Interreg VI A programme area. The border region covers approximately 62,000 km<sup>2</sup> and extends along the entire 620-kilometre length of the Belgian–French border. Starting from the flat coastal plain near Dunkerque (FR) on the North Sea, it runs through the lowlands near Lille (FR), Kortrijk (BE) and Tournai (BE), and on to the forested uplands of the Ardennes near Couvin (BE) and Rocroi (FR), northwest of Charleville-Mézières. Topographically, the region features a gradient ranging from coastal lowlands to the Central European loess belt and the densely wooded low mountain range of the Ardennes.

**Figure 1.2: Geographical features and characteristics<sup>3</sup>**



The region features diverse hydrological systems, including the Scheldt (Escaut) and Sambre river basins, which are important for ecology. Coastal and tidal zones near the North Sea form characteristic ecosystems, while the landscape is dominated by extensive farmland and forest areas inland.

<sup>3</sup> The selection of displayed settlements is based on factors such as size, administrative or cultural importance, transport links, regional coverage and cartographic clarity. This is part of a standard cartographic generalisation process with no pre-set thresholds, and the main aim is to provide orientation.

Key towns along or near the border include Dunkerque, Lille, Kortrijk, Tournai, Mons, and Charleville-Mézières, reflecting the region's mixture of urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. This varied geography creates specific natural subregions that influence local land use and development.

## 2 Cross-border analysis

### 2.1 Territorial dimension

The territorial dimension refers to the spatial characteristics and dynamics of a border region. It specifically depicts how factors such as population density, demographic trends, changes in settlement areas and accessibility influence and reflect cross-border integration.

#### 2.1.1 Population and settlements

This sub-dimension illustrates the population characteristics and land use dynamics of the border region, based on analysed indicators. It examines population density, population development by age groups, and changes in settlement areas. The analysis highlights whether the border functions as a catalyst for integration or as a barrier. Comparisons with the respective countries and the EU average provide context for understanding the region's dynamics.

##### 2.1.1.1 Population density

###### Indicator description

Population density refers to the number of residents per km<sup>2</sup>. This indicator shows the number of inhabitants per square kilometre in a 1x1 km grid. It therefore provides information on the distribution and concentration of population across the region and allows to identify agglomerations of high density. In particular agglomerations at or close to the border area of key interest.

- **Source:** Eurostat
- **Temporal coverage:** 2021
- **Unit:** Inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>

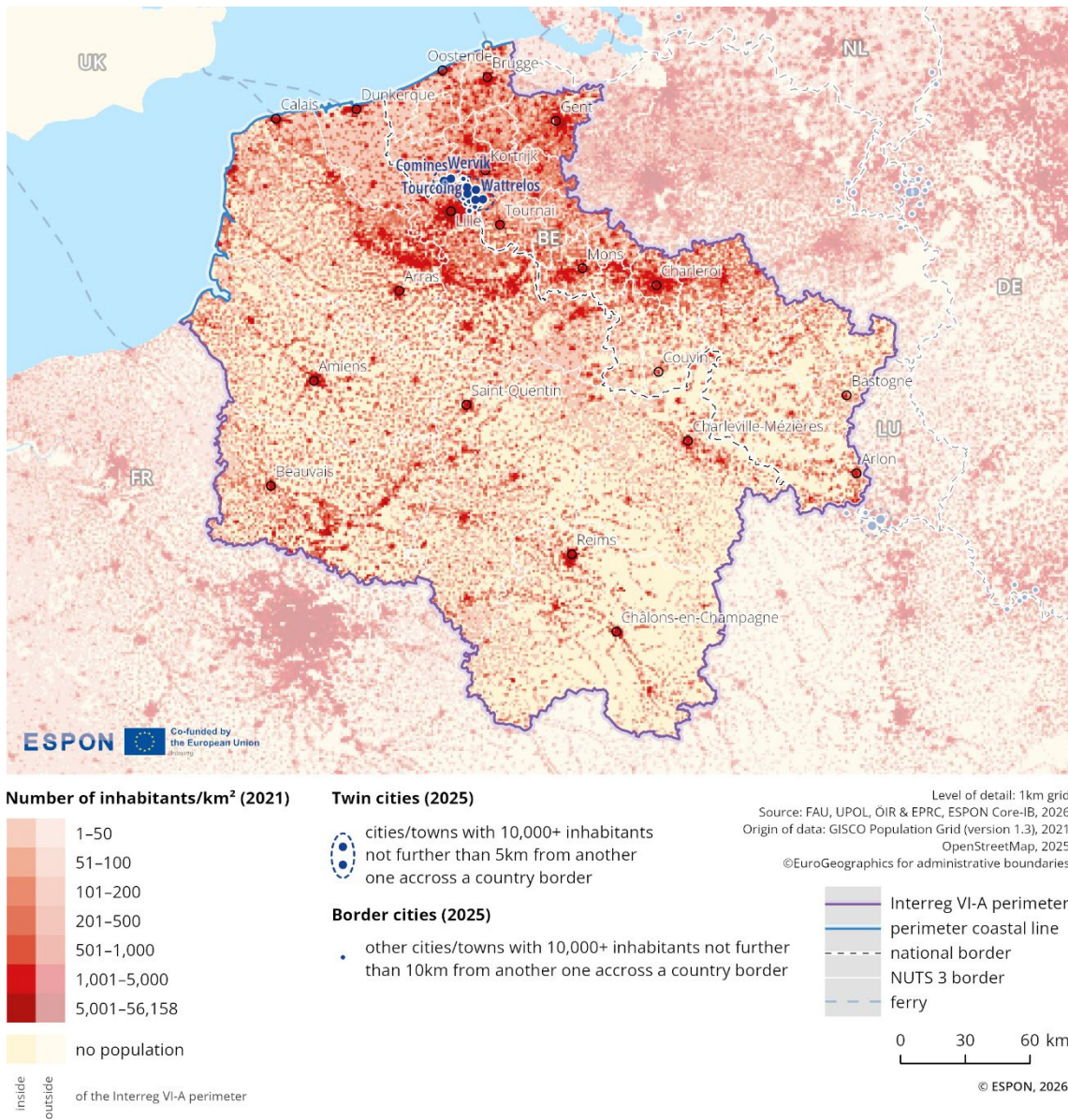
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

The highest population densities are found in the areas of Gent (262,000 inhabitants), Charleroi (204,000 inhabitants), Brugge (119,000 inhabitants), as well as Lille, Amiens, Saint-Quentin, Beauvais, and Reims (see Figure 2.1). A maximum local density of over 12,000 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> is found in Lille. The map highlights that the population distribution is higher in the northern part than in the southern part of the cross-border region. Areas in close proximity to the border tend to be densely populated, particularly in the northern part of the border region resulting in a number of twin and border cities in the Lille-Kortrijk area according to the definition. However, further closely connected towns can be observed along the border.

The average population density across the entire border region is 174 inhabitants per square kilometre, which exceeds both the EU average of 109 inhabitants per square kilometre (according to Eurostat) and the aggregated average of all EU-evaluated border regions (125 inhabitants per square kilometre).

Within the border region, the French part records an average population density of approximately 150 inhabitants per square kilometre. Despite marked internal spatial variation, this value exceeds the national average population density in France (102 inhabitants per square kilometre). The Belgian part of the border region has an average population density of around 241 inhabitants per square kilometre, which remains below the national average in Belgium (372 inhabitants per square kilometre).

**Figure 2.1: Spatial patterns of population distribution**



**2.1.1.2 Population development (by age groups)**

**Indicator description**

Population development refers to the percentage change in population at regional level between 2014 and 2024. The data reflects on the total population, as well as on the age groups 0-14, 15-64 and 65+.

- **Source:** Annual Regional Database of the European Commission (ARDECO)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2014-2024
- **Unit:** Change in %

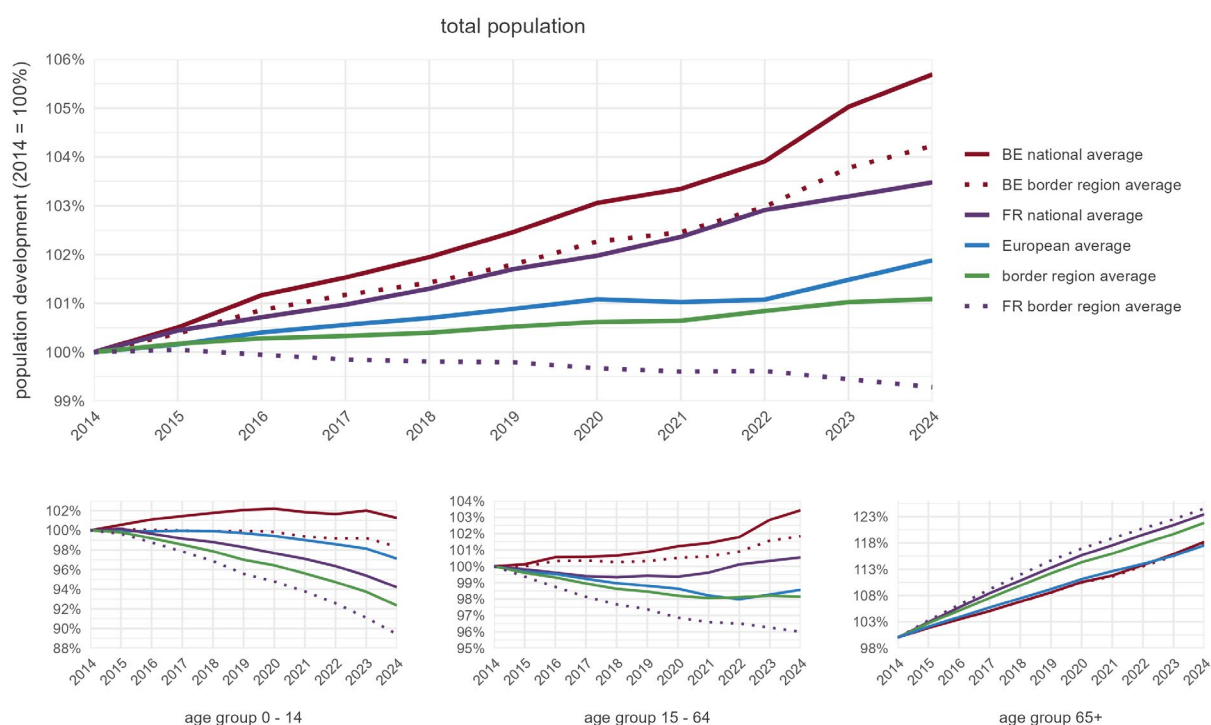
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Population in the Belgium–France (Wallonie–Vlaanderen–France) region in 2024 (Eurostat): 10.9 million inhabitants, of which:

- › 62.4% in the French border territory (6.8 million inhabitants)
- › 37.6% in the Belgian border territory (4.1 million inhabitants)
- › Region within the border region with the highest population increase since 2014: Arr. Bastogne (BE342) at 11.1%

Figure 2.2 shows the population change in the Belgium–France (Wallonie–Vlaanderen–France) region between 2014 and 2024. During this period, the region has experienced slight growth of 1.1%, with the highest growth rate observed on the Belgian side.

**Figure 2.2: Population development (2014=100)**



Population growth across the Belgium–France border region is slightly below the European average (1.1% vs. 1.9%) and similar to the development in all border regions (1.1% vs. 1.5%). While the Belgian border area shows slightly lower growth than the national average (4.2% vs. 5.7%), the French border area has experienced a decline substantially below the national average (-0.7% vs. 3.5%).

In terms of the development of individual age groups in the cross-border region, the population aged 0–14 experienced a marked decrease of -7.7%, while the working-age population (15–64) showed a slight decrease of -1.9%. The population aged 65 and over underwent a substantial increase of 21.8%.

### 2.1.1.3 Change in settlement areas

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the relative change in settlement areas per LAU in the border region. It considers changes in land cover, from non-artificial areas (such as agricultural, forest and seminatural areas, wetlands and water bodies) to artificial areas (such as urban, industrial, construction sites) between 2012 and 2018. This indicator has to be viewed alongside population development in particular.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** The indicator is retrieved via processing of raster data from CORINE Land cover. The raster information is crossed with Local Administrative Units (LAU) to calculate a change in %.
- **Temporal coverage:** 2012-2018
- **Unit:** Change in %

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the change in settlement areas at municipal level between 2012 and 2018. Overall, the map shows similar patterns of change in settlement areas on both sides of the Belgian-French border. Changes are evident in particular around the urban centres of Dunkerque, Brugge, Gent, Lille, Mons, Charleroi, Bastogne, Armiens, Saint-Quentin, Beauvais, Reims and Châlons-en-Champagne. Charleville-Mézières is an exception, with no significant change during the observed time period. High growth in settlement areas is particularly evident around Lille, Brugge and Reims. In close proximity to the national borders, the settlement area increases mainly in Lille, Dunkerque and the areas around the Belgian cities of Kortrijk and nearby Tournai in the south-east, as well as between Charleville-Mézières and Charleroi.

**Figure 2.3: Settlement area dynamics**

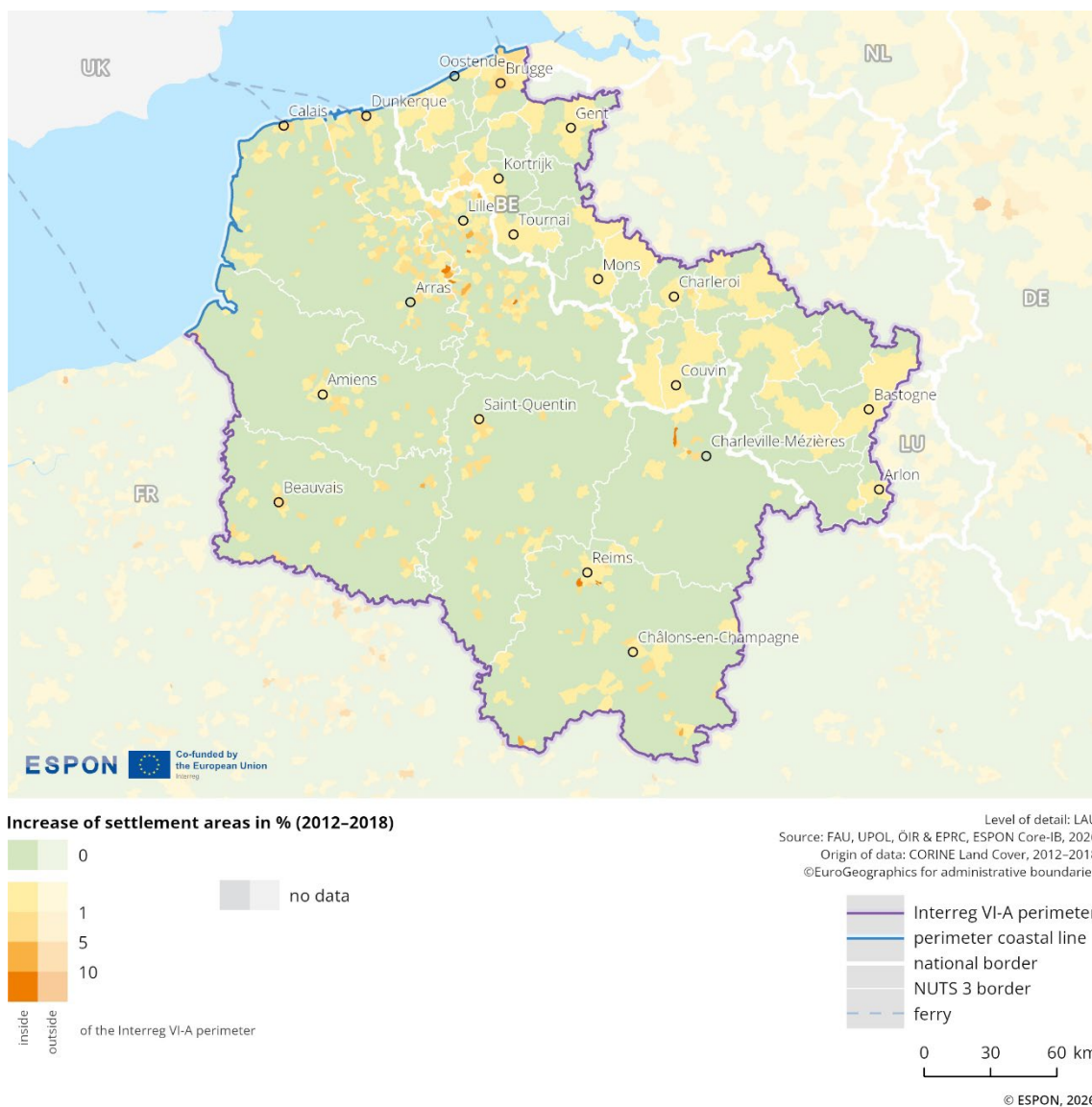
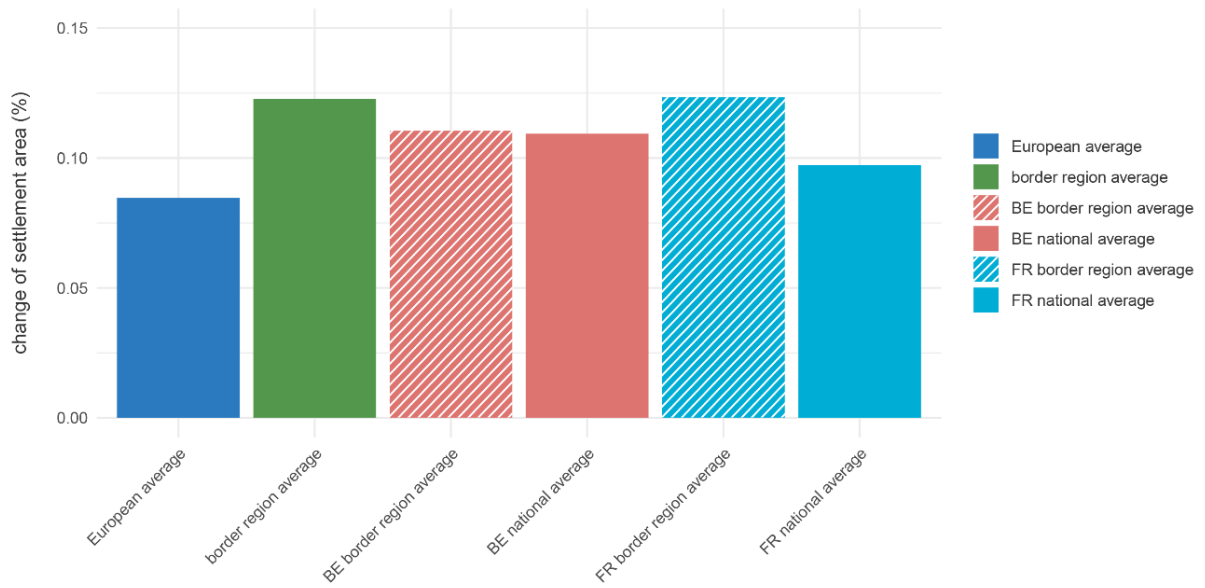


Figure 2.4 presents the change in settlement areas from a comparative perspective. The average for the Belgium–France programme area is higher than the overall European average, which includes both EU member states and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The national Belgian value is higher than the national French one, while the French border-regional average lies above the Belgian border-regional average. Comparing the national and border-regional averages, the French border-regional average exceeds the national average, whereas the Belgian averages are similar.

In general, the programme area shows a dynamic settlement development. The need for an integrated approach to spatial development is obvious. Spatial development has to balance the various demands on land use (e.g., residential, commercial, tourism, transport, agriculture, and nature conservation), and this requires ongoing coordination and exchange, also across the border.

**Figure 2.4: Change in settlement areas (2012-2018) (comparison)**



### 2.1.2 Accessibility of the border area

This sub-dimension illustrates the functional travel connections that already exist in the border region. It examines average cross-border travel times for different modes of transport and cross-border catchment areas based on mobility flows. It also considers travel times to and from border crossings. The analysis shows whether mobility flows are integrated between border regions or if the border hampers mobility.

#### 2.1.2.1 Comparative quality of selected cross-border connections

##### Indicator description

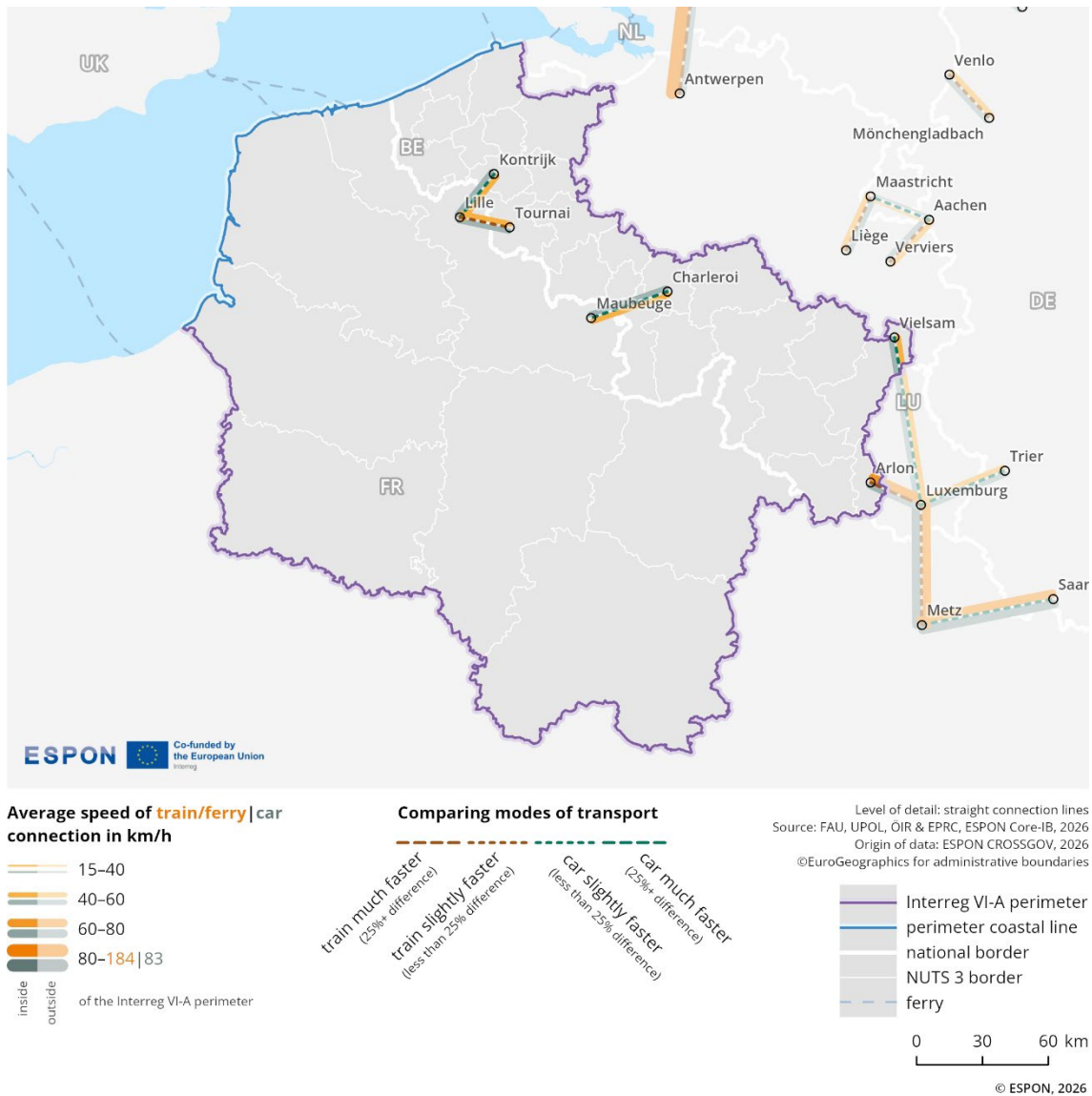
The indicator presents a comparative perspective for different modes of transport (public and private) and their average travel speed (so-called space-time-lines). As such it helps to understand and interpret accessibility patterns along the border and highlights the comparative quality of selected cross-border connections.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Average number and speed of rail connections/ferries, average speed of car connections between selected cities and towns in border regions using Rail Travel Sites, Google Maps, luftlinie.org, Direct Ferries, local ferry companies
- **Temporal coverage:** 2025 (first quarter)
- **Unit:** km/h

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Cross-border accessibility shapes cross-border interactions. Figure 2.5 illustrates this using a "space-time-line" map, which shows car and train travel times in the Belgium-France (Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France) border region as part of an European overview. This visualisation enables an assessment of transport quality by highlighting differences between public (train) and private (car) transport modes.

**Figure 2.5: Comparative quality of selected cross-border connections**



The selection of cities and connections covered is based on a set of criteria applied throughout Europe within the ESPON CROSSGOV project<sup>4</sup>. These criteria include the presence of a railway station, population size, distance to the border, node hub and functionality. The thickness of the lines (orange for trains, grey for cars) indicates the average speed of connections in km/h, with thicker lines representing faster connections. Dotted lines in-between reflect the indexed ratio between train and car speeds. A brown colour scale (values below 100) denotes that trains are faster than cars along the specific route, while a green scale (values above 100) indicates the opposite.

The selected connections within the programme area include Lille-Kortrijk, Lille-Tournai, and Maubeuge-Charleroi. For most of these routes, namely Lille-Kortrijk and Maubeuge-Charleroi, car travel outperforms train connections in terms of speed. Notably, all routes offer relatively fast connections by both train and car.

<sup>4</sup> ESPON CROSSGOV Atlas, see Storymap on 'Space-time-lines': <https://gis-portal.espon.eu/arcgis/apps/storymaps/collections/345c978ad784ad-fac30c16b90219d35?item=4>

### 2.1.2.2 Cross-border catchment area based on mobility flows

#### Indicator description

This indicator measures the movement of people across borders. The density of cross-border movements by Twitter/X users is displayed on a grid cell covering an area of 20x20 km. The indicator does not differentiate between reasons for movement.

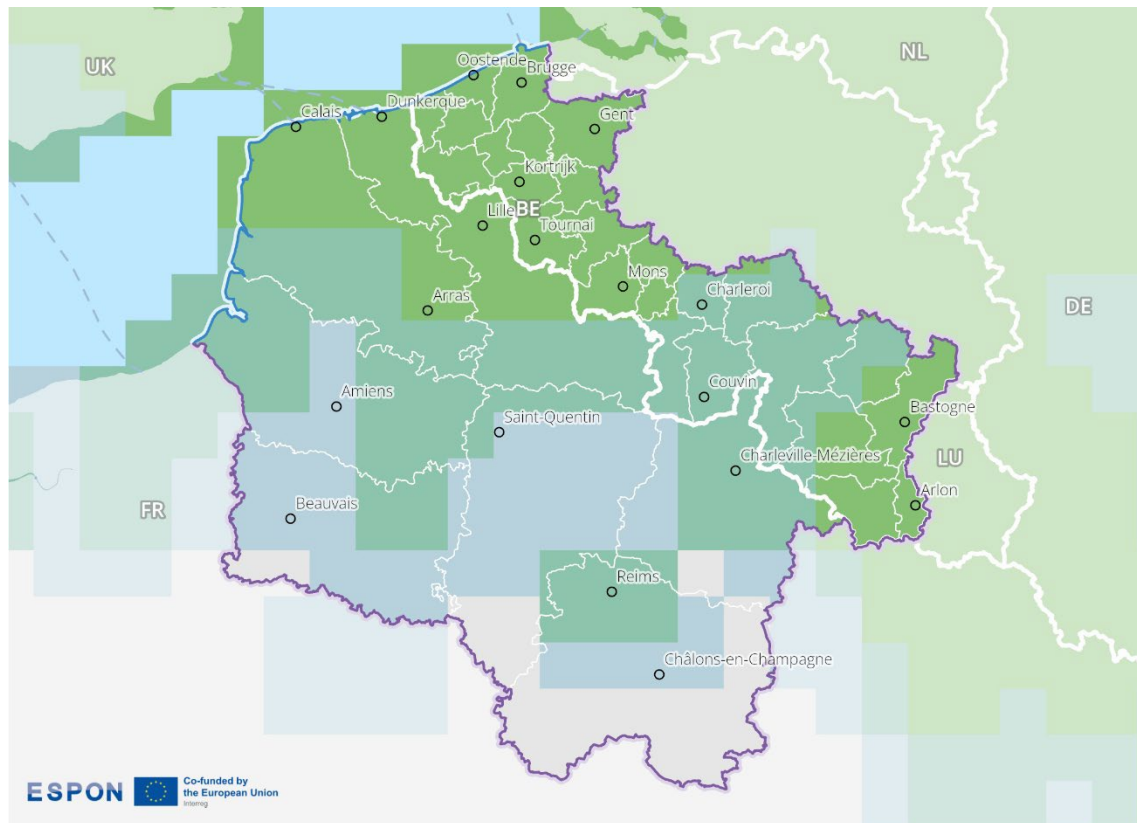
- **Source/method of retrieval:** The indicator is calculated based on Twitter (currently X) data. The digital footprint of individual users provides information about physical mobility flows and is used to calculate cross-border catchment areas of different intensity.
- **Temporal coverage:** 2013-2023
- **Unit:** n/a

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

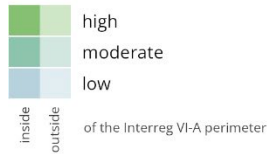
Figure 2.6 shows the cross-border catchment area in the border region based on mobility flows from 2013 to 2023, highlighting estimated cross-border mobility intensity across 3 different quartiles. The first quartile represents the 25% highest mobility intensity shown in dark green, the second quartile represents 25-50% coloured in green-blue, and the third quartile represents 50-75% in light blue.

The intensity of cross-border mobility of people within this cross-border region is rather variable. The highest mobility intensity is observed in the northern part of the region, particularly around the cities of Dunkerque, Brugge, Gent, and Lille, as well as in a smaller area in the southeast near the city of Bastogne closely linked to Luxembourg. In the central part of the region, mobility intensity reaches moderate levels. Further from the national border, particularly in the French part of the region, the intensity is low (e.g., around the cities of Amiens, Saint-Quentin, or Châlons-en-Champagne).

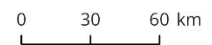
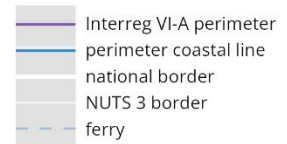
**Figure 2.6: Cross-border mobility intensity**



**Estimated cross-border mobility intensity (2013-2023)**



Level of detail: 20km aggregated grid  
 Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
 Origin of data: ESPON CROSSGOV, 2026  
 ©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries



© ESPON, 2026

### 2.1.2.3 Cross-border travel-time accessibility

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the time it takes to travel from any location within a region to the next border crossing, using grid data and subsequent categorisations into accessibility groups of 30, 60 and 90 minutes. It reflects the accessibility in cross-border areas, considering road transport. The indicator can describe the quality and speed of road connections and thus spatial reach of the cross-border services.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Based on the OpenStreetMap road network, the travel time to the border is calculated for a grid of the border area. Based on this, areas are calculated within which border crossings can be reached below thresholds of 30, 60 and 90 minutes. As additional visual element, key services pharmacies, doctors, hospitals and shops (retrieved from the ESPON PROFECY project) are displayed and categorised into the accessibility groups.
- **Temporal coverage:** 2025 (first quarter, for accessibility data), 2021 (for service facility data)
- **Unit:** Minutes

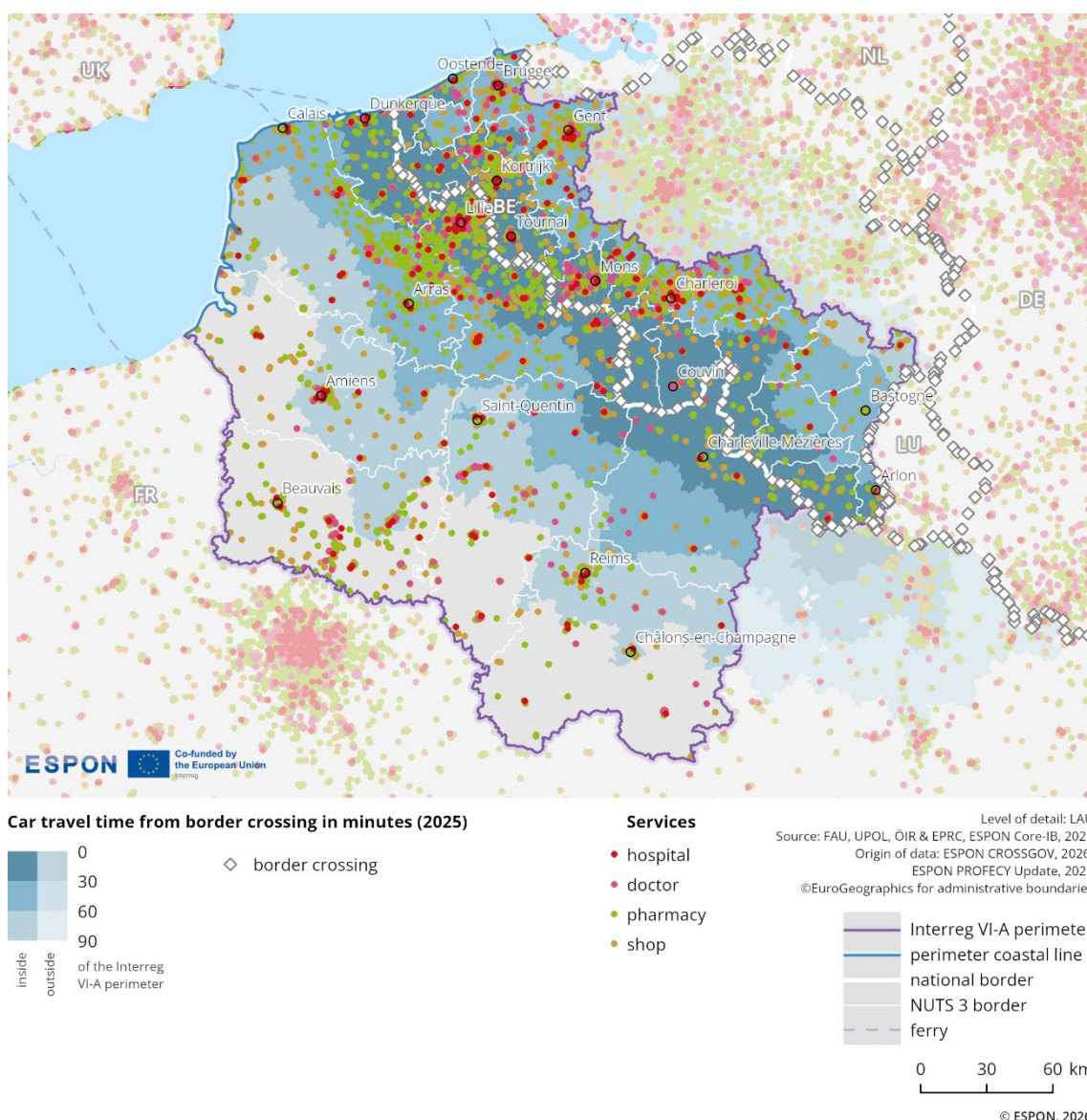
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.7 illustrates cross-border travel time accessibility in the Interreg area, showing the time distance from the national border in 2025. The legend indicates 3 travel time categories in minutes (30, 60, 90) represented by different shades of blue. In addition, it marks the location of services, including hospitals, doctors (general practitioners), pharmacies, and shops (supermarkets and convenient stores), with distinct coloured symbols.

The map shows that along the entire border, the travel-time accessibility is under 30 minutes without any interruptions, due to the continuous border crossings. This indicates a good road network and accessibility in cross-border areas. The parts of the French region further from the border have accessibility times of over 90 minutes. The areas of travel time accessibility thresholds 30- and 60-minute form parallel belts on both sides of the border.

The largest concentration of services, including shops, hospitals, doctors, and pharmacies, is located in the northern part of the border, around the French city of Lille. On the Belgian side, the cities of Charleroi and Gent are important service centres. The southern part of the territory shows a lower incidence of services.

**Figure 2.7: Travel-time accessibility from border crossings**



### 2.1.3 Key messages on the territorial dimension

The Belgium–France border region, which includes Wallonia, Flanders and northern France, is characterised by high cross-border integration. This is reflected in population density, cross-border travel time accessibility and cross-border mobility intensity.

The region follows the broader European trend of a slowly growing but ageing population. Overall, it surpasses the European average in terms of population density and shows notable growth of settlement areas across the border region. However, it is important to differentiate between dense urban networks in the northern part of the border region around Lille, Kortrijk, Brugge, Gent and Charleroi and more sparsely populated areas, like the Ardennes and the French hinterland. The spatial distribution within the domestic regions of Belgium and France shows a stark contrast in population development over the last decade: Belgium experienced significantly growth, whereas population numbers in France declined. This difference can largely be explained by Belgium’s more homogeneous settlement structure, particularly in areas adjacent to the border. In contrast, the southern parts of the French border region remain relatively peripheral in terms of population density and service provision.

An accessibility analysis shows that the Belgian side benefits from high connectivity to the border, with most areas reachable within 60 minutes. On the French side, however, the programme area extends further into the hinterland, creating zones that are less relevant from a cross-border perspective.

Mobility patterns indicate 2 primary catchment areas: one centred on the Lille-Kortrijk conurbation, and the other centred on Luxembourg. Although Luxembourg lies outside the programme area, it plays a significant role in the broader cross-border context.

## 2.2 Economic dimension

The economic dimension includes analyses of gross domestic product, labour market conditions, competitiveness, and key infrastructure and housing indicators. The aim is to illustrate the impact of the border on economic performance, whether it acts as a barrier or a bridge, and the extent to which integration is supported by labour mobility, remote working, and infrastructure connectivity.

### 2.2.1 Gross Domestic Product

This sub-dimension illustrates the economic situation of the border region by analysing gross domestic product (GDP). It shows economic development within the border region and how this has changed over time. Comparisons with the respective countries and the EU average provide important context for understanding the region's dynamics.

#### 2.2.1.1 Gross domestic product per capita at current market prices

##### Indicator description

The indicator shows the regional GDP/capita in current prices and its development over the past years. It highlights structural differences and similarities between the border region and the respective national figures as well as the European average. Furthermore, it highlights patterns within the border region, although has to be interpreted with care in the case of a strong presence of commuters.

- **Source:** Eurostat, Annual Regional Database of the European Commission (ARDECO)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2010-2023
- **Unit:** Euro per capita

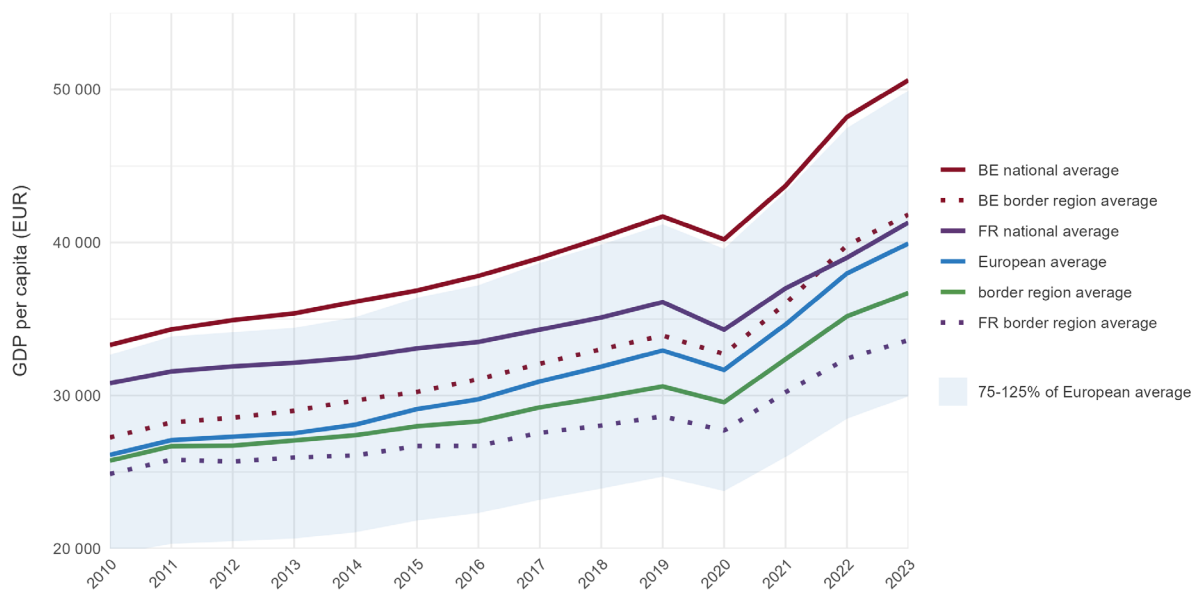
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

The cross-border region shows a GDP/capita value of 97.3% of the EU average in 2022 (see Figure 2.8) and 98.8% of the average in European border regions in general. The region marks a 28.7% increase of GDP per capita in the border region between 2014 and 2022<sup>5</sup>. This corresponds to a 7.1 percentage points lower increase of GDP per capita in the border region compared to the EU average. Furthermore, this corresponds to 6.6 percentage points lower increase of GDP per capita in the border region compared to the average of European border regions. The GDP per capita in the Belgian border regions is around a fifth lower than the national average, which significantly outperforms the EU average by more than 25 percent. Similarly, the numbers of French border regions also lay significantly below the rest of France. While France has a higher GDP per capita than the EU average, its border region displays numbers below the EU average. However, the Belgian border region exceeds the European average.

<sup>5</sup> Percentage changes are calculated using Eurostat data to ensure harmonised statistics from official sources. The latest year for which full coverage of all European regions is available on Eurostat is 2022. For visualisation purposes, ARDECO data has been used to enable longer time series to be visualised by filling the official dataset's existing gaps with model-based estimates. Therefore, slight deviations between the calculation and visualisation are possible.

Belgian GDP growth, both nationally and the border region, is on par with the EU, while France and the French border region performed less dynamically over this timespan. This led to the programme area falling below the EU average growth during the last years.

**Figure 2.8: Gross domestic product at current market prices (per capita)**



## 2.2.2 Labour market and commuting

This sub-dimension highlights the existing and potential functional links within the labour market of the border region. It examines the employment situation and commuting patterns, as well as the role of telework agreements, and considers developments over time based on analysed indicators. The analysis identifies factors that facilitate or hamper cross-border labour market integration.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See also: European Commission 2024: Cross-Border Regional Labour Market Analysis, <https://op.europa.eu/s/AazM>

### 2.2.2.1 Share of employment

#### Indicator description

This indicator shows the share of employees in the population aged 15 to 64. Although it does not fully capture entrepreneurs, marginal employees, or civil servants, this is an important statistic for understanding general labour market patterns. It covers two aspects: first, high values can result from a high proportion of the resident population being employed. Second, high values can result from a high number of incoming commuters (from other NUTS3 regions within the country or from neighbouring countries). The same arguments apply to low values: they may indicate low levels of employment, or they may result from high shares of outgoing commuters. Values of more than 100% are possible, since the number of incoming commuters can exceed the number of inhabitants aged 15 to 64 (including both domestic and cross-border commuters).

- **Source:** Eurostat, Annual Regional Database of the European Commission (ARDECO)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2014-2023
- **Unit:** Share in %

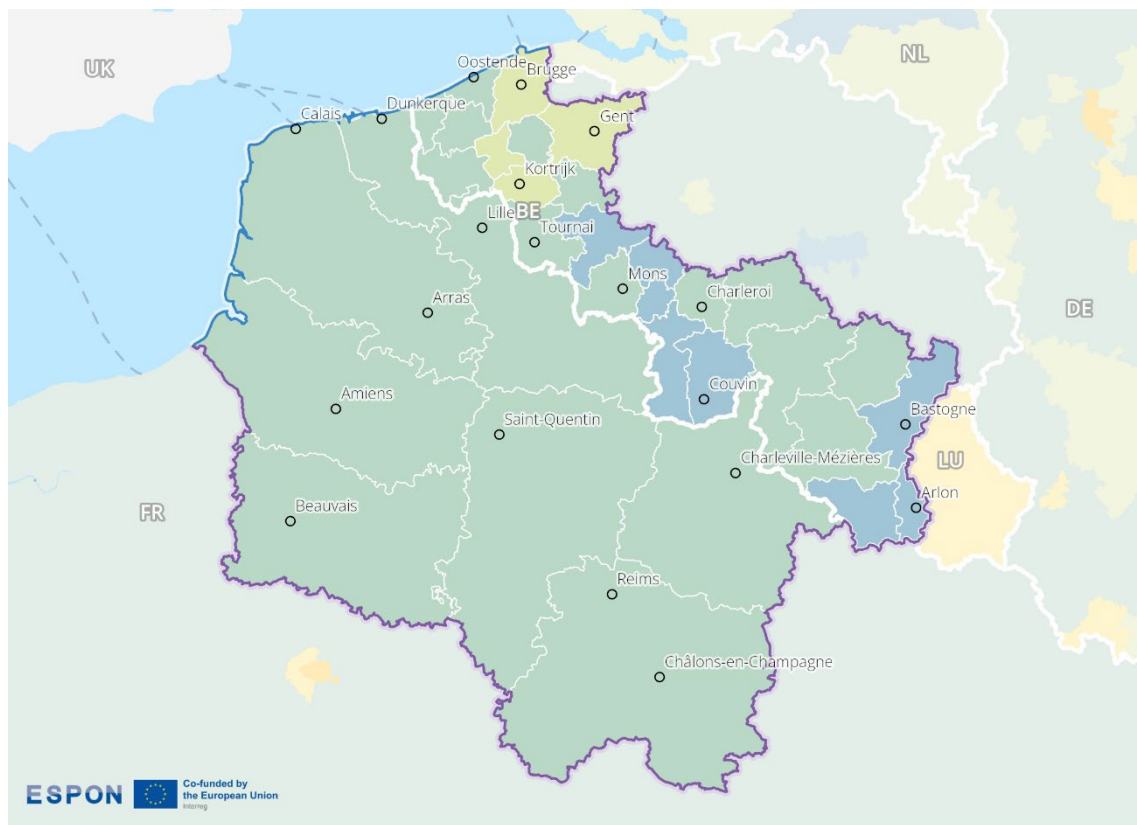
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.9 illustrates the share of employment per capita in the population aged 15 to 64 in 2023. The data are categorised into ranges from below 50% (twice as many residents aged 15 to 64 as employees) to above 200% (twice as many employees as residents aged 15 to 64), with 100% representing a balanced ratio. Blue or green-coloured regions indicate more residents aged 15 to 64 than employees, while yellow regions indicate more employees than residents aged 15 to 64.

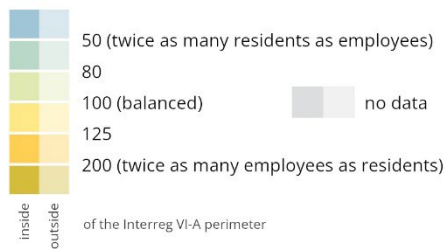
The share of employment in this border region is relatively stable, with the regional average standing at 64.57% in 2023, representing an increase of 6.73 percentage points since 2014. Due to the very similar values of the indicator across the region, differences between the individual countries are not particularly pronounced. In the French part of the region, all values fall within the 50–80% range. On the Belgian side, however, the values are more variable. The highest values (80–100%) are found in the northern part of the Belgian section of the border region, while lowest values (below 50%) are observed in its central and southern areas. When comparing the share of employment in this border region with different averages, the following can be observed (see Figure 2.10):

- › In comparison to the EU average, the cross-border region average is 11 percentage points lower (2023); in 2014, the difference was 9.4 percentage points indicating a slightly divergent development.
- › Compared to the national average in Belgium, the cross-border region is 4 percentage points lower (2023), down from a 5 percentage point gap in 2014.
- › Compared to the national average in France, the cross-border region average is 7.9 percentage points lower (2023); in 2014, the difference was 7.4 percentage points.
- › In 2023 the Belgian border area records 2.8 percentage points below the Belgian national average, while the French border area lags by 8.6 percentage points compared to the French national average.
- › When compared to the average of all cross-border regions, this region falls 9.9 percentage points short (2023); in 2014, the difference was 8.5 percentage points.

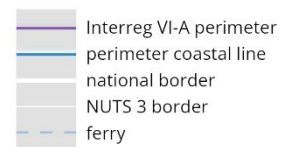
**Figure 2.9: Employment share<sup>7</sup>**



**Share of employment per capita in % (2023)**



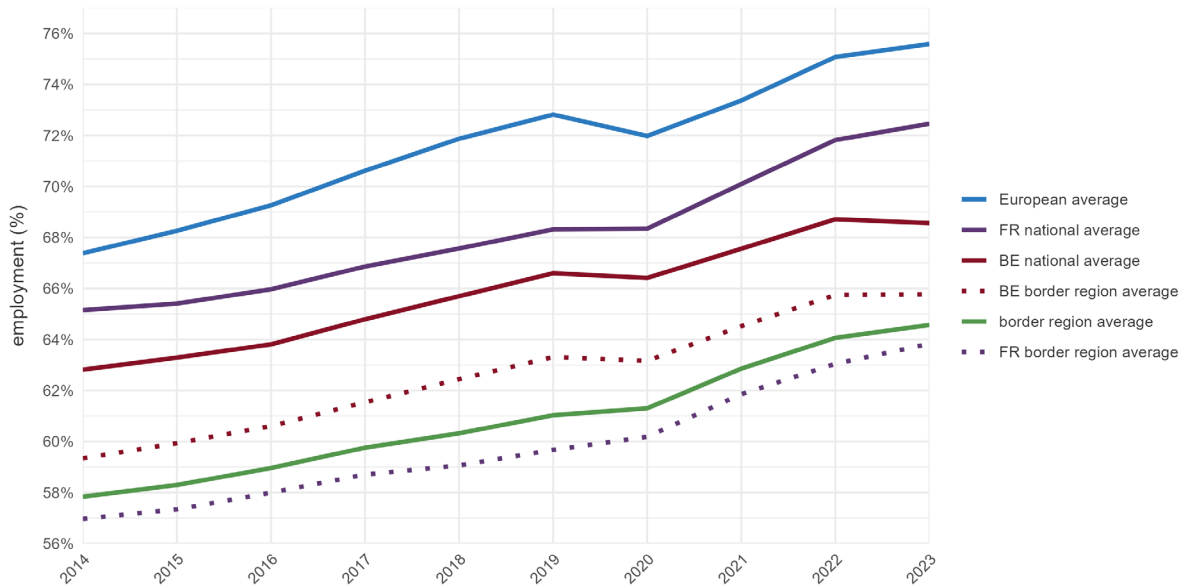
Level of detail: NUTS3  
 Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
 Origin of data: JRC/REGIO, Eurostat, 2025  
 ©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries



© ESPON, 2026

<sup>7</sup> Note: In this map, 'residents' refers to the population aged 15 to 64.

**Figure 2.10: Employment share over time (comparison)**



### 2.2.2.2 Share of working-age population

#### Indicator description

This indicator shows the share of people aged 15 to 64 in the total population, reflecting the potential working-age population. The population counted includes all residents who live in the country permanently, excluding foreign students and military personnel. Using the 15–64 age range is a standard European statistical proxy, since differences in retirement age or labour participation across countries cannot be captured systematically. It allows for regional differentiation of potential workforce throughout the border region.

- **Source:** Eurostat, Annual Regional Database of the European Commission (ARDECO)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2014-2023
- **Unit:** Share in %

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.11 illustrates the evolution of the share of the working-age population in the Belgium-France (Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France) cross-border region between 2014 and 2023. In 2023, the cross-border region shows an average working-age population share of 62.6%, compared to the European average of 63.9% and 63.7% for the average of all cross-border regions.

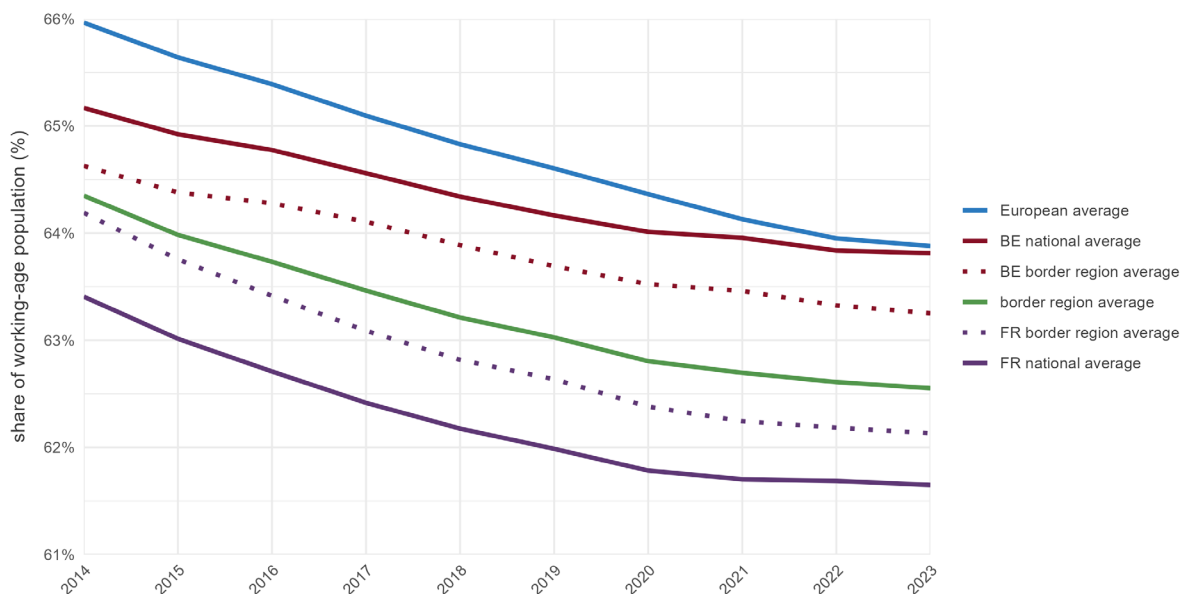
The share of the working-age population in the whole cross-border region is slightly lower compared to both the Belgian border average (63.3%) and the Belgian national average (63.8%). In contrast, it is slightly higher than the French border average (62.1%) and the French national average (61.7%).

The region experienced a 1.7 percentage point decrease in the share of working-age population between 2014 (64.3%) and 2023 (62.6%). This decline is similar to the European average, which dropped by 2.1 percentage points in the same period. While all areas in the region show a declining trend for the analysed years, the rate of decline has been more pronounced in the French parts (-2.1 percentage

points at the border and -1.7 percentage points at the national level) than in the Belgian parts (-1.3 percentage points at the border and -1.4 percentage points at the national level).

This suggests a moderate demographic ageing trend across the entire Belgium-France cross-border region, with relative stability on the Belgian side and a more visible decline on the French side. Despite the decrease, the region remains close to the EU average, though slightly below the overall cross-border average.

**Figure 2.11: Share of working-age population over time (comparison)**



### 2.2.2.3 Employment by sector

#### Indicator description

The indicator differentiates the number of jobs in a region by sector. This indicator focuses on workplace-based employment, providing insight into the employment landscape of a region. The dataset can be disaggregated according to “10-sector” NACE (Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne) classifications, allowing for detailed analysis of employment distribution across various industries.

- **Source:** Eurostat, Annual Regional Database of the European Commission (ARDECO)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2014-2023
- **Unit:** Share in %

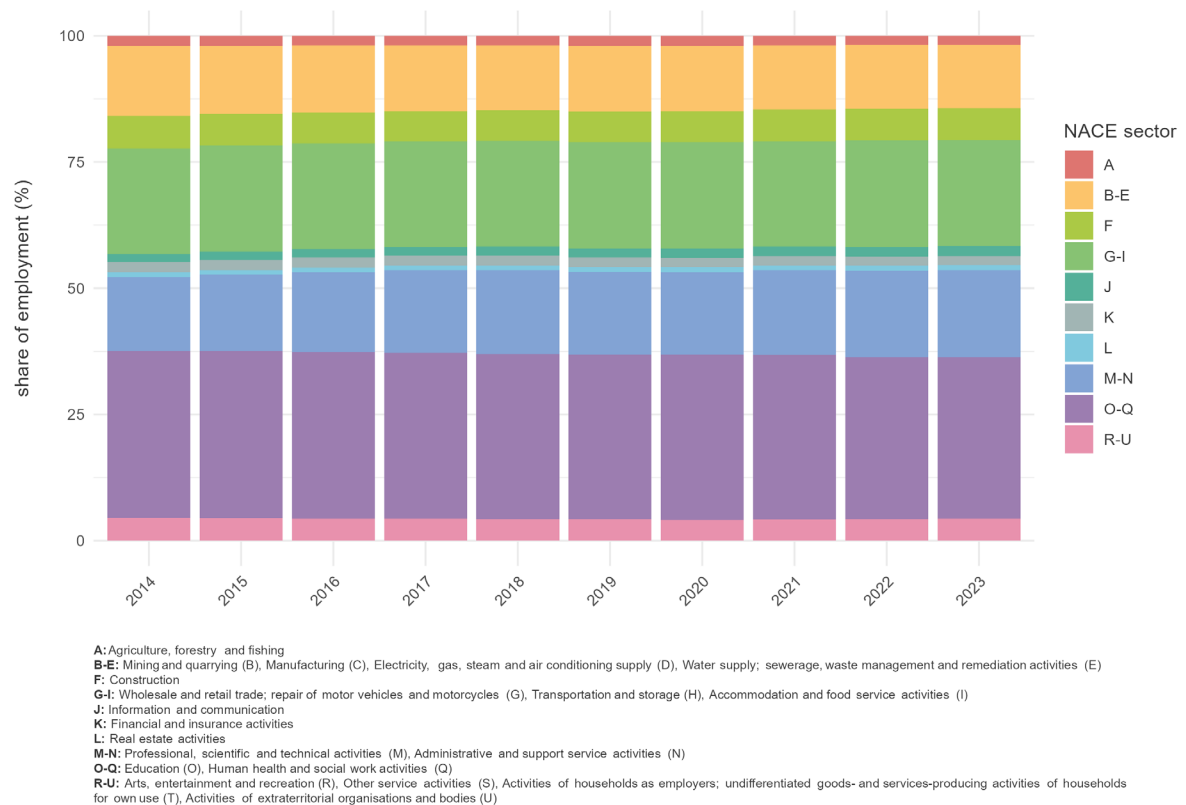
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.12 illustrates the relative number of jobs in the border area differentiated by sectors. It shows where jobs are located (not where employed persons live). This workplace-based indicator offers insight into the employment structure of a region.

The dataset uses a '10-sector' classification based on NACE (Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne) categories. The sectoral breakdown is as follows:

- > A: Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- > B-E: Mining and quarrying (B), Manufacturing (C), Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (D), Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities (E)
- > F: Construction
- > G-I: Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (G), Transportation and storage (H), Accommodation and food service activities (I)
- > J: Information and communication
- > K: Financial and insurance activities
- > L: Real estate activities
- > M-N: Professional, scientific and technical activities (M), Administrative and support service activities (N)
- > O-Q: Education (O), Human health and social work activities (Q)
- > R-U: Arts, entertainment and recreation (R), Other service activities (S), Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use (T), Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies (U)

**Figure 2.12: Employment by sector (comparison)**



Between 2014 and 2023, the relative number of jobs in the different sectors remains fairly stable. There is a slight decline in the share of employment in Mining and quarrying (B), Manufacturing (C), Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (D), Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities (E), Education (O), and Human health and social work activities (Q). Conversely, there is a modest increase in the number of jobs in professional, scientific and technical activities (M) and administrative and support service activities (N).

Over the entire period, the sectors with the highest share of jobs are 'O-Q' (Education, Human health and social work activities), 'G-I' (Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles,

Transportation and storage, Accommodation and food service activities) and 'M-N' (Professional, scientific and technical activities, Administrative and support service activities). Among the sectors with the smallest share of jobs is 'A' (agriculture, forestry and fishing), despite the large amount of agricultural acreage in the border region.

#### 2.2.2.4 Outgoing cross-border commuters

##### Indicator description

The indicator shows outgoing cross-border commuting dynamics at NUTS3 level. Even though no origin-destination information can be provided, it is assumed that commuters primarily travel across the nearest border. Spatial, economic and population arguments are combined to calculate the number of outgoing cross-border commuters.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Eurostat/LFS data on outgoing commuters currently available on NUTS2 level has been regionalised for NUTS3 by means of weighting by border length, NUTS3 population-weighted centroid distance to border, population per NUTS3 region (15–64 years old) and real compensation per employee
- **Temporal coverage:** 2015-2023
- **Unit:** Share in %

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Commuting is one of the most relevant cross-border flows to identify functional linkages. Figure 2.13 illustrates the share of outgoing commuters per capita for each NUTS3 region (more concretely speaking the share of outgoing commuters among the residential population of the age group 15-64 years old, resembling the potential labour force). Origin-destination information cannot be provided, but the share of outgoing commuters in regions close to the border indicates the relevance of commuting. It highlights functional relations in the labour market within the cross-border region.

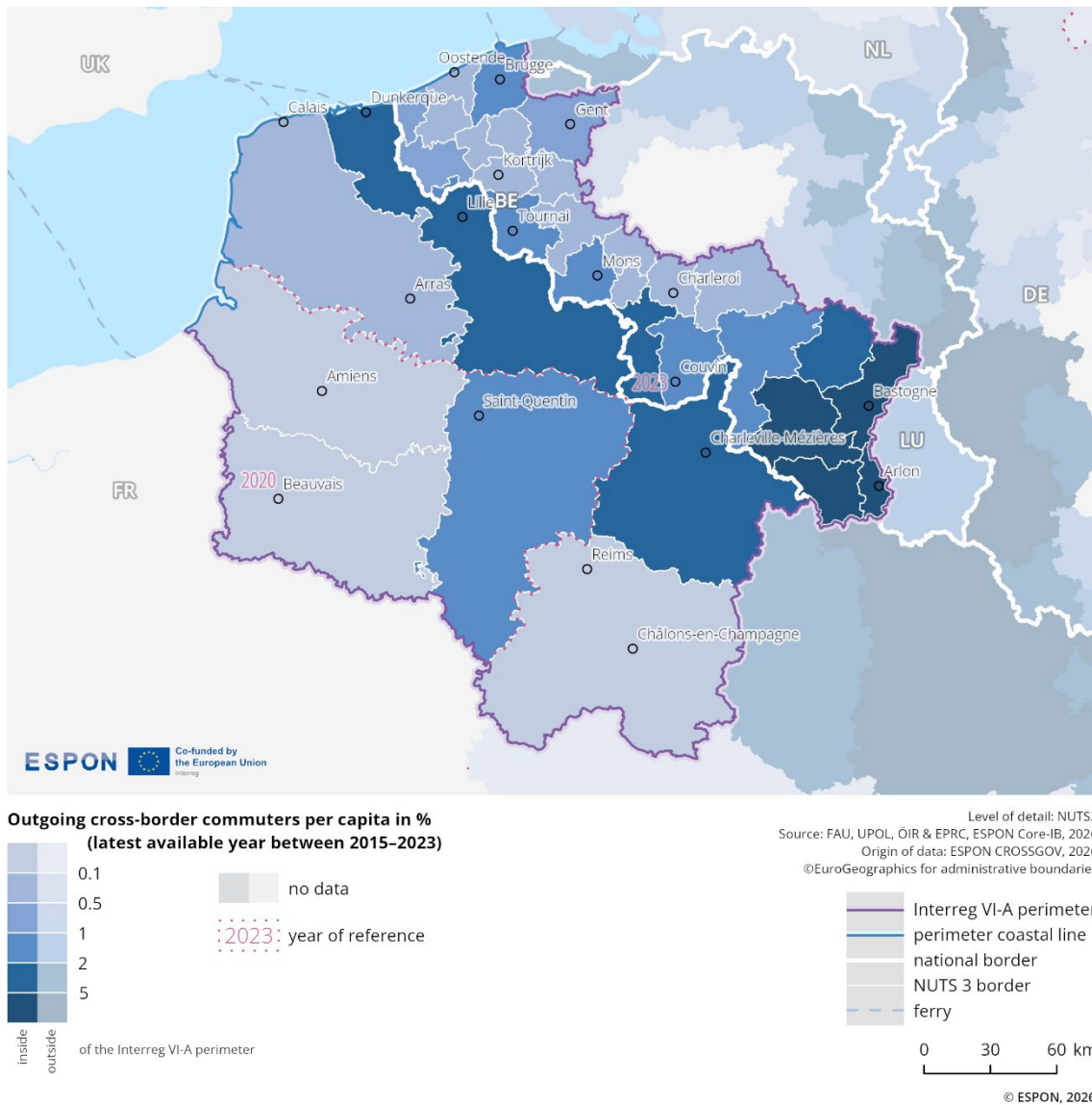
The map illustrates the share of cross-border commuters, based on the most recent available data. It shows relatively strong and fairly evenly distributed cross-border commuting activity in areas directly adjacent to the border on both the Belgian and French sides.

The southern part of the border area stands out in particular, with high levels of outgoing commuters in Arr. Arlon, Arr. Neufchâteau, Arr. Virton, and Arr. Bastogne (Belgium)<sup>8</sup>. However, it is highly likely that these commuters are primarily heading to Luxembourg.

Other 'hotspots' include the French regions of Nord and Ardennes, as well as, on the Belgian side, Arr. Thuin and Arr. Marche-en-Famenne. These NUTS3 regions also show particular elevated shares of outgoing cross-border commuters per capita. Furthermore, a number of Belgian NUTS 3 regions adjacent to the border also exhibit this characteristic, albeit to a lesser degree. This includes for example the Arr. Tournai-Mouscron (Belgium) close to the Lille-Kortrijk conurbation. Overall, the French region of Nord, which includes Lille, has a high share of outgoing cross-border commuters heading to Belgium. However, focusing on Lille, the adjacent Belgian arrondissements have lower shares directed towards France, despite Lille's centrality.

<sup>8</sup> See Eurostat Statistical Atlas for NUTS3 (2021) regions: <https://ec.europa.eu/statistical-atlas/viewer/?config=typologies.json&ch=NUTS&mids=BKGCNT,NUTS2021L3,CNTOVL&o=1,1,0.7&center=49.69576,14.3332,4&lcis=NUTS2021L3&>

**Figure 2.13: Outgoing cross-border commuting patterns**



### 2.2.2.5 Cross-border telework agreements

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows what kind of legal framework for cross-border telework is enacted.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** The indicator is based on information about the legal framework for social security regarding cross-border teleworking, categorised by border pair.
- **Temporal coverage:** Status as of March 2025
- **Unit:** n/a

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

The two countries involved in the programme are signatories of the 2023 Framework Agreement on Cross-Border Telework. Under this agreement, cross-border workers can telework from their country of residence for up to 50% of their total working time without affecting their social security affiliation.

### 2.2.3 Competitiveness

This sub-dimension illustrates the competitiveness of the border region by analysing the main industry sectors that contribute to its economic development. It assesses gross value added (GVA) at basic prices by sector, as well as nominal compensation per hour worked, in order to understand productivity levels and sectoral strengths.

#### 2.2.3.1 Gross value added at basic prices by sector

##### Indicator description

The indicator shows the gross value added (GVA), which is a measure of the contribution of a country or region to the economy. Regional GVA represents the value generated by all units involved in the production of goods and services within a specific area. This indicator can be disaggregated by industry and service sector, allowing for a detailed analysis of economic contributions across different fields. Additionally, the sum of GVA across all industries or sectors, combined with taxes on products and minus subsidies on products, yields the gross domestic product (GDP) of the region. The dataset is available in "10-sector" NACE classifications, facilitating comprehensive evaluations of the regional economy.

- **Source:** Annual Regional Database of the European Commission (ARDECO)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2014-2023
- **Unit:** Million purchasing power standards (PPS)

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

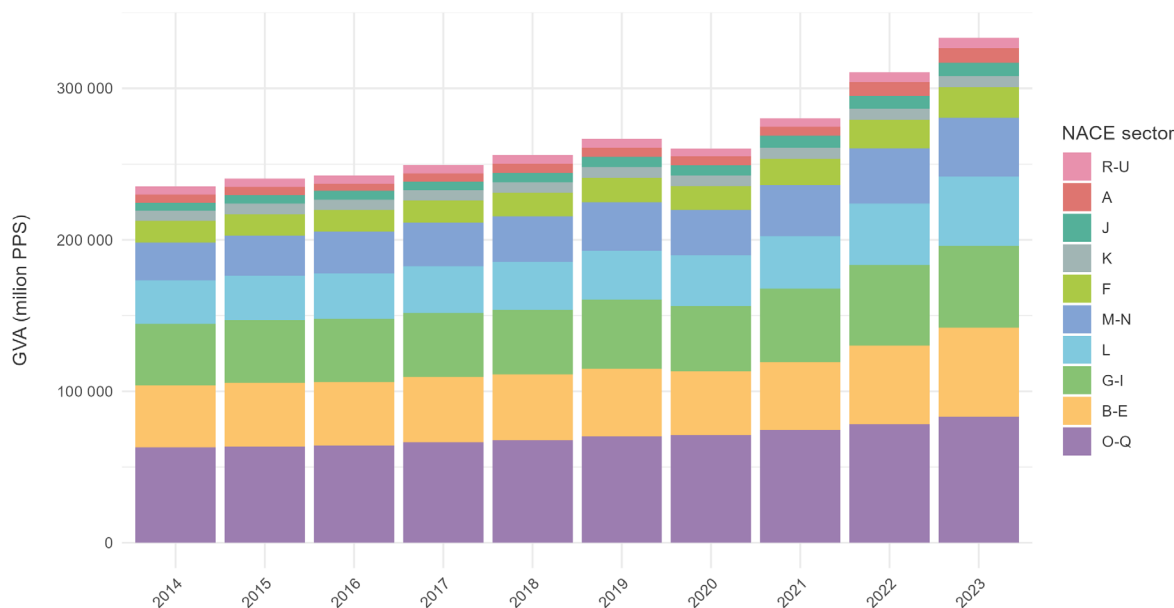
Figure 2.14 visualises gross value added (GVA), which is an important indicator of economic activity. GVA measures the value created by all economic activities involved in producing goods and services in a specific area. It is differentiated by sectors to provide detailed insights into the economic contributions of different fields.

The dataset uses a '10-sector' classification based on NACE categories. The sectoral breakdown is as follows:

- › A: Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- › B-E: Mining and quarrying (B), Manufacturing (C), Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (D), Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities (E)
- › F: Construction
- › G-I: Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (G), Transportation and storage (H), Accommodation and food service activities (I)
- › J: Information and communication
- › K: Financial and insurance activities
- › L: Real estate activities
- › M-N: Professional, scientific and technical activities (M), Administrative and support service activities (N)
- › O-Q: Education (O), Human health and social work activities (Q)
- › R-U: Arts, entertainment and recreation (R), Other service activities (S), Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use (T), Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies (U)

Between 2014 and 2023, the GVA in the border area of Belgium-France (Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France) increased by 42%, rising from 235,291 million purchasing power standards (PPS) to 333,383 million PPS. Sector groups B-E, G-I, and O-Q together make up over half of the total GVA, highlighting their significant contribution to the regional economy within the border area. The sector groups O-Q contributed the largest share, with a total of 83,308 million PPS in 2023. This underlines the significance of sectors such as Education (O), Human health and social work activities (Q) in the Belgium-France (Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France) border region. Furthermore, Real estate activities (L) have become increasingly relevant over this timespan.

**Figure 2.14: Gross value added at basic prices by sector (comparison)**



A: Agriculture, forestry and fishing  
 B-E: Mining and quarrying (B), Manufacturing (C), Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (D), Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities (E)  
 F: Construction  
 G-I: Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (G), Transportation and storage (H), Accommodation and food service activities (I)  
 J: Information and communication  
 K: Financial and insurance activities  
 L: Real estate activities  
 M-N: Professional, scientific and technical activities (M), Administrative and support service activities (N)  
 O-Q: Education (O), Human health and social work activities (Q)  
 R-U: Arts, entertainment and recreation (R), Other service activities (S), Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use (T), Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies (U)

### 2.2.3.2 Nominal compensation per hour worked

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the average income paid for each hour worked, known as compensation per hour worked. This measure is calculated by dividing the “compensation of employees at current prices” by the total number of “hours worked (employees).” Employees, in this context, are defined as individuals engaged by contract in productive activities for a resident unit, receiving remuneration irrespective of their place of residence. The total hours worked is considered the most appropriate measure of labour input, representing the aggregate number of hours actually worked by employees. This indicator provides valuable insights into labour productivity and wage dynamics within the economy.

- **Source:** Annual Regional Database of the European Commission (ARDECO)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2023 (missing data from 2023 in Switzerland were supplemented by values from 2022)
- **Unit:** Euro

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

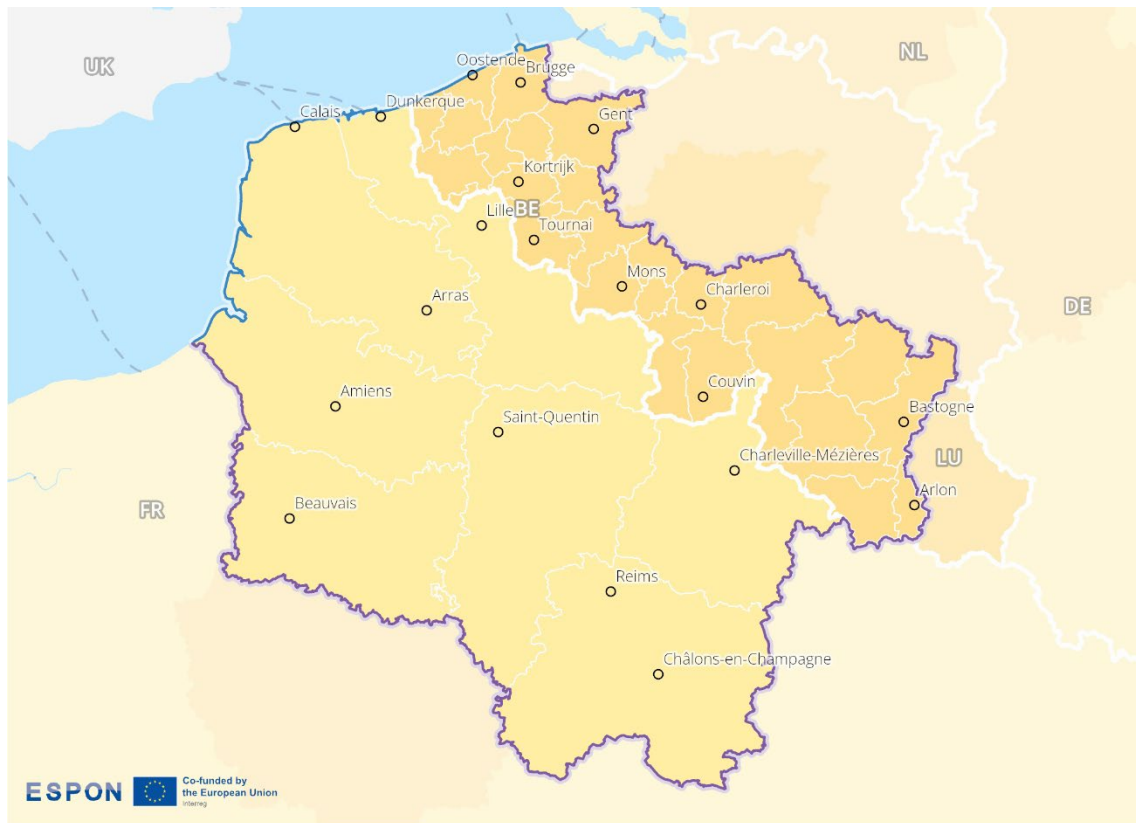
Figure 2.15 shows the average values for the 'compensation per hour worked'. This indicator is calculated by dividing the total compensation of employees (at current prices) by the total number of hours worked by those employees. In this context, 'employees' are defined as individuals engaged by contract in productive activities. The data is available for the place of work, regardless of the place of residence. Total hours worked represent the actual number of hours worked by employees and are considered the most accurate measure of labour input.

In 2023, nominal compensation per hour worked in the Wallonie–Vlaanderen–France border region appears to be relatively evenly distributed. In all regions, the average hourly income ranges between €30 and €50. The Belgian NUTS3 regions report comparatively higher values. For example, Gent reports values of €45.80 per hour, respectively, whereas no French region surpasses €40 per hour<sup>9</sup>. To contextualise the regional pattern shown in the figure, it is noteworthy that the national average hourly compensation reaches €44.50 in Belgium and €36.30 in France, which helps situate the border region within national labour productivity context.

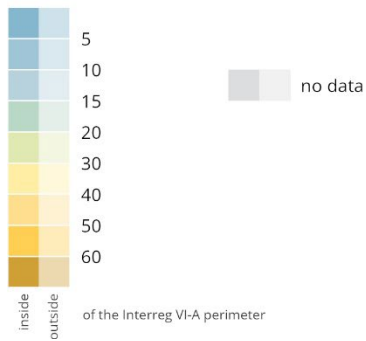
Cross-border wage differences can encourage labour migration from lower-wage areas to more economically prosperous neighbouring regions, creating both opportunities and challenges for local labour markets and social systems. However, wage differences do not appear to be particularly pronounced in this cross-border region.

<sup>9</sup> See Eurostat Statistical Atlas for NUTS3 (2021) regions: <https://ec.europa.eu/statistical-atlas/viewer/?config=typologies.json&ch=NUTS&mids=BKGCNT,NUTS2021L3,CNTOVL&o=1,1,0.7&center=49.69576,14.3332,4&lcis=NUTS2021L3&>

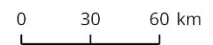
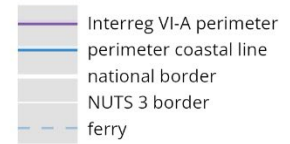
**Figure 2.15: Average income per hour**



**Average income per hour worked in euros (2023)**



Level of detail: NUTS3  
 Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
 Origin of data: ARDECO database, JRC / REGIO, 2006-2023  
 ©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries



© ESPON, 2026

## 2.2.4 Infrastructure and housing

This sub-dimension shows the impact of the border on infrastructure and housing in the region. It assesses housing prices and average internet speed in order to identify cross-border effects, including potential price spillovers and disparities. The analysis reveals whether infrastructure and housing markets facilitate integration or expose structural challenges that are specific to the border area.

### 2.2.4.1 Advertised sales prices

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the advertised sales price per square meter for houses/appartements as retrieved from commercial real estate websites at national level. In the cross-border region, local differences between average sales prices are highlighted and the “cutting” effect of the border and its influence on price levels is visualised.

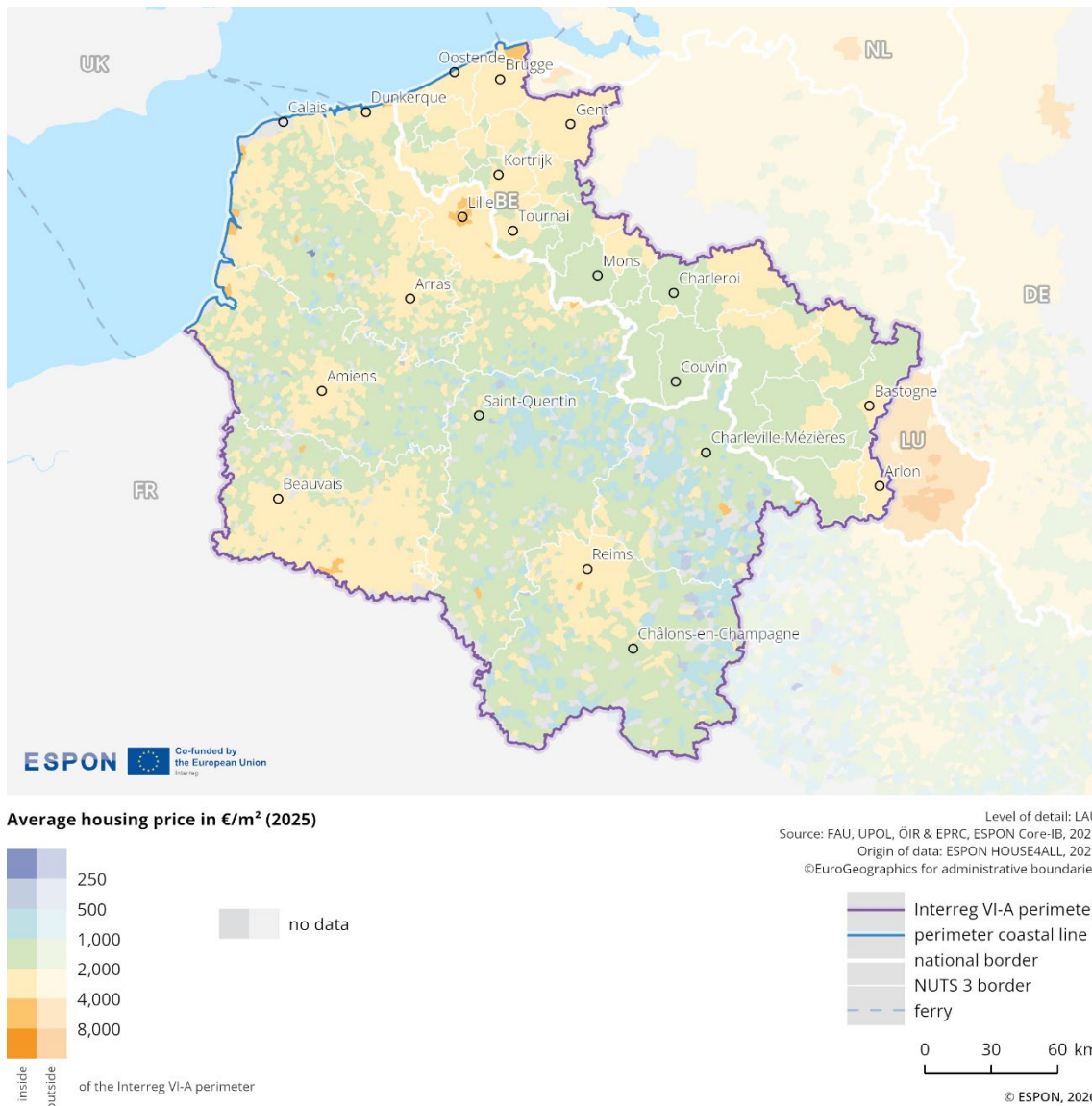
- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processed ESPON House4all data. The original data is collected via web-scraping of national listing websites over a one-year period.
- **Temporal coverage:** 2024/2025
- **Unit:** Average price per square meter (€/m<sup>2</sup>)

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.16 illustrates the advertised sales price of housing in 2025 across the border region. The data are categorised into ranges of average housing price per square metre, from below 250 €/m<sup>2</sup> up to more than 8,000 €/m<sup>2</sup>, shown in colours ranging from purple and blue to green, yellow and orange.

The average price ranges from 1,000 €/m<sup>2</sup> to a maximum of 4,000 €/m<sup>2</sup> across the whole cross-border area. Higher prices can be observed both in and around Lille, as well as in coastal regions. In the south-eastern part of the French border region apart from the area around Reims, prices drop below 1,000 €/m<sup>2</sup>. The border does not constitute a significant barrier in terms of average selling prices.

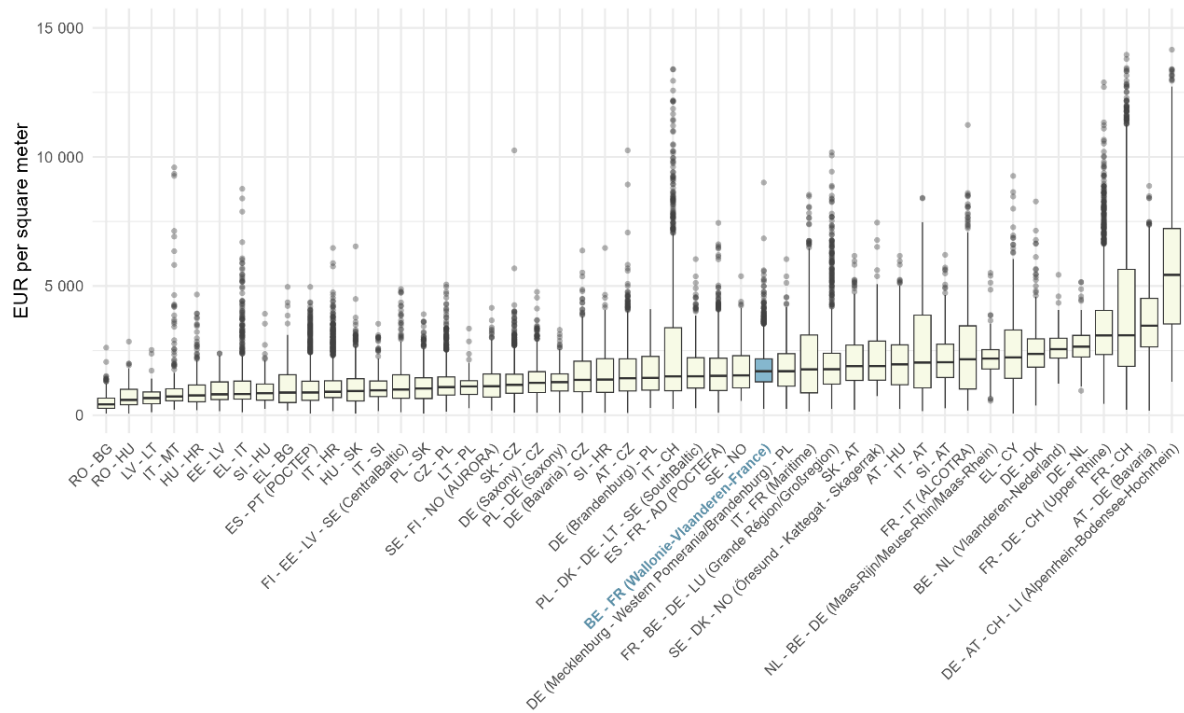
**Figure 2.16: Advertised housing prices**



The part of the border region in Belgium has an average advertised sales price of around 1,990 €/m<sup>2</sup>. The average advertised sales price in the French border region is around 1,770 €/m<sup>2</sup>, though this must be viewed in the context of a wider range, resulting in significant local differences. The average advertised sales price in this whole border region is 1,781 €/m<sup>2</sup>. It is below the average of all EU evaluated border regions, which is 1,900 €/m<sup>2</sup>.

In the European context this cross-border region is in the seventh decile of all EU evaluated border regions (see Figure 2.17) regarding its median value, making it one of the more expensive housing markets in European border regions, despite the lower average. The value distribution highlights the local differences with rather low values as well as several outliers (shown as individual dots) above 3,500 €/m<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 2.17: Advertised housing prices (comparison)**



### 2.2.4.2 Average internet speed

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the population weighted average internet speed available at municipal level. It highlights differences in the “digital preparedness”. In border regions, this indicator is particularly relevant for identifying digital infrastructure gaps that may hamper balanced development and cross-border integration.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing of data provided by Speedtest by Ookla Global Fixed and Mobile Network Performance Maps, based on Ookla’s analysis of Speedtest Intelligence data.
- **Temporal coverage:** 2022
- **Unit:** Download speed in Mbps

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

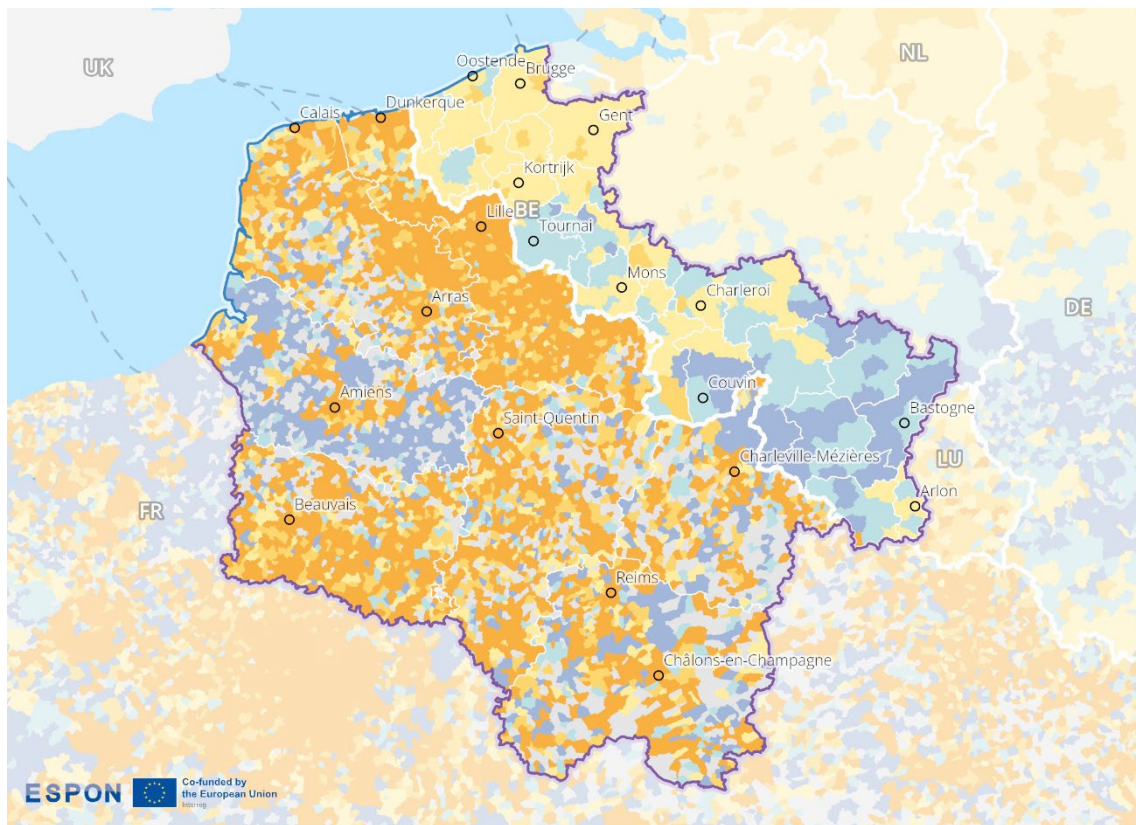
Digitalisation is a highly relevant issue in European border regions, with the overarching objective of ensuring appropriate digital access. It is widely recognised as a key precondition for successful regional and economic development. A major challenge in this process is preventing ‘digital divides’, i.e., avoiding significant disparities in economic, social, and spatial terms.

Average internet speed is a telling indicator of such disparities, highlighting differences in ‘digital preparedness’ at the local level. Figure 2.18 shows the average download speed at the municipality level. The colour scheme ranges from dark blue (very slow speeds) to orange (very fast speeds). The

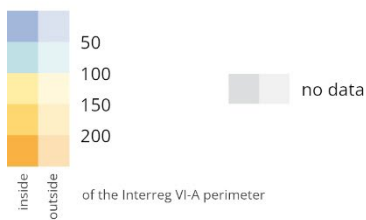
data, prepared by OBC Transeuropa for EDJNet, is based on Speedtest Intelligence data from Speedtest/Ookla's Global Fixed and Mobile Network Performance Maps for the first quarter of 2022. The average download speeds are expressed in megabits per second (Mbps), not to be confused with megabytes per second (MBps).

The map reveals significant differences between urban and rural areas, with values ranging from below 50 Mbps to over 200 Mbps. Cities such as Brugge, Gent, Charleroi, Dunkerque, Lille, Amiens, Beauvais, Saint-Quentin, Charleville-Mézières, Reims, and Châlons-en-Champagne report relatively high average speeds, while the surrounding areas tend to have significantly lower values. This disparity may be due to the higher return on investment typically associated with digital infrastructure projects in urban areas compared to rural ones. However, not all urban areas in this border region exhibit high download speed. Bastogne, for example, does not stand out in this regard. The border constitutes a significant barrier with regard to this aspect of infrastructure, with significantly higher average internet speed in France than in Belgium. Nonetheless, some peripheral municipalities of France also have slow internet speed.

**Figure 2.18: Average internet download speed**



**Average internet speed in Mbps (2022)**



Level of detail: LAU  
 Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
 Origin of data: Orinaldo Gjergji, European Data Journalism Network, 2022  
 ©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries



© ESPON, 2026

## 2.2.5 Key messages on the economic dimension

Although the France–Belgium border region is located at the heart of Europe, its GDP performance is slightly below the European average. At the national level, both domestic border regions have a lower GDP per capita despite having a comparable working-age population. This suggests that economic activity is concentrated in less profitable sectors, such as education, human health, and social work.

Employment patterns further highlight the area's economic characteristics<sup>10</sup>. The border region has a relatively low number of employees per capita compared to the European and European border region averages. Within the large programme area, only a few economic centres notably Reims, Lille, Kortrijk, Gent, Brugge and Charleroi play a significant role due to their size and high employment rates, particularly in the Belgian arrondissements that include these cities. In contrast, Belgian arrondissements near Luxembourg and Brussels have particularly low employment shares, largely due to (cross-border) commuters leaving the area, which contributes to lower local GDP values.

Commuting data aligns with differences in compensation: Belgium offers higher hourly pay, resulting in a larger proportion of cross-border commuters travelling from France to Belgium than vice versa. Differences in housing prices do not appear to be a major driver of commuting. The region near Luxembourg merits particular attention, as high commuting flows reflect the country's robust economic appeal. As a result, less economically competitive regions across the border face a number of regional development challenges.

While the French border region's overall economic performance is less dynamic, its digital infrastructure is notably better, with higher average internet speeds highlighting a promising aspect of the local economic environment.

## 2.3 Green dimension

The green dimension highlights the environmental characteristics, vulnerabilities and sustainability-related interactions within the border region. The analysis provides insight into the environmental interdependence of border regions. Additionally, the spatial distribution of renewable and conventional energy infrastructure, alongside indicators of resources and the circular economy, reveals whether the border facilitates collaborative transitions towards sustainability.

### 2.3.1 Nature protection and pollution

This sub-dimension investigates cross-border functional links in protected areas and areas affected by air and water pollution. It analyses the presence of protected areas in order to identify cross-border ecological links and conservation efforts. It also highlights the extent to which air and water pollution affects people living in border regions.

<sup>10</sup> See also: European Commission 2024: Cross-Border Regional Labour Market Analysis, <https://op.europa.eu/s/AazM>

### 2.3.1.1 Protected areas

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the presence and territorial coverage of protected areas based on the combination of 3 data sources, i.e., Nationally designated areas, Natura 2000 Network and Emerald Network.

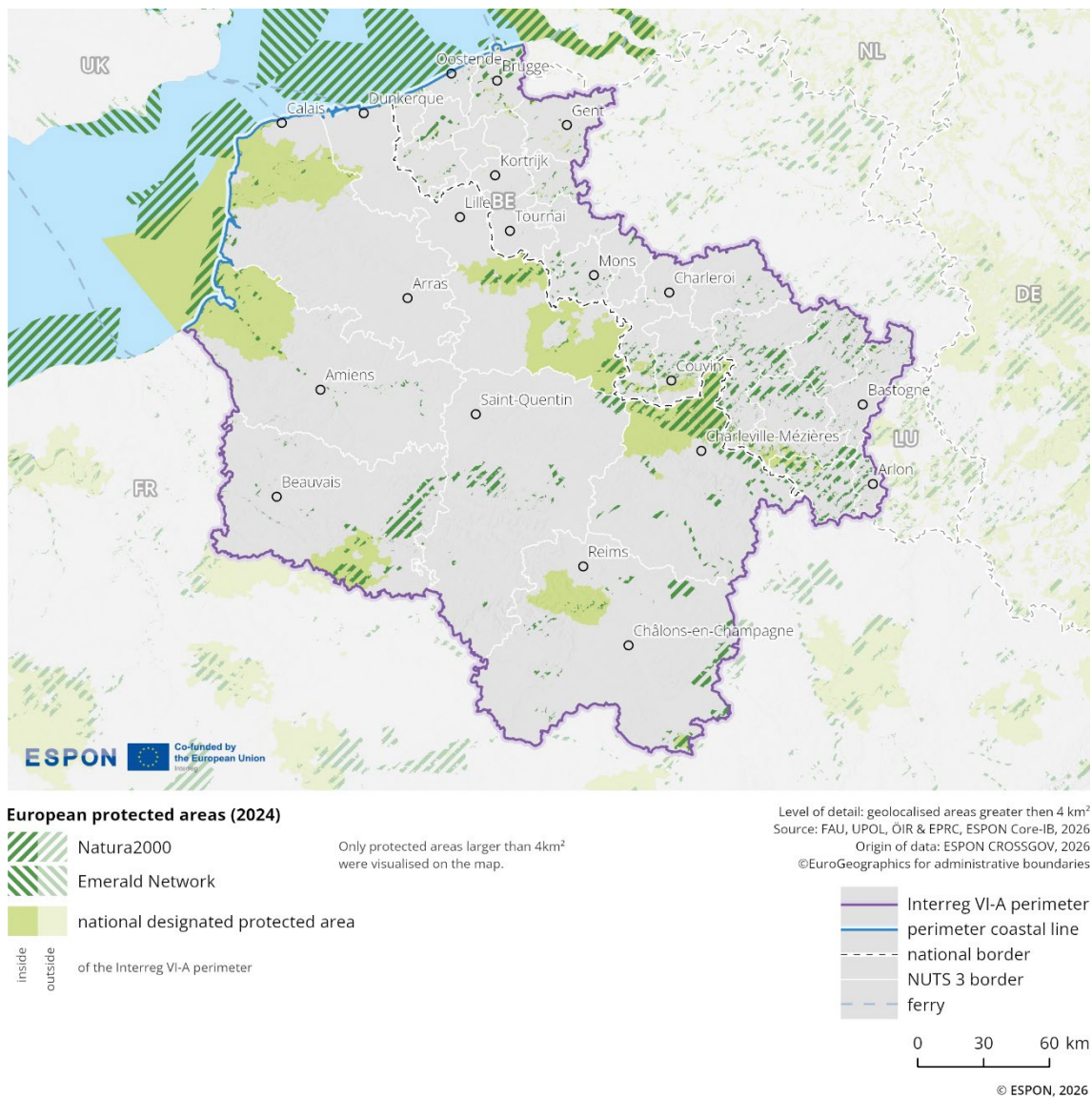
- **Source/method of retrieval:** The indicator represents a combination of nationally designated areas, Natura 2000 and Emerald network provided by EEA (European Environment Agency) Geospatial data catalogue.
- **Temporal coverage:** 2024
- **Unit:** n/a

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.19 illustrates the distribution of protected areas in 2024 across the border region. The data differentiate between Natura 2000 sites, the Emerald Network, and nationally designated protected areas, with only protected areas larger than 4 km<sup>2</sup> displayed.

Natura 2000 areas in the Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France border region are mainly concentrated along the eastern part of the French-Belgium border and in the north-western coastal area of the Interreg region. The largest contiguous protected areas are in the Ardennes and coastal areas near Dunkerque and Oostende, as well as in the region east of Charleville-Mézières. Generally, there are mostly national designated protected areas in the French part of the border region, most notable the Parc naturel régional des Ardennes, Parc naturel régional de l'Avesnois and Parc naturel régional Scarpe-Escaut adjacent to the border. Only 3 smaller areas are visible in Belgium, but these are in close proximity to the French ones. In general, several protected areas along the border show clear cross-border continuity, especially around Charleville-Mézières and at the coast, while other ones located along the central border section display fragmentation. Furthermore, it should be noted that the protected areas in the border region in France are larger and, in some cases, do not continue in Belgium but end at the border.

**Figure 2.19: Nature protected areas**



### 2.3.1.2 Air pollution

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the air pollution from fine particulates (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) at NUTS3 level. The data shows the population-weighted average air pollution level (µg/m<sup>3</sup>), providing an indication of the extent to which the regional population is affected by air pollution.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing and analysis of European Environment Agency data
- **Temporal coverage:** 2022
- **Unit:** Population weighted average of µg/m<sup>3</sup>

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

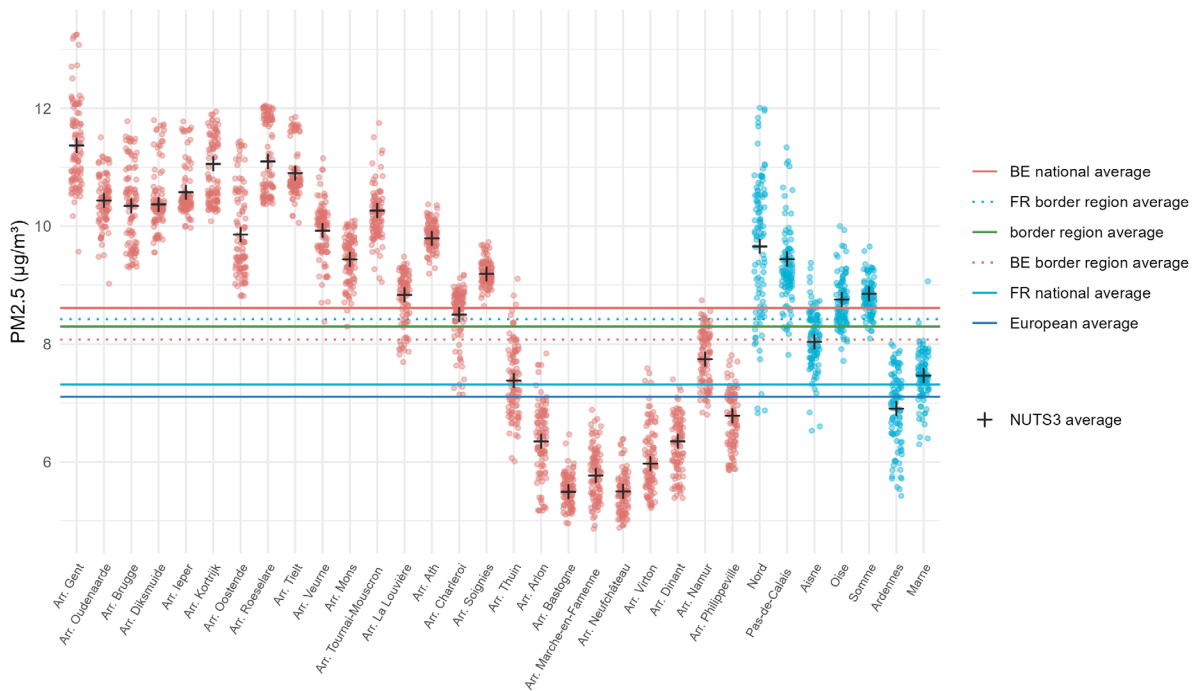
Figure 2.20 illustrates the PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations (in µg/m<sup>3</sup>) across NUTS3 regions in Belgium and France in the Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France border region. Each small dot represents an individual measurement, while the black crosses indicate the average PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentration for each NUTS3 region<sup>11</sup>. The regions are aligned along the x-axis, with Belgian regions on the left (in red) and French regions on the right (in blue).

PM<sub>2.5</sub> values in both countries span a wide range. However, values in the French border region are more tightly clustered, whereas the Belgian cross-border region shows greater variability and higher overall levels of air pollution.

Although several Belgian NUTS3 regions have considerably higher PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels than their French counterparts, the average for the French border regions is higher than that for the Belgian border regions. Primarily, predominantly urban NUTS3 regions suffer from higher levels of fine particulate matter pollution. However, the cities of Arlon and Bastogne are exceptions, as they along with the surrounding NUTS3 areas on both sides of the border boast particularly low levels.

A contrast can be observed when comparing the average for the domestic border region and its respective national average. The Belgian national average is higher than that of the Belgian border region, while the French national average is significantly lower than the average for the French border region. From a national perspective, both national averages are higher than the European average, yet the French national average remains noticeably lower than the Belgian one.

**Figure 2.20: Air pollution**



<sup>11</sup> See Eurostat Statistical Atlas for NUTS3 (2021) regions: [https://ec.europa.eu/statistical-atlas/viewer/?config=typologies.json&ch=NUTS&mids=BKGCNT.NUTS2021L3\\_CNTOVL&o=1.1.0.7&center=49.69576,14.33324&lcis=NUTS2021L3&](https://ec.europa.eu/statistical-atlas/viewer/?config=typologies.json&ch=NUTS&mids=BKGCNT.NUTS2021L3_CNTOVL&o=1.1.0.7&center=49.69576,14.33324&lcis=NUTS2021L3&)

### 2.3.1.3 Water pollution

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the ecological status or potential for coastal and river water bodies. It is based on an assessment of biological, hydro-morphological, chemical and physico-chemical quality elements.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing and analysis of European Environment Agency data
- **Temporal coverage:** 2022 (supplemented by 2016 data)
- **Unit:** n/a

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

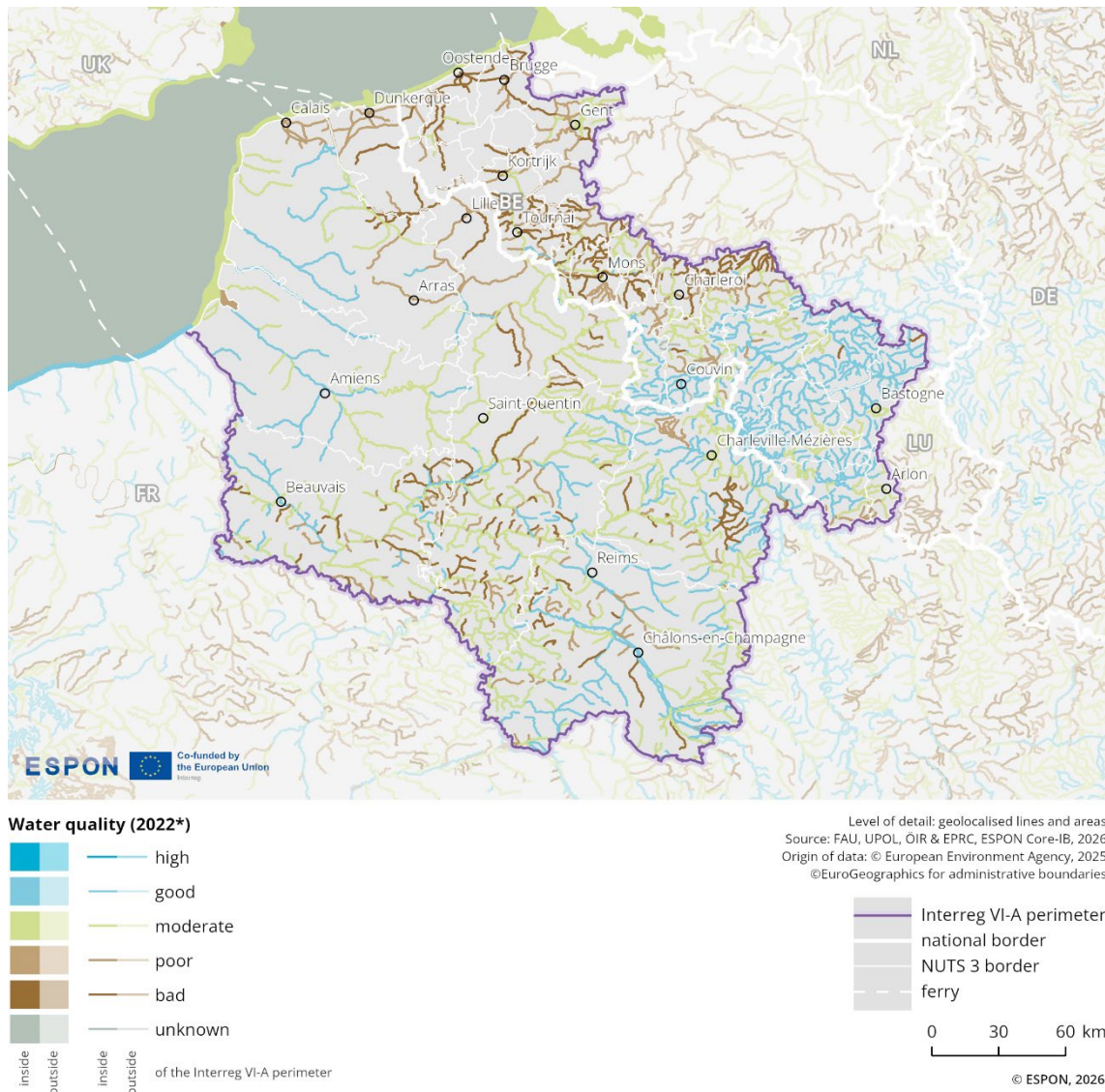
Figure 2.21 illustrates the levels of water pollution in the Belgium-France border region, including rivers and the shared coastal area, in 2022. Water quality is represented using 6 colour-coded categories, ranging from "bad" to "high", encompassing an "unknown" category<sup>12</sup>.

In the French part of the Interreg region, water quality levels are overall positive, with only few rivers having "poor" or "bad" water quality. These are predominantly located in the northern French area around the cities of Lille, Dunkerque and Calais. However, poor water quality is not limited to the French side of the border, but continues or even worsens across the border in northern Belgium. Most rivers around the cities of Oostende, Kortrijk, Mons and Charleroi are also categorised as having only "bad" to "moderate" water quality.

In contrast, the water quality in the Belgian part of the Interreg region improves from northwest to southeast, with predominantly "good" water quality in the area east of Charleroi. This trend is less pronounced on the French side, where mostly "moderate" water quality is observed in the south-eastern border region. Despite worse river water quality in its hinterland, the joint coastal area is homogeneously categorised as having "moderate" water quality.

<sup>12</sup> For more information see the Water Framework Directive Reporting Guidance (2022): [https://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/help/WFD/WFD\\_715\\_2022](https://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/help/WFD/WFD_715_2022)

**Figure 2.21: Water quality patterns**



## 2.3.2 Climate risks and resilience

This sub-dimension examines cross-border functional links relating to climate risks and resilience. It analyses exposure to natural hazards such as landslides, earthquakes, droughts and floods in order to identify vulnerabilities and risks.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3.2.1 Natural hazard risks

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the risk the border region is facing in relation to natural hazards (floods, droughts, landslides and earthquakes). The map highlights potential cross-border affectedness and allows to judge the relative relevance of each risk for the cross-border region.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** The indicator is based on geodata from the Disaster Management Risk Knowledge Centre/JRC. It provides the likelihood of specific natural hazard events at grid level.
- **Temporal coverage:** 2024
- **Unit:** n/a

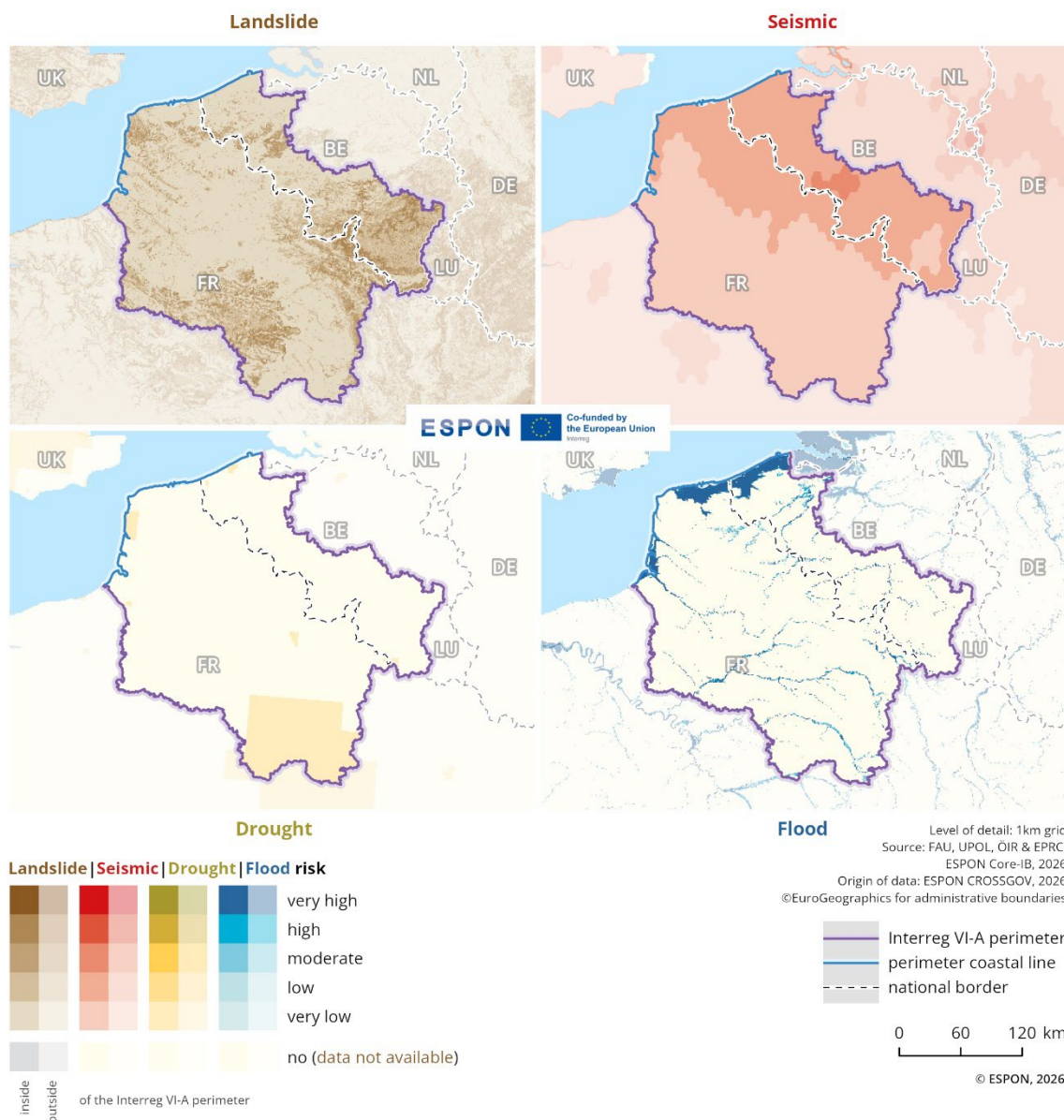
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.22 illustrates the spatial distribution of natural hazards in the Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France region, highlighting areas where risks are shared across national boundaries and where certain risks are more country specific.

For this cross-border region, the greatest shared issue is flooding alongside the coastline. In the interior of the region flooding risks are minor in comparison and only present for a small number of border-crossing rivers, such as the Scheldt (Escaut). Droughts are very uncommon in the region, only occurring mildly in the south, within the French part of the region. Seismic activities are low to moderate, but most pronounced alongside the border. The joint risk of landslides can also be described as low to moderate, with the most danger being present in the Ardennes, located alongside the eastern part of the border.

<sup>13</sup> See also: European Commission 2024: Strengthening the Resilience of EU Border Regions, [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/studies/KN-02-24-586-2A-N.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/studies/KN-02-24-586-2A-N.pdf)

**Figure 2.22: Natural hazard risks**



### 2.3.3 (Renewable) Energy and energy infrastructure

This sub-dimension assesses cross-border functional links in energy supply and infrastructure, focusing on existing connections and missing links. The distribution of power lines, energy infrastructure and power stations is analysed to identify supply patterns and potential integration gaps. The analysis reveals whether the border facilitates energy cooperation and connectivity, or if infrastructural differences create barriers.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See also: European Commission 2025: Handbook on Cross-border Energy Communities, [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/studies/2025/Handbook\\_on\\_Cross-border\\_Energy\\_Communities.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/studies/2025/Handbook_on_Cross-border_Energy_Communities.pdf)

### 2.3.3.1 Power lines and energy infrastructure

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the distribution of power lines and energy infrastructures in the cross-border region. The geodata highlights the existing links and gaps in the cross-border interconnections of the energy transmission network.

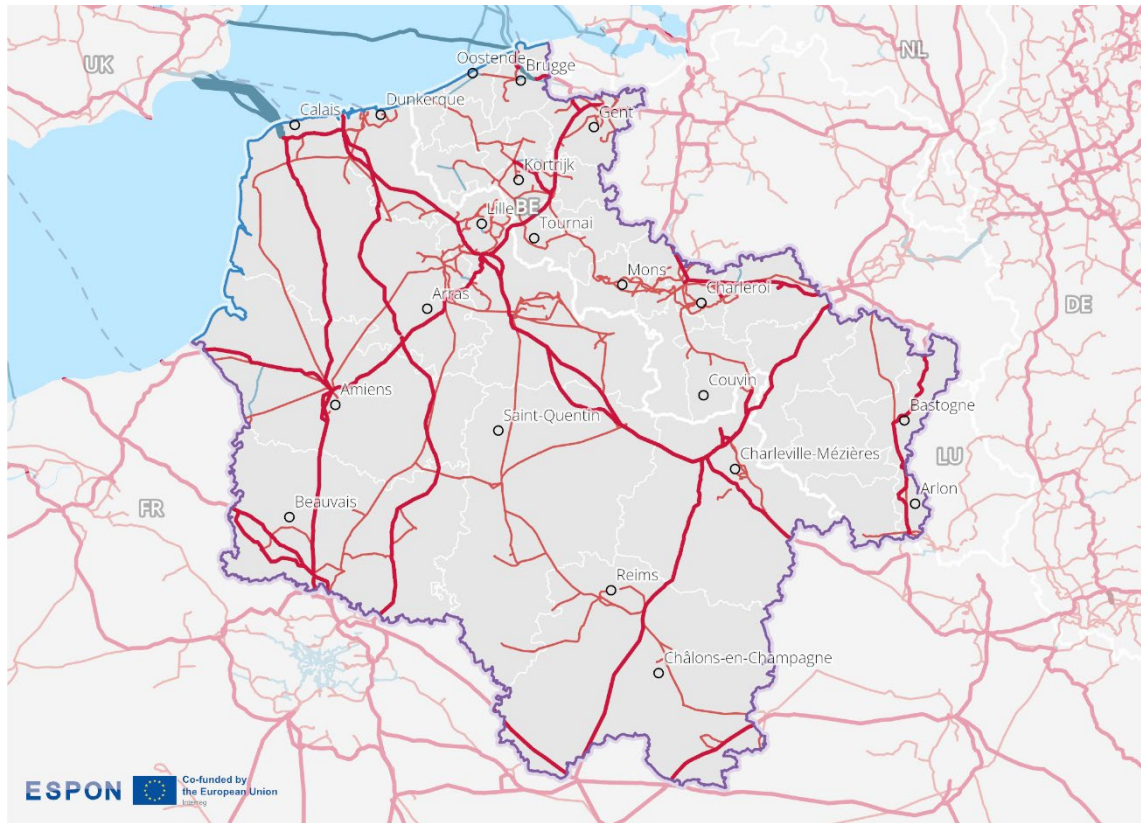
- **Source/method of retrieval:** Geodata on high-voltage energy infrastructure (100 kV and above) has been collected and processed from OpenStreetMap.
- **Temporal coverage:** 2025
- **Unit:** kV

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.23 illustrates the distribution of power lines and cables in 2025 across the border region. The data distinguish between overhead and underground power lines, further classified into high-voltage (100-230 kV), extra high-voltage (230-1,000 kV), and ultra-high voltage (above 1,000 kV).

The cross-border region Belgium-France shows relatively extensive high- and extra high-voltage transmission infrastructure. Both countries are directly connected via two extra high voltage lines. While in Belgium these extra high-voltage lines continue further to inner parts of the country, in France lines branch off with one line running parallel to the border and connecting 3 French cities (Dunkerque, Lille, and Charleville-Mézières). Extra high-voltage connections spread more in the French border region and extend farther inland. Lower-voltage lines dominate domestic energy distribution in Belgium, but according to the map, they do not have cross-border connections. Although not directly related to this cross-border region, it is worth mentioning the important connection between both countries and the UK, via a series of extra high-voltage submarine cables linked to overhead power lines on land.

**Figure 2.23: High-voltage transmission infrastructure**



**Overhead power lines (2025)**

- High Voltage (100–230 kV)
- Extra High Voltage (230–1.000 kV)
- Ultra High Voltage (1.000 kV+)

**Underground power cables (2025)**

- High Voltage (100–230 kV)
- Extra High Voltage (230–1.000 kV)
- Ultra High Voltage (1.000 kV+)

inside  
outside  
of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

ANSI Standard C84.1 was used for classification of power lines.

Level of detail: geolocated lines  
Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
Origin of data: ESPON CROSSGOV, 2026  
©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries

- Interreg VI-A perimeter
- perimeter coastal line
- national border
- NUTS 3 border
- ferry

0 30 60 km

© ESPON, 2026

### 2.3.3.2 Power stations

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the location of power stations by type and energy production levels (coal, gas and oil, nuclear, hydro). It can indicate differences and complementarities in the national energy supply systems as well as highlight potential supply-demand links when viewed in conjunction with power lines infrastructure.

- **Source:** OpenStreetMap, Global Energy Monitor, JRC Hydro-power plants database
- **Temporal coverage:** 2025
- **Unit:** MW

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

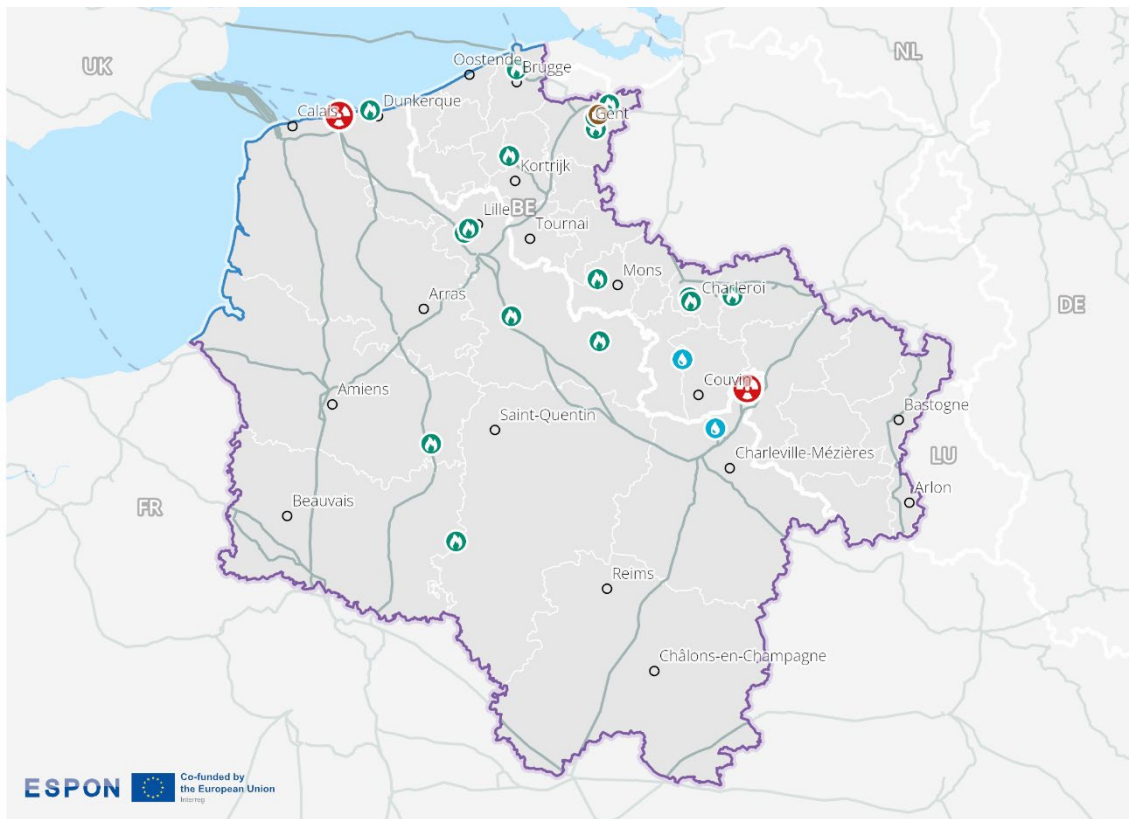
In the Belgium-France cross-border region, there are a total of 21 power stations/plants locations, the majority of which are gas and oil power stations (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Number and type of power stations**

Power stations/plants	Less than 1GW	1GW and up
Nuclear	/	2
Coal	1	/
Gas and oil	16	/
Hydro	2	/

Two nuclear power plants, both located on French territory near the border with Belgium, are an important part of the energy infrastructure (see Figure 2.24). The only coal power station is located in the inner part of the Belgian border region, adjacent to the border with the Netherlands. However, the most common ones are gas and oil power stations located in the western and central part of the border region, 7 of which are located on the French side of the border, with the rest in Belgium. Furthermore, there are two hydroelectric power stations relatively close to each other on either side of the border, though they do not share the same river as their water supplying source.

**Figure 2.24: Power stations infrastructure**



**Power stations (2025)**

- nuclear
- coal
- gas and oil (greater than 20MW)
- hydro (greater than 20MW)
- ≥ 1GW
- < 1GW

**Power lines and cables (2025)**

- ≥ 230kV
- inside of the Interreg VI-A perimeter
- outside of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

Level of detail: geolocalised point and linear features  
 Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
 Origin of data: ESPON CROSSGOV, 2026  
 ©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries

- Interreg VI-A perimeter
- perimeter coastal line
- national border
- NUTS 3 border
- ferry



© ESPON, 2026

**2.3.4 Resources and circular economy**

This sub-dimension focuses on resource use patterns in the border region and their implications for circular economy practices. It analyses resource productivity and waste generation in order to evaluate the efficiency and sustainability of resource utilisation across the border.

### 2.3.4.1 Resource productivity

#### Indicator description

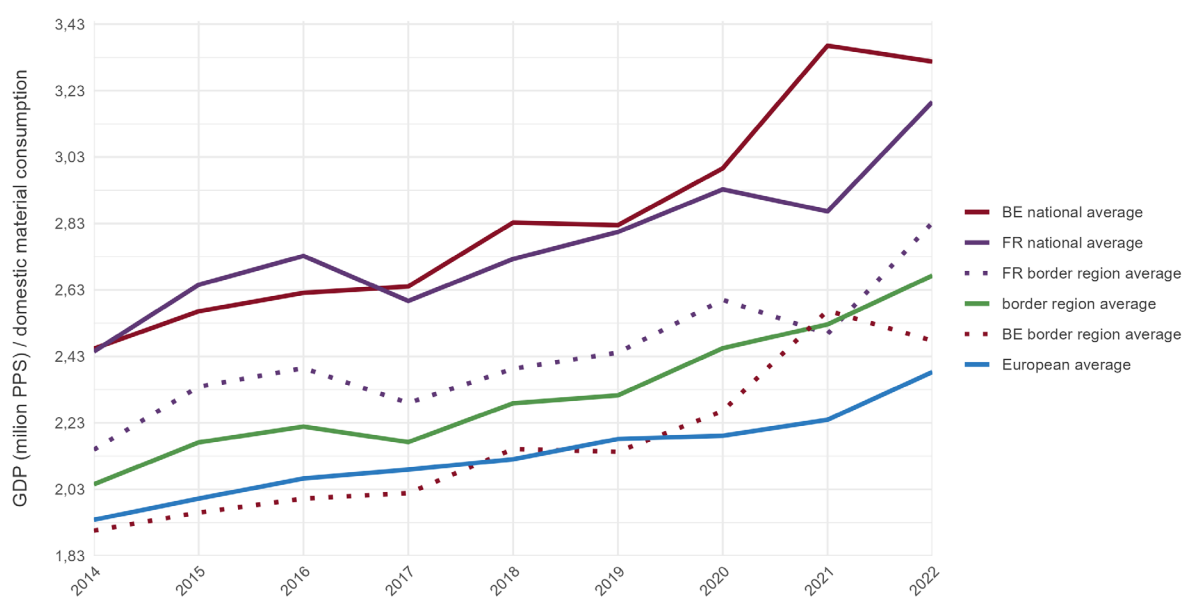
The indicator shows the economic value generated per unit of material consumed for each region within the cross-border area. Developments over time provide insights if the decoupling of productivity from resource use is progressing on regional level.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing of Eurostat and ESPON CIRCTER (Circular Economy and Territorial Consequences) Update data
- **Temporal coverage:** 2014-2022
- **Unit:** PPS/tons

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.25 illustrates the development of GDP per unit of domestic material consumption in million PPS/DMC (purchasing power standards per domestic material consumption) between 2014 and 2022. The data compare the national averages, the averages of their respective border regions, and the overall border regional average with the European average.

**Figure 2.25: Resource productivity**



The Belgian national average steadily increased over time, reaching its highest value in 2021 at around 3.40 million PPS/DMC, before slightly declining in 2022. It has consistently been higher than the Belgian border region average. The French national average also shows a general increase from 2014 to 2022, with slight decreases in 2017 and 2021, reaching a final value of 3.20 million PPS/DMC. The French border average remained consistently lower than the national average, too. Overall, the French national average was lower than the Belgian national average, except during the period from 2014 to 2017, when the values were slightly higher.

The European average lies significantly below the national averages of both countries, as well as slightly below the cross-border average. The border regional average, representing the combined average of

both countries' border regions, is significantly lower than the individual Belgian and French national averages. However, notable disparities exist within the border area itself as the French border regions shows considerably higher PPS/DMC values over this timespan, with the exception of 2021 when the Belgian border region outperformed the French one.

### 2.3.4.2 Generation of waste per GDP

#### Indicator description

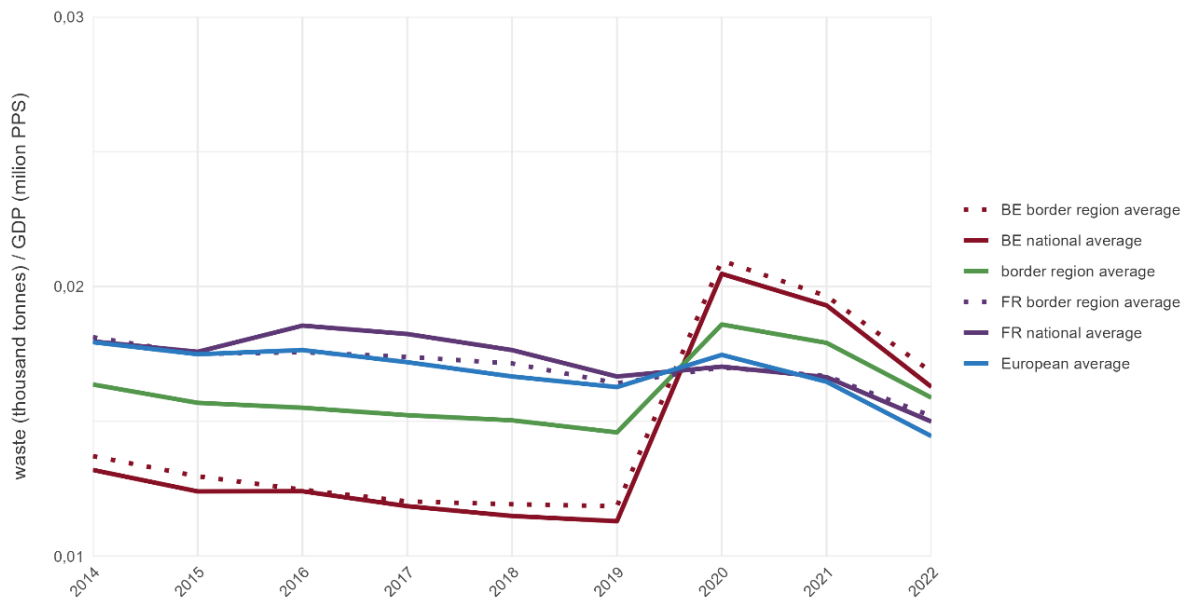
The indicator shows the regional distribution of waste creation in relation to the GDP development. Comparing waste generated to GDP reflects the waste intensity of the economy and provides a measure of “eco-efficiency”. Observation of its change from year to year permits to assess whether the economy is able to produce more wealth while at same time generating less waste.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing of Eurostat and ESPON CIRCTER Update data
- **Temporal coverage:** 2014-2022
- **Unit:** Tons/PPS

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.26 illustrates the trend in waste generation relative to economic output, measured in tonnes of waste per million PPS (purchasing power standards) of GDP from 2014 to 2022 in the Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France region (Belgium-France).

**Figure 2.26: Waste generation per GDP**



The French national average of waste per GDP steadily decreases over time, reaching a value of approximately 0.015 tonnes of waste per GDP in 2022. The French border region average follows a nearly identical trend, remaining very close to the national average. For the period from 2014 to 2019, the Belgian national and border region averages are considerably lower than the French values, before

both experience a sharp increase to over 0.02 tonnes of waste per GDP. Afterwards, both Belgian values decline again but remain above the French values.

The European average decreases gradually from around 0.018 in 2014 to about 0.015 tonnes of waste per million PPS in 2022 with a slight increase in 2020. France's national and border values remain close to the European average throughout. Until 2019, Belgium's national and border values are below the EU average, but then rise significantly above it from 2020 onwards.

The combined border regional average steadily decreases until 2019, then rises sharply in 2020, followed by a slight decline. Until 2019, it remains below the European average. After 2019, however, due to the sharp increase in the average in the Belgian border region, it rises further above the European average.

### 2.3.5 Key messages on the green dimension

The presence of several cross-border protected areas is a reflection of the long-standing and stable cooperation between the French and Belgian border regions. The most notable example is the Parc naturel transfrontalier du Hainaut, comprising the French Parc naturel régional Scarpe-Escaut and the Belgian Parc naturel des Plaines de l'Escaut, which have been working together for over 25 years.

Both regions face common environmental challenges, including above-average air pollution (Lille-Kortrijk conurbation), landslide risks in the Ardennes along the eastern border, water quality issues (Scheldt (Escaut) and Sambre river basins) and coastal flooding (Calais-Oostende).

The region's strong cross-border integration is highlighted by its energy infrastructure. Two extra-high-voltage lines facilitate the efficient transmission of electricity, particularly supporting large-scale power plants, such as the nuclear facilities on the French side.

Overall, the border region as a whole is making positive progress in terms of sustainability. Although waste generation remains a challenge, particularly following a rise in 2020, resource productivity is increasing at a rate above the European average.

## 2.4 Socio-economic dimension

The socio-economic dimension examines patterns of social integration, tourism, and access to public services in the border region. It identifies how socio-cultural links, visitor flows and essential services influence development in the cross-border area. By examining interpersonal interactions via social media, language similarities, tourism intensity, and the accessibility of facilities such as secondary schools, grocery shops, hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and cinemas this dimension highlights both functional integration and potential socio-spatial differences.

### 2.4.1 Social integration

This sub-dimension evaluates the level of social integration in the border region by identifying areas with low or high cross-border interactions. It analyses social interactions and language similarities across and along national borders to evaluate the potential for cultural and social integration.

### 2.4.1.1 Cross-border connectivity in social media

#### Indicator description

The indicator refers to the existing connections between users of META social media (in particular Facebook) across the border. It aims at giving an overview of the degree of personal connectivity between inhabitants of the border area. Even though not all these internet connections will relate to real communication exchanges but sometimes just “following” content from other users, they give an overview of interpersonal and cultural knowledge of the social media landscape from across the border.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing Facebook data on existing connections across the border (data for Good Meta)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2021
- **Unit:** n/a

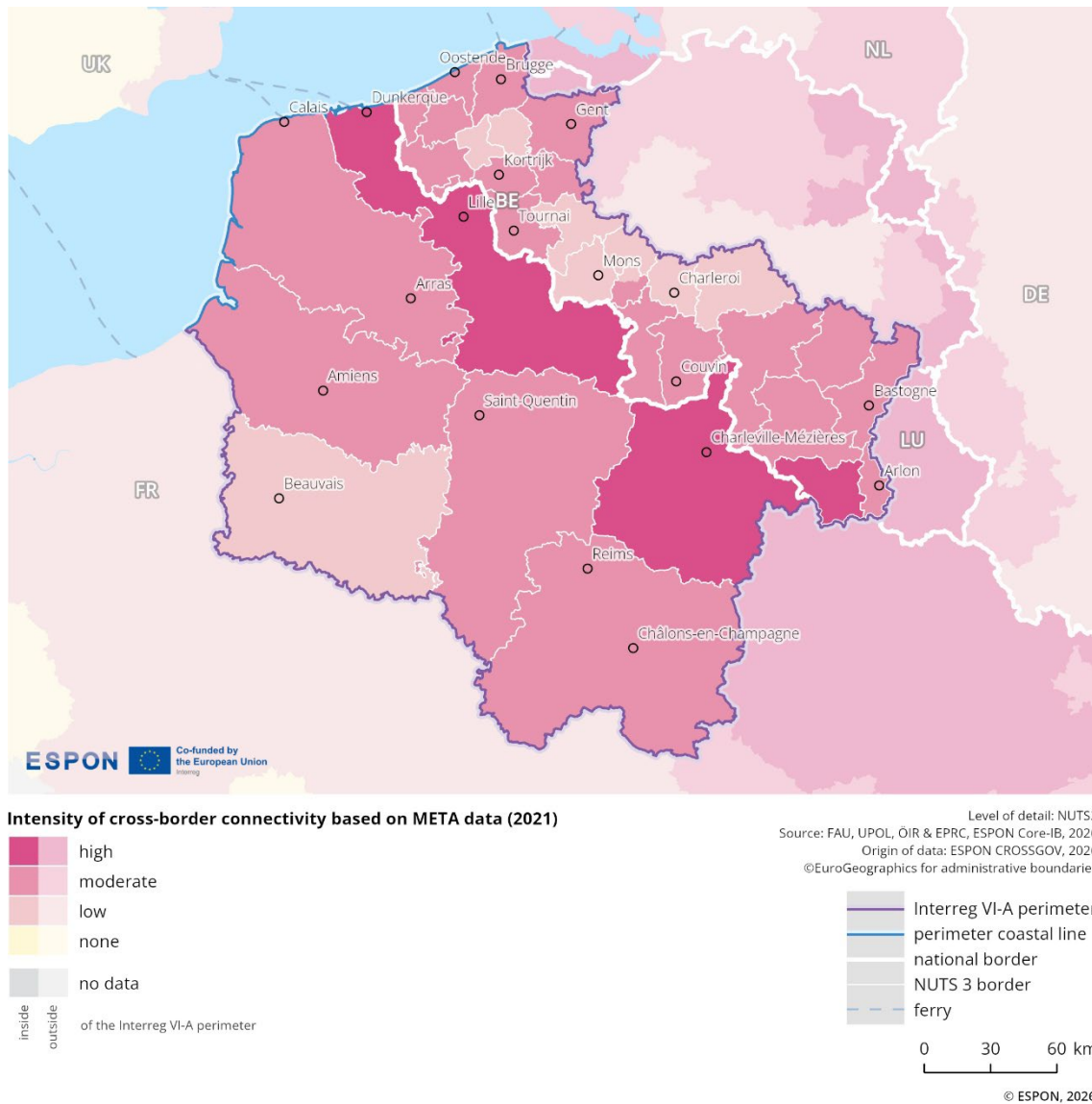
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.27 illustrates the spatial distribution of cross-border connectivity based on Facebook information in the border area. The different shades of pink indicate varying intensities of connectivity, ranging from low to high, with darker tones representing stronger intensity of cross-border connectivity in social media.

Due to differing levels of cross-border connectivity on both sides of the border, clear asymmetries are evident. On the French side of the region, high values are recorded in areas located directly along the state border (including cities such as Dunkerque, Lille, and Charleville-Mézières). Moving further from the border, cross-border connectivity in social media decreases, first to moderate levels (in the vicinity of Arras, Saint-Quentin, and Reims) and then to low levels (around the city of Beauvais). In contrast, on the Belgian side of the region, high cross-border connectivity is observed only in 1 NUTS3 area (Arr. Virton) in the southern part of the region<sup>15</sup>. In the central part, it remains generally low around the cities of Charleroi and Mons, while it reaches moderate levels in the north (Gent, Brugge and Kortrijk) and the remaining southern part (Bastogne and Arlon), despite its vicinity to Luxembourg.

<sup>15</sup> See Eurostat Statistical Atlas for NUTS3 (2021) regions: <https://ec.europa.eu/statistical-atlas/viewer/?config=typologies.json&ch=NUTS&mids=BKGCNT.NUTS2021L3.CNTOVL&o=1.1.0.7&center=49.69576,14.33324&lcis=NUTS2021L3&>

**Figure 2.27: Cross-border connectivity in social media**



### 2.4.1.2 Language similarities along national borders

#### Indicator description

The indicator specifies whether the language is the same across the border, whether the respective national languages have commonalities, whether while different, there are local linguistic commonalities, and whether the language is different.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** ESPON cross-border public services (CPS) 2.0 database along border segments
- **Temporal coverage:** 2022
- **Unit:** n/a

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

The majority of the programme area shares French as common language. Nevertheless, parts of the programme include non-french speaking regions in Flanders, thus the lack of language barrier is not universal to the region.

## 2.4.2 Tourism

This sub-dimension identifies key tourism hotspots in the border region to highlight tourism dynamics. It analyses the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments in order to evaluate the attractiveness of, and developments in, the tourism sector. Comparisons with the respective countries and the EU average provide context for understanding the region's dynamics.

### 2.4.2.1 Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the number of nights a guest or tourist actually spends in a tourist accommodation establishment or non-rented accommodation (overnight stays). This may reveal the tourism attractiveness of a region and shed light on the role of tourism in the local economy, i.e., tourists/guests staying overnight may spend more in the region than one-day visitors.

- **Source:** Eurostat
- **Temporal coverage:** 2020-2023
- **Unit:** Nights per capita

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

The spatial distribution of overnight stays highlights the importance of key tourist destinations in border areas. Tourism contributes significantly to regional income, infrastructure development and employment, and thereby supports regional prosperity. At the same time, it affects environmental and living conditions, which may reduce local acceptance despite its economic benefits. This is in particular the case in places of overtourism, seasonal pressures, and increasing land-use conflicts.

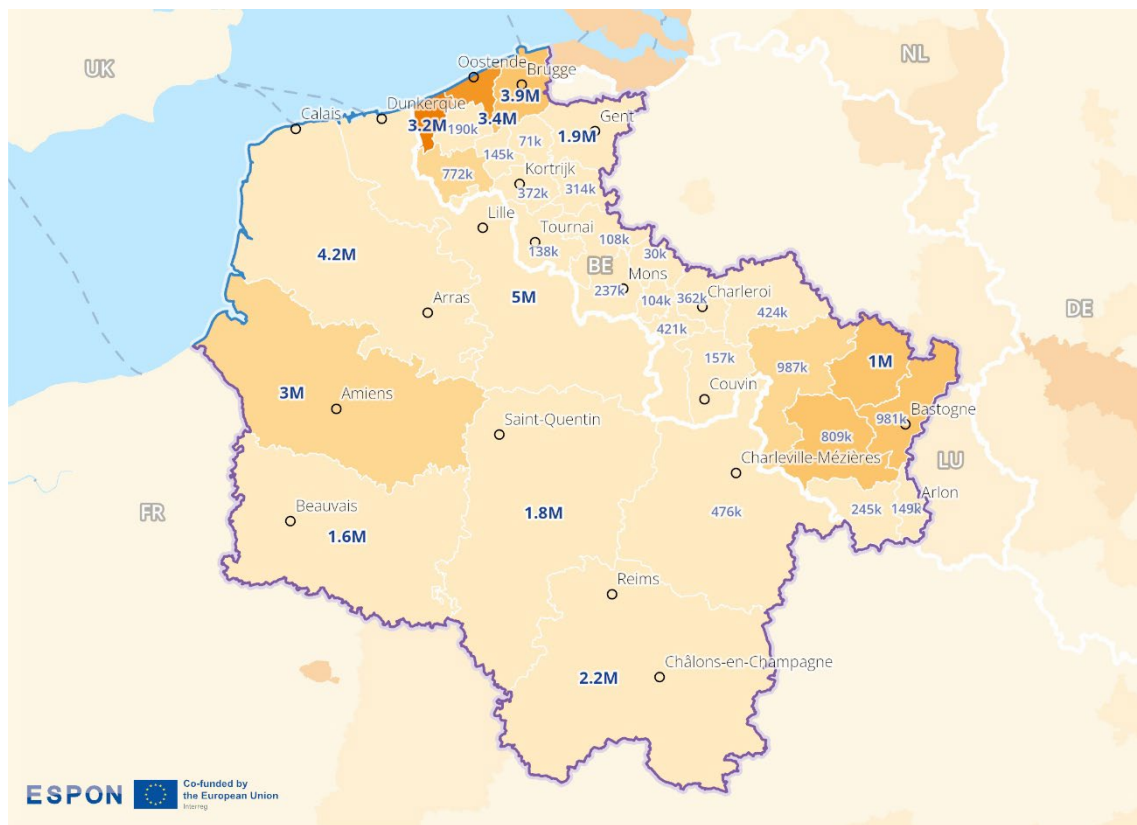
Figure 2.28 shows the number of overnight stays per capita at tourist accommodation establishments in 2023. It includes hotels, holiday and other short-stay accommodation, as well as campsites, caravan and trailer parks. The map uses a colour gradient, with darker shades indicating a higher number of nights spent per capita in 2023. It also shows the cumulative number of overnight stays from 2020 to 2023.

There is a particularly high intensity of overnight stays in the coastal NUTS3 regions of Belgium<sup>16</sup>. The coastal NUTS3 region Arr. Veurne exceeds 40 nights per capita in 2023. Other NUTS3 regions with up to 20 or 40 nights per capita are Arr. Oostende, Arr. Brugge, Arr. Marche-en-Famenne and Arr. Bastogne. On the French side, the per capita figures are lower. Only one NUTS3 region exceeds 5 nights per capita (Somme).

In terms of total overnight stays over the 3-year period, the leading tourism regions are located in the coastal NUTS3 regions in France and Belgium: Nord (approx. 5 million), Pas-de-Calais (approx. 4.2 million), Arr. Brugge (approx. 3.9 million), Arr. Oostende (approx. 3.4 million) and Arr. Veurne (approx. 3.2 million).

<sup>16</sup> See Eurostat Statistical Atlas for NUTS3 (2021) regions: <https://ec.europa.eu/statistical-atlas/viewer/?config=typologies.json&ch=NUTS&mids=BKGCNT.NUTS2021L3.CNTOVL&o=1.1.0.7&center=49.69576,14.33324&lcis=NUTS2021L3&>

**Figure 2.28: Overnight stays in tourism**



**Nights per year per capita (2023)**

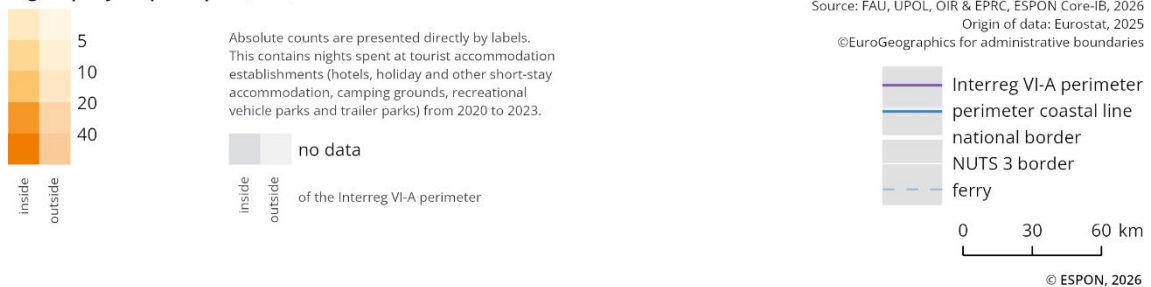
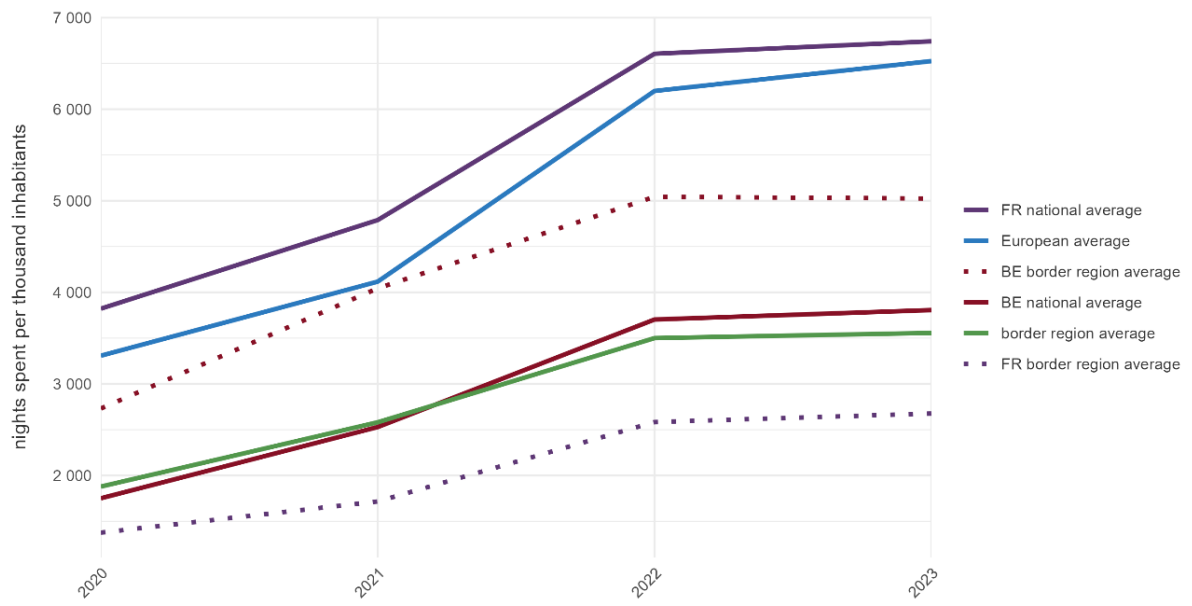


Figure 2.29 illustrates the development of nights spent at tourist establishments per thousand inhabitants from 2020 to 2023. Over the entire period, the average for the Belgium-France programme area is lower than the overall European average, which includes EU member states and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Norway. While the border regional average in Belgium is higher than the national average for all 4 years, the French border regional average is significantly lower than the national average. Additionally, the regional average for the Belgian border area is significantly higher than that for the French throughout the given period. However, it remains well below the European average, except in 2021.

Touristic patterns have a series of implications for spatial development on either side of the border. Transport infrastructure has to consider peak volumes and balancing recreating activities with socio-cultural as well as environmental heritage can be a challenge.

**Figure 2.29: Overnight stays in tourism (comparison)**



### 2.4.3 Services of general interest

This sub-dimension looks at how accessible services of general interest (SGIs) are in the border region, identifying areas that are well-served and those that are more difficult to access. It analyses access to essential services such as secondary schools, grocery shops, hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and cinemas.

#### 2.4.3.1 Accessibility to services of general interest

##### Indicator description

The indicator shows, for the below listed facilities and services, the average driving time to the nearest facility of a series of services of general interest.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing and analysis of standardised travel-time accessibility to secondary schools, grocery shops, hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and cinemas available in the ESPON PROFECY Update (2022)
- **Temporal coverage:** 2021
- **Unit:** Minutes (in 2.5 x 2.5 km grid)

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figures 2.30 to 2.35 visualise average car travel times to services of general interest within the programme area. The maps display accessibility to:

- › Secondary schools (Figure 2.30)
- › Grocery shops (Figure 2.31)
- › Hospitals (Figure 2.32)
- › Doctors (Figure 2.33)
- › Pharmacies (Figure 2.34)
- › Cinemas (Figure 2.35)

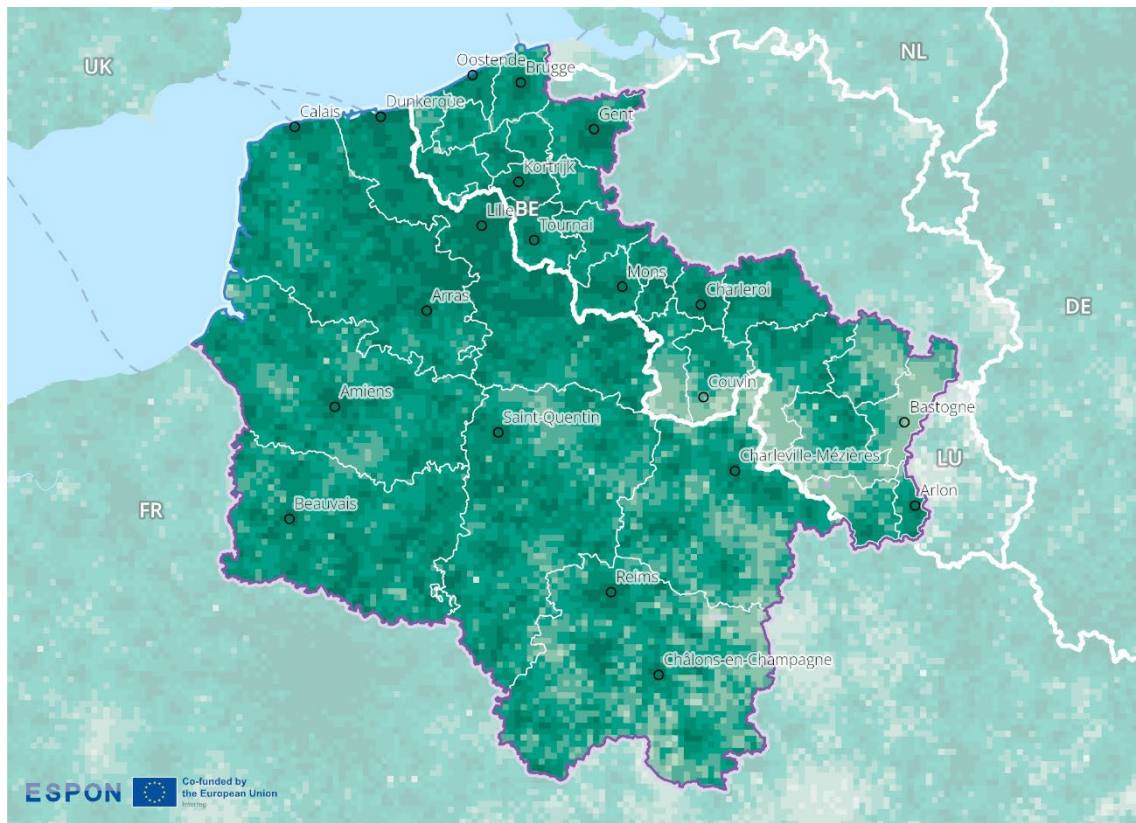
These indicators show how long, on average, it takes to reach the nearest facility by car. The data comes from the ESPON PROFECY Update project (2022) and is visualised based on a 2.5-kilometer grid.

In the Belgium-France border area, essential services such as hospitals, doctors, pharmacies, schools, and grocery shops are generally well distributed across most areas in both countries. As a result, travel times throughout the programme area are typically less than one hour.

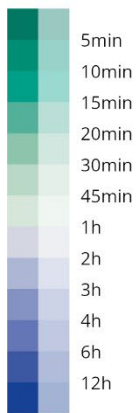
Near the national border, travel times to hospitals appear to be somewhat longer in the southern regions compared to the northern ones. A similar pattern is observed for travel times to doctors; however, in this case, both the southern and northern border areas show slightly longer travel times, while shorter travel times are recorded in the central border area around Lille and Mons.

Hospitals, as medical services, are primarily located in cities and more densely populated areas. This creates an urban-rural gradient, with shorter travel times in and around urban centres and longer travel times in rural or remote regions. The same pattern, in an amplified manner, applies to cinemas as a cultural service.

**Figure 2.30: Travel time to secondary schools**

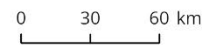
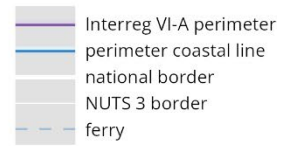


**Car travel time to the nearest secondary school (2021)**



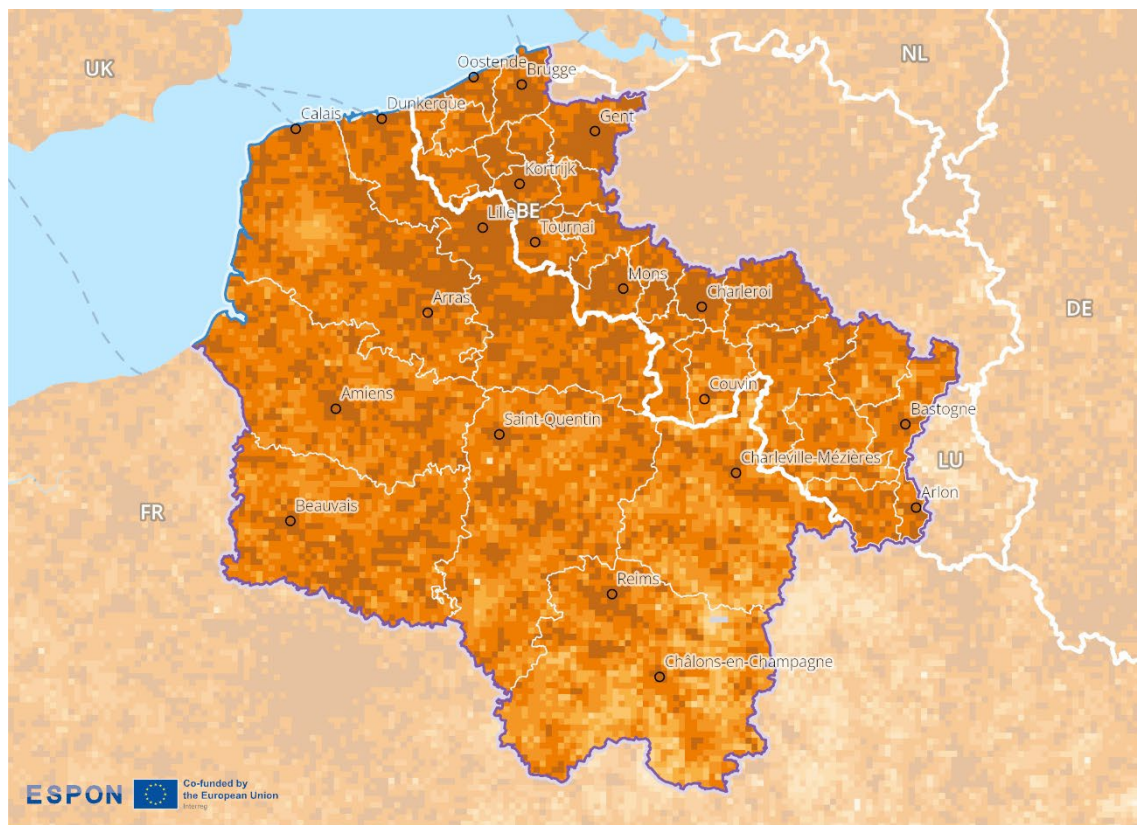
inside  
outside  
of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

Level of detail: 2.5km grid  
Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
Origin of data: ESPON PROCECY Update, 2022  
©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries

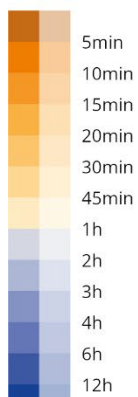


© ESPON, 2026

**Figure 2.31: Travel time to grocery shops**

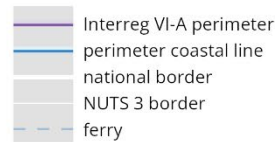


**Car travel time to the nearest shop (2021)**



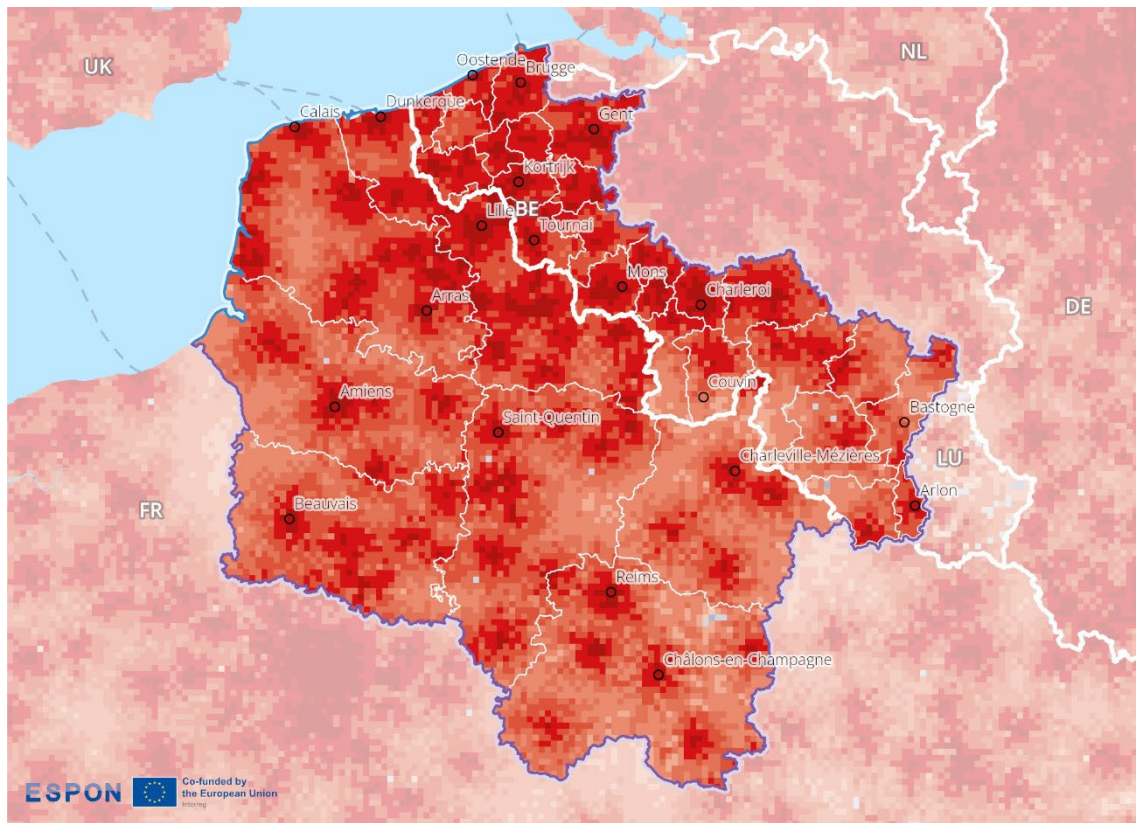
inside  
outside  
of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

Level of detail: 2.5km grid  
Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
Origin of data: ESPON PROCECY Update, 2022  
©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries

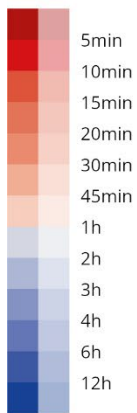


© ESPON, 2026

**Figure 2.32: Travel time to hospitals**

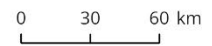
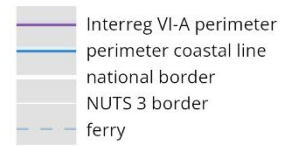


**Car travel time to the nearest hospital (2021)**



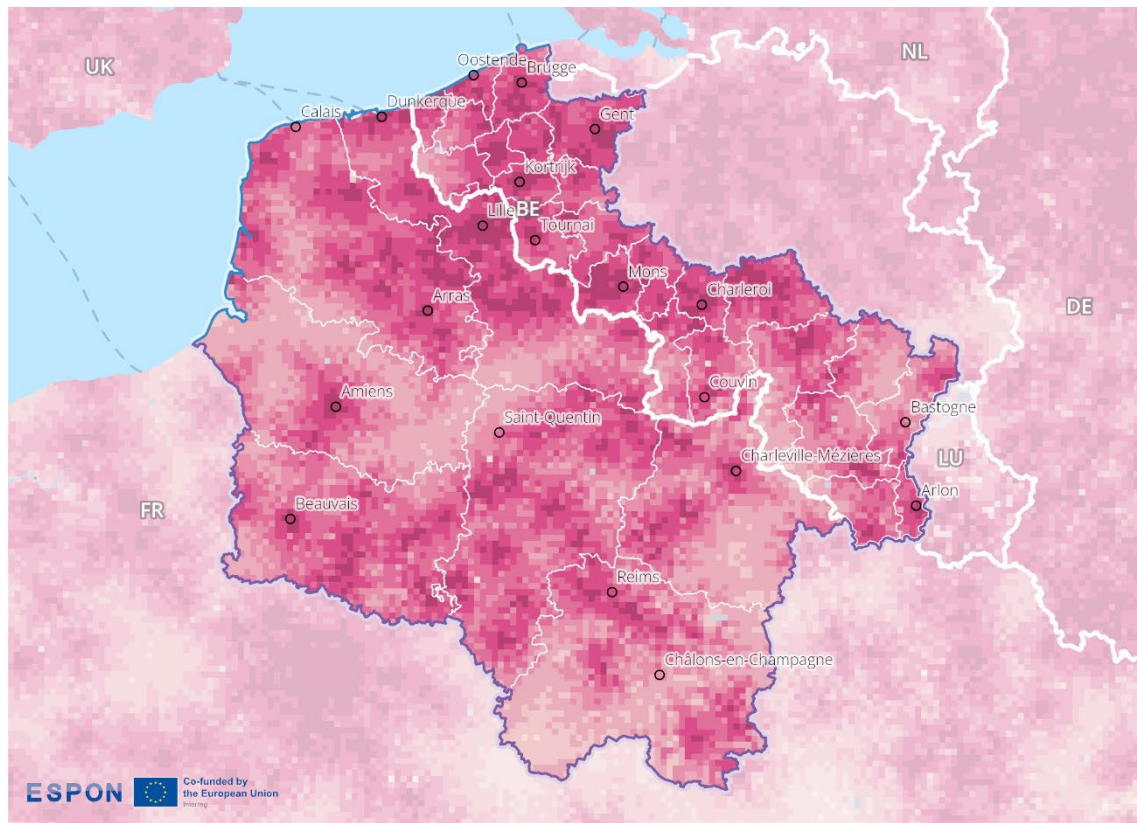
inside  
outside  
of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

Level of detail: 2.5km grid  
Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
Origin of data: ESPON PROCECY Update, 2022  
©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries

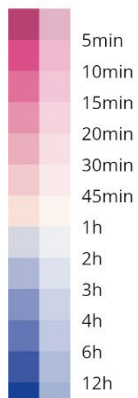


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**Figure 2.33: Travel time to doctors**

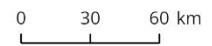
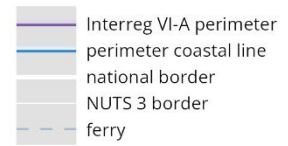


**Car travel time to the nearest doctor (2021)**



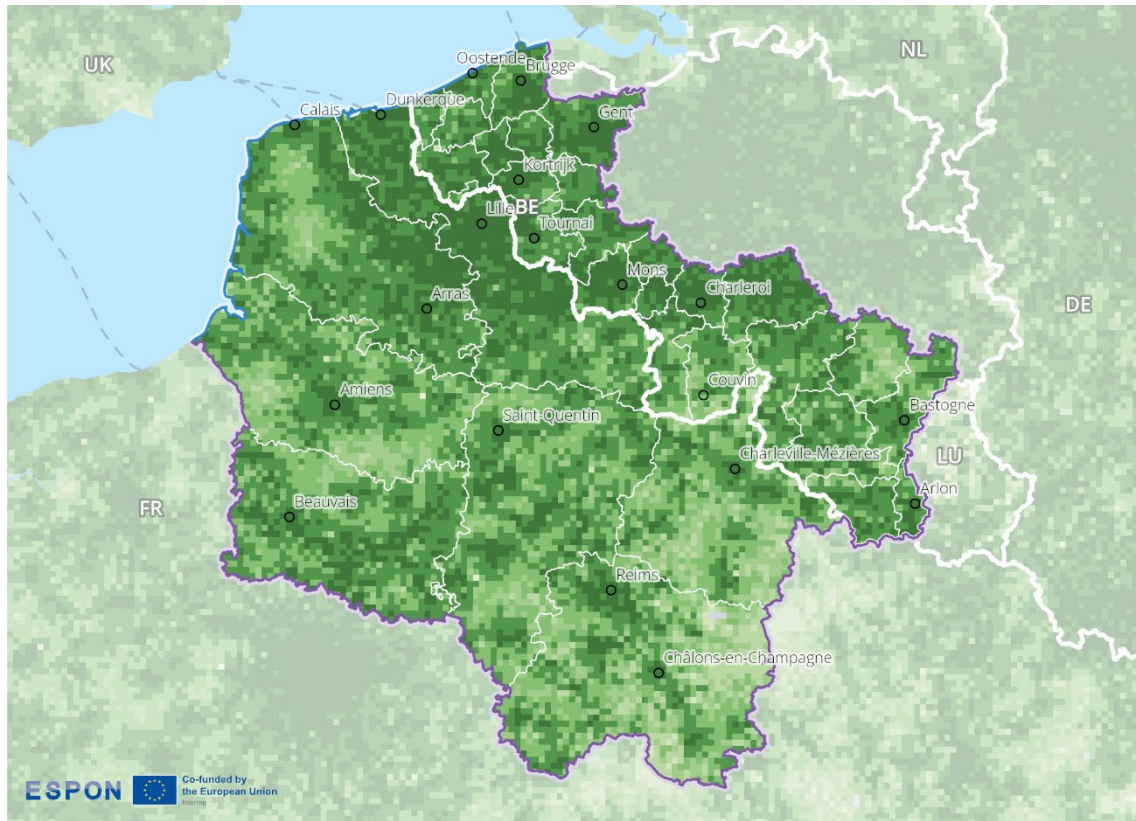
inside  
outside  
of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

Level of detail: 2.5km grid  
Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
Origin of data: ESPON PROCECY Update, 2022  
©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries

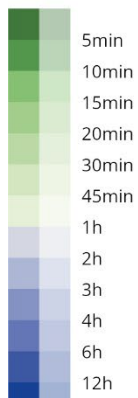


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**Figure 2.34: Travel time to pharmacies**

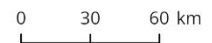
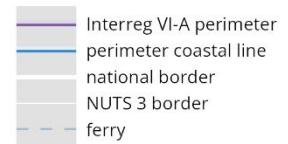


**Car travel time to the nearest pharmacy (2021)**



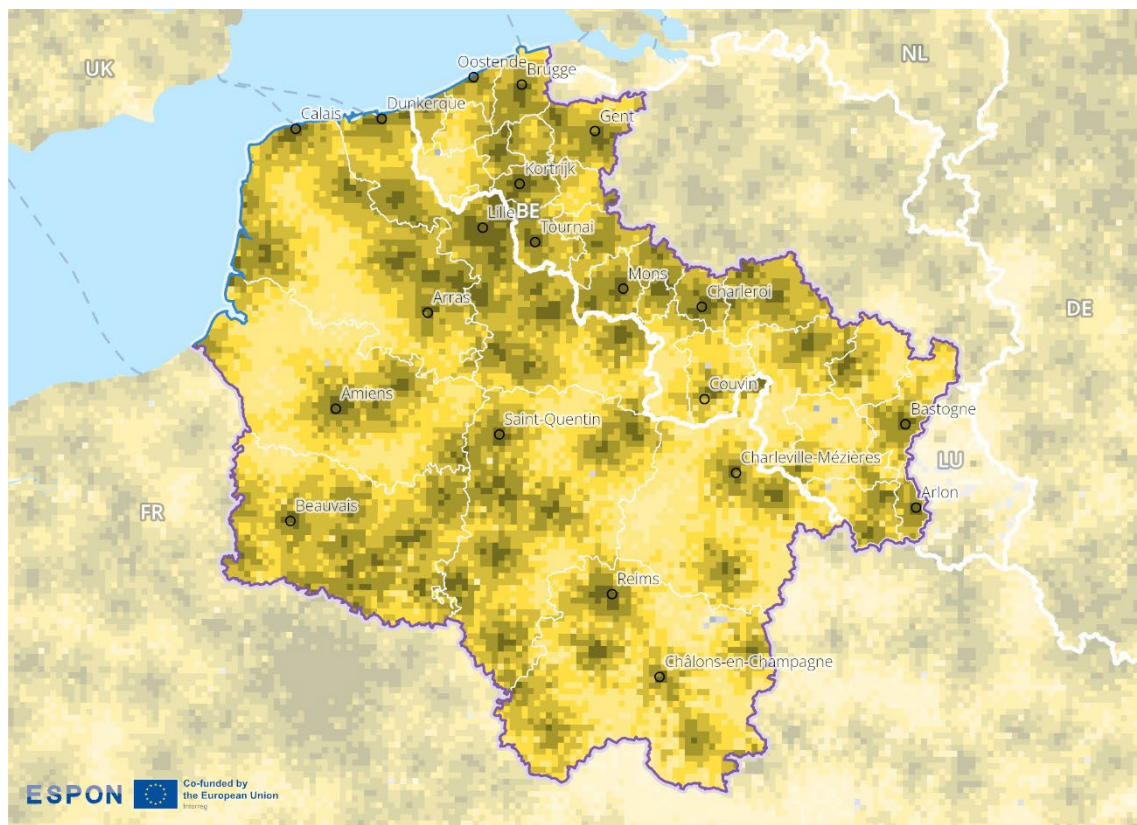
inside  
outside  
of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

Level of detail: 2.5km grid  
Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
Origin of data: ESPON PROCECY Update, 2022  
©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries

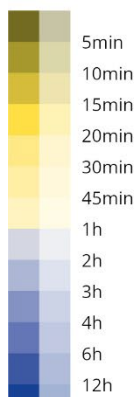


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**Figure 2.35: Travel time to cinemas**

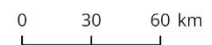
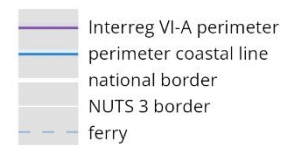


**Car travel time to the nearest cinema (2021)**



inside  
outside  
of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

Level of detail: 2.5km grid  
Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
Origin of data: ESPON PROFCY Update, 2022  
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#### 2.4.4 Key messages on the socio-economic dimension

This cross-border region is one of the most integrated in Europe, in particular in areas close to the border. High levels of social media connectivity across several NUTS3 regions are evidence of this. The widespread use of a common language reduces linguistic barriers and facilitates mutual understanding and cross-border connections.

Socio-economic patterns reinforce a two-axis model of integration within the region. One axis centres on the Lille–Kortrijk conurbation, while the other extends towards Luxembourg. Although Luxembourg is outside the programme area, it plays a significant role in the broader cross-border context.

Tourism appears to play a minor role in the region's economy, with the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments being considerably lower than the national and European averages.

Service provision further illustrates the region's cross-border integration, as border effects, often indicative of limited accessibility, are largely absent. However, a slight exception exists in the eastern border area, where access to hospitals and secondary schools in the Belgian part is somewhat limited.

## 2.5 Border security and safety

This dimension shows the security and safety conditions in border regions. It analyses the number of days on which border control is temporarily reintroduced at internal borders, using this as an indicator of security concerns and restrictions on cross-border movement.

### 2.5.1 Temporary reintroduction of border controls at internal borders

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows the number of days of temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders, including the official reasons behind. The reintroduction of border control at the internal borders must be applied as a last resort measure, in exceptional situations, and must respect the principle of proportionality. The scope and duration of reintroduced border control should be restricted to the bare minimum needed to respond to the threat in question.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing and analysis data of European Commission information pursuant to Article 25 and 28 et seq. of the Schengen Borders Code
- **Temporal coverage:** 2006-2025 (cut-off: 08 May 2025, in order to allow data treatment before work package completion)
- **Unit:** Days per year

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

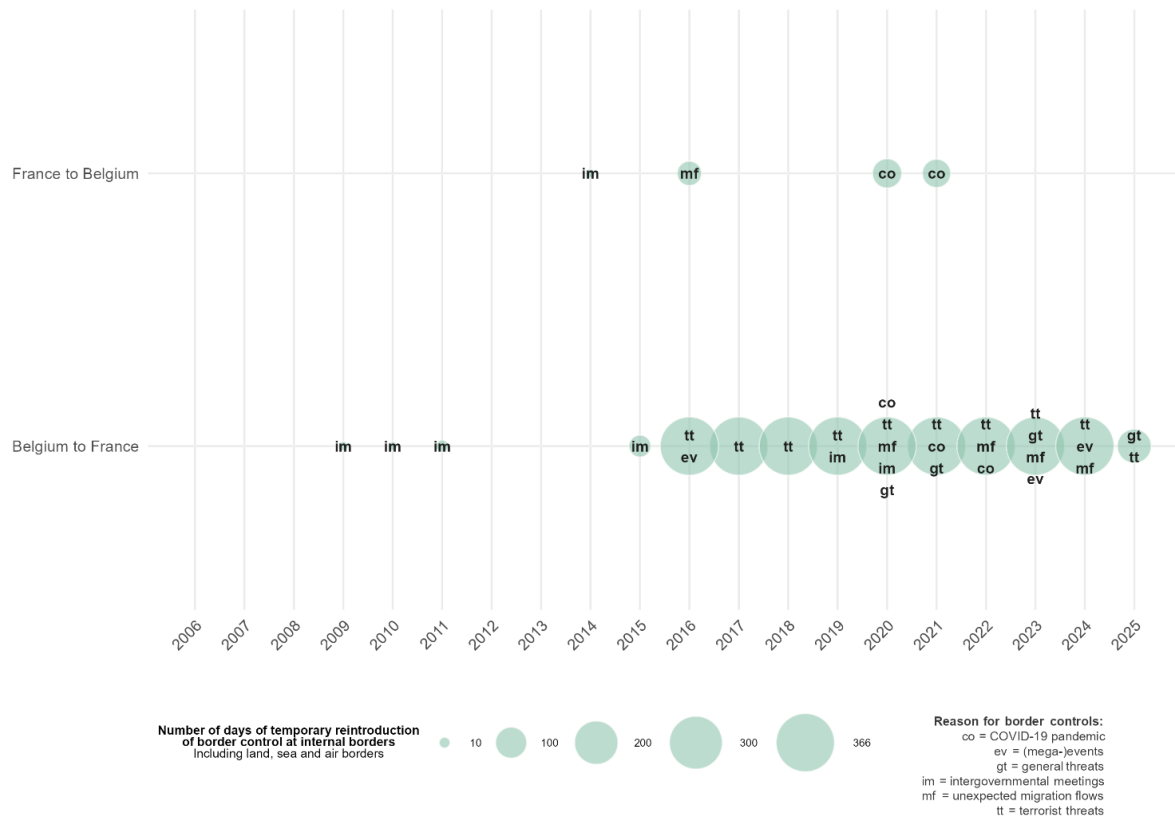
Figure 2.36 illustrates the number of days during which temporary border controls were reintroduced at internal borders within the Schengen Area. Each bubble represents a specific year with bubble sizes indicating the number of days the respective border was under control. The categories of reasons for reintroducing controls include:

- > co – COVID-19 pandemic
- > ev – (Mega-)events
- > gt – General threats
- > im – Intergovernmental meetings
- > mf – Unexpected migration flows
- > tt – Terrorist threats

The data spans from 2006 to 2025 (cut-off: 08 May 2025) and is based on notifications from the European Commission information pursuant to Article 25 and 28 et seq. of the Schengen Borders Code. In line with Schengen rules, the reintroduction of controls is to be used only as a last resort, for exceptional circumstances, and with strict adherence to the principle of proportionality—both in duration and scope.

Both, Belgium and France had already been part of the Schengen Area by 2006.

**Figure 2.36: Temporary reintroduction of border controls**



ESPON Co-funded by the European Union © FAU, UPOL, ÖIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026; Origin of data: European Commission, own calculations, 2025

The Belgium-France border area is characterized by an asymmetric pattern:

- > Crossing the border from France to Belgium: Border controls occurred in 4 of 20 years, tied to a G20 meeting (2014), irregular migration (2016) and COVID-19 (2020-2021).
- > Crossing the border from Belgium to France: Temporary border control occurred in 14 out of 20 years, driven by intergovernmental meetings such as NATO and G20 summits in earlier years. From 2016 until 2025 the border is permanently controlled. The reasons are terrorist threats e.g., because of attacks in Paris and Nice (2016-2017), major sports events like the EURO 2016 or the Olympic and Paralympic Games (2024). Further the border has been controlled due to COVID-19 (2020-2022) and general threats like the situation at the external borders, organized criminality and smuggling (2020-2022). Another reason is the unexpected and persistent migration flows since 2019 (until 2025).

From a comparative perspective, France has implemented controls for significantly more days than Belgium, indicating an unequal impact on cross-border movement in one direction.

These controls tend to have a tangible effect on the smooth functioning of cross-border flows, especially commuting and logistics, as they introduce delays and unpredictability.

### 2.5.2 Key messages on the border security dimension

The Belgium–France border region exhibits an asymmetric pattern of temporary border control measures. While Belgium has only reintroduced controls 4 times in the last twenty years, France has imposed them 14 times, with almost continuous closures between 2016 and 2025. These measures were implemented for various reasons, including terrorist threats, major international events, irregular migration flows, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This asymmetry suggests that movement across the

border is more restricted in one direction, with an uneven impact on commuting, logistics and daily interactions. Despite the south-north direction of the majority of migration flows, the introduced border controls demonstrate the opposite dynamic. Against the backdrop of both France and Belgium being countries of immigration, this presents an interesting asymmetric dynamic.

## 2.6 Governance dimension

The French-Belgian border region has been involved in Interreg since its inception in 1991 and is now implementing its 5th programming period. The border is characterised by a long tradition of cross-border interaction and cooperation. Various agreements have been signed between the French and Belgian authorities. For instance, the 2002 Brussels Agreement sets out a specific legal framework for cross-border cooperation. Moreover, there is a series of agreements on various topics between the countries, such as for example health (2002) and border police cooperation (2001). Long-lasting cooperation also exists for the protection of natural areas in the border region. The natural cross-border park of Hainaut is one of the oldest in Europe. The cross-border region is also characterised by the presence of two EGTCs in the Northern part of the border, the EGTC Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai and the EGTC Dunkerque-Flanders-Côte d'Opale. The Eurometropole was the very first EGTC to be created in the EU (2008).

### 2.6.1 Cross-border cooperation

This sub-dimension identifies the extent of cross-border cooperation in the border region. It illustrates areas of high cooperation intensity and identifies functional links in governance structures across borders. It also identifies areas with high awareness of obstacles and the willingness and support services to overcome them, as well as areas where Interreg cooperation intensity is already strong.

#### 2.6.1.1 Cross-border governance structures

##### Indicator description

The indicator shows active institutionalised cooperation that act as cross-border entities. It includes cooperation formats such as Eurocities, Euroregions, EGTC, cross-border associations, cross-border councils, etc.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Localisation and categorising of cross-border cooperation formats (Eurocities, Euroregions, EGTC, cross-border associations, cross-border councils, conferences, working communities), based on desktop research.
- **Temporal coverage:** Status as of October 2025
- **Unit:** n/a

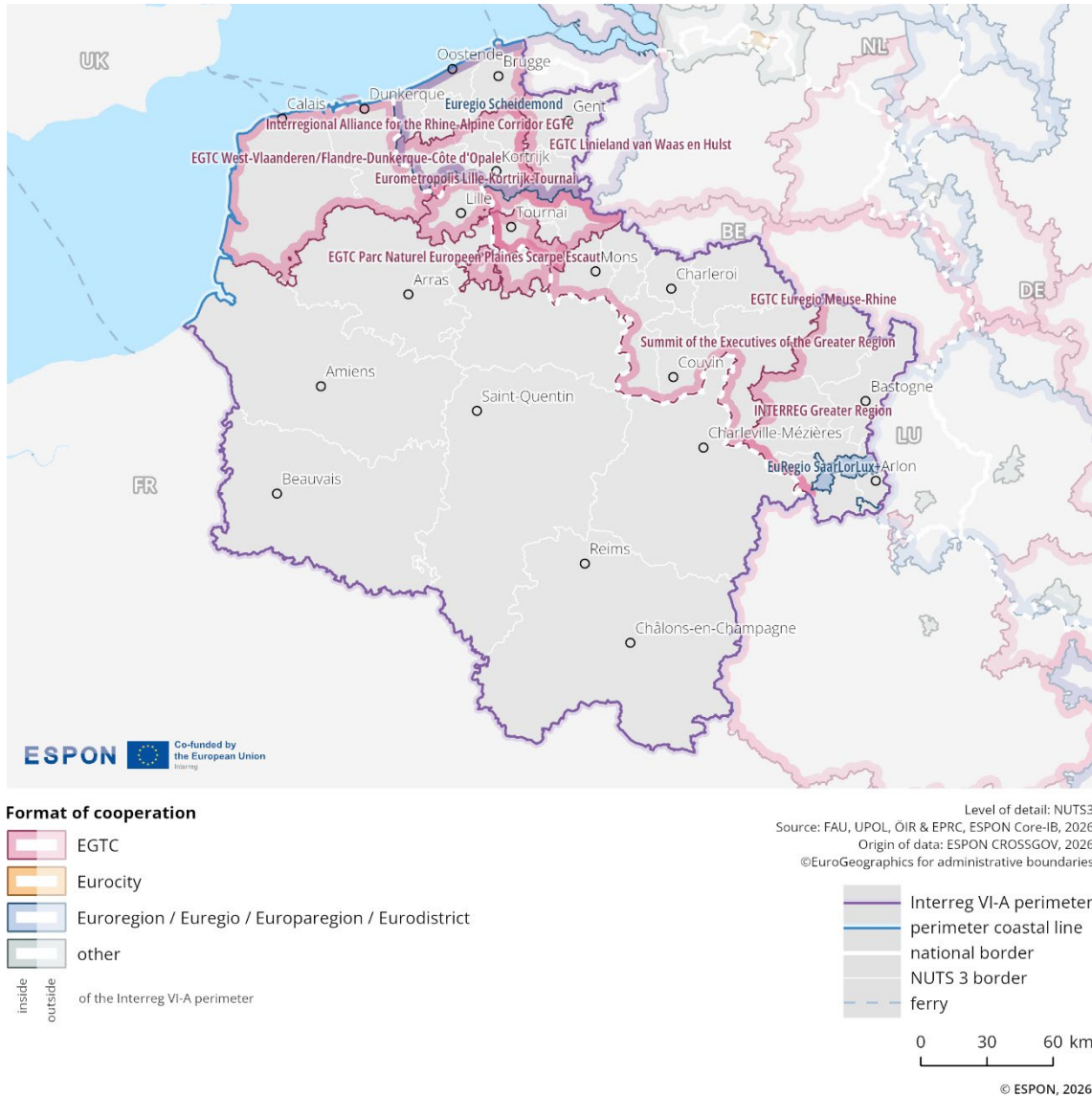
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.37 shows the different types of institutionalised cooperation. These governance structures either function as cross-border entities or bring together stakeholders from the cross-border region around shared topics. The governance structures covered include Eurocities, Euroregions, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), cross-border associations and councils. Project-based cooperation is not included.

The coloured markings on the map indicate different types of institutionalisation: EGTCs are shown in red, Eurocities in yellow, Euroregions/Euregios/Europaregions/Eurodistricts in blue, and other formats in grey.

The multi-level governance structure along the borders of this programme area displays dense spatial coverage in particular along the northern part of the border ranging from Mons to Dunkerque. While the whole Belgian border region is covered by cross-border governance structures, the French part is largely not addressed. Furthermore, no cross-border governance structures are in place along the central and southern border section pertaining to this border region. The most notable formats of this border region, are the aforementioned EGTC Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai and the EGTC Dunkerque-Flanders-Côte d’Opale. They highlight the main cross-border governance characteristics of this border region, with EGTCs being the most prevalent form covering relatively small areas.

**Figure 2.37: Cross-border governance structures**



### 2.6.1.2 Cross-border public services

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows different services specialised on cross-border challenges and development potential, including their domain of operation. As a specific form of services of general interest, cross-border public services (CPS) address joint problems or development potentials of border regions that are located on different sides of one or more national borders.

- **Source:** ESPON cross-border public services (CPS) 2.0 database
- **Temporal coverage:** 2022
- **Unit:** n/a

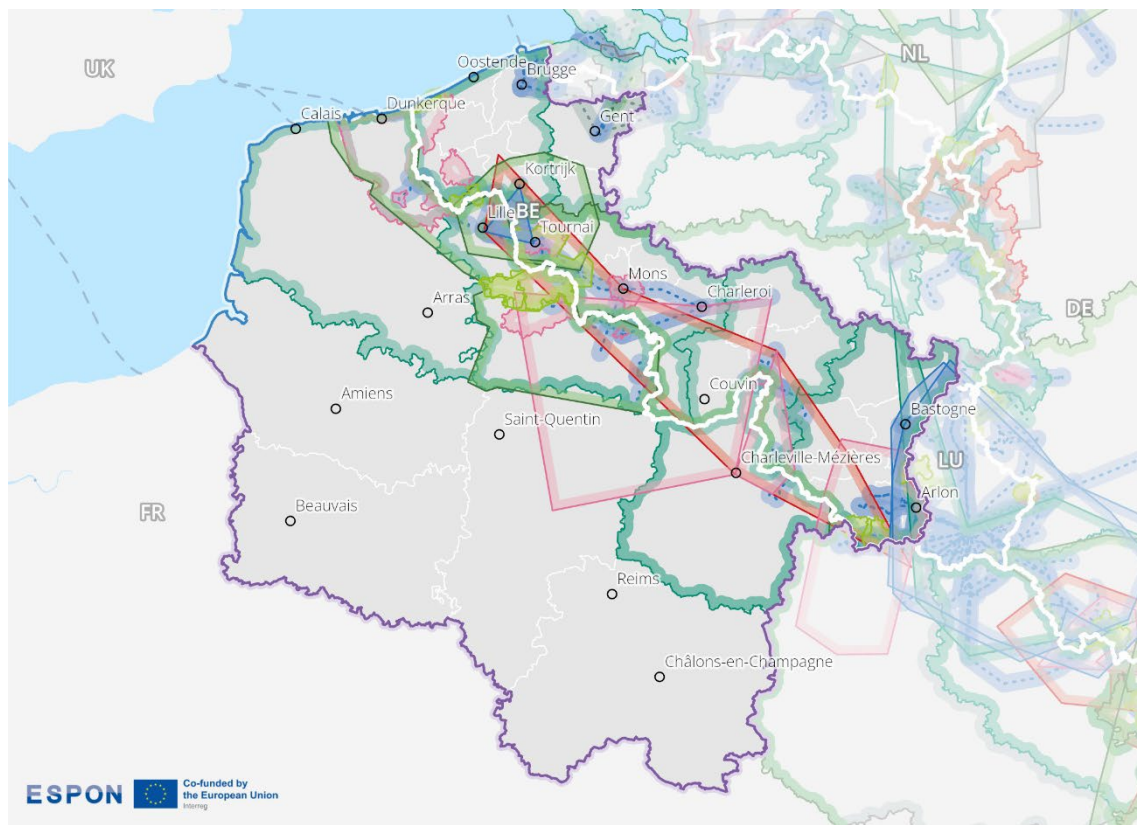
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.38 depicts the geographical extent of cross-border public services in the border area in 2022. Different thematic areas are represented by distinct symbols and colours, indicating services such as disaster management, health care, transportation, education, environment, energy, job placement, and culture. The visualisation highlights where these services operate across the national boundary.

Cross-border public services in Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France Interreg region are dense and spatially diverse, with a broad mix of themes represented. The strongest clusters are found around Lille, Charleroi, and the Luxembourg border zone, where transportation, tourism & information, and health care services dominate. Services in disaster management and transportation form wide and continuous corridors from northern border areas into Luxembourg.

Health care and education & research services are present throughout the entire border region, particularly near Lille and Charleville-Mézières. Although tourism, information and environmental and water services are present, they are more fragmented. Meanwhile, heating, energy, job placement and culture are absent.

**Figure 2.38: Cross-border public services**



**Geographical extent of cross-border public service themes (2022)**

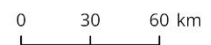
areal	linear	character of the service
		Disaster management
		Health care
		Transportation
		Tourism & information
		Education & research
		Environment & water
		Heating & energy
		Job placement
		Culture

inside outside of the Interreg VI-A perimeter

Cross-border public services covering more than one theme have been assigned only to one. Furthermore, some polygons have been excluded because they were only approximately and not accurately spatially defined.

Level of detail: geolocalised lines and areas  
 Source: FAU, UPOL, OIR & EPRC, ESPON Core-IB, 2026  
 Origin of data: ESPON CPS, 2022  
 ©EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries

- Interreg VI-A perimeter
- perimeter coastal line
- national border
- NUTS 3 border
- ferry



© ESPON, 2026

### 2.6.1.3 Perceived cross-border obstacles in b-solutions

#### Indicator description

The indicator shows cases of legal or administrative obstacles selected in the framework of the b-solutions initiative. This indicator lists the number, location and nature of suggested solution of cases in the b-solutions initiative, including the topic and parties involved.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing and analysis of the b-solutions initiative data
- **Temporal coverage:** 2018-2025 (first quarter)
- **Unit:** n/a

Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

The b-solutions initiative is a European Union project that supports the resolution of legal, operational and administrative cross-border obstacles. It offers funding for pilot actions and legal expert advice in border regions. A high level of cross-border integration often reveals strong barriers of cross-border functioning. In order to exploit the cross-border potentials, these obstacles have to be overcome or at least addressed. Both the number of reported obstacles and the general interest in solutions serve as important indicators of cross-border interaction.

As part of the ESPON CROSSGOV project, all b-solutions initiatives were analysed to deepen the understanding of the thematic focus of the perceived cross-border obstacles across different border regions and the suggested solution, in particular from the European perspective.

In the border area of Belgium–France, 11 b-solutions pilot actions were identified. These included initiatives on cross-border mobility in dual education, emergency medical services, jobseeker accessibility in vocational training, simplified procedures for health professionals, water governance in the European Natural Park of Scarpe Escaut, mutual recognition of lifeguards, cross-border public transport regulations, and the establishment of joint degree programmes to reinforce student mobility. Applications for these pilots were mainly submitted by EGTCs and public bodies.

In this border area, in the field of employment and education, issues relate to youth mobility, talent acquisition, administrative procedures, and recognition of skills. Governance and institutional cooperation encompass EGTCs, legal agreements, and transparency in processes. Health and social security challenges include recognition of qualifications, provision of healthcare services, and coordination of social security systems. Regarding environmental and biodiversity concerns, the challenges focus on water supply networks, natural park management, and the protection of local ecosystems. In terms of labour market and employment, relevant obstacles include cross-border work regulations, pension recognition, and harmonisation of administrative practices.

The solutions proposed in the pilot actions are predominantly hybrid or legal in nature. For example, the cross-border mobility in dual education project involved operational strategies, such as implementing a small-scale field experiment in the cross-border area and creating a legal framework agreement among competent authorities. The emergency medical services initiative suggests legal amendments to broaden existing conventions to include various medical vehicles. Addressing jobseeker accessibility required both a legal cooperation agreement and the establishment of a virtual expertise centre as a one-stop shop through Interreg funding. The initiative for simplified health professional procedures proposes a bilateral convention to facilitate mobility and administrative measures to support temporary healthcare service provision. The water governance action involves introducing legal agreements at multiple levels, alongside operational management plans. The recognition of lifeguards initiative sought legal modifications to existing EU directives and operational projects to assess qualification comparability. The cross-border public transport initiative focused on legislative adaptations to allow exceptions for seat belt regulations and administrative coordination for

setting up operational standards. Finally, the joint degree programme proposal included legal cooperation agreements among universities, administrative frameworks to establish an EGTC for coordination, and operational actions to develop joint degree programmes supported by Interreg funding.

#### 2.6.1.4 Institutionalised advice centres for cross-border issues

##### Indicator description

The indicator shows where institutionalised advice centres on cross-border issues are located, including their thematic focus and geographical perimeter.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Localisation and thematic focus of advice centres for cross-border issues are identified via desktop research.
- **Temporal coverage:** Status as of February 2025
- **Unit:** n/a

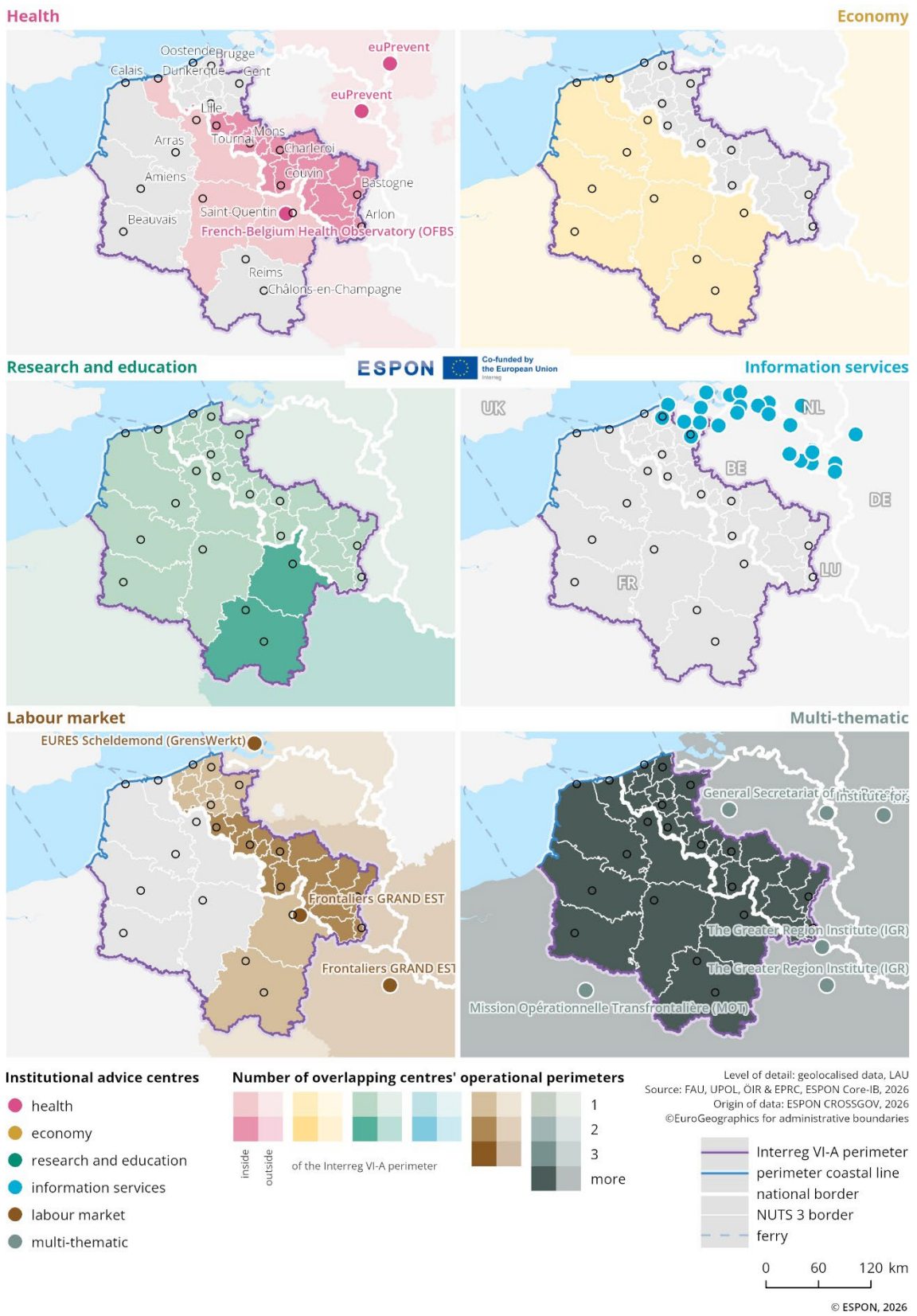
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Figure 2.39 shows the locations and types of institutionalised advice centres, along with their operational domains, in the cross-border Interreg region between Belgium and France (Wallonie-Vlaanderen-France). These centres throughout Europe provide support in various fields such as health, economy, research & education, information services, the labour market, and multi-thematic issues. The operational domains of these centres are also indicated by coloured shading on the map. The more intense the colour, the stronger the influence of that specific domain in the corresponding area.

In the eastern part of the Interreg region, along the French-Belgian border on the French side, two key institutional advice centres are located: the French-Belgian Health Observatory (OFBS), which focuses on health, and Frontaliers Grand Est, which supports labour market issues. However, both the health and labour market operational domains are more prominently represented on the Belgian side of the Interreg region. In contrast, centres' operational domains focused on research and education (mainly in the southeast), as well as those related to the economy, are more common in the French part of the region. Multi-thematic operational domains of centres are equally present in both countries within the Interreg area.

In the northern Belgian part of the Interreg region, there is a high concentration of information service centres. Several of these are located just inside the Interreg area, though concerning the Belgium-Dutch border region. Additionally, some multi-thematic advice centres are situated just outside this Interreg zone, affecting at least part of its area. For example, the General Secretariat of the Benelux is located in central Belgium while the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) is located just outside the southern border of the Interreg region in France, in addition to the Greater Region Institute (IGR) in Luxembourg.

**Figure 2.39: Institutionalised cross-border advice centres**



## 2.6.2 Outline of Interreg activities

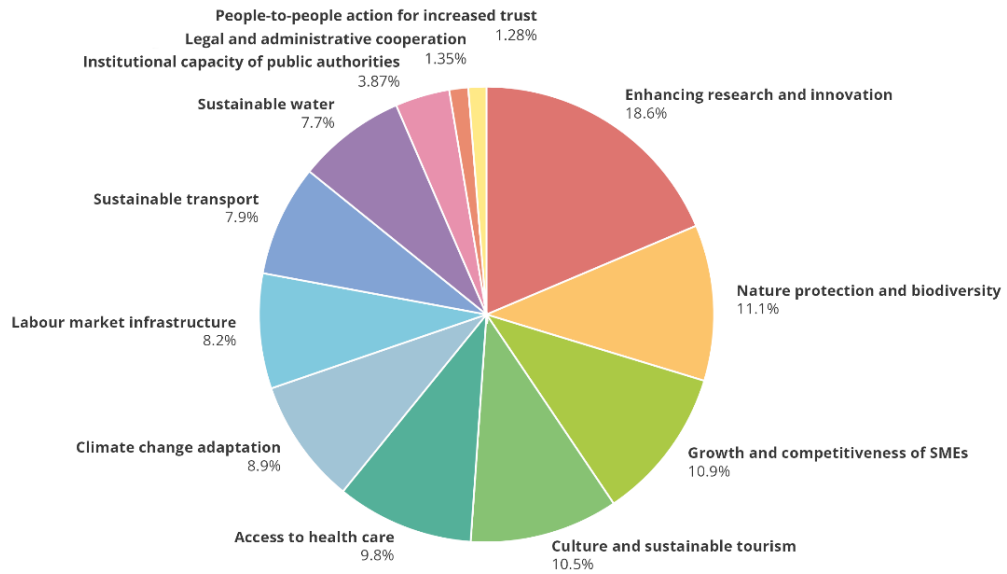
The following section outlines the key Interreg activities in the 2021-2027 programming period. The aspects included concern the development opportunities and challenges identified (see Table 2), the budget available and split of allocation (Figure 2.40), overlapping Interreg programmes and the key aspects drawn from the programme.

**Table 2: Interreg VI (2021-2027): Opportunities and challenges**

Topic	Key development opportunities and challenges identified for Interreg 2021-27
<b>Economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eco systems approach to SME with links to S3 smart specialisation and opportunities in digitalisation</li> <li>▪ Knowledge economy and innovation capacity in relation to ecological transition and circular economy.</li> </ul>
<b>Climate and Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adaptation to climate change and risk management</li> <li>▪ Improved water management</li> <li>▪ Boost urban rural mobility and cross-border mobility</li> </ul>
<b>Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to healthcare and synergies between services, including e health</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strengthening culture and sustainable tourism</li> </ul>
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High level of connectivity and daily crossings</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promoting institutional capacity; legal and administrative cooperation</li> </ul>

**Total Budget:** EUR 417,609,116.07

**Figure 2.40: Split of Interreg allocation**



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Table 3 shows the number of Interreg 2021-2027 cross-border and transnational programmes which share at least one NUTS3 region with the border area. Each programme has its own distinct rationale, value and territorial focus. However, for the purposes of, for example, planning and capitalisation activities it is potentially helpful for programmes and programme stakeholders to be aware of and connected to other Interreg programmes with which they share a direct territorial link.<sup>17</sup> The 4 Interreg C programmes Interreg ESPON, Interact, Interreg Europe and URBACT (Urban Action) cover the whole EU territory and provide a range of joint services and initiatives.

**Table 3: Shared geographies with other cross-border and transnational programmes**

Interreg A (cross-border)	Interreg B (transnational)
2	2

**Key aspects**

- > Focus on protecting biodiversity, on reducing pollution, and on promoting smart, inter-modal transport.
- > Links to opportunities through digital platforms and innovative tools, supporting SMEs (Small and medium-sized enterprises) and smart specialisation.
- > Some territories within the programme area also share territories with Interreg A 2021-2027 Interreg VI-A France-Belgium-Germany-Luxembourg (Grande Région/Großregion), Interreg VI-A Belgium-Netherlands (Vlaanderen-Nederland), Interreg B North West Europe, and North Sea

<sup>17</sup> It is noted that synergies and links with a wide range of other territorial cooperation and sectoral programmes and initiatives are also valuable and this is reflected in the wider analyses presented in this border profile, but not specifically covered in this table.

### 2.6.2.1 Interreg cooperation

#### Indicator description

Based on the keep.eu database, this indicator illustrates the network density of Interreg V-A (2014–2020). It is derived from the geographical location of all partners within a project consortium and reflects the intensity of cooperation between them. For the analysis, project networks were visualised by drawing lines between the locations of partners within a consortium. These connections were subsequently aggregated and spatially abstracted by calculating line density using GIS software. Dark red areas indicate a high density of connections between project partners, while yellow areas represent a lower density of cooperation links.

An additional element in this section is the development of project partner numbers between Interreg IV-A (2007–2013) and Interreg V-A (2014–2020), based on data from the keep.eu database. The datasets were cleaned to remove duplicates, using the partner names as reported in keep.eu. For both programming periods, keep.eu indicates a high level of data completeness<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, this development should be interpreted as indicative, as variations in partner name reporting and general limitations regarding the representativeness of the dataset affect the robustness of the results.

- **Source/method of retrieval:** Processing and analysis of the keep.eu database
- **Temporal coverage:** 2007–2013 (Interreg IV-A), 2014–2020 (Interreg V-A)
- **Unit:** n/a

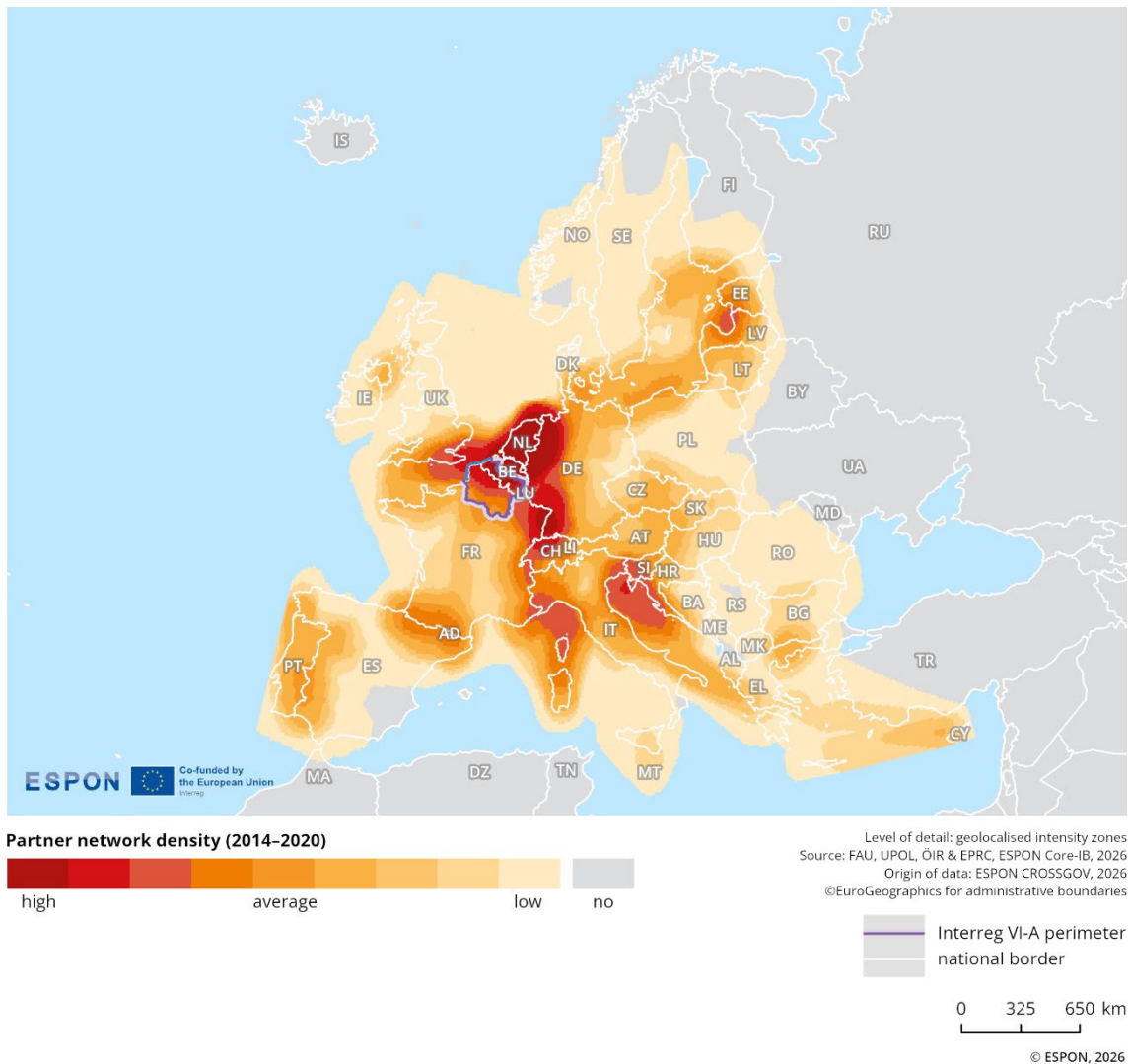
Please refer to the technical annex for more information.

Cooperation activities and networks are among the most meaningful types of information for identifying cross-border interlinkages. As such, the indicator on cooperation through Interreg can help to identify networks among cross-border actors and highlight the density of cooperation in specific border segments.

Figure 2.41 shows the density of Interreg V-A (2014–2020) partner networks. The indicator includes the location of, and links between, Interreg project partners within a project consortium. From a European perspective, partner network density in this programme area appears to be distributed along a north-south gradient. It is particularly high in northern areas directly along the border, while regions further south within the programme area show average levels of partner network density. The partner network density in this border area is one of the highest in Europe. Based on the keep.eu database and excluding duplicates, the number of project partners increased from 665 in Interreg IV-A (2007–2013) to 671 in Interreg V-A (2014–2020), an increase of about 1%. It is important that these changes are considered in the context of factors such as change in programme budgets between 2007–2013 and 2014–2020, emphasis on targeting impact, and numbers of strategic projects.

<sup>18</sup> see [Keep.eu representativeness: Interreg, Interreg-IPA and ENI cross-border](#)

**Figure 2.41: Interreg V-A partner network density**



### 2.6.3 Key messages on the governance dimension

The border area takes a multi-sectoral approach, as illustrated by the balanced distribution of Interreg funding and the variety of institutionalised advisory centres addressing different topics. These include the French–Belgian Health Observatory (OFBS), which focuses on health issues, and Frontaliers Grand Est, which supports cross-border labour market initiatives.

The region's governance structures emphasise the importance of 2 key areas for cross-border integration. One area focuses on the Lille-Kortrijk conurbation and the coastal area, while the other less dense covered area extends towards Luxembourg, with some regions already forming part of the EGTC Greater Region.

The region's long-standing tradition of cross-border interaction is evidenced by 2 key factors. Firstly, there are numerous EGTCs, which represent the most advanced form of cross-border governance due to their distinct legal status. Secondly, the large number of b-solutions initiatives demonstrates widespread awareness of, and proactive engagement with, cross-border challenges.

### 3 Summary and key observations

To support the strategic dialogue on cross-border cooperation beyond 2027, this territorial analysis provides harmonised and comparable information. Its data-driven evidence helps to inform the future direction of cross-border cooperation by facilitating alignment with EU priorities and the evolving regulatory framework. The Core-IB border profiles adopt a harmonised methodology and provide programme areas with access to recent European data. As this approach comes along with limitations, member states may hold additional or more detailed data which can further enrich or contextualise the findings beyond the Core-IB project (see final report and technical annex of this project). These national sources are essential for refining and validating territorial evidence in policymaking processes, including: a) regional, fine-scale data and b) insights from political processes related to prioritisation and objective setting. The study's findings are analytical and are intended to support reflection and discussion. They do not create regulatory or policy obligations for Member States, the European Commission, or programme authorities.

Table 4 provides 2 types of information. Firstly, it summarises the key analytical findings for the border region, as discussed earlier in this profile. Secondly, it suggests policy options based on the analytical findings. These options are intended to provide a practical and informative basis for the strategic dialogue among programme bodies, managing authorities and the European Commission.

Generally speaking, the aim of cohesion policy is to promote harmonious territorial development (also) across borders. The objective is to mitigate the impact of borders and achieve 360° functionality, thereby enhancing the quality of life and fostering prosperous development on both sides of the border. The upcoming Interreg period offers an opportunity to address these objectives and potentials through targeted cooperation projects.

**Table 4: Evidence-based conclusions**

Territorial dimension	
<b>Key analytical findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Belgium–France border region shows high cross-border integration, with dense population, strong accessibility, and well-connected mobility patterns;</li> <li>• Population trends reveal slow growth and ageing, with Belgium experiencing growth compared to France, showing a slight decline, reflecting the gradient between dense urban networks in the northern part of the border region around Lille, Kortrijk, Brugge, Gent and Charleroi and more sparsely populated areas, like the Ardennes and the French hinterland;</li> <li>• Accessibility and functional areas differ: Belgian border areas are highly reachable within 60 minutes, while parts of northern France are more peripheral, and cross-border mobility is mainly oriented around Lille-Kortrijk and Luxembourg.</li> </ul>

Territorial dimension	
<b>Policy options</b>	<p><b>Population and settlement related aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus could be on the sparsely populated areas in the eastern border region (Ardennes) and the French hinterland addressing the trends of slight population decline on the French side;</li> <li>• Cooperation projects could address the sustainable and balanced spatial development across the diversified border region, taking into account the differing territorial dynamics and settlement patterns.</li> </ul> <p><b>Accessibility related aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-border rail links in the Lille–Kortrijk conurbation and between Maubeuge–Charleroi can be enhanced as future strategic backbones for sustainable mobility and cross-border commuting, in the context currently characterised by superior car connectivity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cross-cutting aspect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spatial planning, housing policy and risk management could be further developed from a cross-border perspective, with particular attention to the fast-growing urban corridors such as the Lille–Kortrijk conurbation, in order to ensure coordinated and sustainable territorial development.</li> </ul>

Economic dimension	
<b>Key analytical findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The border region has GDP per capita slightly below the European average, with economic activity concentrated in less profitable sectors such as education, health, and social work;</li> <li>• Employment is uneven: Belgian cities generally show higher employment, while French areas and Belgian arrondissements near Luxembourg experience low local employment due to (cross-border) commuting;</li> <li>• Cross-border mobility is driven by wage differences, with many people commuting from France to Belgium, while digital infrastructure is stronger on the French side, offering some economic potential.</li> </ul>

Economic dimension	
<b>Policy options</b>	<p><b>Competitiveness related aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elevated digital infrastructure in the French part of the border region can be leveraged to reduce the existing economic gap in terms of GDP through targeted cross-border cooperation and investment approaches;</li> <li>• Cross-border cooperation projects could address the transition towards knowledge-intensive services and increased digitalisation, building on the common assets and complementarities across the border region.</li> </ul> <p><b>Labour market related aspect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy development, pilot projects and knowledge exchange can address the shared labour market challenges, including the decline of the working-age population, through cross-border exchange, workforce development and policy alignment.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cross-cutting aspect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation could address the spatial asymmetries such as differences in nominal compensation per hour, which drive cross-border commuting, particularly along major cross-border mobility axes oriented around Lille–Kortrijk and Luxembourg, through coordinated territorial, labour market and mobility approaches.</li> </ul>

Green dimension	
<b>Key analytical findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The border region shows strong cross-border environmental cooperation, with protected areas and shared challenges such as air pollution (Lille-Kortrijk conurbation), landslide risks (Ardennes), water quality issues (Scheldt/Escaut, Sambre river basins) and coastal flooding (Calais-Oostende);</li> <li>• Energy infrastructure is highly integrated, supported by extra-high-voltage lines and major power plants, including French nuclear facilities;</li> <li>• Sustainability is progressing: resource productivity is improving above the European average, though waste generation remains a challenge.</li> </ul>

Green dimension	
<b>Policy options</b>	<p><b>Climate risks and resilience related aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus could be on risk management by systematically integrating a cross-border perspective in response to common vulnerabilities to natural hazards, including the development of cross-border early warning systems and coordinated adaptive infrastructure, in particular for landslide risks (Ardennes) and coastal flooding (Calais-Oostende);</li> <li>• Joint measures could be developed and implemented to address the air pollution levels exceeding EU averages, with a particular focus on densely populated and highly trafficked urban corridors, such as the Lille-Kortrijk conurbation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cross-cutting aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation projects could focus on cross-border conservation efforts for common natural assets, such as cross-border water bodies including the Scheldt/Escaut and the Sambre;</li> <li>• The experiences from longstanding cross-border protected areas can be capitalised on to inform and support similar approaches in areas with comparable spatial and environmental characteristics;</li> <li>• The transition of the border region towards a greener economy to reduce the waste generation through coordinated strategies, knowledge exchange and joint initiatives.</li> </ul>

Socio-economic dimension	
<b>Key analytical findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The France–Belgium border region is highly integrated, in particular in areas close to the border, with strong social interaction facilitated by a common language and reinforced by socio-economic links along the Lille–Kortrijk and Luxembourg axes;</li> <li>• Tourism plays a minor role, with overnight stays below national and European averages;</li> <li>• Service provision is largely accessible across the border, though some eastern areas face limited access to Belgian hospitals.</li> </ul>

Socio-economic dimension	
<b>Policy options</b>	<p><b>Cross-cutting aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-border cooperation could focus on improving the access to health services across the border region through coordinated service provision, shared infrastructure and institutional cooperation;</li> <li>• The strong socio-cultural proximity within the border region can be leveraged to strengthen cross-border labour markets, education systems and service provision via joint initiatives;</li> <li>• The existing cultural proximity can be used as a foundation for formulating joint long-term spatial development perspectives, supporting coherent and integrated territorial planning across the border region.</li> </ul>

Border security and safety dimension	
<b>Key analytical findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Belgium–France border shows an asymmetric pattern of temporary controls: France has implemented them far more frequently than Belgium over the past 20 years;</li> <li>• Controls were triggered by events such as terrorism, international summits, migration flows, and the COVID-19 pandemic;</li> <li>• This asymmetry creates uneven impacts on commuting, logistics, and daily cross-border interactions, often restricting movement in one direction more than the other.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy options</b>	<p><b>Cross-cutting aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impacts of border controls on cross-border commuting and logistics can be mitigated through coordinated and institutionalised cross-border policy dialogue;</li> <li>• The mitigation of border control effects can form part of cross-border cooperation projects in various sectors. Economic networks, transport infrastructure initiatives and tourism-related actions can incorporate considerations related to the impacts of border controls.</li> </ul>

<b>Governance dimension</b>	
<b>Key analytical findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The border region adopts a multi-sectoral approach, supported by diverse Interreg funding and advisory centres, including health (OFBS) and labour market initiatives (Frontaliers Grand Est);</li> <li>• Governance focuses on 2 main axes: the Lille–Kortrijk conurbation and to a lesser extent areas extending towards Luxembourg, with parts integrated into the EGTC Greater Region;</li> <li>• Long-standing cross-border engagement is evidenced by numerous EGTCs and b-solutions initiatives, reflecting proactive management of cross-border challenges.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy options</b>	<p><b>Cross-cutting aspects</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) could be supported to further drive cooperation in functional areas where asymmetries remain high, such as compensation levels or digital infrastructure, building on existing strong institutional cross-border frameworks;</li> <li>• A focus could be on the alignment of governance solutions with the functional realities of cross-border areas to better reflect cross-border interactions and dependencies;</li> <li>• The potential of institutionalised cross-border advice centres can be explored to support citizens, businesses and administrations in addressing cross-border issues effectively;</li> <li>• Cooperation projects could strategically address the effective functioning of multi-level cross-border governance via improved coordination, clearer allocation of competences and more structured cooperation across governance levels;</li> <li>• Strategy development, pilot projects and knowledge exchange can explore the potentials of establishing new cross-border frameworks between the main cross-border mobility axes oriented around Lille–Kortrijk and Luxembourg to further support cross-border integration.</li> </ul>



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## **ESPON 2030**

ESPON EGTC  
11 Avenue John F. Kennedy  
L-1855 Luxembourg  
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg  
Phone: +352 20 600 280  
Email: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)  
[www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu)

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

### Disclaimer

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