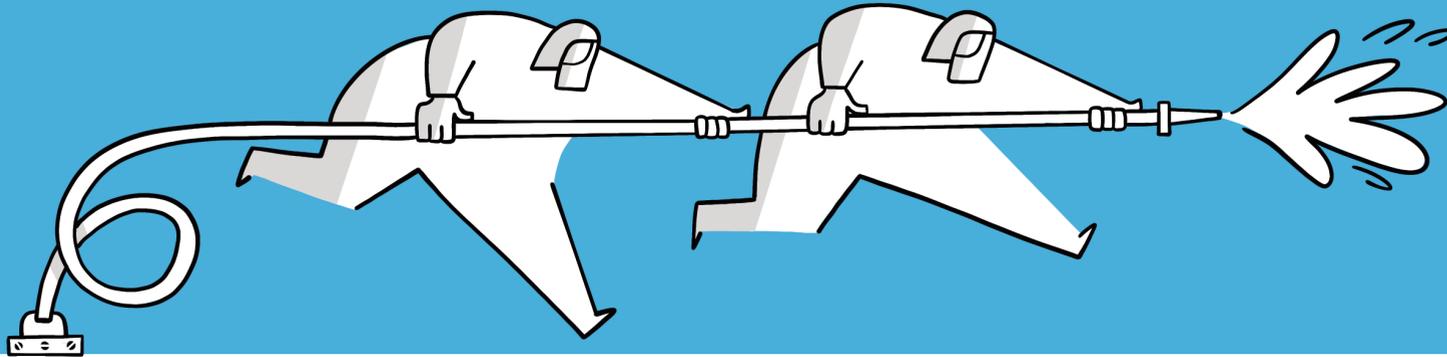
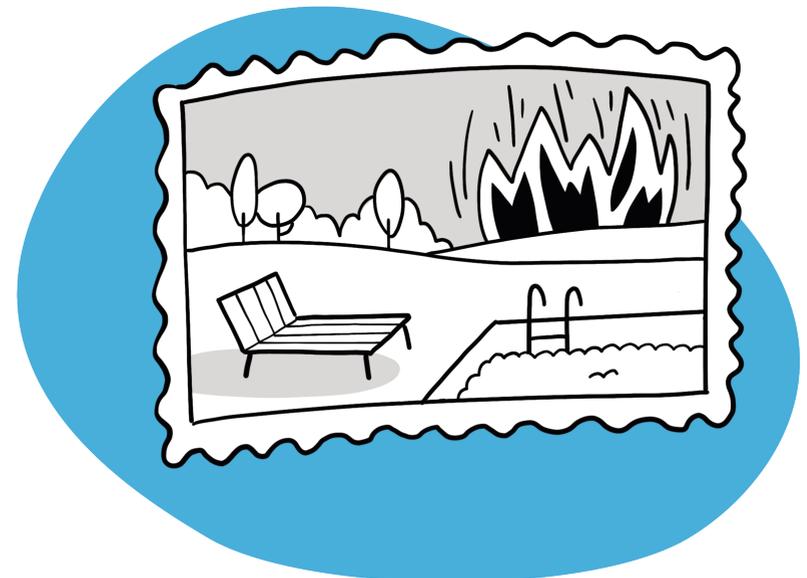


# Working better together to improve fire control



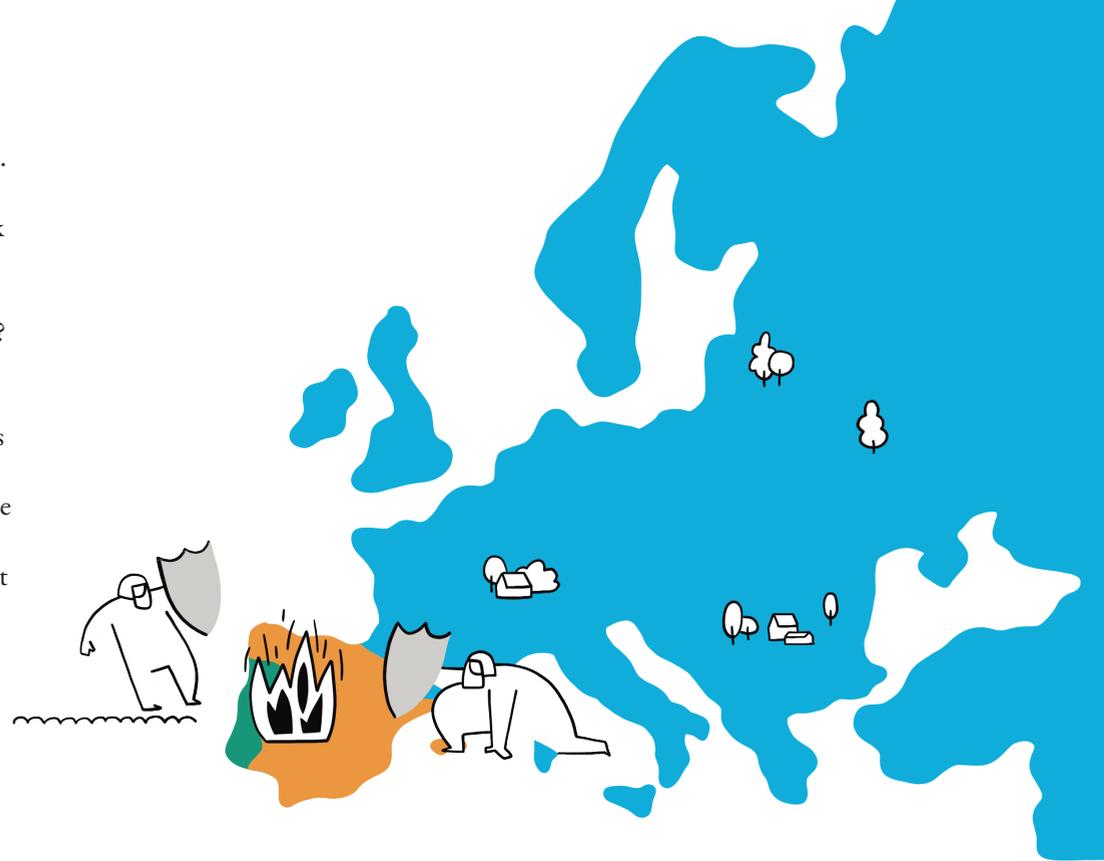
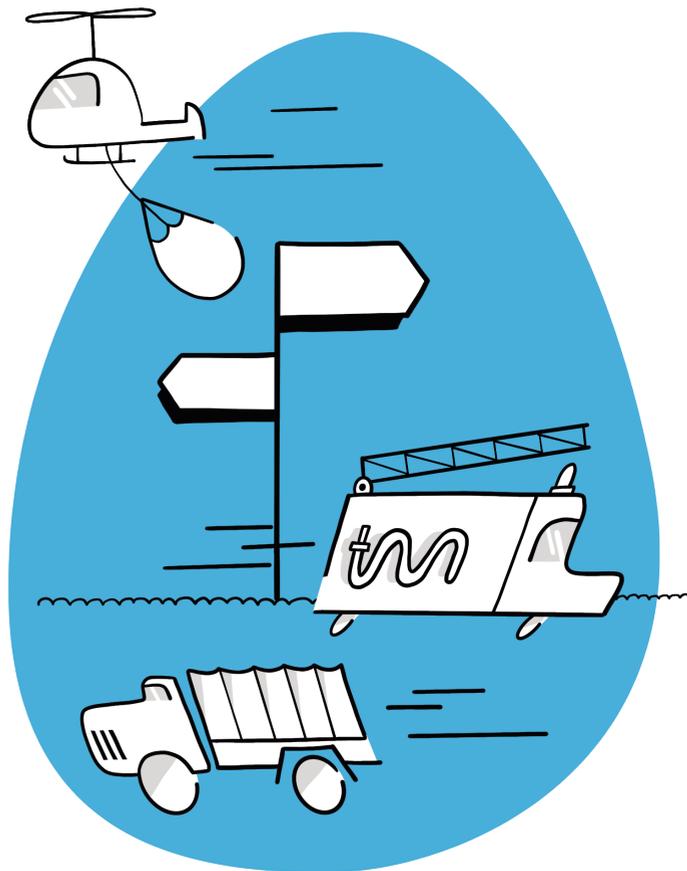
Rosa Maria was born in São Pedro do Rio Seco (Portugal), very close to the border with Spain. Stories of fires, particularly during the summer months, were part of her childhood and always made a strong impression on her. As an adult, she has been studying the evolution of fires. She bitterly remembers the tragedy that occurred in 2017 in Pedrógao Grande (Portugal), when 66 people died, and she refers to the mega-fires that the world has witnessed in recent years, such as those in Australia in 2019 or California and Oregon in 2020, to explain how they are bigger, more unpredictable and much more destructive than just a few decades ago.

Fighting fires is even more difficult when borders are involved. National disasters can easily spread across borders and require well-coordinated efforts. The border between Spain and Portugal exemplifies that challenge well. From the very south to the north of the Peninsula, the border area is highly prone to fires. Fortunately, cooperation to fight fires in Spain and Portugal has shown considerable progress in recent years. For example, firefighters, police and military from both countries are allowed to travel up to 25 kilometers into the territory of the other country to fight the flames in particularly serious situations. However, more is needed.



National strategies to fight natural disasters show remarkable differences across borders. For example, in terms of infrastructure, Spain has more aircraft and heavy machinery, while Portugal has more terrestrial equipment. Those entail different ways of training, establishing protocols, and organising and executing firefighting operations on the ground. Additionally, the lack of a common language, particularly in the coordination of highly risky operations, remains a critical problem. There is a common understanding about the need to work better together, but what does this mean in practice?

Prevention has greatly improved. Measures such as more information and awareness, better preparation of the fields and forests so that the fires are less virulent, ensuring good conditions of both infrastructure and machinery, and better investigation into the causes of fires are all ongoing efforts that are proving successful. However, there are other aspects more specific to the nature of cross-border action that could lead to major improvements to fight fires successfully.



According to **Juan Gómez Roldán**, Head of the Forest Fire Prevention and Extinction Service of the Region of Extremadura,

**“ unlike in other areas, better cooperation in this field does not require more financial resources, but rather a combination of steps to consolidate an adequate framework for working better together. ”**

In this sense, *b-solutions* has been instrumental in identifying two measures that would considerably improve their capacity to work together efficiently. The first one is to harmonise the certificate to conduct air operations in Spain and Portugal. This would speed up the capacity to respond in order to extinguish a fire. The second is improving the capacity of Spanish and Portuguese firefighters to coordinate operations, and at the same time, overcome the language and communication challenges. The creation of a Single Operational Command would provide an enormous added value, improving the management and coordination of fire control in cross-border regions, as well as gradually agreeing on protocols and methods to combat fire emergencies to protect the environment and save people's lives.