



Domestic CIMIC

Civil-military cooperation on Allied territory: Finland, Germany and Spain compared

Condensed version of the revised concept paper (September 2026)

Sonja Gruenbauer
2026

Executive Summary

This study examines how Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) is conceptualised and implemented in domestic contexts and what national variation means for NATO collective defence. It compares Finland, Germany and Spain as deliberately different national systems and asks how each connects military requirements with civilian authorities, emergency-management structures, infrastructure providers, the private sector and society.

The central finding is that institutional diversity coexists with functional convergence. Finland embeds civil-military cooperation in Comprehensive Security; Germany relies on a territorial liaison architecture within a federal and constitutionally constrained system; Spain combines a specialised Military Emergency Unit (UME) with an evolving framework for broader domestic military support. Despite these differences, all three must perform comparable functions: civil factor integration, liaison and interaction, information exchange, dependency identification, coordination of support, access to civilian capabilities, and reconciliation of civilian and military priorities.

The comparison also reveals a reciprocity gap. Domestic cooperation has often been framed as military assistance to civilian authorities. Collective defence reverses part of this logic: military operations on Allied territory depend on civilian and commercial systems for transport, energy, communications, healthcare and logistics. Domestic CIMIC must therefore address two-way interdependence.

NATO does not need identical domestic CIMIC organisations. It needs functional interoperability: enough transparency about national authorities, responsibilities, capabilities, procedures and points of contact for national systems to connect to Alliance planning. The recommendations prioritise a common functional framework, mapping of reciprocal dependencies, closer links to Host Nation Support and military mobility, secure information exchange, private-sector participation, mutual civil-military education, and exercises that test the transition from peace through crisis to collective defence.

1. Context and Problem

1.1 Why domestic CIMIC matters

NATO describes civil preparedness as a critical enabler of collective defence and links resilience directly to Allies' responsibilities under Article 3.¹ Resilience is the individual and collective 'capacity to prepare for, resist, respond to and quickly recover from shocks and disruptions'; civil preparedness rests on three core functions: continuity of government, continuity of essential services to the population, and civil support to military operations.² Since 2016 Allies have measured national resilience against seven baseline requirements.³ Here they serve only as sectoral lenses for locating civil-military interfaces, not as a CIMIC maturity model. NATO publicly released its 2026 Resilience Baseline Requirements in September 2026, after this study's evidence base had been compiled; they are not assessed here.⁴

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine accelerated the Alliance's reassessment of preparedness for large-scale conflict. The implication is not that every civilian function becomes a military responsibility, but that military planning must account for the civilian systems that enable operations and the civilian consequences operations create.⁵ At Washington in 2024 Allies pledged to integrate civilian planning into national and collective defence planning.⁶ Yet NATO guidance leaves the institutional design of domestic civil-military cooperation to individual Allies, so forces deploying across Allied territory meet different authorities, procedures and points of contact.

Two legal anchors frame the issue. Article 3 makes each Ally responsible for maintaining its capacity to resist armed attack; Article 5 provides the framework for collective action once an armed attack has occurred. In practice, crises combine civil disruption, hybrid activity, military preparation and armed conflict, so legal authorities and coordination requirements change along the way, while civilian primacy and national law remain fundamental. The study therefore treats the domestic civil-military interface as an operational problem of collective defence, not as an extension of expeditionary CIMIC practice.

1.2 Problem statement

A. Conceptual ambiguity. 'CIMIC' can denote the NATO military joint function and its specialist capability, or any civil-military cooperation. Labels such as National, Domestic or Homeland CIMIC are used inconsistently. A state can perform extensive civil-military coordination through emergency-management, territorial-defence or total-defence structures without a CIMIC unit; conversely, the presence of CIMIC personnel does not show that civilian dependencies are integrated into military planning. This study uses **Domestic CIMIC** for the military and civil-military interface functions conducted within national territory to identify, understand, coordinate and manage reciprocal dependencies, requirements, capabilities and effects between military forces and civilian authorities, organisations, infrastructure providers, the private sector and society across peace, crisis and conflict.

¹ NATO, *Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3*, NATO topic page, 13 September 2024.

² NATO (2024), *Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3*.

³ NATO, *Commitment to enhance resilience*, 8 July 2016.

⁴ NATO, *2026 Resilience Baseline Requirements*, 15 September 2026.

⁵ Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence, *Case Study Ukraine: A CIMIC Analysis* (The Hague: CCOE, 2026).

⁶ NATO, *Washington Summit Declaration*, 10 July 2024.

- B. Doctrine versus national practice.** NATO doctrine does not prescribe how Allies organise domestic civil-military cooperation. The resulting gap is a translation problem between an Alliance military function and diverse national governance systems, not national non-compliance. The operational concern is whether national systems expose the authorities, capabilities, information and relationships NATO forces need.
- C. Friction under collective-defence conditions.** The 2024 NATO Resilience Symposium stressed integrating civilian and military planning, identifying military dependence on civilian-owned assets and deconflicting military and civilian demand.⁷ Three friction points recur: institutional arrangements not designed for the scale, tempo and reciprocity of collective defence; information exchange constrained by classification and incompatible systems; and peacetime emergency mechanisms that do not translate automatically into crisis and conflict.
- D. Mutual institutional literacy.** NATO CIMIC has doctrine, specialists and training, whereas many civilian counterparts meet CIMIC only as one element of wider responsibilities.⁸ The relevant question is reciprocal: whether the actors expected to cooperate understand each other's authorities, constraints, procedures and points of contact.

1.3 Research questions

RQ1: How does the conceptualisation of CIMIC as either a joint function or a specialised support activity shape its integration into domestic civil-military structures and planning? **RQ2:** How do national approaches to domestic civil-military cooperation differ from one another and from the NATO CIMIC framework, and what do these differences imply for functional interoperability in collective defence?

2 Approach and limits

The study is a comparative case study following the logic of structured, focused comparison: each case is examined through the same analytical questions.⁹ Finland, Germany and Spain – presented from north to south – were selected on a most-different-systems logic within a shared Alliance framework: all are NATO members, but they differ in the constitutional and legal frameworks for domestic military deployment, strategic culture and threat perception, institutional architecture, and operational experience. They are not treated as equivalent in size, expenditure or threat perception, and the comparison does not rank national preparedness.

Each case is examined across five dimensions: (1) legal and governance context; (2) actors, authorities and points of contact; (3) performance of core CIMIC-related functions, including Civil Factor Integration and Civil-Military Interaction; (4) management of reciprocal civil-military dependencies; and (5) ability to connect national arrangements to NATO requirements such as Host Nation Support (HNS), military mobility, resilience and collective-defence planning.

Evidence comes from legal and doctrinal documents, expert consultations (semi-structured interviews in Finland and Germany, an informal written exchange on Spain), a practitioner survey¹⁰ and secondary literature. The limits are clear: only three cases, so findings should not be extrapolated to the Alliance; an exploratory, qualitative design that does not measure resilience or causal effects; limited access to operationally sensitive documents; a limited number of consultations; and later developments only partly reflected. Spain is the most weakly evidenced case.

⁹ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, 'The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison', in: *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 67–72.

¹⁰ S. Gruenbauer, *Survey on Domestic CIMIC and Civil Preparedness*, 11 August 2026 (Domestic CIMIC Research Project).

3 Conceptual and doctrinal framework

3.1 From AJP-9 to a joint function

NATO's first CIMIC doctrine, AJP-9 (2003), defined CIMIC as 'the co-ordination and co-operation, in support of the mission, between the NATO Commander and civil actors, including national population and local authorities, as well as international, national and non-governmental organisations and agencies'.¹¹ It organised CIMIC around three functions: civil-military liaison, support to the civil environment and support to the force. AJP-9 did not formally exclude collective defence – it stated that CIMIC applied to both Article 5 and non-Article 5 operations and foresaw CIMIC facilitating Host Nation Support.¹² Its conceptual centre of gravity, however, was the expeditionary mission, with civil actors as counterparts for coordination in support of the commander.

AJP-9 was succeeded by AJP-3.4.9 and, since 2018, by AJP-3.19, whose Edition A already described CIMIC as a joint function.¹³ Edition B (2025) defines CIMIC as 'a military joint function that integrates the understanding of the civil factors of the operating environment and that enables, facilitates and conducts civil-military interaction to support the accomplishment of missions and military strategic objectives in peacetime, crisis and conflict'.¹⁴ The shift is from coordination as an act towards the integration of civil understanding: civil factors become part of the operating environment that must be analysed and built into planning. As a joint function, CIMIC is intended to be integrated across planning and operations, which makes civil considerations a recurring command responsibility rather than an issue delegated to specialists. It does not mean that CIMIC staff control civilian matters.

'Support activity' and 'joint function' are not mutually exclusive: CIMIC expertise continues to support commanders through civil analysis, liaison and advice. The issue is whether support is understood narrowly as a specialist service or whether it enables the wider force to integrate the civil dimension routinely. The professional debate points the same way; at the 2025 CIMIC Units Commanders' Conference SHAPE's then ACOS J9 described CIMIC as a strategic capability rather than a support asset.¹⁵

3.2 Civil Factor Integration, Civil-Military Interaction and Domestic CIMIC

Civil Factor Integration (CFI) is the internal military process through which civil information and analysis enter military understanding and decision-making, even when no external engagement takes place. **Civil-Military Interaction (CMI)** is the external engagement – liaison, coordination, consultation, negotiation – with authorities, organisations, companies and communities. The two are analytically distinct but operationally interdependent: interaction generates information for civil analysis, and analysis determines with whom to engage.¹⁶

Domestic civil-military cooperation and NATO CIMIC overlap but are not synonymous. The former describes the wider national system through which civilian and military institutions coordinate responsibilities, capabilities and dependencies; Domestic CIMIC, as used here, is the military-facing interface within that system. The case studies therefore apply a functional test rather than an organisational one: which functions are required, who performs them, under what legal authority, and through which interfaces they connect to military planning.

¹¹ NATO, AJP-9: *NATO Civil-Military Co-operation (CIMIC) Doctrine* (NATO, 2003), p. 1-1.

¹² NATO (2003), AJP-9.

¹³ NATO, AJP-3.19: *Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation, Edition A, Version 1* (NATO Standardization Office, 2018).

¹⁴ NATO, AJP-3.19: *Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation, Edition B, Version 1* (NATO Standardization Office, June 2025), p. 2.

¹⁵ Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), 'Strategic Convergence and CIMIC Leadership at the Core of NATO's Civil-Military Engagement', news release, 6 June 2025.

¹⁶ NATO (2025), AJP-3.19, Edition B.

4 Case studies

4.1 Finland: embedded integration

Model. Comprehensive Security distributes responsibility for safeguarding vital societal functions across public authorities, the Defence Forces, business, organisations and citizens.¹⁷ Finland has no discrete domestic CIMIC structure; CIMIC terminology has historically been tied to international operations such as Afghanistan or Mali, while domestic cooperation is discussed as comprehensive security, total defence, preparedness and inter-authority cooperation.¹⁸ Each authority continues its statutory responsibilities during disruptions as long as possible, so preparedness is built into existing administration rather than transferred to a separate emergency organisation. Civilian authorities remain responsible for civilian functions and the military provides capabilities where appropriate. Cooperation is therefore inherently bidirectional: military support to civilian authorities and civilian support to military defence. Finland illustrates reciprocity without institutional fusion.

Society and networks. All citizens have a national defence obligation;¹⁹ men aged 18 to 60 are liable for military service²⁰ and women aged 18 to 29 may volunteer.²¹ Conscription acts as a bridge between the armed forces and society, so cooperation benefits from relationships that exist before a crisis.²² The National Defence Courses have brought together politicians, officials and business leaders for more than six decades.²³ Regional and local exercises with authorities, companies and NGOs build trust; coordination is reported to become harder at higher administrative levels, where political responsibility, legal competence and funding come into play.²⁴ The private sector is indispensable: it owns or operates much of the infrastructure on which both society and the Defence Forces depend.

Vignettes. In healthcare, military demand would rise while civilian demand continues or grows; civilian capacity must not be treated as automatically available military capacity, and planning needs a joint assessment of what can be provided, for how long and at what cost to civilian services. In critical infrastructure, energy, transport, telecommunications and logistics are predominantly civilian yet decisive for military capability, and infrastructure dimensioned for national needs must now also support reception, staging, onward movement and sustainment of Allied forces.

Assessment. Strengths are an embedded preparedness culture, trust, continuity of structures and stocks, regular exercising and recognition of the private sector as a security actor. Frictions are information sharing (classification and incompatible IT, made more acute by NATO membership),²⁵ resource prioritisation, regulatory speed in a severe crisis, cross-border interoperability, and terminology: ‘total defence’ does not mean the same everywhere. Transferable principles are building relationships before a crisis, involving civilian actors in planning rather than treating them as resources, exercising with private-sector organisations and NGOs, strategic-level education and networking, and translating resilience objectives into concrete responsibilities. For NATO, Finland shows that effective cooperation can exist without a dedicated CIMIC structure, and that secure exchange of classified or sanitised planning information is a CIMIC capability requirement.

17 Security Committee (Finland), *Security Strategy for Society* (Helsinki: Finnish Government, 2025).

18 K. Pelkonen, interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Research Project on National Civil-Military Cooperation and Total Defence), 5 August 2026.

19 Ministry of Justice (Finland), *The Constitution of Finland* (Helsinki: Ministry of Justice, 2018).

20 Ministry of Defence (Finland), *Conscription Act* (2008).

21 Suomi.fi, ‘Voluntary military service for women’, 27 October 2025.

22 R. Björn and V.-P. Valkamo, interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Domestic CIMIC Research Project – Case Study Finland), 29 July 2026.

23 Security Committee (Finland), ‘National Defence Courses’, web page, n.d.

24 Pelkonen (2026), interview.

25 Gruenbauer (2026), survey.

4.2 Germany: territorial liaison

Context. The German system is shaped by the legacy of National Socialism and the Second World War, a highly decentralised federal system and a constitutionally anchored separation of civilian and military responsibilities. The Basic Law entered into force in 1949; the Bundeswehr, established in 1955, was embedded in democratic control.²⁶ It has no general police powers,²⁷ and domestic employment rests on Articles 35 (administrative assistance, Amtshilfe, and disaster relief) and 87a of the Basic Law.²⁸ As a Cold War front state, West Germany built extensive civil-military structures, and interviewees note that some ZMZ concepts still resemble those of the 1980s. Today Germany is a rear area, logistical hub, Host Nation and transit nation (*Drehscheibe Deutschland*)²⁹, and since 2022 attention has shifted from International Crisis Management to National and Alliance Defence (Landes- und Bündnisverteidigung, LV/BV).³⁰ With 16 federal states there is no single civilian counterpart; disaster-management law, police structures and procedures differ.

Architecture. German ZMZ (Zivil-Militärische Zusammenarbeit) and NATO CIMIC are two distinct terms: ZMZ covers reciprocal arrangements between the Bundeswehr and civilian actors on the basis of German law and must interface with NATO structures (Figure 1).³¹ The Operational Command is the central interface for national and multinational actors,³² and the Operational Plan for Germany (OPLAN DEU) links military planning with civilian support and HNS.³³ Each federal state has a Landeskommmando; below it, liaison commands at district and county level (BVK, KVK), staffed predominantly by reservists, provide local points of contact, help authorities translate civilian needs into formal requests and build relationships before an emergency.³⁴ The Amtshilfe process is well established: requests must come from a competent public authority, private organisations cannot submit them directly, and costs and legal competence are considered.³⁵ The reverse direction – military requests for civilian support – is less visible and less exercised; OPLAN DEU details are classified, and some needs are met through existing commercial contracts.

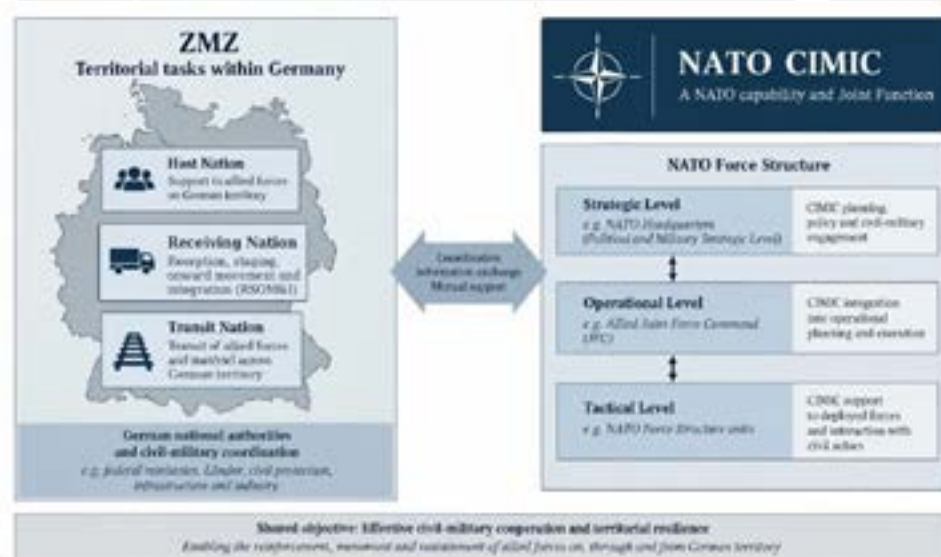


Figure 1. Relationship between Germany's ZMZ and NATO CIMIC

Note: This figure illustrates how ZMZ's territorial tasks within Germany (Host Nation, Receiving Nation, Transit Nation) connect with NATO's CIMIC capability and Joint Function across the strategic, operational and tactical levels of the NATO Force Structure.

26 Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 'Geschichte', web page, n.d.

27 Landeskommmando Bayern, interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Domestic CIMIC Research Project), 29 June 2026.

28 Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, in the revised version published in the Federal Law Gazette Part III, classification number 100-1, as last amended by the Act of 22 March 2025 (Federal Law Gazette 2025 I, No. 94).

29 T. Melber, interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Domestic CIMIC Research Project), 3 June 2026.

30 Kommando Zivil-Militärische Zusammenarbeit der Bundeswehr (Bundeswehr Civil-Military Cooperation Command), interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Domestic CIMIC Research Project), 21 July 2026.

31 Landeskommmando Bayern (2026), interview.

32 Bundeswehr, 'Das Operative Führungskommando der Bundeswehr', web page, n.d.

33 Bundeswehr, Operational Plan for Germany, web page, 2026.

34 Melber (2026), interview.

35 Landeskommmando Bayern (2026), interview.

Vignettes. In healthcare, the Amtshilfe system provides for civilian requests for military medical support, but allocating civilian capacity to military needs in sustained conflict is harder, because private providers cannot use the same administrative channels. Logistics and military mobility show reciprocal dependency most clearly: reinforcement depends on transport infrastructure, permissions, police coordination, commercial logistics and fuel; HNS arrangements can operate outside Amtshilfe, but fragmented procedures and incompatible information systems cause friction. In industry, contracts designed for peacetime may meet workforce shortages, cyberattack or competing priorities in a sustained conflict, so the question is whether industrial capability remains resilient.

Assessment. The main strengths are the territorial liaison architecture, mature assistance procedures and HNS experience. Frictions are federal fragmentation, information exchange, unclear funding and responsibility, the mobilisation of reservists (which now depends on individual and employer cooperation rather than conscription-era structures) and uneven mutual literacy. The constitutional separation is a design condition, not a deficiency; the task is to make cooperation work across it. Transferable lessons are permanent local liaison below national level (the KVK model is relevant for federal states), clearly defined request procedures – which require an equivalent for civilian support to military operations – and training that moves from crisis management abroad towards total defence, including legal questions such as responsibility for casualties, treatment of prisoners of war, access to infrastructure and mobilisation.

4.3 Spain: specialised response

Spanish law provides a clear basis for military involvement in domestic emergencies: the Armed Forces contribute, with state institutions and public administrations, to protecting citizens in situations of serious risk, catastrophe or public need.³⁶ The UME is a permanent military organisation for major emergencies; Royal Decree 1097/2011 governs its intervention, provides for cooperation with public administrations and allows it to employ personnel from other units.³⁷ The National Civil Protection System remains a civilian system.³⁸ The UME generates extensive civil-military interaction, but it should not be equated with the CIMIC joint function: its purpose is emergency response, not the systematic integration of civil factors into military planning. The 2020 National Defence Directive confirms the importance of civil-military cooperation but does not show how the joint function is organised domestically.³⁹

The 2024 Valencia floods (Operation DANA) are the clearest test. The UME was reinforced by capabilities from across the Armed Forces, operating in support of and, where relevant, under the operational direction of the UME.⁴⁰ The UME itself deployed more than 2,200 personnel and 600 assets, and the wider military contribution became considerably larger.⁴¹ Army elements conducted liaison with civilian authorities, identified needs and supported distribution.⁴² According to an informal exchange with an expert, lessons from DANA also fed into doctrinal work on Army support to the UME; that framework had not been formally approved during the research period.

Spain is best characterised as a specialised-response model with a standing military organisation prepared to interact with civilian emergency structures. It shows that the intensity of military-civil interaction is not itself a measure of domestic CIMIC integration. Whether this architecture connects to HNS, military mobility, contested infrastructure and competing resource demands cannot be determined from the available evidence; Spain should be treated as an evolving and more weakly evidenced case.

³⁶ Jefatura del Estado (Spain), *Ley Orgánica 5/2005, de 17 de noviembre, de la Defensa Nacional*, BOE.

³⁷ Ministerio de la Presidencia (Spain), *Real Decreto 1097/2011, de 22 de julio, por el que se aprueba el Protocolo de Intervención de la Unidad Militar de Emergencias*, BOE, 26 July 2011.

³⁸ Jefatura del Estado (Spain), *Ley 17/2015, de 9 de julio, del Sistema Nacional de Protección Civil*, BOE.

³⁹ Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón, *Directiva de Defensa Nacional 2020*, 11 June 2020.

⁴⁰ Ministerio de Defensa (Spain), *‘Robles destaca la eficacia, rapidez y humanidad del Ejército del Aire y del Espacio para afrontar las consecuencias de la DANA’*, La Moncloa, 6 November 2024.

⁴¹ Ministerio de Defensa (Spain), *‘La Unidad Militar de Emergencias: Un año de desafíos, logros y compromiso global’*, 2 January 2025.

⁴² Ministerio de Defensa (Spain), *‘Regimiento de Operaciones de Información nº 1’ (Operación DANA Valencia)*, 16 January 2025.

5 Comparative analysis

5.1 Functional convergence and three models

Across the cases, the same functions recur: liaison, Civil Factor Integration, Civil-Military Interaction, information exchange, dependency mapping, coordination of requests and support, access to civilian capabilities, and reconciliation of military requirements with civilian priorities – even where they are not labelled CIMIC. This suggests distinguishing structural CIMIC (identifiable CIMIC organisations, staffs, liaison elements or specialists) from functional CIMIC (the actual performance of CFI, CMI, liaison, information exchange, dependency identification and coordination). Organisational structures are poor proxies for the actual level of integration: a country may have dedicated structures and still show functional gaps, while another performs many CIMIC-related functions through institutions that do not carry the label.

The cases can be read as three exploratory models (Table 1). They are not a hierarchy of effectiveness, they reflect different historical, constitutional and strategic conditions, and they are not mutually exclusive: embedded preparedness, territorial liaison networks and specialised response capabilities can coexist in one national system.

	Finland	Germany	Spain
Dominant Model	Embedded integration	Territorial liaison	Specialised response
Core framework	Comprehensive Security	ZMZ / territorial structures	UME-centred emergency response
Institutional logic	Distributed	Federal and networked	Specialised military capability
CIMIC Label	Limited relevance domestically	More visible; ZMZ and NATO CIMIC are not identical	Appears primarily associated with military operational capability (limited evidence)
Civilian Interface	Embedded cross-sector networks	Formal territorial liaison	Strongest in emergency management
Peacetime Integration	High and continuous	Standing architecture, varying practical interaction	Standing emergency-response capability
Collective-defence challenge	Integrating NATO requirements; prioritising competing resources	Transition from Amtshilfe towards reciprocal LV/BV requirements	Connecting emergency-response experience to wider National and Alliance Defence
Key lesson	CIMIC functions can exist without dedicated CIMIC structures	Dedicated interfaces do not eliminate legal and institutional friction	Emergency-response capability is not a comprehensive domestic CIMIC architecture

Table 1: Comparative overview – analytical ideal types, not rankings of national preparedness.

5.2 From assistance to interdependence: the reciprocity gap

Peacetime domestic cooperation is often imagined as a civilian request followed by military support, and floods, wildfires and pandemics have created established mechanisms for it. Collective defence adds the reverse dependency: military forces on national territory depend on civilian transport, energy, communications, healthcare, industry, administration and private logistics, while civilian authorities may simultaneously need military support to maintain essential services or manage population movements (Figure 2). The comparison shows a **reciprocity gap**: systems with extensive experience of military assistance to civilian authorities do not necessarily have equally mature mechanisms for integrating civilian capabilities into military requirements. Germany is the clearest example, with mature request procedures in one direction and much less tested ones in the other. Finland is structurally better placed but still faces hard prioritisation questions, for instance in healthcare. For Spain the evidence is too thin to judge.



Figure 2: Two directions of dependency in domestic CIMIC.

5.3 Sources of friction

Four recurring sources of friction cut across the cases. **Governance:** whole-of-society distribution in Finland, federal decentralisation in Germany and a specialised military capability in Spain shape who holds formal responsibility and how fast information and requests move between national, regional and local levels. **Legal frameworks:** they determine what military actors may do and under whose authority; Germany shows that legal limits are an intentional feature of democratic governance, and the question is whether coordination can work across them. **Information exchange:** classification, incompatible systems, organisational culture and differing information needs inhibit exchange; digital interoperability is a civil-military capability requirement, not merely an IT problem. **Transitions:** structures that function in routine emergency assistance cannot be assumed to work under wartime conditions, when authorities, priorities, command relationships and information needs change.

5.4 Functional interoperability

Interoperability in domestic CIMIC cannot be reduced to technical compatibility or standardisation. It has four dimensions (Figure 3): **technical** (systems and communications), **procedural** (how to request support, exchange information, resolve competing requirements), **conceptual** (shared understanding of terms such as CIMIC, resilience, HNS, Comprehensive Security and total defence) and **relational** (trust and contacts that cannot be created quickly once a crisis begins). Finland builds relational interoperability through long-standing networks and exercises, Germany through its liaison architecture, Spain through repeated emergency operations. Civilians need not know NATO CIMIC terminology, but they need to understand military responsibilities, requirements, limits and points of contact; military personnel need the same of civilian governance, law, ownership structures and commercial constraints. This is **mutual institutional literacy**.

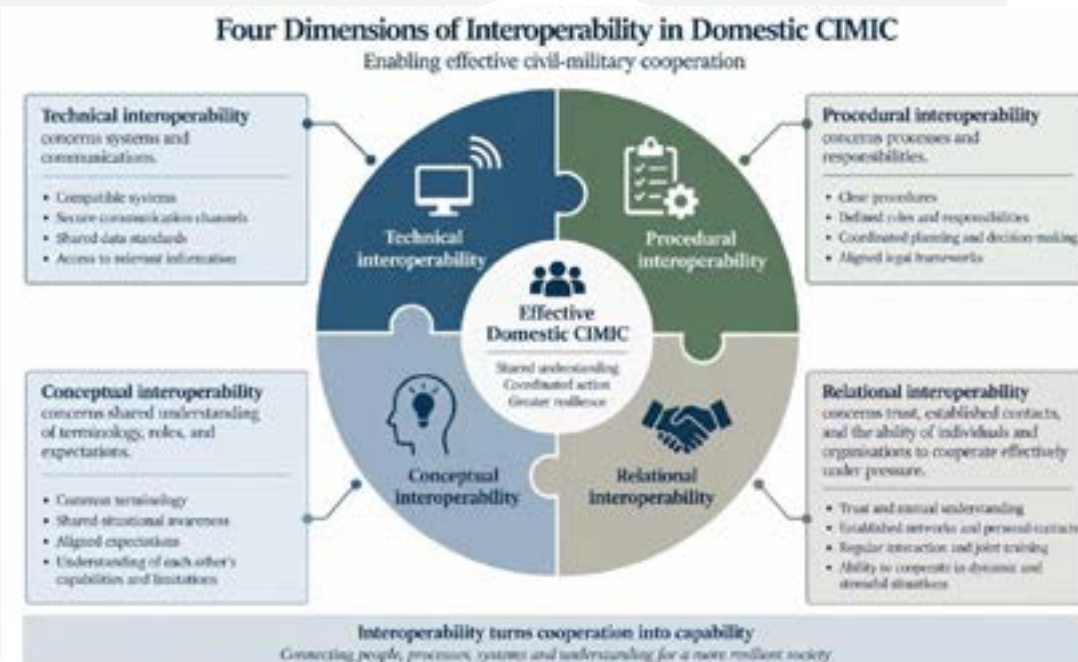


Figure 3: Four dimensions of interoperability in domestic CIMIC

Note: The figure illustrates the four interrelated dimensions of interoperability – technical, procedural, conceptual and relational – that are essential for effective civil-military cooperation in a domestic context.

Figure 3: Four dimensions of interoperability in domestic CIMIC.

6 Findings and implications

RQ1. Conceptualising CIMIC as a joint function is better suited to domestic collective-defence requirements than treating it as a specialised support activity. A specialist capability remains necessary for expertise, liaison, analysis and advice, but the civil environment affects logistics, movement, sustainment, protection, medical support and infrastructure, so responsibility must be shared across the staff. Finland shows that substantial integration can exist without the CIMIC label; Germany shows that a highly visible liaison architecture still has to extend beyond Amtshilfe; Spain shows that extensive interaction with civilians is not CIMIC in the doctrinal sense. A joint-function approach does not give CIMIC ownership of civilian matters; it is an enabling function through which civil factors and dependencies are identified, analysed and connected to planning.

RQ2. National approaches diverge significantly in institutional form but converge around common functional requirements. None reproduces NATO CIMIC doctrine, and NATO should not seek organisational standardisation, which would be both unrealistic and unnecessary given constitutional law, administrative structures and sovereignty. The requirement is that NATO forces can understand which national actors perform relevant functions, what authorities they hold, how requirements are coordinated and how information is exchanged. Domestic CIMIC is best understood as an **interface function** between national defence and societal resilience: it does not control civilian systems, but identifies where military and civilian requirements intersect and where coordination is needed. Because a state that can sustain governance, infrastructure, mobility and Allied reinforcement under pressure is a harder target, it also contributes indirectly to deterrence.

Doctrine, education and training. Doctrine should explain domestic CIMIC without implying military ownership of civilian responsibilities and should distinguish CIMIC specialists from the wider military organisation. Education must reach logistics, movement, medical, protection and infrastructure planners, and be framed as mutual literacy. Training should work at three levels: individuals (liaison, negotiation, civil analysis, legal awareness), organisations (information exchange, request procedures, dependency mapping, prioritisation) and the system (exercises with authorities, municipalities, emergency services, infrastructure operators, companies and NGOs). The transition from peace through crisis to collective defence must itself be exercised.

7 Recommendations

The recommendations are organised by addressee. They implement five priorities – a common functional framework, mapping and management of reciprocal dependencies, functional interoperability across national systems, institutionalised civilian and private-sector participation before crisis, and exercising the transition to collective defence – and do not seek to standardise national systems.

7.1 NATO

N1. Common functional framework. A non-prescriptive framework naming the functions NATO forces can expect within a Host Nation: identification of civilian authorities and actors; CFI; CMI and liaison; mapping of civilian and military dependencies; information exchange; coordination of civilian support to military operations; military support to civilian authorities where nationally authorised; interfaces with HNS and mobility; coordination with critical-infrastructure operators; resolution of competing resource demands. NATO assessments should ask whether these functions and interfaces can be identified and accessed, not whether a CIMIC structure exists.

N2. Terminology. Keep distinguishing NATO CIMIC as a joint function, national civil-military arrangements, military support to civilian authorities, civilian support to military operations, HNS, and civil preparedness and resilience.

N3. Interoperability benchmarks along the technical, procedural, conceptual and relational dimensions, without ranking nations against one institutional ideal.

N4. Information sharing treated as a CIMIC capability requirement: classification and releasability procedures, sanitisation of military information for civilian use, secure environments for selected civilian partners, common procedures with infrastructure operators.

N5. Integration with HNS and military mobility. Planning should identify the civil-military interfaces linking CIMIC, HNS, mobility, logistics, infrastructure and resilience.

N6. Exercising the transition from peacetime through crisis to collective defence: legal authorities, mobilisation, changing classification requirements, allocation of scarce civilian resources, HNS activation, infrastructure prioritisation and coordination with civilian crisis structures.

7.2 Nations

- S1. Assess by function, not label:** who conducts civil factor analysis, maintains relationships, coordinates dependencies, engages the private sector, exchanges information, and how this changes between peace, crisis and conflict.
- S2. Address the reciprocity gap:** identify in advance which civilian services military operations depend on and how competing demands will be prioritised.
- S3. Institutionalise civilian participation before crisis,** adapting the Finnish principles (continuous cross-sector cooperation, frequent exercises, private-sector involvement, national defence courses) to national constitutional contexts rather than copying the model.
- S4. Strengthen mutual institutional literacy,** particularly at regional and local level.
- S5. Treat the private sector as a core preparedness partner,** with mechanisms for information exchange, contingency planning, continuity requirements and exercising; NATO's 2026 guidance on public-private cooperation reinforces this.⁴³

7.3 NATO CIMIC Centre of Excellence

- C1. Domestic CIMIC functional reference guide** with adaptable examples, not a prescribed organisational model.
- C2. Comparative repository of national approaches** (terminology, legislation, actors, liaison structures, HNS interfaces, crisis arrangements, points of contact, exercises), aimed at understanding rather than public evaluation.
- C3. Education for civilian audiences** (civil protection, regional government, infrastructure, healthcare, transport, telecommunications, humanitarian organisations, industry), with military participants.
- C4. Domestic functional specialists** (energy, healthcare, transport, telecommunications, public administration, legislation, industry, emergency management), not necessarily military, supporting subject-matter understanding without replacing engagement with competent authorities.
- C5. Exercise modules** for friction points: simultaneous civilian and military demand, degraded communications, classified information, infrastructure disruption, HNS under pressure, legal-authority transitions, cross-border movement.

⁴³ NATO, *Guidance for enhancing public-private cooperation for resilience*, 16 July 2026.

8 Further research and conclusion

Further work should revisit Spain once the doctrine following Operation DANA is adopted; add cases (Baltic, Nordic, Eastern, Southern European and North American Allies, and selected non-NATO states); study civilian support to military operations, the role of the private sector and civil-military information sharing more closely; and test whether common indicators of **functional domestic CIMIC readiness** can be developed without a standardised organisational model.

NATO's return to collective defence has made the domestic civil-military interface an operational concern. The comparison of Finland, Germany and Spain shows no single national model, yet convergence around comparable functional requirements. The study's principal contribution is the distinction between institutional form and functional performance: a dedicated CIMIC organisation can support these functions, but its presence is neither necessary nor sufficient evidence of effective integration. Domestic CIMIC is best understood as an interface function that makes national diversity operationally manageable while preserving civilian primacy and national legal authority.

Sources cited

Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, in the revised version published in the Federal Law Gazette Part III, classification number 100-1, as last amended by the Act of 22 March 2025 (Federal Law Gazette 2025 I, No. 94), https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gg/englisch_gg.html (accessed 29 April 2026).

Björn, R., and V.-P. Valkamo, interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Domestic CIMIC Research Project – Case Study Finland), 29 July 2026.

Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 'Geschichte', web page, n.d., <https://www.bmvg.de/de/themen/verteidigung/bundeswehr-parlamentsarmee/geschichte> (accessed 15 August 2026).

Bundeswehr, Operational Plan for Germany, web page, 2026, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/en/organization/bundeswehr-joint-force-command/missions/operational-plan-for-germany> (accessed 13 June 2026).

Bundeswehr, 'Das Operative Führungskommando der Bundeswehr', web page, n.d., <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/operatives-fuehrungskommando-der-bundeswehr> (accessed 16 June 2026).

Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence, Case Study Ukraine: A CIMIC Analysis (The Hague: CCOE, 2026), https://www.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/20260212_O_CCOE_Case-Study-UKR_3.0-DOWNLOAD-EDITION.pdf (accessed 2 May 2026).

George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett, 'The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison', in: Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 67–72.

Gruenbauer, S., Survey on Domestic CIMIC and Civil Preparedness, 11 August 2026 (Domestic CIMIC Research Project).

Jefatura del Estado (Spain), Ley Orgánica 5/2005, de 17 de noviembre, de la Defensa Nacional, BOE, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2005/BOE-A-2005-18933-consolidado.pdf> (accessed 5 June 2026).

Jefatura del Estado (Spain), Ley 17/2015, de 9 de julio, del Sistema Nacional de Protección Civil, BOE, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2015/BOE-A-2015-7730-consolidado.pdf> (accessed 6 June 2026).

Kommando Zivil-Militärische Zusammenarbeit der Bundeswehr (Bundeswehr Civil-Military Cooperation Command), interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Domestic CIMIC Research Project), 21 July 2026.

Landeskommando Bayern, interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Domestic CIMIC Research Project), 29 June 2026.

Melber, T., interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Domestic CIMIC Research Project), 3 June 2026.

Ministerio de Defensa (Spain), 'Robles destaca la eficacia, rapidez y humanidad del Ejército del Aire y del Espacio para afrontar las consecuencias de la DANA', La Moncloa, 6 November 2024, <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/notasprensa/defensa/paginas/2024/061124-robles-eficacia-ejercito-aire.aspx> (accessed 20 August 2026).

Ministerio de Defensa (Spain), 'La Unidad Militar de Emergencias: Un año de desafíos, logros y compromiso global', 2 January 2025, https://www.defensa.gob.es/ume/Noticias/2025/01/Noticias/noticia_resumen_2024.html (accessed 23 May 2026).

Ministerio de Defensa (Spain), 'Regimiento de Operaciones de Información nº 1' (Operación DANA Valencia), 16 January 2025, <https://ejercito.defensa.gob.es/en/unidades/Valencia/roi1/Noticias/2025/01-operacion-dana-valencia.html> (accessed 23 May 2026).

Ministerio de la Presidencia (Spain), Real Decreto 1097/2011, de 22 de julio, por el que se aprueba el Protocolo de Intervención de la Unidad Militar de Emergencias, BOE, 26 July 2011, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2011/BOE-A-2011-12869-consolidado.pdf> (accessed 20 May 2026).

Ministry of Defence (Finland), Conscription Act (2008).

Ministry of Justice (Finland), The Constitution of Finland (Helsinki: Ministry of Justice, 2018).

NATO, AJP-9: NATO Civil-Military Co-operation (CIMIC) Doctrine (NATO, 2003).

NATO, Commitment to enhance resilience, 8 July 2016, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2016/07/08/commitment-to-enhance-resilience> (accessed 12 July 2026).

NATO, AJP-3.19: Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation, Edition A, Version 1 (NATO Standardization Office, 2018).

NATO, Washington Summit Declaration, 10 July 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm (accessed 16 July 2026).

NATO, Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3, NATO topic page, 13 September 2024, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/resilience-civil-preparedness-and-article-3> (accessed 31 August 2026).

NATO, 2024 NATO Resilience Symposium, report, 2024, <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/NATO-Resilience-Symposium-2024-Report.pdf> (accessed 15 June 2026).

NATO, AJP-3.19: Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation, Edition B, Version 1 (NATO Standardization Office, June 2025).

NATO, Guidance for enhancing public-private cooperation for resilience, 16 July 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2026/07/16/guidance-for-enhancing-public-private-cooperation-for-resilience> (accessed 16 August 2026).

NATO, 2026 Resilience Baseline Requirements, 15 September 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2026/09/15/2026-resilience-baseline-requirements>.

Pelkonen, K., interview conducted by S. Gruenbauer and T. Rixen (Research Project on National Civil-Military Cooperation and Total Defence), 5 August 2026.

Prezelj, Iztok, 'Towards integrated crisis management: Human, institutional and technical issues of civil-military cooperation and how to address them', Comparative Strategy (2026), pp. 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2026.2667275>.

Sánchez Pérez-Castejón, Pedro, Directiva de Defensa Nacional 2020, 11 June 2020, <https://www.defensa.gob.es/Galerias/defensadocs/ddn-ingles-2020.pdf> (accessed 18 July 2026).

Security Committee (Finland), Security Strategy for Society (Helsinki: Finnish Government, 2025), <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/aff0ba13-4037-43e8-8b85-e138215ce3ac/content>.

Security Committee (Finland), 'National Defence Courses', web page, n.d., <https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/en/cooperation/national-defence-courses/> (accessed 16 August 2026).

Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), ‘Strategic Convergence and CIMIC Leadership at the Core of NATO’s Civil-Military Engagement’, news release, 6 June 2025, <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2025/strategic-convergence-and-cimic-leadership-at-the-core-of-natos-civilmilitary-engagement> (accessed 15 August 2026).

Suomi.fi, ‘Voluntary military service for women’, 27 October 2025, <https://www.suomi.fi/citizen/safety-and-security/emergencies-and-security/guide/national-defence-obligation/voluntary-military-service-for-women> (accessed 16 June 2026).

Abbreviations

BVK/KVK Bezirks-/Kreisverbindungskommando · CFI Civil Factor Integration · CMI Civil-Military Interaction · HNS Host Nation Support · LV/BV Landes- und Bündnisverteidigung (National and Alliance Defence) · OPLAN DEU Operational Plan for Germany · UME Unidad Militar de Emergencias · ZMZ Zivil-Militärische Zusammenarbeit. Full reference list and evidence base: long version of the concept paper.



Address:
Brasserskade 227A
2497 NX The Hague
The Netherlands

Contact Information:
Registry CCOE: +31 (0)889566439
Public Affairs Office: +31 (0)889
566441
E-Mail: info@cimic-coe.org